

How can I
get your
approval?

Am I
forgiven?

Is God
Angry at me?

Shattering Toxic Beliefs

Discovering
God's Love For You!

BY SCOTT
JOHNSON

Is God
Doing This?



SHATTERING TOXIC BELIEFS

Discovering God's Love For You

Scott Johnson

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Introduction

I attended a business meeting that was held in a local hotel. I went there that day to learn new things that would help me in my own business. I was excited to see what I could learn and apply to enhance my business efforts. But the real value I was to receive that day never came from walking inside that convention room and I dare say, it never came from any of the many instructors that day; instead, it happened outside the meeting room at the check-in table.

The man behind the table that was registering and handing out name tags to people was sitting in a wheel chair. As I started to walk up to the table, I was prompted to do something so crazy that just mentioning it here might have you thinking I was out of my mind.

It was a strange experience to say the least. In an instant, I saw myself approaching this man's wheelchair and kicking the wheel of his wheelchair and asking him, "So, when are you going to decide to get out of that thing?" Now you're probably thinking that I knew him that no one in his right mind would be so crude to act upon a prompting like this to a complete stranger!

Now you might be wondering by now, "What is a prompting?"

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An inner prompting is that inner voice, nudge, or guide that only you can hear. It can come in the form of a creative idea; a thought that comes out of nowhere or just a simple “knowing” that is the direction you should take. We all have them but we are not always aware of them primarily because we have never learned to act upon them.

I knew that it was a prompting that I had to act upon. I didn't even stop to think how crazy it would be to go up and kick a wheelchair of a stranger and say such a thing as, “So, when are you going to decide to get out of that thing?” But, ignored all sanity and did exactly what I saw in my mind. I walked up to his wheelchair and kicked it and asked him the question.

You would have thought that he would have become shocked and angry with a perfect stranger being so disrespectful. But somehow this man found the good graces to look up at me and smile. He responded that he was able to stand, but not for very long because of the pain.

I had been doing a lot of self-study on the power of our imagination and the fact that none of us can live beyond what our heart or subconscious allows us to live out. I talked with him about the power of his imagination and how he should see himself walking, jumping and doing the things he would like to do. He responded that he was a Catholic and knew that in God's time it would happen.

As I continued to talk with him about seeing himself out of his wheelchair a voice suddenly interrupted my thoughts as I was talking with this gentleman. The voice spoke to me loud and clear and asked me a question. Now I know what you are thinking. No, I was not on drugs nor was I dreaming this experience. I am a spiritual person and knew that it was God speaking to me. But as sure as I am sitting here writing this, there was a clear distinct voice that I heard in my mind. What I was about to hear would change my life and perspective forever!

It was a simple question that asked, “So Scott, when are you going to decide to get out of your wheelchair of poverty?” In an instant, I knew that I had been “set up” and this whole thing was orchestrated for my behalf to get my attention. I thought that I was “being led or prompted for the good of this “poor soul” who was stuck in his wheelchair. Instead it was a wakeup call to me that exposed my own nakedness as it were. I was the “poor soul” that had been stuck in a wheelchair! Not one that was physical like the one I had tapped with my foot, it was one that had held me unknowingly as it’s prisoner without knowing it. I walked away from that meeting with a lesson I will never forget.

That next morning I woke up emotionally moved by the previous day’s revelation. I was determined to walk out of my wheelchair of poverty, so I went for a long stroll in our neighborhood. I stood in an open field and imagined myself tearing that wheelchair into a thousand

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pieces and crushing it to dust. I can tell you that in the mind of my imagination, what was taking place was as real as real can be.

It was a very emotional experience as I determined in my heart that this would never be an issue in my life again for as long as I lived. I imagined the wheelchair of poverty disappearing in the rearview mirror of my car as I spoke out. “I don’t ever want to see even one faint spot of you left in my sight”. From that moment forward, I began to look at and see myself differently! Instead of me chasing money, I would see money chasing me! My perspective completely began to change about the free gift of God’s abundance that was mine and what it personally meant for my life. From that day forward I began applying principles to my life that would begin to paint a new reality of God’s complete provision in my life.

I am sharing this story because I know that you can relate to it regarding areas in your life that you have been stuck at. The fact of the matter is that we all have wheelchairs that we have been sitting in. I don’t know what yours is but this one thing I do know, life was meant to be lived more fully than what you are experiencing right now.

Solomon who was known as one of the wisest men of his time once wrote about the heart or what I believe represents the subconscious mind. He instructed his readers to “*Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*” The word for issue here in the original Hebrew text is actually the word for boundaries or borders.

When you think about it in this context, we all have boundaries or borders in our life or what we would call “Wheelchairs”. We all have created borders within our heart and it is these borders that maintain what we have accepted as the status quo. It is part of that conditioning we have accepted as our sense of normal. It’s not necessarily a bad thing and it’s not necessarily a good thing. It all depends on what you have held onto as truth in your life that has created boundaries and borders.

You see, the most dangerous thing in our lives is not the unfamiliar, it is the familiar. It is those things that we have become accustomed to, it is those things that we have embraced and claimed as our own.

This is why I am writing this book – Toxic Beliefs About God. You see, wheelchairs can be dangerous if you’re not careful! Why? Because if you sit in a wheelchair long enough, it will become your “normal” and you will resist all attempts to get you out. When you have sold yourself on the belief that this is just the way it is and always will be, you have resigned yourself to a lifelong limiting belief. The scary thing is that most of us have acquired many of these limiting beliefs as small children which have become a part of our psychic (our normal).

Now, I was fortunate that I didn’t get hit in the head when I tried to convince this stranger behind the registration table that he didn’t belong in his wheelchair. Most people will fight for the right to stay right where they are at.

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The good news is that you have chosen to download this book or pick it up off of the shelf and are now reading it. This shows me that you are hungry and have a desire to move forward and break free from past entanglements that seem to have slowed your progress. The truth is that every one of us has the inner wisdom where it concerns our life. Each of us entered this world with full access to everything we have need of in order to live a fulfilled and abundant life. We just need a little help so that we can hear the truth that is in us. That is what this book is about, to help you live a rich fulfilling life.

What are you believing about YOU in light of the truth of what God thinks is paramount to truly walking out a life of freedom and victory. One belief system will keep you weak while the other will keep you strong in faith and promise.

Chapter 1

Solid Foundations

The two things they tell you to never discuss are politics and religion. That is because once you do, you open up an unending battle. What makes these two topics so emotionally invoking? Is it because these two subjects strike at the core beliefs of a person. Well, the good news is that we are not going to discuss politics. Hey, but we are going to talk religion and how the messages we hear in church about God, influence and impact our lives. More specifically, this book will address things that we have accepted as truth as Christians but that may not be true at all.

I remember a test paper that was handed out in a Bible class for new students. The instructor asked us to go through a list of terms and identify those that we thought were in the Bible and those that were not. It was amazing how many things there were on that list that most people accepted as truth but that just weren't so. Phrases like, "God

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helps those who help themselves”, “Cleanliness is next to godliness”, “Money is the root of all evil”, “Everything happens for a reason”, “God needed another angel in heaven so he called him/her home”, “The Lord never gives someone more than they can handle,” just to name a few.

The above terms may or may not be of any real importance to our lives, but what we do know is that in the Bible there are thousands of statements on topics that cover just about every issue. When studying the Bible you will find that there are topics that are more important than others. The fact is that none of us will agree on everything. It is not my intention to get into non-essential areas of understanding. Instead, I want to focus my attention on those areas that keep you from discovering the goodness of God in your life. These are essential foundational truths that will have a direct result in your ability to receive all that God has provided to you through the finished work of Jesus. What is the finished work of Jesus? Jesus prior to breathing his last and final breath on the cross spoke out these words, “It is finished!” It was upon that moment, He declared the completion of His mission on Earth.

Foundation is everything, without it, anything that is built upon it lacks long lasting results in your life. It is the foundation that is the most important thing of any building and it is this that will determine the quality of the building you have. It is not the walls, windows or roof, it is the foundation. Many years ago in the area where I live there

was a building boom, a lot of new homes were being built. Because of the soil condition of Benenite in the ground contractors had to take special measures when building the foundations. Years later, you could tell which homes were built upon proper foundations and which were not. Stress cracks ran across garage floors, ceilings sagged and floors were no longer level. It is the same in your life; a faulty foundation will eventually cause you to waiver and fall.

When you get into trouble in your life and you need stability, believe me, it's what you believe about the finished work of Jesus that is going to keep your faith intact. What you believe about healing, prosperity or any other promise made to you in the Bible is not going to make a big difference in the level of victory you experience in life if you have a wrong foundation. It will have everything to do with what you believe about Jesus.

Through the years, I have heard just about everything there is to hear about Christianity. The one thing that I have discovered is that within the Church there are religious beliefs that are contrary to foundational truths taught in the Bible. Many of these are beliefs that have evolved from cultural viewpoints and the things that we have blindly accepted as truth but that just aren't so. These beliefs burden and suppress people just like they did in Jesus day.

When facing difficult times it is easy to disqualify yourself from the goodness of God and His promises if you don't know that He is always for you and not against you. No matter what's going wrong in your life, be careful to not disqualify yourself from God's profound

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love and mercy. As one minister friend of mine puts it, miracles are not for the deserving, they are for the believing!

I can remember the many stories that were presented to me from the Bible when I was a child sitting in Sunday School. Showcased before me were the character studies of great heroes of faith such as David and Goliath, Elijah and Elisha and many others. From them we learned what it meant to have faith in God, and we learned also the importance of having integrity, trustworthiness and respect. Learning about the Ten Commandments was also a part of my early training. We, as parents and teachers, all desire for our children to learn the importance of understanding these things and want to impart them into the lives of the children we care for.

But as important as these principles and stories were, somehow, while I sat there in Sunday School and church another message was being transmitted to my mind. It was a message that mixed what Jesus provided freely through His death, burial and resurrection with the Old Covenant which based acceptance and blessing based on my behavior.

The toxic beliefs about God that I am talking about here is not just the cult religion down the street. It's easy to get comfortable sitting in our church thinking that it is those people down the street that are the ones being brainwashed.

Blues musician Jimmie Bratcher wrote and sings a popular song by the name of "Bad Religion". In it he admits that it was bad religion

that messed up his mind and made him a mean and angry person. Later in the song he sings the words:

“Fussing and fighting and praying all night. I argued and screamed; I just had to be right. I was broken and run down and ready to quit. I met a man named Jesus and He ended my fear. Oh He told me about love and I made a decision. My old man died with my bad religion.”

What is bad religion? It is the mixing of the covenants! In the Old Covenant the high priest brought the blood of animals into the holy place as a sacrifice for sin. In the New Covenant it is the blood of Jesus which once and for all brought forgiveness of sin.

Mixing the covenants would mean in essence that we are mixing the blood of animals with the blood of Jesus! Mixing performance based religion to be accepted by God with what Jesus bled, died and was resurrected for. This is a pretty serious indictment because what we are saying is that we don't believe what Jesus did in His death, burial and resurrection was good enough. It is this message that in my estimation is more insidious and dangerous than the wares of any drug pusher met on the street.

Why do I say this? Because of the fact that at least you can see a drug pusher coming. Children are warned about them. Toxic Beliefs about God can be introduced to you without your knowledge and its effect can lead you to a lifetime of turmoil. It can cause you to suffer needlessly, causing disillusionment, distrust, disappointment, anger and you may eventually “burn out” and completely shut God out of

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your life. I have talked to many adults who later in life still suffer the effects of wrong beliefs about God that they learned as children or young Christians. It is impossible to estimate the total damage toxic beliefs about God has caused in the lives of millions of people across the generations. These people as a result have closed their hearts and minds to the true message of God's complete love for them.

It's amazing how upset people get when they discover that they might be introduced to toxins. It might be a substance to which they are exposed at work, the discovery of mold growing in the walls of their home or maybe the use of some chemical cleanser. I think we should treat toxic beliefs about God are toxic and are just as seriously as any other toxin or addiction that we discover are hurting people. Maybe there should be intervention sessions, Rehab Centers or maybe even a 12 step program dealing with toxic beliefs about God.

I am purposely overemphasizing this because I want to get across to you how important it is to get a correct understanding of God in your life. Don't take it for granted that everything you hear or read from a television preacher is true, it could cost you dearly. Don't rely on what anyone says or even what you read here, go to the Bible for yourself and check it out.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

The book of Acts talks about the Bereans who stood out to the apostles because of the eagerness with which they received the Gospel. The scripture tells us that they searched the scriptures to see if what they were hearing was true. (Acts 17:11)

This is one of my purposes for writing this book, getting you to ask important questions about what you believe and why you believe it. If you approach it with an open heart, what you are about to discover in this book will profoundly affect your relationship with God in a positive way. It will open your heart to receive from God in a new way. I believe that as a result you are going to fall in love with God all over again and discover a new world of possibility for your life.

Jesus Came To Show Us the Way

The message is right there in plain sight for all to see. God laid it all out there in the life of His Son Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John states it rightly: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* The living Word, God in flesh, was about to be revealed as the true nature and character of the creator of the universe.

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It was a grand theater of sorts with seats filled to capacity and all heaven watching intently as God unveiled Himself to a naive and unsuspecting world. How would this God be seen, how would he be understood, what legacy would He leave behind in the minds of millions upon millions who would go on to later hear and know His name?

Would Jesus portray God as a tyrant, an angry punisher of man's sin? Or would He reveal to us a God who was only loving, kind and compassionate? Or might He possibly be seen as a combination of both?

However He portrayed God during His thirty three years on Earth, we have to accept the fact that He would absolutely demonstrate the full truth of who God was, not a shadow, not a reflection, but God Himself! Jesus did not show up on the scenes of humanity to offer an opinion of God, a religious concept or a belief about God. What He did can't even come close to or be compared to what Confucius, Mohammad, Buddha or any other religion teacher represented. They all proclaimed a thought, idea and philosophy. Jesus was God Himself on the Earth! John the Baptist looked upon Jesus that eventful day when he was to baptize the Savior and said, "Behold, the lamb who takes away the sins of the world." He saw something others did not see, he saw God's perfect provision for humanity, a ready lamb upon whom the sins of the world were to be laid.

If you want to get a good look at God, take a long look at Jesus. Jesus unashamedly proclaimed *“I am the way, the truth and the life”*. He did not say “This is the way, follow me.” or point to the truth and command us to walk in it, and He certainly did not point up to the heavens elsewhere and say “There is life.” What He did say was that He was the personification, the living testimony, of the way, the truth and life - God Himself!

We do know that there was a definite reaction everywhere He went. The crowds loved and followed Him, the religious leaders hated Him. Those who opposed Him were not the crowds but those who had strongly held beliefs steeped in religion. The religious leaders were not interested in real truth that would set the people of their day free. They were only interested in upholding the religious institutions that allowed them to continue their control and manipulation of the people. The religious leaders of that day did not have the interest of the people at heart. The law that they preached only served as a means to an end. It was to and about these who would pollute God’s true image (who God really was) on the Earth that Jesus spoke most harshly.

We all view and understand our world through the lenses of our own lives. Our world view is constrained and jaded by the things to which we have become accustomed. It isn’t until we are challenged in our beliefs that we grow uncomfortable and wary. This is what was happening when the religious leaders heard and saw the truth in the life of Jesus.

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Jesus held the Law of Moses up and used it as a mirror to convict and show how man's futile efforts could never measure up. He showed us the ineffectiveness of living a life independent of God and based on our own ability. This stood in complete opposition to everything the Pharisees and Sadducees believed.

New information always challenges the old established mindsets with which we have become comfortable. Jesus told His disciples that as they came into the truth it had the power to set them free. Their immediate reaction was, "Hey, what are you talking about? We are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone!" Like the disciples, the knee jerk reaction to strongly held beliefs can stop us from experiencing the freedom that comes from truth. This was certainly true with the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day and it is certainly true with us in our day.

Seeing Jesus

It is important to realize the full context of what Jesus meant when He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life;" because in that passage He also went on to tell his listeners that "No one comes to the Father except through me." He was not just telling them that He was a doorway to God; He was saying to them that if you want to see, hear, comprehend and understand God you will need to see, hear comprehend and understand Jesus!

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...” “When you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” John 14:6-9

It is interesting to note how easy it is for us in today’s society to recognize God but not to recognize Jesus. It is acceptable to thank God for achievements in sports or when receiving an award, but it is not politically correct to thank Jesus in a public forum. This is because mentioning only God is considered a “safe zone” that will not offend people. People really don’t want an up close and personal God because they wrongly believe that they will be condemned by Him.

An Up Close and Personal God

The children of Israel didn’t want an up close and personal God either. In the book of Exodus you will read the story of what happened when they found themselves at the foot of Mt. Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given. It says that all the people were there at the mountain witnessing thundering, lightning and smoke, and the sound of a trumpet sounded long, becoming loud and louder! It must have been a wondrous sight to behold from the bottom of that mountain.

Moses told the people not to fear. But nevertheless, they told Moses that they would rather he talk to God directly and then speak to them and tell them what God had said. God must have seemed frightening to them, and instead of seeking to know God’s ways and true character they chose to instead know or judge God only through His deeds. (Ps.

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103:7) Moses in this passage did not even have a hint of fear; he knew God was for them and not against them.

“So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.”

Ex. 20:21

Is it possibly this same reason people keep God at a distance today and choose not to “draw near” to Jesus is because we have not “understood” the ways of God just as the Children of Israel did not understand Him at Mt. Sinai? Have you ever noticed how easy it is to misjudge someone if you really don’t know the heart of that person? Truly knowing and understanding God and His ways will only be accomplished in the act of knowing Jesus Christ on an intimate level.

Let me ask you a question. What do you believe about the character of God? Seriously, if your understanding of God is not based solely upon New Covenant truths and realities, you will experience conflict in your relationship with God. There will be no peace in that relationship because you will wrongly feel that God is angry with you.

Grant it, it was easy for the Children of Israel to jump to some wrong conclusions about God. After all, the separation they felt and experienced was real, and as a result they could only interpret God’s intentions toward them from afar off.

Their viewpoint of God was a distorted one because humanity had long before declared themselves independent of their creator.

Before Jesus, Israel related to God through the Mosaic Covenant, which was based upon the keeping of the Law. The law served only one purpose, it brought condemnation and guilt. The Law represented a list of 613 laws that were impossible to live out. It served to remind Israel and now us, that a life lived based on strict adherence to obedience was impossible.

You see, this was the basis of Eve's temptation in the Garden... to become independent, to be like God. The tree of life represented all that God had to offer, the tree of knowledge of good and evil represented a life separate from Gods provision. The law served to expose man's heart to the utter nonsense that he could ever live effectively on his own without his creator. The law condemned men because they continually missed the mark (sin).

The Pharisees preached rules and regulations and presented God as harsh and judgmental. They never understood the true heart and character of God and wrongly thought that man could be perfected through the keeping of the law. They falsely thought that God was an enemy to man. It is interesting to note that whenever the New Testament writers spoke of the wrath of God, the hostility is represented not as on the part of God, but of man. It was man who sinned in the Garden and chose to be separated from God and it was man who chose to suffer the consequences of his actions.

Jesus demonstrated a different message than the religious leaders of His time; He spoke and demonstrated ultimate love to the world.

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He loved all equally without judgment or preference. He looked upon what we would consider unlovable and repulsive and had compassion. His message was clear and simple; For God so loved the world! It was God in Jesus reconciling the world back to Himself. The Bible tells us that He stepped into human history and balanced the books on our behalf. He took the sin and results of that sin (all pain and suffering) which belonged to us and placed them upon Himself. The very death sentence that you and I had upon us was removed and in its place God gave us His own righteousness and now calls us Holy!

This was God's gift to the world, He demonstrated that love to us in that while we were yet sinners He died for us in the person of Christ! He took away all shame, all guilt and all condemnation. This is the good news message that Jesus brought to all who would hear Him, not a message of guilt and condemnation, but a message that says that peace has been made for you on your behalf.

For God did not send the Son into the world in order to judge (to reject, to condemn, to pass sentence on) the world, but that the world might find salvation and be made safe and sound through Him.

John 3:17 (Amp)

Alright, so here is the question; two thousand years have come and gone and the question remains the same. It is the same question that Jesus asked His disciples, do you remember it? He asked them, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

The questions remain the same to this day. What message have you heard, what do you believe about Jesus and how has your belief affected your understanding of God's character?

Who Do You Say That Jesus Is?

Many years ago, while ministering in the Philippines, I heard the story of one young missionary who, after traveling from church to church preaching with his interpreter, became discouraged because he wasn't having any results. It seemed that the people just weren't getting the message. He would have altar calls for those who wanted to receive Christ as Savior and no one would respond. He would preach on God's willingness to heal the sick, and pray, but no one came forward for prayer. It seemed that no one was hearing anything he had to say.

As time went on, a seasoned missionary who had served in the mission field for many years came and sat in on the service. Because of his years of service on the field he had come to know the local dialect and understood every word that was being spoken by the interpreter. After the service, he took the young minister aside and spoke to him privately. "Did you know that everything you preach was contradicted by your interpreter?" As it turned out, the interpreter was not in agreement with anything that was being preached. Instead, he took it upon himself to distort everything he had heard preached. When the young missionary told the people that God was loving and merciful and that is why He sent his son Jesus to the world, he instead told people that God was angry and would punish them for their evil

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ways. When the interpreter was to tell the people that it was God's will to heal, set free and deliver them. He instead would tell them calamity, sickness and poverty was God's way of testing them.

No wonder this missionary did not get any results, the people hearing him preach were not hearing the truth but instead were hearing a distortion of the truth. As a result, their perception of God was completely based on a distortion.

A few years back, at the U.S. Capitol in Washington DC, the Muslim community held what they called a day of Islamic unity. As several hundred Muslims gathered, others who claimed to be Christians gathered too. Instead of a speaking peace and showing acts of kindness they gathered for the purpose of protesting. A man stood across the street with bull horn in hand blasting word of hate. *"Muslims are going to hell"* and *"Muhammad was a pedophile"*. Other "Christians" wore t-shirts with slogans that were just as damaging, while other people preached "fire and brimstone" on the street corners. Even on the website where the event was to be made available, the chat section was filled with "Christians" attacking the Muslim community with words of hate. E-mails were sent out and passed on by the thousands prior to the event, alarming Christians out of fear that the Muslims were taking over. This is really incredible when you stop to think about it, I know that this is not the thinking of the majority of Christians. The truth of the matter is that communicating a distorted Gospel like this will have an effect upon many believers, to say nothing of those who are not yet Christians.

You might be asking, “Isn’t it important to pray about the changes and threats we see in our culture?” The answer is, of course we should, but our overt response and the way we treat those around us should come from our perception of who God is. Obviously someone has lied and misinterpreted the good news Gospel to these dear Christians who were interpreting God through a wrong belief system of fear and judgment. They have believed a lie that is based upon the Old Covenant and are acting out of that understanding. The sad truth is that not only did they believe a lie but they were themselves misinterpreting and corrupting the message of God’s goodness to the world.

Again, recently I meant a dear Muslim man by the name of Bess with whom I had the opportunity to develop a relationship with. He told me of a Christian pastor who had entered his mechanic shop who pounded his chest declaring, “I am a pastor” and you Muslims are all murderers and killers! After much debate back and forth from this pastor about his religious cause and how right he was, the pastor became frustrated and instead of listening he told Bess that he was full of demons, turned and walked away. Without realizing, this pastor spoke out of the same mindset that the Pharisees had in Jesus’ time. Instead of demonstrating God’s love which comes from a revelation of that love, he could only act out of his own understanding and perception of God.

The last time I meant with Bess, he shook my hand and said, “brother pray for me”. I answered, I already have been doing that Bess and I will continue to do so!

Jesus Acted Out of His Identity

Jesus was the personification of God Himself, which means that when you saw and heard Jesus you also saw and heard the heart of His father. Jesus was the full expression of God in the Earth.

John the Apostle wrote in John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The message is that the war is over. The conflict and wall of separation that stood between God and man has been completely annihilated. In the literal sense, the words we sing each Christmas, “Peace on Earth,” take on a deeper meaning. It goes beyond the conflicts of wars between nations, people or families that we experience. It is a declaration from God Himself that there are no requirements placed on man in order for him to be at peace with God. Really, the only requirement is to simply believe and in faith receive God’s free gift.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

Colossians 2:13-15

It was this grace and truth that a man named Saul fought against so vehemently. Saul, later to be renamed Paul the Apostle, was considered a devout religious man. But, when he was challenged with this new message of God's grace and peace he became a zealot and fought against the message. The good news is that, while traveling to the next city where he planned to persecute and hopefully stop these Christians who claimed Jesus as the Messiah, Saul had a direct encounter with the Christ Himself.

Up until this moment, all he knew and understood about God was that God was a list of dos and don'ts. He knew God as the children of Israel did in the wilderness but did not understand His ways, and as a result Saul thought that to be considered righteous he had to work and earn it. When you think about it, it is easy to understand why Saul became so angry. After all the years of preparation and striving to keep the law perfectly, these "Christians," like their teacher Jesus, simply walk in and think that they can partake of the goodness of God effortlessly. I mean, wouldn't it make you upset if you worked all your life for something and then had someone else who didn't deserve it get what you had strived, studied and worked so hard for?

This sounds much like the parable Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes about the prodigal son and the elder brother. In the parable, the elder brother became very angry because his brother was extended grace, mercy and favor that he felt belonged only to him.

The message of the early church was one that was based upon a loving personal experience with the Lord Jesus Christ through the

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work of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, it didn't take long before this vibrant life-giving relationship was turned back into control and legalism. Paul knew the damage that comes from religious zealotry because of having once been a religious zealot himself. He himself claimed that he at one time had been a "Pharisee of Pharisees."

Paul knew firsthand and understood this more than anyone; he knew just how destructive the message of "works righteousness" was. Time and time again Paul spoke out against the legalists' efforts to distort the truth of who Jesus was. The legalist believes that righteousness can be earned and must be maintained by our continual works. Paul taught that it was by faith that we receive the free gift of righteousness.

Paul claimed that he had a special responsibility of extending the message of grace. He believed, as we should, that it was to be the center point of everything he taught.

Throughout the next few chapters you will be confronted with common lies that people wrongly believe about God, His Son and His message. We will make a close examination of scripture from truths that are based upon the New Covenant realities of the finished work of Jesus, Grace, Peace, Faith Righteousness, and Unconditional love.

Killing The Performance Addiction

Addiction comes in many forms: drugs, alcohol, food, work, gambling, sex, even shopping, just to name a few. All addictions have one thing in common and that is control. Most people are completely unaware of the addictions that have control over them. This is because people become used to their addictions over a period of time and eventually accept them as normal and simply a part of who they are. I have sat and talked to people about their addictions, alcohol for example, and invariably the conversation leads to denial and blame.

There is one addiction that is rarely talked about but which can be just as destructive and hideous as any other. It really has to do with how we relate to God. It is called “Performance Addiction.” The lie that you can earn God’s love and acceptance is very destructive at its core and has worn many different kinds of masks in the church. Many marriages and families and individuals have been destroyed because of this sometimes subtle and other times overt message.

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Performance addiction finds its roots in the area of our need for personal worth and significance. Our society's attitudes are based upon the premise that a person's worth and value are determined by their performance. As a child we learn that in order to meet the need driven drives in our lives we must do something in return: perform. Performance in the context of this writing keeps us from being real, genuine or authentic.

We believe this falsehood because we are born into a world that tells us that we are incomplete. As a result we learn to reach into our outside world toward those things we believe will satisfy and complete us, such as the approval of others.

Because the need for love and approval is so strong, we become highly refined in our ability to extract and gain the thing we seek, and as a result we end up in Performance.

Let's face it; our world is all about getting approval. We get good grades in school for the effort and diligence we put in. We learn that in order to satisfy our employer we had better measure up to the expectations of that job. Oftentimes even as adult children we find that we are still seeking the approval of our parents.

As I said, Performance addiction causes us not to be real or genuine with each other. The end result is that we learn to live behind a performance mask, which causes stress in our relationships. It becomes difficult to relate because we feel and therefore believe that

if we don't meet the expectations of those around us we will be rejected.

Because this is the way we have learned to deal with relationships around us, it becomes quite natural to think this same way in how we relate to God. This is the great lie that has held our world back from experiencing a loving God who desires to have a close and intimate relationship with His children.

Performance addiction regarding our relationship with God comes from beliefs we have about God and what we believe about ourselves in relationship to God.

Really, performance addiction started in the Garden of Eden. As you know, Adam and Eve were presented with the choice of two trees. The tree that grew in the middle of the garden was the "Tree of Life" and the second tree was the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil". We of course know that the choice made that eventful day was to eat from the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," which really means that they made the choice to live a life of self-sufficiency and self-effort outside of God's provision. Once the fruit from that tree was eaten, all humanity has had no other choice but to live with a need to perform.

This is the pitfall that keeps us from discovering God's answer to all mankind. "In order for me to be, I must do!" My personal identity and worth now comes from my efforts and behavior.

This leads us to a relationship with God that ends up in complete frustration, stress and eventual anger. Here is what happens when we expect God to be pleased and then to bless us based on our

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achievements and performance. First of all we fall into despair and disillusionment when life stops working the way we think it should. Our conclusion is one of two choices. The first is to decide that if our religious performance doesn't seem to be working then there must be something wrong with us, so we end up living a life of begging God to accept us and forgive us. Or we give up on God altogether because "it is just too hard" to make it work. The results all too often lead to hatred, anger and murder as it did in the story of Cain who killed his own brother Abel. That was a horrific act of violence that started out of a performance-based mentality on Cain's part, instead of his simply resting in the blood of a lamb as Abel had.

There was a time in my life that, because I was basing my life on performance, I felt as though I had been completely abandoned by God. As a result I became thoroughly disillusioned and spent five years full of hurt and anger toward God. Even when I knew that I needed to break out of the self-destructive negative feelings I was going through, I couldn't. I would stand in a worship service, raise my voice to worship and the moment I did, the deep hurts of anguish would rush in on me. You see, without realizing it I had built my identity upon the unstable shifting sand of performance, which told me that my relevance was in my doing.

The second thing that takes place in many people whose lives are based on performance is the conclusion that, if indeed life is "working for us," we fall into pride because "Obviously we must be 'doing' the right thing". As a result of living a life based on performance we begin

to judge others and begin to lay out a list of dos and don'ts that they must abide by in order to have the same success that we are experiencing. You see, religion at its best will not meet man's best intentions to meet God. All world religion is based first and foremost on trying to find and connect with their idea of God.

Performance religion always ends up in some form of penance to alleviate the sense of shame and guilt that they have. I have watched the self mutilation of sincere victims in their efforts to earn God's love because they never heard the truth of God's provision for their lives. Standing and watching people beat and nail themselves to crosses in the Philippines is only the demonstration of just how deep the anguish of mankind's pain goes in trying to satisfy the lie in their own hearts.

What is the Root of Performance Addiction?

Performance addiction is seductive in its ability to blind us into thinking that we can actually meet our own needs outside of our creator. Believing that is like believing that a human can remain completely functional without water, food and air. Now granted, we have become very good at adapting to our world and have become pretty refined in our ability to live life. However what we accept as "normal," or even a life that speaks of achievement and success, is really only a shadow of how we were meant to function as intended by our Creator. Our lives today in contrast are a complete distortion to the way life was meant to be lived.

Prior to the fall Adam and Eve operated and lived from an inner knowing that they were complete. If you are complete, then you

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contain and have everything at your disposal to accomplish and live life effectively. They did not have a need to reach outside of themselves in order to be or feel complete. Rather than living from a place of weakness, want or even struggle, they lived effortlessly.

The word sin in the Bible is defined as “missing the mark”. I like to say that Adam and Eve moved from one way of living to another way of living, from an inner knowing that they were complete to a life of independence that said there were not complete. Sin is our inability to hit the mark no matter how hard we try.

Typically we think of sin as a behavior, that somehow if we “behave” correctly we will hit the mark. Sin goes much deeper than this. Like a fish trying to swim without water, it’s simply not possible to avoid all sinning, no matter how hard you try to change your behavior.

You might be asking the question, “Well, if we are not to be performance-based then why were we given the Ten Commandments?”

First of all we must realize that God is love, which is how He is described in the New Testament. He is the personification of love itself, not some cheap imitation. From the very beginning it has always been His full intention to redeem and bring man back into that completeness he once had. From the beginning we can see God continually reaching out to His creation. Somehow religion would

have us believe that it was God who turned His back on man, when in fact it was man who turned his back on God. Scripture tells us that it was God who went searching for Adam in the garden.

“And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, ‘Where art thou?’ And he said, ‘I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”

Gen. 3:9-10

You can almost hear the sadness in God’s voice as He described to them the consequences of their declaration of independence. “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...” Gen. 3:19. In other words, you will not have the capacity as you once did to live out of a sense of completeness. Instead of having the knowledge of fullness, you will have no other choice but to live and operate out of the use of force. Up until now, everything came to you because you understood that everything was already yours. From this point forward, you will have no other choice but to reach outside of yourself in order to gather the things you think you have need of.

Later we again see that it was God Himself expressing love to His creation man and woman, instead of punishing them he made coats of skins out of an animal and clothed them. This spoke as a type and shadow of the need for the shedding of blood. Heb. 9:22

Again and again we see God reaching out on some level with the purpose of connecting with humanity in spite of mankind’s declaration of independence and self-sufficiency. Through the covenants he made with Noah, Abraham and even Moses we can see His hand at work

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with the purpose of bring humanity back to the quality of life they once had.

There are two types of covenants that you will find in the Bible: conditional and unconditional. A conditional or bilateral covenant is an agreement that is binding on both parties for its fulfillment. Both parties agree to fulfill certain conditions. If either party fails to meet their responsibilities, the covenant is broken and neither party has to fulfill the expectations of the covenant.

An unconditional or unilateral covenant is an agreement between two parties, but only one of the two parties has to do something. Nothing is required of the other party.

Both covenants with Noah and Abraham were based on an unconditional act that required no performance by them. Hebrews 6:13 tells us that *“For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, **“Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”***

The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. God made promises to Abraham that required nothing of Abraham. There were no conditions attached to it (no “if” clauses that suggest its fulfillment is dependent on man). We do know that Abraham simply believed God and as a result we are told that it was accounted to him as righteousness.

Now, granted, we can always make wrong choices and as a result suffer the results of those choices. Take for instance Abraham's choice to pimp his wife out to Pharaoh (Genesis 12:14-19) and then after God got him out of that one, he later listened to the impatience of his wife Sarah by moving into performance so that they could help God out by having a child through Hagar. We are still dealing with those consequences, and God had nothing to do with it.

The question is, if every covenant was unconditional through Abraham, then why the sudden change when it came to Moses and the giving of the Law? Let's take a look at the events that led up to the giving of the Law.

When God made covenant with Abraham He himself spoke to Abraham about how Abraham's descendants would end up in Egypt, and their eventual deliverance. The promise was that they would come out with great possessions, which we later discover that they certainly did. (Genesis 15:13)

We see God's promise of deliverance being displayed over and over again. First we see deliverance as they crossed the Red Sea. They then saw God turn bitter water into sweet and send bread from heaven. God shows up again and again in profound and powerful ways in order to get them through the journey. You would think that Israel would be humbled and on their knees in thanksgiving by this time. But the text tells us differently, it says that instead they murmured and complained.

“Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

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Exodus 17:3

Now you would think that God would simply turn His back on them because of their ungratefulness and tell them that they are on their own, but we see that He didn't. Why did God continue to provide for them while they murmured and complained? It was because they were still under the Abrahamic covenant which had everything to do with God and nothing to do with them. They could have screamed, shouted and complained twice as much and it would not have affected God's blessing and faithfulness to them one bit.

Interestingly enough, when they arrived at Mount Sinai, something drastic changed in the way God dwelt with Israel. Suddenly a new covenant was set into place. Israel went from experiencing God's provision unconditionally to a covenant based on performance (conditional).

How did this happened and why the change?

God in His wisdom needed to communicate to man what man's full potential was and to restore him to his greatness. He was not satisfied to allow humanity to continue living below their true identity. God introduced the law because He had to communicate man's weakness and inability to live a life that is based on performance. You can hear the voice of arrogance in the voice of the children of Israel when they answered God's question as He asked them if they could base their life on performance, independent of Him. (Exodus 19:5)

In Exodus 19:8 we read their answer, “Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

It is important that you understand what the Hebrew text says here. They were saying that all that God requires and demands of us, we are well able to perform. In their own words they like many in our day believed that God does not bless us based upon His goodness. Instead they cried out to God to assess, judge and bless them based upon performance.

It is important that you reread what I just wrote again and you will discover that it was the Children of Israel that told God to give them the law, that they were able to keep it. In many ways we do this today, we tell God we can't accept His freedom, instead just give me the rule book, give me a list of do's and don'ts. Tell me which button to push or lever to pull to receive your blessing. God says, it is for freedom that I set you free, trust and believe that my provision is simply based on my love for you.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Man Must Discover His Need

Ever since Adam and Eve launched their unholy rebellion to live independently, God has been at work preparing the hearts of humanity.

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Historically, step by step He has taken man by the hand and has led him on a journey in order to reveal His nature and love to man.

While mankind is ignorant of just how short of the mark he really is, God knows that he will never on his own come to understand his desperate need for complete dependence of God's grace. He may give lip service to the Gospel, speak about Christ, attend church, sit in a pew, serve Christ, but he will still be unsaved. Man is by nature self-righteous and will never let go of his pride and self-confidence until he realizes that it is impossible to live in self-reliance outside of God's provision.

The Law clearly defines just how far off the path mankind was. It reveals to us that we cannot hope to live and function in true life by our own performance and effort.

Take the example of the atom. An atom is made up of three basic components: electron, proton and a neutron. Remove just one of those components from that atom and it would cease to function as it was intended. It would no longer be a complete atom. In the same way, man cannot function to his full capacity because he is not complete. The scriptures call this spiritual death, which is really separation from God. God is not and never has been responsible for the pain and suffering caused by mankind's choice to walk independent of His provision.

Jesus illustrated man's need for this awareness by the way He dealt with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. This rich Performance addict, secure in his own apparent goodness and ability to keep the law, came to Jesus and asked him what he "had to do" to inherit eternal life. Jesus recognized immediately that he was a soul unprepared for the Gospel. He had never been enlightened by the Law to realize that "...There is none righteous, no not one." Romans 3:11. He was unaware that all the goodness and self-righteousness of man, when compared in the light of the perfect goodness and righteousness of God, is nothing more than filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

Jesus, recognizing this young man's lost condition as well as his unpreparedness for the Gospel, did not simply offer him grace and forgiveness. He instead spoke directly to his greatest need. What did Jesus use to reveal the truth to this man's true heart condition? He used the Law to expose the covetousness which held him captive.

Being self-righteous, this man believed he could be saved by "doing" and didn't need God's mercy as a sinner. Therefore, Jesus quoted some of the Law to him. The rich young ruler's response was proof of a lack of understanding of the perfection of God. He immediately claimed that he had kept these laws perfectly from childhood. Knowing the true spiritual condition of this young man and his secret love of money, Jesus said, "...go thy way, sell whatsoever though hast, and give to the poor..." By giving the instruction that He did, Jesus was confronting this Performer with the realities of the second great commandment, "...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself..." (Mark 12:31). How did the young man respond? Did he

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turn and repent? Did he, like the publican in the temple, acknowledge that he was a sinner and needed God's mercy? No, he turned away, clutching his riches as his greatest treasure.

All people, regardless of their religious or cultural background, must be led down this road to self-awareness of their deficiency where it concerns their ability to function outside of God's provision. Paul the Apostle came to the realization of these truths when he wrote to the church in Rome which became the cornerstone message of his entire ministry.

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”

Romans 8:3

This scripture was the concluding statement of a lifetime of frustration in trying to live a life based on Performance by the keeping of the law.

Toxic beliefs about God embraces the myth that God's love can be bought by our actions, deeds and good works. It is amazing to me just how far off course we can get where it concerns our salvation. We usually have no problem where it concerns being saved by God's grace. It is easy to celebrate God's goodness and mercy and we can't wait to share the joy of our newfound faith. But it isn't long before we fall into the trap of “doing” instead of “being”. We are told that “We

are saved by grace,” but once we are saved a new believer is taught that he or she must now begin living a lifestyle of holiness that is pleasing to God. Holiness is not a matter of becoming, it is who we are by God’s grace. It is not achieved by our own actions it is that idea that very often becomes the stumbling block that gets in the way of true holiness. Instead of learning “how to become” we need to discover who we are! Discovering our true identity awakens us to live in the freedom that is ours. We awaken to our righteousness where we are living a victorious overcomer’s life.

Nearly everyone is familiar with what a treadmill is. A treadmill is typically found in a gym and is used for burning calories and cardio work. When you first start out, it is fairly easy to keep up with the pace of the track under your feet and you might be fooled into thinking that there is no real challenge. But before long the pace of the track picks up and it slowly rises into an incline. After all is said and done your workout leaves you in a sweat and with rubbery legs that feel like they are about to give out at any moment.

Religion and treadmills have a lot in common, we start out thinking that not only is it something we should do but something that we can do. In our vigor and zeal we fall into the pit of legalism, which in the end wears us out.

Jesus spoke about the treadmill of religion when he said,

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am

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gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

I love how the Message Bible words this quote from Jesus.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Matthew 11:28-30

The High Cost of Religion

I wanted to insert the story below because I believe it conveys the high cost of religion. This story is from Robin Sampson, who is the author of Heartofwisdom.com. Robin tells us that she, like many others, believed the lie that God's love and acceptance could be earned.

Robin wrote:

Most of my life I have run on a performance treadmill attempting to earn love and acceptance from God and others. The result has been a mess. I became a Christian as a teenager and deeply wanted to follow Christ. But I was full of shame and guilt, enslaved in bondage, unable

to accept love and the forgiveness God offered. The treadmill kept me from freedom to enjoy the blessings of God. I married at 17 and had four children in five years. I was determined to raise my children in a Christian home.

In my zeal, I went from the life of a sinner to a religioholic (an alcoholic is preoccupied by alcohol, a workaholic is preoccupied by work, I was preoccupied with legalistic religion). We joined a legalistic church and went every time the door was open. If we missed a service, the guilt would drive me to volunteer for something else. I kept the nursery during church and taught Sunday School. I wasn't fed much spiritually because I was busy earning love and approval. Artificial rules and regulations sucked the love of God out of our family.

I sincerely thought I was on the right path. I tried to control our family with my lists of Christian rules. Church attendance and Bible studies were duties. My husband was rejected by the church because he drank beer on weekends. After that, he had several affairs; he finally abandoned us and we didn't see him for 15 years.

I was completely rejected by the church I served. I was told, "I must not have been submissive enough." It was a small church and I think they were afraid to have a single mother with four children and no income.

I emphasize with the millions of single mothers in America struggling to feed their children every day. I was raising four children without child support for six years. We slept on mattresses, ate meals

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off a cardboard box, skipped many meals, and collected soda bottles in ditches to buy medicine. I was desperate to feed my children. I worked waitress jobs and even got a job in a nightclub for a while. The churches we visited were afraid of us or too legalistic for a divorced mother. After a few rejections, I stopped trying to go.

I then married, this time to a man with an unsavory past, but he promised to take us to church and he did. We were involved in a mid-size church without all the extreme legalism. I had three more children. I worked hard toward the Proverbs 31 goal and we began homeschooling. Our family was dysfunctional, as most families are, but I was determined to work hard and protect my children from the evil world.

Externally we appeared to be a godly family, but internally each of us was unraveling.

I passed down unhealthy habits of performing to earn love and acceptance to my children. Instead of teaching the love of God, I taught them (by actions, not words) how to run on the performance treadmill and jump through behavioral hoops. While I was running on this treadmill I had a judgmental attitude towards anyone who wasn't on the same treadmill. I was extremely critical of myself and others. Where is the love of God in that?

Homeschooling brought in new artificial rules and regulations (wearing dresses, baking bread, using the right math program, the

number of school hours, etc.). I had new rules to follow—maybe this time I could get it right! I was willing to work hard. I truly believed I was on the right path, but the fruit proved otherwise. When my children hit their teen-age years they rebelled.

I was in deep denial. My closest friend once told me, “If being in denial was an Olympic sport, you would be a gold medalist!” My formula for coping with the dysfunctional mess went something like this:

- Step 1: Denial (Pretend there is no problem or pretend I don’t feel the way I feel)
- Step 2: See some of the problem, blame myself, and wallow in shame.
- Step 3: Work harder, try harder
- Step 4: Fail.
- Step 5: Blame myself, wallow in shame.
- Step 6: Lose it.
- Step 7: Blame myself for losing it, wallow in shame. Emotional collapse.

The good news is that the story of Robin did not end there; she later discovered God’s unchanging love and acceptance. The sad truth is that her story is a common one, that there are many who have fallen for the same destructive lie.

When we first come to Christ as a new believer with our needs, our

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prayers are answered instantly. As time moves on, our relationship with Christ and answers to our prayers seemingly become more difficult. We are told that this is normal and that it is part of the growing up and maturing process that the Lord wants to take us through. We are told that the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives will grow dim and in fact it will feel like God has abandoned us altogether. What a hideous lie!

I remember sitting in Bible school while being sold this bill of goods. We were told that this was part of the “dying to self” process. We were also told that the Holy Spirit used circumstances and bad stuff to help kill off the flesh in our lives. We walked around that entire semester waiting for the hammer of God to drop so that we could ultimately “Glorify” God. And we weren’t disappointed either, because sure enough, when someone expects bad stuff to happen, they attract what they expect. Before long the whole student body was walking around with singed hair and smelling of smoke. If someone walked into one of our classrooms for the first time, their first question would be, where’s the barbeque?

In recent years I have seen a teaching about the various seasons that God takes us through in our lives. This teaching proclaims that God at times in our lives “hides” from us. This is erroneous doctrine and a myth that stands in opposition to the word of God that says “He will never leave us nor forsake us”. I love how the Amplified Bible expounds on this passage.

“...for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax my hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]”

Hebrews 13:5

The reality of God’s promise here stands strong in opposition to whatever man’s experience may be. Do we have times and seasons in our lives where God’s voice or presence doesn’t seem to be around? Have you ever felt that God was trying to escape connection with you? I want you to know that God’s Word stands true no matter what circumstances or situations may try to tell you. There is a greater reality that supersedes the reality of life’s experiences. The question is which reality will you allow your heart to be persuaded by and live by?

Truth is Truth

So why do we feel that God is sometimes there and sometimes He is not?

Paul the Apostle spoke about this to the church in Galatians, he states: Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

The church here in Galatians had gotten off course by mixing the old covenant with the new covenant. Remember, as I stated before, the

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old covenant Mosaic Law was not an unconditional covenant but was instead based upon the doing and the keeping of the law. Somehow the Galatians got it into their heads that what God had given them was not good enough, that in fact they could perfect and improve upon God's pure gift that was given to them through Jesus.

Jesus provided an unconditional, everlasting covenant that was not depended up our trying to keep it. Like Abraham, all we are to do is "believe and trust" in what is provided. Whenever we mix something else in we dilute its effect and this is especially true where it concerns the old and new covenants. In fact, Paul told them that when you mix covenants that "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

Read Galatians 5:4 in the Amplified.

"If you seek to be justified and declared righteous and to be given a right standing with God through the Law, you are brought to nothing and so separated (severed) from Christ. You have fallen away from grace (from God's gracious favor and unmerited blessing)."

The question is, if you are separated from a relationship with Christ, what will be the natural consequence of that relationship? If I am told that I must do, do, do in order to be, be, be, what happens to the living vibrant communion I was enjoying when I first accepted and believed on Christ? Does it become stagnate, dry and lifeless? I think you would agree with me that it will. How we interpret what we are

experiencing in Christ must be held up to the pure light of what He has provided to us through the new covenant.

toxic beliefs about God would have you believe that the issue of sin and “falling from grace” is based upon behavior (doing). No my friend, it is based upon what Jesus did for you. He took your sin and punishment; it was His behavior, not yours, that saved you and indeed is what is keeping you now.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2: 8-10

Repeat the following out loud to yourself and allow its words to come alive in you.

“On my worst day, in my greatest failure, you died for me. On my worst day, in my greatest failure, you were on my side. On my worst day, in my greatest failure, you saw the best in me. On my worst day, in my greatest failure, you saw a good end for me.”

The question is whether Jesus completely satisfies the demands of the law on behalf of humanity. This question is hard on religion and is often answered with a “Yes I believe He did die for me and satisfied the demands of the law, but...”

And then the air is filled with all of the reasons this too good to be

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true gospel can't work unless we are doing something. The question usually arises, "Aren't you afraid people will go out and abuse this by living any way they want to?"

Well, if keeping of the law works, then by all means we should stay there. Fortunately that was not God's intention. God's intent in the giving of the law was to bring us to the understanding that it is impossible to live a life based upon the law and that we were in desperate need for something much greater.

Did you realize that when you focus on the keeping of the law you empower its influence over your life? I Corinthians 15:56 tells us that "the strength of sin is the law." This means that once the law has served its purpose, which was to bring us to Christ, we are then to rest in the provision of God's free gift. Remember this, God declares you righteous, God declares you holy and pure. In the midst of whatever feelings of failure you may be dealing with today, God boldly and confidently celebrates your life and declares you as a complete, whole person who lacks nothing!

How God Sees You

When I was a boy, I picked up a pamphlet called “This Was Your Life”. It was published by Chick Publications and was meant to be an evangelism tool. It was in cartoon form which made it appealing and easy to read. It set up a scene of man who died of a heart attack who ended up standing in front of the judgment seat of God where his life was reviewed based on the deeds of his entire life. The next few pages showed all heaven watching a large movie screen which showcased every wicked deed and thought ever committed. As scene after scene played across the screen, dirty jokes and evil thoughts were seen and heard in the throne room of God. In the end, the question was asked, “Is his name written in the book of life?” The final judgment of God boomed out across heaven, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”.

This pretty much outlines the majority of the church’s understanding of how God views sin and the eventual judgment of sin.

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It certainly affected my understanding of God for years and as a result caused a lot of struggle for me as a young Christian. My inconsistency to live a life without sin became an impossible task for me created a lot of guilt and condemnation in my life.

The scriptures that were used in the tract to prove that indeed God will judge us are found in Revelations 20:12, 13.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works.”

At first glance at this scripture it would seem we all will someday stand before the throne room and be judged based on our works and our name being in the Book of Life. Accepting this scripture at face value here would be wrong without understanding this scripture in its full context.

This section of Scripture presents the Great White Throne Judgment. This is a judgment against non-Christians only, which occurs just after the Millennium. No believer will stand before this throne. The time period is important to note, it is after Satan comes out of his 1,000-year imprisonment when he again deceives the nations who are still on Earth. We the Bride of Christ will have long been gone celebrating the Marriage Supper of the Lamb during this time.

Can you see how taking a scripture completely out of context can change the entire meaning? The whole question of sin is an important

one. It can either bring freedom or a life ridden with condemnation and guilt.

A frequent question is “What happens if I sin, and then I die before I have an opportunity to confess that sin to God?” Another common question is “What happens if I commit a sin, but then forget about it and never remember to confess it to God?”

Many people believe that although their sins have been forgiven prior to salvation, after salvation it is up to them to obtain forgiveness through their confession. Others believe that all their sins have been forgiven at the cross, however, they cannot experience forgiveness unless they confess each time they sin.

Growing up in the church I fell into this trap for many years. I guess you could say that I was the victim of a combination of my not knowing my true identity as God saw it and some of the preaching that I was exposed to which told me what a miserable sinner I was. As a small child I would return to the front of the church again and again in hopes that by asking for forgiveness yet again I could rid myself of the sin consciousness that plagued me. I would feel so much guilt and shame at times that I was afraid that if the rapture took place that I would be left behind. I can remember many times coming home from school to find the house empty and panicking, thinking that I had missed it and been left alone.

First of all, I want to assure you that God is not like that, God knows the inconsistency of man’s heart. His love for us is so intense

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that He provided a way that deals with our inability to keep the law and commandments of God. I did not understand this as a teenager and as a result my relationship with God was always strained. I lived on a roller coaster of emotion that went from knowing God in powerful ways to the opposite end of the spectrum where I felt like a stranger to God. This is because I based my relationship with God on myself and my ability to live consistently rather than on what He provided through His son Jesus Christ for me.

God's love is constant and continuous; He has been demonstrating His love to all mankind throughout the ages and now reveals His love to us through His son. Read what Paul wrote Romans 5:7-9 about how God demonstrates His love to us:

“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”

Did you see that? This is something that was provided to you on your behalf before you were ever born. That is incredible! Many Christians are still chasing after and trying to acquire God's love, trying to get something that has already been provided to them as a free gift.

In the book of Colossians Paul bears this out as he speaks about the finished work of Christ and what is already ours. Paul states that when

Christ died, you died with him, and in the same way, when Christ was made alive you were made alive with Him. Now that's powerful! Again, this happened two thousand years ago on the cross, well before you or I was born.

Listen to how the Message version states it in modern English.

“Entering into this fullness is not something you figure out or achieve. It's not a matter of being circumcised or keeping a long list of laws. No, you're already in—insiders—not through some secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin. If it's an initiation ritual you're after, you've already been through it by submitting to baptism. Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as he did Christ. When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.

Colossians 2:11-15

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Notice, everything listed in this passage of scripture is something that has already taken place, it is past tense! It is a free gift where the only requirement is to believe that it is already ours.

Can you see why it is important that we place our faith and trust in what has already been provided and not get caught up in continually confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness?

Let me ask you, if you are continually asking God for something that is already yours, are you able to stand confidently before God without shame and guilt? Let me tell you from personal experience, it is not easy to do so.

If confession of sin is something we must do on an ongoing basis then there is no hope for any of us.

Why do I say this? Let's take a moment and go over some typical definitions of sin. According to the law and Jesus who loved quoting the law back to the Pharisees, sin not only represents the act of disobedience but even the thoughts of disobedience. Now put that into context of what Jesus said: that even the person with just the thought of hatred toward someone is guilty, and that thoughts of lust for a woman are as though you have already committed adultery with her.

Now if you look at the deeper cause of sin, which is independence and self-sufficiency, you will soon realize that all behavior is based upon the meeting of our own needs. In other words, we are selfish to

the core. Even when we do “good things” they are meant to meet a need of our own, thus the Tree of Good and Evil.

Now let me break that down a bit more so that you can really understand what it is I am saying here. Every human on this planet is born into this world with unmet needs. These needs represent very strong desires that absolutely must be met. Things like the need for love, significance and power are only the tip of the iceberg. You might as well strap yourself to a team of wild horses and have them drag you around your entire life without any recourse to save yourself, because that is exactly what is happening to you moment by moment. This is what the Bible means when it says in Ephesians 2:3 that we live by the dictates of the flesh and the mind.

We of course live under the delusion that this is the way life is supposed to be lived. We live and act moment by moment, not necessarily by any conscience thought or decision. We instead act to meet the unmet needs of our lives based on well established beliefs that go to the core of our subconscious minds. These beliefs about how to get our needs met became well established in childhood, beginning at the point of our birth.

The Bible tells us that we are by nature children of wrath, making choices out of well established mindsets that are based on independence and self-sufficiency.

In light of this, do you think it is better to rely upon your own works of self-righteousness by trying to keep all of your thoughts and deeds in line or is it better to trust in God’s provision for your life? Which

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option do you think is a more reliable choice on which to put your faith?

The words of John the Baptist when he saw Jesus at the river Jordan: “Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.”

You might be wondering about 1 John 1:9 which says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When we read the Bible, we need to look at the context in which each book was written. If we don't do that, it's easy to misinterpret what a particular book or chapter is really saying. When that happens, we can easily come to wrong conclusions, which can then cause a lot of misunderstanding about the work of Christ on our behalf.

The book or letter of I John was written to the church in Asia. John wrote it to deal with a major doctrinal heresy called "Gnosticism." Gnosticism comes from the Greek word "gnosis", which means knowledge. The Gnostics claimed to possess a special knowledge, a “higher truth” known only to a certain few. They had many beliefs, a primary belief being that all flesh is evil and that only spirit is good. Because they believed this, they didn't really believe that Jesus came in the flesh - they believed that his humanity was an illusion. They also believed that because sin had to do with our flesh, sin wasn't actually real - sin to them was just an illusion. The church in Ephesus

was filled with people who not only didn't believe Christ came in the flesh; they didn't believe sin was real.

We can see that John addresses each of these beliefs throughout his letter here in I John. He insisted that Jesus had not been an illusion but that he had been seen by their own eyes and handled by their own hands.

He then wanted the Gnostics to see that there were many people who could testify to the reality of Christ and that there were some people in the church who were not in fellowship with Christ. John's message here is clear and he states it when he wrote that "God is light and in Him there is no darkness. We are either in the light (saved) or in darkness (lost)." Scriptures are full of this comparison between light (saved) vs. darkness (lost).

He went on to say that if someone says they have fellowship with Christ but they are walking in darkness (lost), they are lying and not practicing the truth. The Gnostics claimed to be in fellowship with Christ (saved), and yet were actually living a lie and therefore weren't practicing the truth.

You can read in verse seven that "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." To put it another way, once we are saved we are in fellowship because the blood of Jesus continually cleanses us from all sin. Therefore, we aren't forgiven because we confess our sins; we are forgiven because of what Christ

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did for us on the cross. Faith appropriates what God has already provided for us by grace.

In verse eight, John addresses the wrong belief the Gnostics had regarding sin because they didn't believe it was real and therefore believed they had no sin. We read in verse eight, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" The "we" John is using here doesn't refer to believers. He is referring to the Gnostics, who believed they were without sin. Because they claimed to be without sin, then they were only deceiving themselves and the truth (Jesus) was not in them.

The answer to the Gnostics is found in verse nine which says that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." In other words, if the Gnostics were to confess they had sins, then God, is faithful and righteous and would forgive and cleanse them from their unrighteousness.

It is important to note that the Greek language here uses a noun and not a verb. In other words, it is not a continuous act; instead it is a single thing. This presents to us the fact that guilt comes to all mankind because of the one and only sin that hangs over our lives: the sin of independence that says we can do it on our own outside of our true identity. It is the words "forgive" and "cleanse" which mean past actions that have results today and will continue to have results in the future. Also, the word "all" used in these verses means completely all.

It doesn't mean that we are cleansed of our past sins and our past unrighteousness; it means we were cleansed of all our unrighteousness. And if God cleanses us from all unrighteousness, then we are cleansed forever!

The purpose of First John was to compare the truth of God to the error of Gnosticism. John here was addressing the Gnostics, who were deceived by their own teaching. He wanted the Gnostics to understand that what they believed stood in opposition with what God said. He was not, however, addressing believers.

Today, there are people who believe that Christians must confess their sins in order to be forgiven. They believe that it is possible for us to be "in and out" of fellowship with God and that we must "keep short accounts". The Bible doesn't teach that we are "in and out" of fellowship with God.

Teaching that we are to "keep short accounts" with God causes very real and damaging problems because we miss the point of what confession really is. Such popular teaching makes confession a mindless cure-all, a "bar of soap" we use daily to clean up our flesh. A common scenario would be of a person privately confessing to God a bitter attitude towards another and then asking for forgiveness. Afterwards, he doesn't think about it, feeling that he has adequately met the "spiritual" requirement. He is in fact putting faith in works righteousness rather than in faith righteousness which is based on what God already provided through Jesus.

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The fact is that while the sin issue is dead between you and God, it isn't between the people with whom you come in contact daily. When we realize we've wronged another, we need to go to that person and take steps toward reconciling the relationship with that person. Acts of sin, which really means to walk and act independently of God, have destructive consequences. Any time you are not in harmony with your identity which is in Christ it means that you are probably making wrong choices that can inhibit you from living out your true potential.

Teaching that we must continually confess our sins in order to be forgiven does not produce changed hearts. Why? Because we have placed ourselves under a "law" which demands that we confess every sin or act of disobedience in order to be forgiven and stay in fellowship with God. However, there are no laws, Mosaic or manmade, that can free us from sin. The law was never meant to free us from sin because *"the power of sin is the law"* (1 Corinthians 15:56). Therefore, we usually end up repeating the same sin before the week (or even the day) is over and feeling guilt and frustration over our inability to change.

This obsession with confession keeps us under the power of sin because we are consumed with thoughts of ourselves in a sincere desire to please God. As a result, though, we become so concerned about whether we are "in or out of fellowship" with God that we don't have time for our relationships down here.

Did you realize that because of the finished work of Christ God's grace is the same toward everyone? This is really incredible when you see the full meaning and impact for all humanity.

The Bible is quite plain in pointing out that forgiveness of sin is something that was made available to the entire world. The grace of God is what God has provided for us, independent of us.

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

Titus 2:11 tell us this, it says *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,”*

Does this mean that everybody is saved? Absolutely not, because faith is a necessary part of our response to the free gift that has been given to us.

We need to focus on the fact that God has forever settled the sin issue. Before Christ, men's sins separated them from God. Christ was the only solution to this dilemma. When He hung on the cross and said "It is finished!" He meant it is absolutely finished! God has bridged the gap between Himself and man through His Son.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them... God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

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2 Corinthians 5:18,19,21

Since the Bible tells us that all of our sins are forgiven because of the grace of God, then what do we do when we do sin, ignore it and say "I'm under grace, so it doesn't make any difference if I sin."? Many believe that teaching the forgiveness of Christ will cause people to go out and sin more. This is crazy when you think about it. The first misunderstanding is that we think that it is the law that keeps us from sinning in the first place. This is completely wrong. It is the law that demands us to perform so that we come to the end of ourselves and discover Christ as the only answer.

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

Romans 8:2

Paul dealt with this argument over 2,000 years ago. He responded, "*By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" (Romans 6:2). He continues to tell us that "*we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. . . In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. . . For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace...*" (Romans 6:6,7,11,14).

The more we understand our identification with Christ, the more we understand that we have been freed from the power of sin. We are

freed from sin because of the work of Christ Jesus on our behalf, not because of our keeping the law. Teaching the forgiveness we have in Christ is not a license to sin - we don't need a license to sin. The only reason people often believe this is true is because they lack an understanding of God's unconditional love, forgiveness and acceptance. They do not understand the motivating power of Christ's love for them.

Chapter 4

Sorry Lord, I Swear I'll Try Harder

The term rededication is very much a part of our Christian culture. Having grown up in church I can attest to the fact I have rededicated my life many times - so many times that eventually I wore out my rededicator. When you hear about someone rededicating themselves it sounds like a very noble and honorable thing to do. I mean, who hasn't reaffirmed their faith at times?

However, when I talk about rededication, I am talking about when I promise God that if He would help me, I would try harder to live for Him. In my understanding at the time, living for Him meant that I would behave in a better way. I would read the Bible more consistently, pray more earnestly, witness more boldly, give more generously, and avoid sin more fervently.

It's interesting to note that Jesus never once calls on us to rededicate ourselves, yet this what we hear every week from church

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leaders in many churches. The sermons we hear challenge the congregation to rededicate themselves in a variety of ways. One week it might be to read the Bible more or to pray more, the next sermons might be focused on trying harder or making a change in our behavior.

The problem is that we mistakenly think that somehow our behavior directly relates to our relationship with God. We miss the point that our salvation has nothing to do with our doing or performing. Our relationship is based on something that is much more than our erratic behavior. Judge yourself by law and you'll come up short every time. The result will always be a sense of condemnation and guilt.

What Jesus does tell us is that we should renounce our self efforts to do better and simply follow (enter into union) with Him. (See Matthew 16:24 – it says “deny” yourself, not “dedicate” yourself.)

Understanding this brings me to a deep abiding conclusion that outside of Christ, the human soul is not fixable. You cannot put him on a gurney as it were and wheel him into the nearest Emergency room so that the doctors can resuscitate and “repair” him. We are reminded again and again by Christ himself that our best intentions will never measure up to meet God. Remember his admonition that “unless *your righteousness exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”. Rededicating is the self belief that if I try just a little harder this time, I just might make it the next time around.

Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." In Christ, we've been made NEW. We haven't been "improved." We've been made brand new. To make the point, let's substitute various words in place of "new" to see if they really tell us the truth of who we are in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *repaired* creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *fixed up* creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is an *overhauled* creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *polished up* creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *reorganized* creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is an *improved* creation.

How about using these words: reconditioned, refurbished, mended, patched, adjusted, renovated, recalibrated, tuned up, enhanced, modified, revised, altered, corrected, balanced, refitted, revived, refreshed, rejuvenated, made over, covered, doctored, reshaped, spruced up, changed. I'm sure you can think of more.

All of those words seem to work well in some "brands" of Christianity, but I personally don't believe they have *any* place in describing the reality of who we are in Christ! When we came to Christ, did God begin a process of "fixing us up," and then helping us to "improve" our lives to be better people?

Let's try another verse, using the same words above in place of two missing words. Do you know what the real missing words are?

For you *were fixed up*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

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When Christ who *mended* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

For you *were enhanced*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who *revived* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

For you *were spruced up*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who *changed* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

For you *were refurbished*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who *improved* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

For you _____, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who _____ our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

What are the missing words in the above verse?

For you **died**, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who **is** our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:3-4

If you're a Christian, at one point in your life here on earth, you *died* and were created anew. Paul obviously isn't talking about physical death, but about the core of who we are - the reality of who we are - our spirits. God didn't take the "old us" and change us into a

"better" or "improved" us. Rather, we died ("I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live" - Gal 2:20), and we were born again as a brand new creation. We haven't been *revived*. We've been *regenerated* ("re-created," "produced anew") completely! In other words, God didn't take the old us and pump some life into it. Rather, we died and God made us into something completely new. A *new* creation. Our old life wasn't changed. It was *exchanged* with a real life - the very life of Jesus!

God didn't just "cover" us, or our sins, with the life of Jesus. The Old Testament sacrifices "covered" sins, but could never actually take them away (see Hebrews 10). But, "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The person we were in Adam was dead to God. There was nothing God could do with that old creature. All the work in the world, all the touching up, all the revising... could never produce real life. So we died, and we became a new creation. Righteous and holy, clean, purified, justified. You can't improve on that! Our "job" in this life is not to become a better person, because God has already made us into a new person. Rather, I believe our daily walk with God is a matter of growing daily in the understanding of who we already are - who we've already become as a new creation by God's grace - and walking more and more "in" that.

We are truly His workmanship, not our own workmanship. He has created us anew so that now we live and move and have our being in Him. It's a life that's so much better than having merely been "improved."

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Did you realize that rededication of oneself is really a focus on self instead of the finished work of Christ? It is actually a subtle form of idolatry when you think about it.

We must stop worshiping the false god of our own behavioral expectations. Instead of worshiping our own self-efforts to improve, we must stop permitting our Christian experience to be about our efforts, our sins, our good works, and our promises to do better.

Doesn't The New Testament Tell Us To Repent?

The word repentance, which means change of mind, shows up in the New Testament sixty times, so with that in mind, the answer is obviously yes!

We know that the end result of “sin” (choosing to walk independent of God’s provision) is all kinds of self destructive behavior. If our sin is not on a conscience level we do it by default and suffer in other areas of our lives without knowing the cause.

Repentance is the ongoing decision to change your mind by acknowledging that you can only live life effectively through your connectedness to God. How many times have you been inspired and quickened in your heart to change your mind and attitude toward something? You might have acted or responded in a wrong way, but once you recognized a better way you repented and chose a different direction.

You see, true repentance has nothing to do with coming to God and asking for forgiveness. The fact is that your sins have already been forgiven. Repentance is the changing of your mind from the way you have seen yourself in the past to the truth of how God sees you now.

The Bible tells us that it is the goodness of God that leads a person to repentance. Let me put it this way to make a point, it is knowing and realizing how good God is toward us that leads us to making radical mind shifts where it concerns our identity and our original blueprint and design!

My hope is that this book has already brought you to repentance numerous times as you realized that you needed to change your mind about how God sees you.

A great story that really brings this point out is the story that Jesus told of the prodigal son. It is interesting to note that son left the pig pen fully intending to rededicate himself to his father. His full intention was to return home to his father in hopes of serving him better. “I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” (Luke 15:18,19)

As the story goes on we are told that the son approached his father with the full intention of “trying harder,” he had a change of mind which was repentance. “What did he change his mind about,” you ask? Notice that the father never even allowed his son to give his speech about becoming a servant. Not one word of “I promise to do better”

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was allowed to be spoken by the son. Instead the father only showed unconditional love.

Obviously the son up to this point had a wrong understanding about his father. What did he have to repent from? He had to repent from rejecting his father's unconditional love and acceptance. A change of mind suddenly occurred in the son. Up till now his understanding had been that his Father was looking for performance, when in fact the father only wanted his beloved son back.

The bewildered son wasn't given the chance to make any promises. His only choice was to relax in his father's arms and accept his unconditional love or to pull away. His choice was to repent of his own faulty concept of who his father was.

Notice, he started out in the pig pen with good intentions of rededicating himself, but it wasn't until he felt the arms of his father and his father's hug that he repented of his faulty concept about what his father wanted from him.

Maybe you, like the son, have misunderstood God and his love toward you. Maybe you have fallen into the trap of Performance addiction. God wants you to know that he doesn't need your promises to do better. He loves you, accepts you and desires to live through you. Will you allow him to do that? Choose to see God differently today.

I Love You

A man returned home to find that his wife was gone. At first he thought that she had gone out with her girlfriends or

possibly was late coming home from work. That was, until he found the note she left on their bed.

It was simply addressed with his first name on the plain white stationary envelope. The typewritten paper on the inside was folded in three quarters precisely. There was no 'Dear' or any other kind of greeting to start the letter. It simply started with the intention of ending their life together.

I've been cheating on you. Direct and to the point. His wife was nothing if not direct. The letter went on to explain that she had been carrying on an affair with one of her coworkers. She hadn't intended to start it. But once it had started she couldn't stop. She had come to the conclusion that it wasn't right nor fair to him, that she was a terrible person and he deserved better.

The man sat there on their bed in their house. In the home that they had built together. It was true that over the years their interests had diverged a little. He had gotten busy with his work and she with hers. They had grown apart and had stopped spending so much time together and they had stopped talking about anything really meaningful to them. Conversations had consisted of 'How was your day?', 'Good', 'That's good.'

But he couldn't point to a single instance where things had gone terribly wrong. It had just been one little thing on top of another

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until they had just started cohabitating rather than really being married. 'Just one more sad statistic', he thought.

Shock gave way to anger. How dare she? How dare she do this to him? Hadn't he stuck by her when her father had died of cancer? Hadn't he supported her when she decided to go back to school to get her degree? And when they had found out that she couldn't have children hadn't he stood by her?

One thought and feeling piled up on top of another until he had worked himself up into a rage. He crumpled the damn letter, got up and went to throw it away in the trash. Suddenly he stopped and stared down into the trash can. Her wedding ring lay at the bottom. Images flashed through his mind. He remembered their going to the jewelry store together to pick it out. How happy she had been, how happy they had been, both of them believing that they would be together, forever.

"Nooooo!"

The single word uttered was enough. He fished the ring out of the trash can and went out to the kitchen. He called her mother and asked where she had gone. Her mother was hesitant to part with that information but after his assurance that he was going

to get her back, not hurt her, that he still loved her despite what she had done, her mother finally reluctantly told him where she would be.

He grabbed his keys and was out the door. While looking down at the ring in the bottom of the trash can he had rapidly come to the conclusion that he couldn't throw away their lives. Their dreams and their hopes were still alive in him even though they had both strayed from the path. He loved her. It was as simple and profound as that. All was not forgiven, but with some work and time what they had could be salvaged and he wanted that more than he'd ever wanted anything else in his life.

With that thought he pulled up in front of the apartment building and got out. He walked up to the door of the address he had been given over the phone and knocked.

"Just a minute," someone sang out from inside. The door locks came undone and she opened the door.

"Jim? What," she faltered.

"I love you."

"What?" Now she looked stunned. He took her left hand and placed the ring back on her finger. "I love you, I always have. And I'm sorry that I didn't say it enough. That I didn't show it enough. I'm sorry that I let you slip away from me."

"Jim, I cheated on you. How could you love me after that?"

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"I'm hurt but I think you're hurt too, right?" She looked down and away from him, a blush of shame on her face.

"What you've done doesn't change how I feel about you."

"Jim..." She looked at him helplessly. "What do you want me to do? I'm sorry, but I don't think I can go back."

"I'm not asking you to go back. I'm asking you to go forward.

Do you still love me?"

"I don't know."

"I can work with that. And I can make you fall in love with me again."

She made a sound of frustration. "Don't you get it. It's over between us. I don't want to hurt you anymore."

He smiled, "Then you still have feelings for me."

"Jim, what do you want from me?"

"Let me love you. That's all."

Story written by Nicole Ward

Chapter 5

Conviction Is Not From God

Many people believe that the Holy Spirit's job is to convict them of sin. I know that this is true because I at one time believed this too. This topic is a controversial one because this has been such a prevalent belief and has been taught widely for so many years.

It is interesting to see what people really think about this topic. While searching on the Internet I ran across an online forum where people post various questions.

The question was posted "Is it true that God the Holy Spirit convicts Believers of their sins?"

It was interesting to read the line of thought as many people responded with their answers. One person wrote, "Do you ever feel guilty when you know you've committed a sin? That is conviction."

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Many people provided scriptures showing that indeed the Holy Spirit did convict people of sin, for instance;

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Acts 2:36-38

And,

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation"

2 Cor. 7:9b

What then is the truth regarding this topic? It certainly is an important one because it has everything to do with our salvation. Let's take a close look at what the Bible says about this topic.

What Justifies You?

The Bible is really quite clear about what Jesus's purpose was in His coming to humanity. We can read what John the Baptist said about Jesus when he saw Jesus walking toward him.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:29

This is amazing; John the Baptist knew by revelation the purpose of Jesus, We read here that John was able to read the complete job description of Jesus that day. Notice, he did not say or infer anything that would point to any conditions having to be met in order for Jesus to fulfill his job description. You see, according to what this passage says it would seem that the sin issue was to be completely dealt with.

Up to this point, the focus of the old covenant was upon man's own effort to measure up and as a result it will cause you to look at and examine yourself rather than what was provided for you by God. The new covenant has a completely different focus; it causes you to look toward the finished work of Jesus. Somehow, John the Baptist knew this as he stood there that day.

Here is another scripture that shows us that the sin issue has been dealt with.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:2

In the Old Testament, God's judgment was poured out on both individuals and nations. In the New Testament, God's judgment was poured out on Jesus.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” 2 Cor. 5:19

Do you see that? Christ has reconciled the sin of the entire world

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unto himself. This passage tells us quite directly that God is no longer imputing people's sin against them. Not imputing really means "not counting their sins against them". This is incredible and is really what the good news of the gospel is all about.

Just How Forgiven Are You?

From everything that we have read here, it would seem that the forgiveness of God is complete! What is truly amazing about this is that the forgiveness of sin is not only for those of us who have embraced Christ as Savior but for the sin of the entire world.

"And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." I John 2:2

Now, that to me is past, present and future! No wonder the angels sang at Jesus' birth "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). It was truly to be a day of celebration. This Jesus was to take upon himself all of the sin of the world. This speaks directly to you and to me, it covers all of our sin, sickness and pain, every aspect of our life that falters and fails in living out our purpose in life.

The Sin of Blasphemy

If, as the scriptures point out, the sin issue – past, present and future has been dealt with, then is there any sin that would keep a person from receiving eternal life?

There is a passage in the Bible that has perplexed many people throughout the years. It refers to one of the most fearful terms to be found in the New Testament, it is the word “blasphemy.” Blasphemy is represented as a horrible sin, but what is it? Have I been guilty of it? Can one obtain pardon for it?

One person by the name of James wrote on the online forum: *"Jesus refers to sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as unforgivable sin. What are these sins and what constitutes blasphemy? Sometimes I feel I may have sinned."*

The scripture this person is referring to is *"but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"* Mark 3:29

Wow, I know exactly how this person feels. When I was young I too heard sermons preached about the unforgivable sin. There were many times I felt as though I had turned away from God and there would be no way back. When I was older, this actually worked in the opposite way in my life. I had experienced some very serious disappointments in my life and as a result became very angry at God. I felt that He had abandoned me and wasn't there when I needed Him. In my anger, hurt and misery I struck out in the only way I knew how. I told myself that I would not walk this walk any longer. In my rebellion I made some pretty bad choices, I convinced myself that there would be no way that I could ever turn back to God. I figured that if I committed the worst sins that I could think of, I would eventually hit the one that would finally cause God to turn His back

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on me completely. I became self-destructive in every way I could think of, my hurt, anger and bitterness lasted five years.

Talk about a bad case of religion! Everything I had believed about God was not true. Somehow I had missed the message that God loved me and that he, as the scripture points out, “would never leave me or forsake me.”

Let me write out these words of comfort to you in the Amplified version of the Bible.

“...for He God Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down relax My hold on you)! Assuredly not!” Hebrews 13:6

You might have struggled in one form or another over this same question, let me assure you that God’s promise to never let you go is a real one.

So if God loves me and accepts me, then what is the unforgivable sin? And does that mean I can do whatever I want as long as I don’t commit it?

These are two great questions that need to be answered. First of all, if all sin has been forgiven then what is the unforgivable sin? I believe that the only unforgivable sin is the rejection of Jesus Christ's offer of salvation, His free gift of eternal life, and thus, His forgiveness from

sin. If you don't accept His gift, you cannot be forgiven. If you deny the Holy Spirit's entrance into your life, to work His sanctification in you, you cannot be cleansed from unrighteousness.

Are You Saying I Can Do Whatever I Want?

Paul the Apostle answered this question when he wrote to the church in Corinth.

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” I Cor. 6:12

You can choose to live a life of self-sufficiency, but man was never meant to walk disconnected from God. This is the actual cause of sin's having entered and destroyed our world in the first place. Self-sufficiency is the act of saying; “I will meet my own needs outside of God.” Anytime a person does this they are, as Paul put it, being “brought under the power” of something other than God. It is interesting to point out that some people, because they have not understood the love of God, argue that they “don't need God because he is too controlling”. Paul infers here that living a life disconnected from God is to, by default; connect oneself to other outside influences that don't have your best interest at heart.

Choosing to live a life disconnected from your source rather than as you were meant to live it is to open yourself up to eventual pain and suffering. So the bottom line is, yes, if you want to destroy yourself you certainly can and the devil will show up to help you along the way.

What Does The Holy Spirit Convict Us of?

Jesus Himself answered this one when He was talking about the Holy Spirit and his job description.

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged

John 16:8-11

This passage says that the Holy Spirit convicts of three things: First of all, Sin, secondly, of Righteousness, and thirdly, of Judgment. He convicts two groups of people: The world (not you) and you (the Christian).

Who does the Holy Spirit convict of sin? According to verse 9 here it says that the conviction of sin is connected to the world. Why are they convicted? “Because they do not believe in Me,” says Jesus. It is the unbeliever who is convicted of sin. What is that sin? They are convicted of one sin in particular – unbelief in Christ. Note, the Holy Spirit doesn’t convict unbelievers of their sins (plural), the use of the word here singular, and refers to the greatest sin of all -- their failure to trust Christ as their Savior.

But what about the Christian? Jesus said the Spirit would convict believers of righteousness because “I go to My Father and you no

longer see Me.” Conviction of sin is directed to a group Jesus called “they” – the world. Conviction of righteousness is associated with “you” – the follower of Jesus. The ministry of the Holy Spirit toward the Christian is to convince us of our righteousness. Jesus has put away our sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26). Now He seeks to convince (convict) us of that reality so that we will act consistently with who we are.

There is nothing more affirming than when someone tells you that you are completely loved, that you are complete in Christ, that everything you have need of is already yours. I don’t think that there is anything more moving to me than to have someone look me in the eyes and tell me, “I am your friend forever” and, “I will never abandon or forsake you.” These are actually the words of the Holy Spirit affirming and reaffirming the Father’s love to me.

The Holy Spirit does not use guilt and condemnation to get you to obey, He simply reminds you of your true identity and that Jesus already paid the price for it. He reminds you that the ruler of this world (Satan) has already been judged and has nothing on you anymore. Your sins have been defeated, so when you find that you have fallen; don’t beat yourself up, because God doesn’t. Just get up and act like who you are!

So does the Holy Spirit convict me as a Christian? Yes He does, He convicts me of my righteousness. To that I say, “Bring it on!”

What is this gift of righteousness of which He reminds me? It represents everything that God is: His truth, His reality. In literal

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language it can be translated as the “as it should be” of God. The good news is that the “as it should be” of God is not something to which you and I have to somehow by our own effort adhere. The “as it should be” of God simply changes us from the inside out as a natural result of seeing ourselves through God’s eyes.

Where Does Conviction Come From Then?

The next obvious question would be, well if God isn’t convicting the Christian of sin, then why do I at times sense conviction in my life? The Bible does answer this,

For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God . I John 3:20

This tells me that there are times that our heart will condemn us, but it does not mean that God or the Holy Spirit is the one who is condemning us; it is our heart that is doing this. What is the heart? The heart represents your soul - mind, will and emotions. I think conviction for the Christian happens when there is a conflict between your conscience and sub-conscious mind. The heart holds within it deep seated heart beliefs and when you are making conscious choices these beliefs will try to hold you back. These deep seated beliefs can be good or bad; they are made up of whatever you hold to be true.

If I have heart beliefs about what constitutes good or right behavior and I make conscience choices that are directly opposed to my beliefs I will find conflict within myself, that is, conviction.

If I have heart beliefs about my self-worth and believe that I can gain love and acceptance from wrong choices, when I consciously try to change I can experience the same feelings of conflict. The problem is that we are not even aware of most of our heart beliefs; we simply accept them as “the way I am.” We don’t know why we feel what we feel; we just know that “something must be wrong”. This is why the book of Jeremiah says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and is desperately wicked; who can know it?”

Jeremiah 17:9

It is interesting to note the original Hebrew language here in this passage. When the word *wicked* here is translated it means “weak or sick.” And the word *deceitful* is translated “tracked by footprints”. Reading this entire verse from the literal Hebrew here, it would say “The heart is woefully sick and above all showing footprints.”

What does this say about our lives?

It says to me that our self-concept can be out of touch with reality and we can wind up believing something that is not true about ourselves.

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What this scripture in I John 3:20 is saying regarding “if our heart condemns us” is that whether your heart condemns you or doesn’t condemn you, God is greater than your heart! We should simply believe and have confidence in Him!

It tells you that there is one that is greater than your conscience and so you must now persuade your heart to this new reality.

Chapter 6

God Look At What I've Done

While traveling in Uganda, Africa where my wife and I were to speak at a ministers' conference, I was watching television in the room where we were staying. I was surprised to discover that people in the capital city of Kampala had 24 hour Christian television available. I started wondering, with all of this preaching, why I was even there to speak when all of this was already being made available to the masses.

While I was watching there in the guest house, a minister from America (whom you would immediately recognize if I was to mention his name) was talking to the television audience. He was quite excited as he told people that he had finally discovered the truth of why so many Christians were not experiencing victory in their lives. He had figured out this nugget of truth and was taunting his audience with it.

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He went on and asked, “Would you like to know the answer of why you may not be experiencing victory in your life?”

I can imagine that at that moment there were millions of viewers from around the world who were all leaning forward in their chairs in anticipation of hearing this great revelation. He then had his audience turn to the book of Deuteronomy and read out of chapter six where it gives the Children of Israel a warning that they were not to forget to observe all God’s statutes and commandments so that blessing would continue in their lives. This minister then read a list of observances that must be kept, one of which was the paying of the tithe.

My mouth fell open in shock at what I was hearing. Here was a respected minister who was reading from the Old Covenant and came up with a conclusion of why God was not blessing people. The Lord reminded me that this was the reason I was there in Uganda and that these people did not need to be put under “works righteousness.” Instead, they needed to hear the good news of the Gospel, which is based on faith righteousness. We are told that under the New Covenant that Jesus is the Mediator of a much better covenant, which was established on better promises. (Heb. 8:6) If this is so, then why in the world would I want to go back to something that is now considered by God obsolete?

The word *covenant* means “agreement,” and the Bible has listed many covenants. Some of these covenants were unconditional, while others were conditional. The covenant between God and Abraham was

unconditional; Abraham had nothing to do with it. God laid no conditions based upon Abraham's performance other than to simply believe God's promise. The Mosaic covenant was different because it was based upon conditions that were to be met. Oh, and get this, observing the Ten Commandments was only the tip of the long list of things you were suppose to observe. The Law also included all of the commandments listed in the Torah. The Torah represented the first five books of Moses, and you might be shocked to learn that there are 613 commandments listed there.

Under the Mosaic covenant performance was everything! "Do this and all will go well with you, disobey and..." well, you get the picture. So, you can imagine my surprise when I heard this well known minister tell people basically that they had to go back to the Old Covenant in order to see God's blessings in their lives.

Yes, it is true; God at one time blessed people based on a curve or point system. I wrote about this in an earlier chapter, about when Israel said to Moses "*All that God requires and demands of us, we are well able to perform.*" (*Exodus 19:8*). The good news today is that our relationship with God is no longer based upon a bell curve of performance but is now based upon the cross of Jesus and what He accomplished!

This is the New Covenant which is based not upon our ability to keep the law, but upon what has been done for us. If you are to be blessed based upon a point system then it will have to be based completely upon what Jesus earned on our behalf and not ours.

Whose perfection are you going to base your life upon?

What is Works Righteousness Anyway?

Works righteousness is anything you place as a condition in order for you to receive from God, other than simply believing. People put conditions on receiving from God all the time. A friend asked somebody if they were a Christian, their answer was, “Yes I am, but not a very good one”. They were expressing shame or guilt because they did not feel that their behavior warranted being called a Christian. This is because they were placing their trust in their own ability and not on what God provided through Jesus.

The traditional mainstream church has placed a lot of emphasis on works righteousness. Have you ever been told that in order to receive God’s blessings or keep your Salvation that you need to adhere to right doctrine? It happens all the time, think about it, we are told that if we don’t keep the Sabbath we won’t be blessed – for some religious groups the “holy day” is Saturday and for others it is Sunday. Some religious groups would have you believe that going to hell is based on which version of the Bible you choose to read.

Oh, and it doesn’t stop there, the list of doctrinal issues goes on and on. There are certain methods of prayer, or the use of makeup and a proper wardrobe.

People ask ministers all the time, “Why didn’t I get healed? I have prayed and fasted. I’m a good Christian, been in church my whole life, give in the offering too. I just don’t understand why God won’t heal

me? Well, by placing trust in what you have done (works righteousness) versus what Jesus has already been provided you have disqualified yourself from the promises. God has already provided everything for you independent of you.

Works Righteousness is not to be confused with “good works” which is something we do because that is who we are as God’s children. It’s good to study the word, spend time in prayer, attend church give in the offering and the like, but none of these will earn or affect God’s love toward you. The same faith that saved you is the faith that will keep you.

“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”

Galatians 3:3

People often disqualify themselves from receiving from God based on their past and their failures. Don’t do this; God’s answer to you has nothing to do with you and everything to do with what He has already supplied to you.

When Bad Things Happen

I am writing this with an incredible sense that there are people reading this who have faced very difficult situations in their lives. I can't help but think that are those here who have suffered the loss of a child, the unfaithfulness of a loved one, the crisis of a terminal disease. My heart breaks for you in what may seem to be an unbearable set of circumstances. Others who may be reading this may have heard others say that the reason a tragedy has happened was because of the wrath or judgment of God or perhaps, that God is teaching a lesson.

You might be asking; "I thought God was sovereign, that He can do whatever He pleases where it concerns the affairs of man? That we must accept the downturns and negatives in life as somehow connected to God."

There seems to me a contradiction of beliefs. On one hand there are those who believe that somehow by becoming a Christian they are handed a *carte blanche* to a life of protection where no difficulty exists.

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Then there are those who believe the complete opposite, that the Christian life is one of difficulty, and that if you call yourself a “real Christian,” suffering is inevitable.

Both beliefs drawn out to their conclusions have devastating consequences in the lives of people who believe them. Our identity must be based upon our faith in the finished work of Jesus, not upon the shifting sands of events and circumstances, no matter where they come from.

Let’s discuss the first crisis mentioned in this chapter, where people become devastated when things go terribly wrong.

Maybe you have heard or have sung the song, “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” Do you remember it? The second verse says “He’s got you and me, sister, in His hands”. In the innocence of our childhood we believe that all things are possible, there is no evil in the world and nothing bad can happen to us. As we grow up, we discover that the world is not a bed of roses, there is evil, and yes bad things happen, even to “good” people.

We meet with difficulty when our Christian world view clashes with the reality of a true world view that experiences downturns and bad things. You might find yourself questioning your faith and God when painful things take place in your life. I can honestly say that there were times in my Christian life where I felt that even though I did “all

the right things,” my life was not working for me. I literally felt at times like God Himself threw me under a truck and ditched me.

Have you ever felt abandoned and left alone by God? Believe me, you’re not alone, thousands of people have had these same feelings and questions about God’s love.

Diana shares...

“A major cause of many of my problems with God over the years has been the "Jesus loves you and if you love him you will never have problems." message I received as a young child. After my child was molested, my life fell apart. How could I equate a loving caring God with the one who would allow harm to the child I had prayed for? I walked away from Jesus and the Church and never looked back until many hard years later.”

Steve writes...

“My wife and I had been on the mission field for a year when doctors found she had cancer, which forced us to return to the States and fight cancer for the next four years. At the time, our four boys were 9, 6, and 8-month-old twins. A few months after completing this series, the Lord took her home.

In most situations like this, grieving hearts scream, Why? With such a need for missionaries, why would God call someone to go? And while many abusive parents live long, healthy lives, why would He take one who daily showered her children with love?”

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In another story, a little girl stands on the edge of a playground set and calls out, “Catch me Daddy.” In one sweeping leap of faith, she lands in the arms of her loving Father! This same little girl at age 14 dies of insulin shock after her family believed God had healed her of diabetes.

What happens when we trust God, jump out in faith and then there is no one to catch us? One thing for sure is that we can become emotionally devastated and as a result become angry at God for letting us down. Many people check out on their Christian faith when this happens. Others simply change their doctrinal view to fit their experience of the ups and downs that they have faced in life.

Our words reveal what we believe in our hearts when we say “God took her home,” or that God had a higher purpose for the death of a loved one. We say these things as if to say that God had the final word on the situation. That the choices and decisions of the person or others prior to their dying did not have any influence on the situation.

I can still remember hearing the words of a preacher spoken to a young man at the graveside of his Father, “Son, I don’t know what God is trying to teach you”, speaks volumes about our distorted perceptions of God.

You might be saying; “I thought God was sovereign, that He can do whatever He pleases where it concerns the affairs of man? That we

must accept the downturns and negatives in life as somehow connected to God.”

I remember watching an old movie about Greek mythology, it was called, “Jason and the Argonauts”. In this movie, Zeus is seen playing a Mount Olympus game of chess and the lesson to humanity was to accept your fate and obey the Gods. I think that at some level most people tend to believe this. I mean think about it, insurance companies even describe catastrophes in their contracts as “an act of God”. I guess if you can’t blame people, you can blame God.

But an important question is whether this true or not.

One thing is for sure, when getting down to understanding why bad things happen in the lives of people, we can start reaching for some wrong conclusions if we are not careful. The worst thing anyone can say is that somehow God had anything to do with what happened. Personally, I resist even using the word “He allowed it”, because it somehow ties God as a co-conspirator to the tragedy that took place. The thought process would be the same as if you were standing on a street corner and watched a child get hit by an oncoming vehicle while crossing the street. You had the power to save the child but instead you stood there and watched. Most people would conclude that you were a callous, non-caring person if you allowed such a thing to happen.

We understand God to be all knowing (omniscient). In other words, nothing catches God by surprise. He is all powerful (omnipotent),

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nothing is impossible to him, and we know God as love. You put these three factors together and it can be difficult to make any sense of it when life deals us a cruel blow.

Often when dealing with such issues it is easy to jump to conclusions based on stories found in the Old Covenant and trying to relate them to a New Covenant understanding. As we have covered in other chapters, there is a distinct difference between the two. The bottom line of understanding with issues like this is to always go back and ask yourself, “How does this relate to the finished work of Jesus?”

You might ask, what is the finished work of Jesus?

It is what He did for us through his death, burial and resurrection. He took the full punishment and judgment upon himself in order to satisfy the requirements of the law. Jesus, representing humanity, took our sin upon himself, where it was judged. The law dictated to each of us that we deserved death. But instead of receiving the judgment that once belonged to us, we have now been made righteous.

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:21

As I said before, when reading various scriptures and trying to make sense of why bad things take place in the lives of good people, always start with the finished work of Jesus. God’s love toward you

is consistent and complete, period. You may not feel it or know it or even fully understand it, but God's love is real. Anything that is inconsistent or opposes this love needs to be questioned. When preachers try to tell you that God was somehow behind bad things so that he could teach you something, it needs to be questioned. When you hear someone saying that God's wrath is somehow involved, it needs to be questioned. There is no way you can make God's love equate to testing, trials and tribulations. There is no way you can equate God's love to wrath and judgment, God cannot be for you and against you at the same time!

You cannot trust in the nature and character of a loving God if you don't know if He truly loves you. If you don't know if God is for you or against you how can you freely run to Him knowing that pain and calamity waits for you.

The one scripture that has been used over and over to prove that indeed it is God who is behind the bad things that take place in our lives is "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

You should know that everything written in the Bible isn't true in the sense that it is from God's perspective. There are many quotes that have been recorded in the Bible that were made by men and that are not in agreement with the God's character and nature.

God later corrected Job's thinking by asking him a question. "Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:8) According

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to this scripture, it was easier for Job to blame God for his calamity than to accept other possible reasons.

Job admitted in his own words that he was anticipating calamity in his life by the things he feared when he wrote “For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me.” (Job 3:25)

Man will always overlook the obvious when it concerns his need to be right. Here, it was easier for Job to blame God than to take a close look at his own fears as being a possible cause. On this earth we still reap what we sow and we many times also reap the bad consequences of what others sow. None of it is caused by God... But, God can bring wonderful things out of bad situations if we trust Him.

Fearing God’s Wrath

I got my share of whippings when I was young. I can remember many times my brother and I came home late knowing full well what was waiting on the other side of that door. I was always smart enough to send my brother in the door before me because he would end up taking the worst of it. That is how the mind works, it avoids pain, it avoids punishment and if there is a way to avoid them, well you can put me in that line.

The Bible tells us that it is “the goodness of God that leads a man to repentance” (Romans 2:4), not wrath or punishment. When I was young, I remember my parents taking us to hear an Evangelist who

came to Denver. He would come every year and pitch his tent, and set up a cow tank in the front of the tent to be used as a baptismal for those who got saved during the meetings. His message was one of wrath and judgment; I can still remember even now, his words as he prophesied that Denver, Colorado was going to be judged with calamity. When comparing his message to the message and life of Jesus, you begin to wonder whose messenger he really represented.

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10

When you want to see how God feels about people just look at Jesus. The only people he spoke harshly to were the religious leaders of His time. The Bible tells us that He hung out with the sinners, the outcast and when dealing with issues that people faced, He never verbally beat them up or condemned them. Instead He healed them and told them that the choices they were making were not good for them, that instead they should think about better choices.

How does this image of Jesus line up with the preachers you hear on the radio and TV?

The word “wrath” is defined in the dictionary as “Strong anger, often with the desire for revenge...the vengeance, punishment or destruction reaped by someone in anger”. In some beliefs wrath is believed to be God’s punishment for sin. Describing God as wrathful is to say that He is out of control and vengeful.

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It is interesting to point out that Jesus told us to “bless those who curse you” (Luke 6:28), but we think He is going to kill those who curse Him. Jesus tells us to “be merciful, just as our Father also is merciful.” (Luke 6:36) yet, we think He is full of vengeance and wrath. Have we somehow misunderstood Jesus’s words here? Instead of recognizing them as representing Gods heart to us, we have heard a different message that distorts God’s very character.

So the question here is, if God is not wrath and judgment, where do wrath and judgment come from? Romans 4:15 is quite specific about this and tells us that wrath comes from the law.

“...because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.”

What this scripture tells me is that if there is law then there will be wrath. Therefore in the absence of the law there can be no wrath. The scripture prior to this verse tells us that faith is actually made void and the promises of God becomes of no effect in our lives if we are trusting the law or trying to live by it. You might want to think about what that means the next time you wonder why the promises of God aren’t working in your life.

“For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect”

Romans 4:14

No wonder why so many people are not receiving the promises of God in their lives. Works righteousness has made their faith in God of no effect. The law goes beyond what the old covenant tells us; the law is anything you determine that qualifies you for God's blessings apart from the finished work of Jesus.

Why Doesn't God Just Make Everything Alright?

We can look all the way back to the story of man's creation in the garden in order for us to get a clue about how our world got to where it is today. It is evident that God placed man in the garden to rule and reign. I personally believe that man was to eventually expand the garden throughout the entire planet.

“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:28

Not only did Adam and Eve have complete authority but they were also given supreme authority through the power of choice. We can see that it was they who made real life decisions through the way they lived, from the naming of the animals to the choice to disconnect themselves from God.

Adam and Eve abdicated their authority to satan and as a result, satan became the benefactor. Of course we can see that chaos, death and destruction were the end result.

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Now read the following carefully, because it is an important aspect of why God just doesn't step in and solve all the problems of the world. The ultimate power of choice is for the giver to allow the full benefit and consequence of decisions to be experienced.

For God to somehow step into human history outside of this would mean that the authority God gave Adam and Eve was a sham. God's sovereignty in His dealings with man is fully dependent upon working through man, not by subverting him. Throughout scripture you will find that each time God stepped into history, He always worked through the will of a person. Whether it was Abraham, Moses, Elijah or Esther, He always worked in concert with a person's will.

This is the whole point of why He became a citizen of Earth in the person of Jesus. He became a man and as such legally was able to take back the authority that was lost. God could not undermine man's will outside of the will of man; He became a man and did what no other man could do by giving of Himself as a sacrifice.

“For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”

Romans 5:17

It was God's ultimate plan to get that authority back for man through, as the Bible calls Jesus, “The Son of Man”. Jesus has stripped all authority from satan and has now given it to us.

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Matthew 28:18

“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” Luke 10:19

The Power of the Lie

Now if you don't know that God through Jesus has regained what was lost and had given it to us, you will never walk in it.

Even though Satan is referred to as the "god of this world" in 2 Corinthians 4:4, his power is limited to the power of the lie. This same passage goes on to say that he "has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." Believers are no longer under the rule of Satan (Colossians 1:13).

If God is not in control of this world, who is?

The truth is that, when you look at this from a scriptural viewpoint, you will discover that indeed, God does allow bad things to happen, in fact, he allows everything in this world that is taking place right now to take place. The power of man to select and choose his demise or victory is in his own hands.

Someone once said that there are three votes to be cast: the first one is cast by God, the second vote by the devil and the third is you, which carries the election.

Don't Misjudge the Source of Your Troubles By Blaming God

Sometimes a person's heart will lead them down a path where he does not want to go. Bottom line, we are all believing things about ourselves and that belief is often reflected in the choices we make in our lives. What a person believes deep within themselves, the mindsets, judgments, and unforgiveness, all have an influence.

More often than not we are completely unaware of these inner beliefs and have no knowledge of why we keep experiencing these things in our lives. Often, a person whose health has deteriorated won't even realize that the bitterness in their heart is the cause. It's amazing how quickly God can move in their physical body once the "heart damage" is dealt with. Sadly, I have seen others when their choices had brought them to such a point that they were not able to deal with these heart issues in time and they died.

By Blaming Yourself

Even though there are things that happen in our lives that are the result of our bad choices, we don't have to live with them and stay in them. We can take the necessary steps to deal with issues in our heart and access God's grace. Be careful to not let the voice of self-accusation and condemnation keep you down. Realize that "God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". (Psalms 46:1)

Sometimes Nobody is to Blame

Difficulties, ups and downs just happen because they are the result of living in a fallen world. Jesus was asked for clarification concerning the blind man who had been blind from birth. The assumption was that the man was blind because of his own sins or his parent's sins, but Jesus said that in this case it was neither. It wasn't this guy's fault that he was born blind.

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,'"

John 9:1-5

Jesus told everyone there that it was for the purpose of showing God's glory, and then He healed him.

Perhaps this is what Paul the Apostle was thinking of when he wrote that we are to give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:20). Even though God is not the cause of calamity, He is the answer as we see here in the story of Jesus and the blind man. As we submit to God's answer for our life's he is able to make all grace abound toward us. In the end, what was met for harm is turned to good.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28

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God redeems the negatives that take place in our lives. Terrible things happen all the time but God says, somehow, someday I will redeem this situation and turn it to good.

You might not see it right now but put your trust trust in God and His promises and see if kingdom currency, value and praise will come.

You Can't Control Other People's Choices

Face it; people around us are making bad choices every day. God tells people to love their spouses and their children, indicating His perfect will, but they often rebel and do the opposite. Often times, people make choices that put other people in harm's way, for example a drunk driver who drives into oncoming traffic. All of those bad choices are driven by a lie that they have believed about their life, others and God. Sometimes destructive people want to attack us, like the Hindus who are persecuting those Christians in India.

I Will Never Leave You or Forsake You

There is one thing you can know for sure, no matter what you are experiencing, no matter your personal failings, God's love is consistent. God's promise in Hebrew 13:5 provide us with comfort and peace, it promises that He will never leave us or forsake us. But when you are facing a crisis, it can be difficult to know this to be true in your own life. Pain, anguish and grief have a way of numbing our feelings.

There is no way God's love equates with testing and trials, there is no way that the love of God can be interpreted as the wrath of God. Don't make the mistake of disqualifying yourself from the goodness of God by accepting the lie that somehow God was involved in causing your pain and grief. God's goodness is consistent with His nature and the gift of His righteousness that has been given to humanity.

No matter what comes, know that God loves you. Fix your heart on God; trust in Him even though you may not understand everything. Keep in mind that you can't "live good enough to get God to bless you," His provision is already yours for the taking.

Remember, God cannot be for you and against you all at the same time.

The High Cost of Christian Living

Are you ready for some good news? Here it is: Contrary to what many people believe, God wants to connect with you. He has left no stone unturned in order to make that happen.

To me, that is a wonderful thing! Somehow, we have gotten the idea that connecting to God is something to be afraid of and that if I do connect to God somehow, He is going to make me do something that I don't want to do.

What about all those people who say that the Christian life is difficult or that there is a price to pay for becoming a Christian? Believing such things is like telling a flower to be sure to avoid the sunlight or absorbing any rain because, for heaven's sake, it might be bad for it.

Connecting to God should be as natural and desirable as breathing air. The bottom line is, learning how to connect with God should be the most rewarding experience you'll ever have in your life.

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Is there a price to pay for following Jesus? How can there be a price for breathing the air my lungs were designed to breathe? This is the reason Jesus gave Himself for us, to reconnect us to the source of all that is good.

Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life and have it in abundance”

John 10:10

And yes, in order to be a partaker of that new life, I need to discover this new way of living and what it means for me. It does require me to give up some things. For example: Up until now, I have lived my whole life learning how live by force, exertion and effort. Everything in me screams and tells me that in order for me to meet the need driven drives of my life, I must somehow reach outside myself in order to get satisfaction. Instead of living and depending on my own resources, I need to discover that everything is already (present tense) mine! The Bible declares that I am now complete in Jesus Christ, which means that the things I don't think I have are already in my possession.

We sure spend a lot of time trying to get what is already ours. We spend countless hours of worry in order to find peace. We manipulate, control and coerce life and others in order to get the love and significance that is so freely ours. Instead of my achievements being the end result of authentically living from my uniqueness as God's child, I seek to establish my own identity in it.

People “want what they want” in order to make themselves happy and in the end they end up living by the dictates of their environment, which can never satisfy or bring peace of mind.

There are many people who consider themselves Christians but who are convinced that there is a price to pay for following Jesus. More likely than not it is because they have misunderstood what this life that God gives us is all about, they think that Christianity is a list of do’s and don’ts. They look at their faith as standards and rules that they must live by in order to be accepted and approved of by God.

And sadly, without even realizing it, they nullify and make the working of God’s grace in their lives of none effect.

A woman stood with microphone in hand and prophesied in a church we were recently visiting. The words she spoke were embedded with a “you are here and God’s blessings are over there” message. The “word of the Lord” encouraged the people that they were almost there and with just a little more effort, enough dedication, they would climb the steps and arrive at the destination that they hungered for.

The congregation followed in a fun sounding song as they sang together, “Our praise goes up, and the blessings come down”. The words of the song spoke of conditional blessing based on doing something other than just simply believing.

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Another song followed: “Let it rain, let it rain, open the windows of heaven.” But, even though the song is pleasing to the ears it is completely contradictory to the gospel which tells us that the windows have already been opened. In fact, it has been raining for two thousand years starting from the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It’s not the windows of heaven that need to be opened now; it is the windows of our heart that needs to see what is already ours. This is the truth of what will lead us into living incredible lives.

Where does this wrong belief come from and is there any basis for it in scripture? It would seem at first glance that indeed there is scriptural backing, especially when looking at the following terms:

I die daily

Lose yourself

Deny yourself

Pick up your cross.

The Apostle Paul used the words “I die daily” in the same breath describing the constant persecution he went through on a daily basis. It had nothing to do with resurrecting the old man out of a grave where he died with Christ once and for all.

Should we deny ourselves? Absolutely! We do it by recognizing that we are dead and now alive in Christ.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me” Gal. 2:20

To me the way we typically interpret the above phrases tells me that my life in Christ is lacking somehow and instead of embracing all that was achieved on my behalf I am in need of more. Trying to get God to do something He has already provided.

The power of the Gospel is when we recognize what is already ours. This is the good news we share with the world around us, that they already have been reconciled to God.

The majority of people in our world think that sucking air through a small confined straw their whole life is something to be enjoyed. As for me, I prefer to draw my air from the open meadows of God’s grace which is His divine enablement.

What about Persecution and Suffering?

Without a doubt, the early church was birthed in the midst of a culture that faced much conflict. Jesus warned His disciples that persecution was to come. Why? Because the world they lived in stood in opposition to those who wanted to remain in control. Anytime you see persecution it is because someone’s throne of power is being challenged.

Persecution in the early church came from the religious community as well as from Roman leaders who felt that they were going to lose control. When persecution, hardship and difficulty come we can easily

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fall into the temptation to come up with “reasons” that keep us from seeing the truth.

Although there are many scriptures in which we can take comfort when we face difficulty, it is important we look at them in the context in which they were spoken. Otherwise, without realizing it we can easily end up creating doctrines that really keep us from experiencing deliverance in times of difficulty.

Take for instance the following words of Jesus, “These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

No doubt, these words can bring comfort to us today, but as we consider them we have to realize that Jesus was speaking directly to His disciples concerning his death. In the previous scripture we read that Jesus was telling His disciples that “indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave me alone.” Here we see Jesus warning his disciples directly about something that was to take place in that period of history. Jesus knew that his friends were about to face terrible persecution in which all but John would die as martyrs.

In the early church, persecution and suffering had become so much a part of their experience under Nero in 64 AD to 68 AD that somehow many Christian believers felt that it validated their Christian

faith, that suffering and persecution proved that their faith was legitimate.

Later, when persecution was stopped under Constantine, some Christians went so far as to even seek out and welcome martyrdom. History says that Roman authorities tried hard to avoid Christians because these Christians "goaded, chided, belittled and insulted the crowds until they demanded their own death."

Has there been great persecution and suffering throughout the generations since the time of Christ? Of course the answer is, yes and in fact there still is in many cultures. Why? Bottom line, because our message is one that is powerful and threatens the power of the enemy. Why? Because it sets man's heart free to live from the inside out.

Your identity is hid in Christ. The need driven drives of your life for love and acceptance come from Christ, this means that your life is independent of what is going on around you. Yes, there are disappointments and difficulties in life. Some of these disappointments are self inflicted because of the choices we make, while others take place because we live in a world that is constantly deteriorating.

The good news is that as we discover Christ as life in contrast to our world around us being the source of life, our world loses its control and influence over us. The power of grace is awakened to allow us to live incredible lives no matter what the circumstances.

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Chapter 9

You're Still Not There Yet!

Have you ever stopped to think about how ALL religions (including most of modern Christianity) plants the thought in you that you are lacking in some way? Hey, we sing songs about it all the time. We use phrases like, needing more power, more love, more of Jesus or Come holy spirit we need you.

Psychology calls it deficiency motivation. It is because of this thought that we are lacking and deficient. Religion creates all types of laws, rules, principles, precepts, behavior codes, performance standards, and other things for you to follow in order to attain what you lack.

The focus is what I call The Kingdom of Self. The focus is the bad things you need to change, and the good things you need to improve.

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The questions in our minds are, “What do I lack?” – “What do I need to do to have a better life?” – “What do I need to change to get God to help me and answer my prayers?” – “Why me, Lord? Why is this happening to me?” Questions like these stifle and strangle the power of the gospel working in our lives.

This is in Direct Conflict With The Gospel of God's Kingdom!

When we approach the Christian life this way, we short circuit the power of God. We erase it from our lives. We are simply left with SELF. At best we have a Separation theology - a theology that says, “God is up there somewhere, and I’ve got to get Him to come down and help me.” This is not the gospel. Somehow it is now our duty to convince God to do something that is already ours.

On one hand we believe that God is in us and on the other hand we continue to look for Him to show up out of our performance. We pray, we sing, we fast, we beg and we strain. Trying to get the Holy Spirit to show up. This dichotomy of beliefs puts people in a place where their faith becomes ineffectual and powerless.” This is not the gospel. The gospel is all about Christ IN us, the hope of glory. It is about living life in the faith of Christ, and not in what Hebrews 6:1 calls our ‘elementary faith.’

The New Testament, and especially Paul’s writings, point us to the power of God repeatedly – over and over and over and over again. But

we miss it if our focus is SELF. James says we are “Double-minded and unstable in all our ways.”

This is why the very first sermon of Jesus was, “Repent and believe the gospel.” We are to have a radical mind shift where it concerns God and his provision for us and simply believe the gospel which is, “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” (I Peter 1:3)

” Paul says to be ‘separated’ unto the gospel, which is saying the same thing another way.

Trying to get God to do what He has already accomplished creates rabbit trails that makes us “feel good” because it is something we are doing. The difficulty is that we are no longer resting in what has already been done. Our effort nullify and makes Gods word of no effect.

Convincing Our Hearts

Instead of trying to convince God to work on our behalf perhaps we should be convincing and persuading our hearts with the truth of the power of the Gospel. The power of the Gospel is the good news of Gods complete provision for your life as a present tense reality!

Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 that it is the Gospel that is the very power of God unto salvation. This good news tells us that we are complete in

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Him, that we lack nothing and that all things are ours. This is a new creation reality that escapes most believers.

Completeness And Taking Ownership

In my book Empowered, living beyond limitations I share about the power of ownership which makes my point about the difference between heart belief and head knowledge about our position in Christ. Below is an excerpt that will help you understand this point.

We have underestimated the gift that has been handed to us. We have surmised and limited God's expression and intent to us as only being the forgiveness of sin and a ticket to heaven. God gives us so much more than that! His provision has within it the power of unlimited supply for the meeting of every need that you have. Our greatest handicap is to not see what is ours right now in the present.

The declaration has been made "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

Ownership is Everything!

Stand in the parking lot of any city and try to convince a person who is getting into their car that it is really your car. Ask them to willingly give up the keys so you can drive off. When they say "No, this is my car!", Now, continue to talk and explain to them that there is

no way that this is their car but, it is yours. I am sure that no matter how hard you try or how good your explanation may be, they are not going to willingly shrug their shoulders and hand you the keys. I doubt you could even wrestle the keys out of their hands. Why? They are not going to do it because ownership is everything!

Ownership is in the present, it is not the hope or prayer for ownership at some future point, it is in the now! Once you've got it, you've got it and no one can take it away from you. You don't have to explain or convince others or yourself why it is yours, you just know it.

Have you ever heard yourself say, "That's just not me" when it came to taking on a new direction in your life? Maybe you started out in earnest where it concerned what you felt passionate about or even how God sees you. You felt unworthy or maybe you felt like a pretender or a fake because somehow you felt you did not measure up because of your past and present mistakes!

This is normal, choosing to walk in faith regarding your new identity in Christ can be challenging. The Bible talks about a warfare of the mind where we are to let go of the limited beliefs we have had about ourselves. Instead we take ownership of what is rightfully ours in Christ Jesus. Taking ownership is something you must step into for yourself, no one is going to hand it to you. Yes, the Holy Spirit is your personal teacher and coach and will always remind you regarding your new identity but it is you who must embrace the truth of who you are.

Who's Going To Give You The Keys To Your Car?

We realize that God has provided everything we need but how can we move from a head belief to a heart belief where we no longer are disqualifying ourselves from all that God has given to us in our new identity?

Let me use a different story to make a point. Imagine yourself standing in a room in front of a crowd of one hundred people and tell them that somebody there has the keys to your car. Explain to them how important it is that you get your keys back so that you can leave. After everyone looks at you like you're crazy, continue to tell them that you know without any doubt in your mind that somebody there has the keys to your car. "Please bring them to the front" you instruct. You hear people responding, "We don't have your keys" but you continue on, demanding that someone there has your keys. Even if you jump up and down, throw a tantrum, fall on the ground and beg, I doubt anyone will willingly come up and hand you the keys to their own car just to satisfy you. There could be a hundred people there, a thousand, or ten million people there, you are still not going to get anyone there to give up the keys to their own car.

What is the point of this? No one, and I mean no one, can hand you the keys to your own car! The fact is, only you can hand you the keys to your own car!

Did you get that? You can spend your entire life looking into the eyes of people around you, hoping that they will give you what it is you seek in life. You might be looking for identity, approval, relevance or even that next promotion. Simply put, this is building your life upon the shifting sands of a world that is ever changing. It is not solid and is not based upon the unchanging, view and opinion of Gods unconditional love of you.

Embracing your identity in Christ, establishing truth in your heart as you experience kingdom results, takes place when you look into the mirror of God's Word. There you will discover the truth of who you are and God's purpose and blueprint for you.

Embracing your identity in Christ, which is establishing truth in your heart where you are experiencing kingdom results, takes place when you look into the mirror of God's word. It is when you discover the truth of who you are as well as God's purpose and blueprint for your life.

“Now we all with new understanding see ourselves in Him as in a mirror; thus we are changed from an inferior mindset to the revealed opinion of our true Origin.” 2 Corinthians 3:18 (Mirror)

How Do You See God?

Okay... Here is a question to get you thinking! This has to do with the scripture out of John 5:12

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“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

The Greek word in question is *airo*. This is the word that has been translated as cut or take away. But look at how this word is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as lift up or take up:

Matt 16:24 – Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Mark 16:18 – They -will pick- up serpents...

Luke 5:24 – I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go...

Luke 17:13 – And they lifted up their voices and said...

John 5:8 – Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.”

John 11:41 – And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said...

Act 4:24 – And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord

Rev 10:5 – The angel ... lifted up his right hand to heaven

If we are to translate John 5:2 in light of the way the word *airo* is used elsewhere, what should it say? Why would all other Bible translations use take away instead of lift up or take up?

Which translation fits your understanding of God and His nature?

How to Experience God in Your Area of Need

Is there an area in your life where you need a miracle?

Ask most people and they will say, “YES!”

For some it may be a restored marriage, a child gone adrift. For others, it might be financial, a new home or a car. Many are in need of a miracle in their body.

What is your greatest area of need? What miracle are you believing God for?

What Stops Us From Experiencing Miracles?

First and foremost I believe it starts with having uncertainty! In other words, not having the assurance about what God's will is for us in

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our personal lives. It isn't because we lack faith... Believe me, you have enough faith. More often than not it is uncertainty that blocks and keeps our faith from being activated.

The problem with having uncertainty is that our mind does not like the unknown so it will want to fill that gap. This is where we come up with "reasons" why we are not experiencing the miraculous in our lives.

Our experience begins to supersede what God's word says and we start coming up with excuses why it's not working.

Here are a few toxic beliefs I have heard through the years that keep people from experiencing miracles.

I must be out of God's will

What I am believing for must not be God's will

I must have sin in my life

It might be God's will for others but not for me

God is testing my faith

There must be a generational curse

God is mad at me

Sometimes God moves on our behalf in spite of our toxic beliefs we buy into. I have seen God heal someone who had no previous knowledge or understanding about God while others struggle for answers.

There are always two voices that will be speaking to you and trying to persuade your heart. First there is the voice of reason, circumstance and speculation. Then there is the voice of God which is based on the finished work of what is already ours. Someone may tell you, that you lack faith or you must have sin in your life or maybe this is God's will for your life.

Two contradictory thoughts are opposing each other.

It is only by knowing God promises about what you are seeking for that all uncertainty can be removed and steadfast faith is made possible. His promises reveal to us what God is eager to do for us. Until we know what God's will is, there is nothing on which to base our faith.

But What if I Am Still Struggling For Answers?

If we understand that it is already a finished work we have no reason to think that there is something outside of ourselves to blame. We can't say it was an Act of God which is a term found on insurance policies. We must instead turn to the heart beliefs that we may not be aware of. What do I really believe about God's will for my life?

Heart beliefs are different from the beliefs we may have intellectually embraced and may be something that we are completely unaware of. Asking the Holy Spirit to reveal and bring truth to us where it concerns our heart is key to experiencing the answers in our lives.

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It is not about us trying to convince God to do something He has already completed, it is God convincing us that He is just that good!

Throughout time and history humanity has accepted the lie that living life as it has been was to be accepted as normal. Our empty hearts hungered for relevance and purpose that only could be realized as a result of being connected to our maker as one. We lived according to the dictates of what we thought would satisfy the longing in our hearts.

God is the manufacturer and we are the end result. The answers are to be found here. Man began in God, we are the greatest idea that He has ever had. Its true!

The universe and the expanse of all of heaven cannot be compared to His creation called man. There is nowhere else God would rather be than being unified with man. Jesus proves that humanity was tailor made for God.

One writer puts it this way. While the expanse cannot measure or define God, his exact likeness is displayed in human form. The human body frames the most complete space for Deity to dwell in. (Francois du Toit)

This is where you and I are to live and experience life from and once understood in its full depth of meaning it has the power to change your life forever!

Conclusion

We have to be aware of some of the inner conflicts that take place when coming face to face with new information that contradicts something that we have held onto in the past.

A lot of times I have known I was wrong, but changing my heart response was far different than simply changing my mind.

Strongholds (established heart beliefs) fight for their lives and tell you that you will suffer if they are breached; after all, that is why they were created in the first place, to defend you. That is how the subconscious mind works; it will resist anything that opposes it. We spend our entire lives gathering evidence to support what we feel and believe. As a result we look at things only from the perspective of “Does it support what I know to be true?” We see things only from our own perspective and no one else’s. The question should always come back to “What does God’s word really say and is what I believe consistent with the new covenant of who Jesus is and what he accomplished for us?”

Here is a perfect example of two different perspectives regarding a passage of scripture. John 9:39 says:

Shattering Toxic Beliefs

And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

Some would take this verse to support their idea that God is an angry God. I have seen this verse used to support the idea that God was responsible for various natural disasters like Katrina Hurricane and the Haiti earthquake. The question is how to reconcile this passage with John 3:17: *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*

The fact is that it is man's own heart and his choices which bring condemnation, not God.

Here is an allegory: Say that one group of people believes that if you grab a hold of an electric wire it will hurt and even kill you. Because they believed this they never touched the electric wire. Another group of people believes that you can hold onto an electric wire because it won't have any effect on you. As a result they reached out and touched the electric wire. The result was they all ended up flat on their backs with no pulse, I would say they discovered the truth, albeit too late. Their own belief brought judgment upon them.

In John 3:19 we read that this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. The fact of the matter is that if you choose not

to acknowledge the truth that we were made for connection with God, then you will suffer the natural consequences.

Another great example would be if I were to choose not to acknowledge the law of gravity, and so I step off the top of a 12 story building believing that it will have no effect on me. There would of course be natural cause and effect - which would be me spattered on the ground below. The question is, did gravity judge me? Well, in a way, I guess it did. But really what I did was that I brought condemnation upon myself.

Do you remember the story of the woman who was caught in adultery? Jesus could have judged this woman; He was the only one there that day who had no sin. But He instead forgave her and told her to sin no more. Now, even though Jesus had forgiven her she could have left that day and returned to a life of adultery, and as a result she would have brought judgment upon herself. The natural consequences would have possibly been being caught again and stoned, as well as, perhaps, sexually transmitted disease, and certainly a life of unfulfillment and of separation because of not being connected to her true purpose. Then there would be, of course, the final end judgment of never having received her true Savior.

Now compare that to the common belief that somehow God is throwing lightning bolts and calamity upon cities and people because of their rejection of Him, that somehow He is personally involved in

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bringing suffering, sickness and death. Do you see how we can distort what the scripture is really saying here?

What we truly believe about ourselves will have an influence upon our lives. And as I stated before, we will gather the evidence that supports that belief.

Now let me give you that verse in John 9:39 again but from a different perspective. This is how the Message Bible puts it:

“Jesus then said, “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.”

Big difference, isn't there? This is what Jesus marveled at when He was approached by the religious Pharisees of His time. They could not perceive or understand the truth, He concluded, because they were of their father the devil, in whom no truth dwelt. Just as truth eluded the minds of the Jews 2,000 years ago, it still escapes the minds of people today.

False belief based upon man's perception of reality stands as a blockade to freedom in the lives of many. People truly desire to achieve; people yearn to grow and reach their full potential. The problem for many is not in the lack of sincere desire to succeed in life.

The fault lies in a lack of the correct belief system that can only come from the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal God's full intention for man, the unveiling of the son of God, Jesus the unfailing one, who has restored us completely and has seated us with Himself on the right hand of God.

Christ In You

From the moment you embraced the wonderful free gift that is ours in Christ Jesus, you began the journey of a lifetime. It can sometimes be a challenge to believe that there is someone who believes in us more than we believe about ourselves.

It's amazing how we can interpret the world around us through our own perceptions. This in many ways keeps us from seeing things as they truly are. The Bible tells us that we see through a glass darkly. The sun glasses of our reality hides the full truth of the good news that is fully ours.

The Holy Spirit is now exposing you to the full awareness of God's perception of you. Remember, "even as because as He is, so are we in this world." 1 John 4:17

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

1 Cor. 13:12

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