

Christian Basics

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Christian Basics

1: The Basic Message. *1 John 1:5-9*

John and the other disciples spent altogether about three and a half years with the Lord Jesus Christ. They learned quite a lot from Him, and they wrote about it. That's what we've got in the New Testament. That's a lot of teaching. But the basic Christian message can be summed up in just these few verses in 1 John. This gives us the whole reason why God sent the Lord Jesus Christ into this world.

[5] This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you....

This, verses 5 to 9, is a summary of the main message that the disciples heard, which came from God through Jesus Christ. And John now declares it to his readers.

....that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The message begins with a description of God. God is light, and He's only light. He doesn't contain any darkness at all. That's the one true living God. There can only be one God who is all-powerful, all-knowing and in control of everything. I have to say that, because men have invented all kinds of gods for themselves, gods who aren't gods at all really. The gods men invent get angry, they get jealous, they have emotions. In fact they're all too much like us.

But the one true God isn't like that. He is light. In Him is no darkness at all. He is good. He's only good. He's always good. That's what it means when it says He is light. So He's not like these man-made gods, doing what He fancies at the time, sometimes this, sometimes that, so that we never know what He's going to be like at any one time. He is always good, so everything He does will only ever be good. There'll always be a good reason for everything He does or allows to happen.

But, we might say, if God is always good, what about all the evil in the world? Where does that come from? Well, it doesn't come from God,

because we're told here that ***“in Him is no darkness at all”***. Darkness, or evil, comes from men.

[6] If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth

John tells us here that men walk in darkness. And Christ said elsewhere that they don't even want to see the light:

John 3:19

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

John here specifically mentions people who walk in darkness but at the same time they say they have fellowship with God. In other words they're lying to us. What can we learn from this? Well, if we want to know anything about Christianity, we should be careful where we get our information from. People might be deceiving us, like these here. But not only that. Even the best Christians, who have the best of intentions, will still make plenty of mistakes. They'll say wrong things, because they're still learning about the faith. They'll get angry when they shouldn't, they'll do wrong things and regret it later, and so on. So please don't dismiss Christianity because of wrong words or actions we've seen from some Christians. To find out about Christianity, the only truly reliable source we have is to go to Jesus Christ Himself. Not men, not a church, but Jesus Christ Himself. Find out how He lived, and what He had to say. Then we won't get a distorted view.

[7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin

A Christian is one who walks in the light as God is in the light. Or at least that's what the Christian's aim is. That's what the Christian wants more than anything else, to be like Christ. Christ was perfectly sinless, the only one who has ever lived who never at any time walked in darkness. In fact He said of Himself:

John 8:12

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Christians are far from perfect. We have Jesus Christ as our ideal, but we don't live up to it. But to the extent that we do ***“walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another”***. Christians fellowship is something that the world can't really understand. The world lies in darkness. But Christians are those who, although maybe still very dark in themselves, are at least aiming towards the light, they are wanting to be Christlike. Christian fellowship is the fellowship of all those who are heading the same way. We encourage one another along the way towards the light. People who want to continue in darkness won't understand that.

Ephesians 5:8

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light

Every one of us was originally born in darkness. But Christians have come to the light. We hate the darkness and we want to get away from it. Christ has given us light, so we now want to live our lives as children of light, not as children of darkness any more. But how do we come to the light in the first place? Well, ***“the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”***.

What does this mean? Well, men, who live in darkness, put Jesus Christ to death on a cross, despite the fact He never did anything wrong. Men naturally don't like Him, because He keeps telling them they're ways are evil. Christ said of Himself:

John 7:7

The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

But what these men who crucified Christ didn't know was that His death would become life for all those who put their trust in Him. That blood which He shed on the cross cleanses His people from all their sin. The Bible tells us that:

Hebrews 9:22

without shedding of blood is no remission [of sin].

In the Old Testament, this concept was symbolised by a series of animal sacrifices. The animal sacrifices didn't take away sin, but they pointed forward to the day when a sin-bearer would come to do just that. And that sin-bearer has now come. He is Jesus Christ.

And in order to make sure His shed blood takes away our own sins personally, we must believe on Him, trust in Him to cleanse us from all sin, and, if we are genuine, He will. We will be fundamentally changed, and we will know it. Call upon Him to do this. Pray to Him. But do we really want this? Many people reject Jesus Christ altogether because they don't want to think about their own personal sins, because they don't want to believe they have any:

[8] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But all of us have sins before God that need dealing with, we must acknowledge that fact. In fact we don't really see how dark we are inside at all. That only comes the nearer we get to the light. But this is what God wants us to do, acknowledge our sins before Him, and come to the Saviour.

[9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Do we recognise our sins before a holy God? Do we want cleansing from them? The good news is that we can have this freely if we really want it. All we have to do is pray. Confess our sins to God, not to anyone else, nobody else needs to know about them, it's just between each individual and God. And if we do genuinely confess our sins to Him, "***He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness***". That's it. Just come to God through Jesus Christ confessing our sins to Him. We don't have to do anything difficult, just come to Him.

Do we want a clear conscience before God? He is there for the asking for all those who are genuine, take Him seriously and confess their sins to Him. That is the basic Christian message that John had heard from God, and is giving us here. Yes, there's plenty more teaching the Lord Jesus Christ came to give us, the Bible is full of good things for us to learn about how we should live, but this is the one message that can begin a new life, a life of following Christ, of wanting in our hearts to be more and more like Him. This is where the Christian life begins.

2: The Human Condition. *Romans 3:10-18*

Many religions teach about forgiveness of sins. But they all believe we are capable of doing something to atone for them. And they then go on to tell us what that something is. But Christianity is altogether different. In Christianity, we are told that there is nothing we can do to atone for our sins. Our sins are so great, because we are so bad. What we need is a Saviour outside of ourselves to atone for them in our place. And that is what Jesus Christ came to do for all those who put their trust in Him.

But people don't like this idea because they don't think they are that bad at all by nature. We all want to think we can do whatever is necessary ourselves and don't need anyone's help from outside. But the Bible says:

Genesis 6:5

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

God didn't originally make us like that. God originally made us upright, capable of doing good:

Ecclesiastes 7:29

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

But God also gave the first man, Adam, a test. He put a tree in the middle of the garden of Eden to see what he would do with it:

Genesis 2:17

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Adam did eat of the tree, and he didn't seem to die at first. But he was fundamentally changed within. And death did come into the world:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Adam physically died eventually, but at the moment of eating from that tree he died spiritually. And that is the condition all of us are born in. We are all born spiritually dead. We no longer have the will to choose good, we naturally choose evil. Think of a child. He's naturally naughty. We don't have to teach him to be naughty, he just is. We have to teach him to be good. So that's why God said *"every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."*

As a result, God had to judge the world. So He brought a great flood on the earth, which killed everybody apart from Noah and his family:

Genesis 7:1

And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

But that didn't mean Noah wasn't still sinful like everybody else. He was. After the flood he got drunk. Mankind hadn't changed. Man was still just as evil in his heart:

Genesis 8:21

And the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

But Noah was *"seen righteous,"* not because he was righteous or had become righteous by his own effort, but because he saw his need of God to save him from his sins, and put his trust in God to do so.

And that's the only way we can be *"seen righteous"* too.

[10] As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one

Our hearts are not right with God:

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

[11] There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Nobody understands spiritual things:

1 Corinthians 2:14

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

And nobody seeks after God, They just seek after themselves:

1 Corinthians 15:32

Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

[12] They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

So this renders people “*out of the way*” and “*unprofitable,*” deserving punishment:

Matthew 25:30

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[13] Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: [14] Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness

Our evil nature can be seen in two ways, our words and our actions. Of our words, James says:

James 3:6

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

[15] Their feet are swift to shed blood

And our actions. We hate. Few of us are murderers, but we make sure we come out on top in any dispute with anyone else.

Philippians 2:21

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

[16] Destruction and misery are in their ways: [17] And the way of peace have they not known

And all our lives become is “***destruction and misery***” to all around us and to ourselves. And there is no peace in our hearts. The one thing missing, causing all of this is that:

[18] There is no fear of God before their eyes.

We need to recognise the human condition. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. This goes against modern psychology, which says that we must have a positive view of ourselves. Job didn't have that. After all his trials, God finally answered him, and he saw himself for what he really was:

Job 40:3-5

Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

Job 42:5,6

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

We all must come to this view of ourselves, because without it, we will never see our need of a Saviour.

3: The Necessity of the New Birth. *John 3:1-8*

[1] There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews

This man Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man who has studied the Scriptures. He was also a ruler of the Jews. So he was a religious leader.

[2] The same came to Jesus by night....

He came to Jesus by night, on his own. The religious leaders didn't like Jesus because the ordinary people were going after Him rather than them. That's what a lot of "Christian" leaders are like. In fact the religious leaders were instrumental in getting Jesus put to death later on. Nicodemus went to see Jesus on his own, because he didn't want any of the other leaders to know he was meeting Him, otherwise he would get into trouble with them. But also, maybe he went by night because he couldn't sleep. He'd heard bad things said about Jesus in the council, but he didn't want to go against God. So he had to find out about Jesus for himself. That's good. That's what we need to do.

....and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Nicodemus understood that the miracles Jesus was performing proved that He came from God. And that's true. Nobody else could do these miracles. That's exactly what the miracles pointed to. But before Nicodemus could even ask Jesus a question, Jesus said something very strange:

[3] Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

He told Nicodemus that he couldn't even see the kingdom of God unless he was "**born again.**" What does that mean? Nicodemus was confused too:

[4] Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

The only birth Nicodemus knew about was natural childbirth, and he knew that no-one could go through that a second time. He really wanted to understand what Jesus was saying, but from his own experience he just couldn't understand it at all. Jesus explained further:

[5] Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

So, Jesus was not talking about natural childbirth, He was saying that there are two types of birth, one "**of water,**" which is natural childbirth which we all go through to get here, and the other, which is similar, but is "**of the Spirit.**" We have to experience both in order to see the kingdom of God.

[6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

We have all been born of the flesh, we are all here in this world now, and we all experience what we experience here. But there is a whole new dimension that we just naturally cannot see. Only those who have also been born of the Spirit can see it, and that's what Jesus meant when He said we must be "**born again.**"

[7] Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

We shouldn't be surprised at this, even though spiritual things are, to us, invisible.

[8] The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

A person born of the Spirit is compared to the wind. We can't see the wind, we can't tell where it's coming from or going to, but we can hear it and see it's effects. Similarly spiritual things are invisible, but a person born of the Spirit can know for himself the Spirit's effects.

We now have two questions to answer: **Why** must we be "**born again**"? And **How** can we be "**born again**"?

Firstly, **Why** do we need to have this spiritual aspect to our lives? Can't we live perfectly well without it? The short answer is, no, we can't.

We must first understand that we are all born with a sinful nature. We're born living primarily for ourselves, living self-centred, selfish lives. We saw this in the last lesson:

Romans 3:10-12

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Genesis 6:5

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Ecclesiastes 9:3

the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Every religion on earth, including many forms of Christianity, teach that it is possible for us to atone for our sins by ourselves, all we need to do is make an effort. Maybe we need to do good works, or say certain prayers, or go through certain rituals, and we can be made clean.

But that's not true. No matter how many good works we do, we can never do enough. That's the problem of the human condition. There is no hope at all, unless, as Jesus said, we are "**born again**", completely changed and renewed in the heart.

[3] Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And we can't do this ourselves, it is a gift of God. Salvation, being made right with God, is a free gift. It has to be, because we can't do enough to please God ourselves.

Ephesians 2:8,9

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.

So, secondly, **How** do we receive this free gift? We ask.

Matthew 7:7,8

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Luke 11:13

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Men don't want free salvation, they don't want a free gift from God. They want to believe they can make it to heaven by themselves. So they get all the glory. But nobody can. To get to heaven is a free gift, given by God to all those who ask with a genuine heart, so God gets all the glory, not us. If we ask God to change us, in all genuineness and simplicity, He will answer us, He will give us a new heart, we will be "**born again**". And we'll know for sure that we have been fundamentally changed from within.

4. How Then Shall We Live? Putting Off the Old Man. *Colossians 3:1-9*

We have so far seen the wretched condition by nature that we are all born into, and the absolute necessity of the new birth, of being “*born again*,” born from above – a work done solely by God as we ask Him to do so, and not worked up by ourselves in any way.

Now we have become a Christian, we should therefore be different from the world. If we have exactly the same priorities, motives, tastes and aspirations as everybody else, then we’ve got nothing to offer anybody. Our difference is the witness we should be to others. We really need to understand what this difference is.

In Peter’s first letter, he speaks to Christian women whose husbands aren’t believers. If their husbands don’t listen to them, they can still be a witness simply by the way they live:

1 Peter 3:1-4

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Our witness to others is about our “*hidden man of the heart*.” Having a “*meek and quiet spirit*.” So how can we develop this inward life, this inward witness?

[1] If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

The first thing to note is that this passage is for those who have been “*risen with Christ*.” If we don’t know Him for ourselves yet, if we’ve

never been “*born again*,” this isn’t for us. In such a case, we’ll find we can’t possibly do the things that are mentioned here.

[2] Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

We’re to “*set our affection on things above*,” because that’s where Christ is. If we’re not “*risen with Christ*,” we won’t understand heavenly things at all. This new life changes our desires. Things we once loved, we now have no delight in any more. The apostle John says:

1 John 2:15-17

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

Do we chase after “*The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?*” People all around us are pursuing these things every day – self-gratification and self-exaltation. And they encourage each other to do the same. But if we chase after these things, “*the love of the Father is not in*” us. When it says “*love not the world*,” it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t deal with anything in the world ever again. Go off and become a hermit somewhere. No. The Lord keeps us in this world for a purpose. We’re still called to deal with the things of this world every day. But our desires shouldn’t be set on them any more. We’ve now got far more important things, heavenly things, to love.

[3] For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

We’re dead, but yet we’re alive at the same time. If we’ve had a spiritual resurrection, if we’ve been “*born again*,” then we’re told here that the old nature we used to have is now dead in the sense we no longer desire to follow it any more. It’s still there, but all it does now is drag us back. Christians still sin against God. The apostle Paul talks about a battle going on within us. We won’t be perfected until we die. So at the same time we’re “*dead*” to our own sins, and yet alive in Christ.

Romans 7:22-25

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

It's so easy to do what the flesh wants. We do it without thinking. It's natural. It's always an effort to do what the Spirit wants. We should hate ourselves for being dragged back like this all the time. We should think ourselves as a "*wretched man*." That's what we're called to do.

Romans 8:10-14

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Who are we going to be led by? The flesh or the Spirit? The old man or the new man? Whenever we fail in doing what we ought to do, we grieve ourselves, and the Lord. But we have been "*born again*." We now have a new life within us that the world does not have. Our new life is now "*hid with Christ in God*." It's hidden from the world. It's spiritual. It's to do with "*things above*." The world will notice a change in us, and that change is our witness to them. But they won't understand us. We no longer want to please self, but to please Christ. We no longer want to follow the crowd. This world is no longer our home. Abraham:

Hebrews 11:10

...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

[4] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

We've got a sure hope in heaven after our death. We'll one day "**appear with Him in glory.**" But it says here "**Christ, who is your life.**" He's our life here now. He's the one we love, the one we desire to please now. He is our life here, now, as well as after death.

Philippians 1:21

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

So, if we're different because we follow Christ rather than ourselves, we need to know **how** He wants us to live. It's more than merely following a set of rules outwardly, like other religions would teach. We would always fail trying to do that. Our witness is not to come from ourselves, but from the Holy Spirit in our heart:

John 14:15

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

So, with this in mind, the rest of the passage gives us a few instructions. And first of all we've got a list of things to put to death, or "**mortify**":

[5] Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

"fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence." That's "***the lust of the flesh.***" These are sins against the seventh Commandment, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*" The Commandment doesn't just forbid physical adultery, it includes "*idleness*" [David], "*gluttony*" [Esau], "*drunkenness*" [Noah and Lot]. These are all "***the lust of the flesh.***"

Then we have "***covetousness, which is idolatry.***" That's "***the lust of the eyes.***" If we covet our neighbour's ox, ass or Ferrari, we're really idolising these things. That's "***the lust of the eyes.***"

[6] For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

It's because of these lusts and desires, there's going to be a judgment. The world is full of sin. There has to be a judgment, otherwise everybody would get away with what they do. But before we start complaining about others, look at the next verse:

[7] In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

This verse brings us right down to earth. We're no different from anybody else. We too deserve the very same judgment. The reason I'm going to heaven and my neighbour isn't, is due to the grace of God alone, and not me being better than him in any way. That fact ought to break "***the pride of life***" in us. We should no longer be proud of anything in ourselves. We're called here to put to death what belongs to our earthly nature. So we should hate ourselves, and everything we are by nature. Modern psychologists tell us we ought to have a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance, self-esteem, but that's just another way of telling us to be proud, to nurture "***the pride of life.***" No. We should put pride to death:

1 Samuel 2:3

Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

[8] But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

Another list of things we need to put to death. We've got a natural tendency to get angry, to take vengeance, to lie, to laugh at questionable jokes. It's these natural instincts the Christian is called to put to death. Only the Holy Spirit within a believer can do this. We must emphasise that we can never do this ourselves, it's impossible. We're called to put off the old man and to put on the new man. We mortify the old man, we put it to death. We're finished with our old life. And we're to put on the new man by following the Holy Spirit in us. Next time, we'll look at what that involves.

5. How Then Shall We Live? Putting On the New Man. *Colossians 3:10-17*

Last time we looked at putting off the old man. What we need to get rid of in our lives. And we know we can't do any of it without the Holy Spirit within us doing these things for us. Now we look at putting on the new man. And, in exactly the same way, we again have to acknowledge our absolute reliance on the Holy Spirit within us:

[10] And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

The new man is said to be ***“renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created Him.”*** Man was originally *“made in the image of God.”* But we lost that image after the fall of Adam. When we receive the new birth, we gain it again, it's ***“renewed”*** in us. An equivalent passage in Ephesians says:

Ephesians 4:24

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

So the ***“image of God”*** involves three things: knowledge (spiritual), righteousness and holiness, all of which were lost at the fall of Adam, and are regained on receiving the new birth.

[11] Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

In the world there are divisions. To the Jew, the big division was that of Jew and Gentile (Greek). Circumcised and uncircumcised. But there are other divisions. Each nation is a division in itself, Barbarian, Scythian etc. There are social divisions, like the one between slave and free. These are all outward divisions. But in reality, only one division matters. The division between those who've received this new birth, and those

who haven't. Only if we have received the new birth can we begin to mortify the old man and put on the new man. And here we've got a list of things to nurture:

[12] Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering. [13] Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

God's chosen people, those who've been "***risen with Christ,***" are "***holy and beloved.***" We're holy, separate from the world. Still in the world, but not of it. These are the things we should be nurturing: "***bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.***" What have these all got in common? They're all fruit of the Spirit. At this point we need to look at a similar passage in Galatians:

Galatians 5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Here is a list of things to mortify. And it's followed by a list of the "*fruit of the Spirit*":

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

That's not an exhaustive list, there are others. The natural man can't do any of these things. They are "*fruit of the Spirit*". Only the Spirit of God living within us can produce them. And these are what we should nurture. These are our witness to the world. We are here for one purpose only: to grow fruit.

John 15:5

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Without “*abiding in Christ*” we simply cannot produce spiritual fruit at all. Without Christ we “*can do nothing*”. So unbelievers cannot produce any of these things, although they would maybe try their best to convince us that they can. So any “*love,*” “*peace,*” “*faith*” or any other fruit that unbelievers think they have is always false and selfish.

Back to Colossians 3:

[14] And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Charity, or love is “*the bond of perfectness.*” It’s the greatest of the spiritual fruit.

1 Corinthians 13:13

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Romans 13:10

love is the fulfilling of the law.

[15] And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

The peace of God should rule in our hearts, not our lusts and desires. That’s the life we are called to. And thankfulness for all things keeps us humble, because it makes us realise that we don’t deserve anything at all in this world. In fact all we deserve is God’s wrath for our sins.

[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Remember, we're to "***set out affection on things above.***" To do this, we must let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. We should teach and admonish one another from it. And we're to do it "***in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.***" We should use God's word frequently. And we should be a joyful, singing people.

[17] And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

So what is it to be a good witness to the world around us? How should we be different from everybody else? It's not in outward appearance, in putting on an external show. But it's the "*inner self,*" "*a gentle and quiet spirit,*" "*simplicity and godly sincerity.*" Here's a summary of how to live. Let's be good witnesses to the world by making sure we are a holy, godly, Christ-like people. Only then can our witness be truly effectual.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

6. Prayer. *Philippians 4:6-7*

Prayer is our communication with God. Christians have a real, living relationship with Him. This is unlike Muslims, Buddhists, or even many Christians, who just think that prayer is merely “reciting” previously written prayers. No. We have a living relationship with the Creator God. We can speak to Him as children to a Father. And get answers. We’re told to:

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

We are always in full two-way communication with Him.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives a good definition of prayer:

Q. 98. What is prayer?

A. *Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.*

And Christ Himself taught the disciples how to pray. Not like the heathen, with vain repetitions, but in real, heartfelt communication:

Matthew 6:7-13

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

And in Philippians, we’ve got a wonderful description of the Christian’s prayer life:

[6] Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. [7] And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

“Be careful for nothing,” or ***“Be anxious for nothing.”*** Prayer is to keep us from getting anxious. If, after prayer, we’re more worried about our situation than before, we’ve got it all wrong. Prayer should be a relief from the cares of this world, knowing the the Lord of glory is in control of all things, and looks after His people. We’re to make sure we are:

1 Peter 5:7

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Real prayer is calling on the Lord in a two-way living relationship. It was said of Moses:

Exodus 33:11

And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Now, that’s real prayer. Speaking to Him. Communicating with Him. Crying to Him. Not merely reciting words, or vain repetitions. The Lord is there to call upon at any time. We are not to be afraid of doing so:

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

We are to pour out our heart to Him:

Psalms 62:8

Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.

We are told to ***“let your requests be made known unto God.”*** He knows them all anyway, but He wants us to articulate them. And we are always to pray ***“with thanksgiving.”*** One of the worst things we read about the wicked is that they were never thankful for God’s mercies:

Romans 1:21

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Now, if we're true believers, that can never happen to us. But as true believers we should be all the more thankful in our hearts for the Lord's mercies. He has given us life, health, strength, food and clothing. Every breath comes from Him. Every heartbeat comes from Him. And above all else, we have been given the most precious gifts of all: repentance and faith in Christ. We should never cease to be thankful to Him:

Psalm 136:1

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

And if we pray to God in this prescribed manner, not in empty recited prayers, but in a real heartfelt relationship, our anxieties will be quenched. We are told we will receive "***the peace of God***" in our "***hearts and minds.***" Our spiritual problem is in our hearts and minds. That's where the battle takes place. It's there that we get anxious about things. And it's also where the Lord works in us. True religion is spiritual:

Ephesians 6:12

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

This is not talking about peace ***with*** God. If we're truly the Lord's people, we already received that when we first came to Him in repentance and faith:

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is talking about the peace *of* God. This is a state of heart and mind that we can have. But we need to ask for it. It is something to attain in our hearts:

Romans 15:13

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

And we can't understand it, it "*passeth all understanding*". It is incomprehensible. It's impossible to explain, especially to those who've never experienced it.

1 Peter 1:8

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Notice, it doesn't say wait for the answers to our prayers, then we'll receive the peace of God. It just says "*let your requests be made known to God*" and then we'll receive it. So we receive the peace of God as soon as we make our requests to Him. But how can this be? If I ask you a question because I'm worried about something, I won't have any peace in my mind until you've at least given me some sort of answer. If you just sit there and say nothing, my anxiety, if anything, is probably going to be increased. But with God, we get the peace in our hearts and minds before He's answered. Isn't that strange?

And another question that ought to cross our minds: What's the point of prayer, when God knows what we want before we ask anyway? The answer is quite simple. Prayer, real prayer, is for *our* benefit, not God's. He knows what we want before we tell Him. God knows everything. In fact He knows far more about what we need than we do. Our prayers only scratch the surface of what we really need. The Holy Spirit prays for us:

Romans 8:26,27

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And Christ is also praying for us:

Hebrews 7:25

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

What a comfort it is to the Christian to know that both Christ and the Holy Spirit are praying for him. We need them. Our prayers are so shallow, even at the best of times. We feel so inadequate in prayer.

And then finally we see that all our prayers should be **“through Christ Jesus.”** These aren’t just words to say at the end of every prayer. As though God will hear us better if we always say the magic words, “In Jesus name, Amen” at the end of every prayer. That’s superstition. But Christ is the one we must acknowledge in everything. We can have no access to God the Father unless it is through the Son:

Ephesians 2:18

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

We may not be able to understand prayer. We may not know how God is going to answer our prayers. But we know that prayer works. We have promises and examples throughout the Bible that this is true:

James 5:16

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Let’s make sure we are fervent in our prayers, and that we have a true, real relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can answer our prayers and lead us in the right way. And this, according to this passage, is the perfect answer to all our worries.

7. The Birth of Christ. *Matthew 1:18-25*

To understand who Jesus Christ really was, we can start by looking at a very unique birth. We have two records of it, one in Luke mainly from His mother Mary's viewpoint, and this one in Matthew, mainly from her husband-to-be Joseph's.

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

"Before they came together, she was found with child." Anyone in this situation would think straight away she's been messing around. And that's exactly what Joseph thought:

[19] Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

Joseph was *"a just man"*, so he wanted to deal with this situation properly. Under the law of Moses, there were two ways of dealing with this. He could either make her a public example and get her stoned to death, which was the punishment for adultery, or he could just quietly divorce her. He chose the latter.

[20] But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

But before he could do anything, an angel of the Lord came to Him and told him to go ahead and take Mary as his wife, because *"that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."* So, there was no third party involved. Mary had already been told:

Luke 1:35

The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

The father of the child was the Holy Spirit. Muslims think this terrible. They say, “God forbid that He should have carnal relations with a woman.” But it doesn’t say that. It says the Holy Spirit “**overshadowed**” her. They also say, “God forbid that He should have a Son.” But we’re told here that her son was specifically to be called “**the Son of God.**”

[21] And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

The name “**Jesus**” means “*He saves.*” And that’s exactly what He came into the world to do, to save all those who come to Him in faith from the punishment of their sins, by dying in their place.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

[22] Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, [23] Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

We’re told in Scripture:

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus Christ was from eternity, the beginning. The book of Proverbs says something similar as it personifies Wisdom:

Proverbs 8:22,23

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

This is Jesus Christ. He is the Word. He is Wisdom. And we're told He "was with God" and at the same time "was God." So how can Jesus Christ be a man on this earth, and a God at the same time?

We could go into a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity here. This says that God is one being, but exists in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each person has separate work to do, but each is worshipped as God. But there's only one God. We can try to understand that. We can't understand it at all really. The doctrine of the Trinity is man's best feeble attempt to explain this. We're specifically told God became man:

John 1:14

And the Word was made 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.

1 Timothy 3:16

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

In order to save a people for Himself, what does God have to do? Send messages telling us how to behave? No. Whatever He asks us to do, we just can't do it. He had to come personally into the world as a man. Not only to be an example to us of how we should live, but to pay the price of sin for all those who come to Him. There could be no other way. Somebody has to pay the price for our sins, we can't do it ourselves. But:

1 John 4:9,10

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

[24] Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: [25] And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

Both Joseph and Mary did exactly what the Lord told them to do. He took her for his wife, but had no sexual relations with her until after the birth. We know from other passages of Scripture that they had at least six children in the normal way after that. And they called His name “*Jesus*”, just as the angel had told them.

8. The Upside Down Kingdom

Matthew 5:3-12, 38-48

Christianity has been described as “The Upside-Down kingdom,” by which is meant that the Christian way is totally opposite to the way we would normally behave or react. It is exactly the opposite of our natural instincts for the preservation and love of self.

Matthew chapters 5-7, often known as the “Sermon on the Mount,” is the longest single discourse we have of Christ’s words. And this shows us what His kingdom is like:

Matthew 5:3-12

[3] Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[4] Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

[5] Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Naturally, we believe we should be strong, happy and forceful. We should be somebody, we should assert ourselves. But Christ teaches exactly the opposite. Here He’s saying the “***poor in spirit,***” “***they that mourn,***” and “***the meek***” will be the ones that inherit His kingdom. But these are the ones who are usually trodden on and passed over by society at large. We naturally think little of such people. But these are the ones Christ loves.

[6] Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Naturally, men always like to fiddle the system to their own advantage. They’ll fiddle their taxes, they’ll lie, they’ll steal things, they’ll even murder if they think they can get away with it. That’s how bad we are. But here we’re told, “***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.***” If we knew our work colleagues were stealing off the company, would we tell the manager? Or stick with the group and not tell anyone? Most people would do the latter, but Christ is telling us to

love righteousness, which would probably mean going against our colleagues and losing their friendship.

[7] Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

[8] Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

[9] Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

It's always seen as a sign of weakness to help others. We're told we ought to look after number one, and not be "***merciful***" to anyone. And "***purity of heart***" is laughed at. Naturally people like dirty things, telling rude jokes with each other. Sex and violence sells films. But no, we should be "***pure of heart***". And we should want to be a "***peacemaker***". Too many people want to make war, they want a confrontation with everyone they just don't like. But again, Christ tells us we should be the opposite.

[10] Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. [12] Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

So, the Christian will be persecuted for righteousness sake, reviled, and even spoken evil of falsely. And it will all be for Christ's sake, because naturally we wouldn't behave like this. But rather than giving up on Christ, we rejoice, because this is the Christian life, this is the way the prophets went. This is indeed the way Christ had to go, even unto death. And He is our example:

1 Peter 2:20-24

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own

self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

And later on in this “Sermon on the Mount,” we also come across some, to the world, odd behaviour:

Matthew 5:38-48

[38] Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: [39] But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil....

We’re told here to “*resist not evil.*” But we hate evil, don’t we? We hunger and thirst after righteousness, don’t we? But at the same time, we’re told to not resist it. And we’re given some examples of how to do this:

...but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. [40] And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. [41] And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. [42] Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

But if we really took this literally, wouldn’t that make us a doormat? People would walk all over us, they’d take advantage of us all the time. They would say, “You’re a Christian, you have to give me everything I want.” So, how do we deal with this? We trust in the Lord.

[43] Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. [44] But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; [45] That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

We're not to behave in the same way back to them. If they curse us, we bless them. If they hate us, we do good to them. If they spitefully use us, we pray for them. That's the Christian way. We're not to just love those who love us, we're to do good to all men. And that's the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian:

[46] For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? [47] And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

We're told:

[48] Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Now, none of us can be perfect. We don't even come close. We need God to change us and help us. That's why we need to be "born again" and have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Otherwise we couldn't even begin to live this way.

And what about righteousness? Why can't we avenge ourselves whenever someone wrongs us? Because we should leave vengeance and judgment to God:

Romans 12:19-21

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is the authentic Christian life. And we need the Lord to help us react in these ways, because by nature we cannot do it. But this is the only real witness that we have.

9. The Miracles of Christ

When Jesus Christ was on earth, He performed many miracles, i.e. events over and above the natural order of things. He healed the sick, He fed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, He even raised the dead. This is extraordinary to say the least. In order to understand the miracles more, we just want to look at three aspects:

1. We Can't do Miracles Today

Christ could perform miracles. Many people think that all Christians can do the same today. But that's not true. We read of two occasions during Christ's lifetime when He gave the power to perform miracles to some of His disciples for certain evangelistic campaigns. And he left His apostles with that power for a short time after His ascension. That's all we read about. The Bible calls these "*signs and wonders,*" and we are told they were specifically "*the signs of an apostle*":

2 Corinthians 12:12

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

But even the apostles didn't have this power for very long. We find that, towards the end of his life, Paul couldn't even heal his friend:

2 Timothy 4:20

Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.

What were these miracles? The best list we have is in Matthew 10, on the occasion Christ gave these powers to his twelve disciples for the first time:

Matthew 10:1,8

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.... Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

We see straight away that these are completely different from the “*spiritual gifts*” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and elsewhere in Scripture. People often confuse the two, especially as the list of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 does include “*miracles*” and “*gifts of healing*”:

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues....

People assume these are the same as the miracles Christ did. But they’re not. The Greek word for “*miracles*” in 1 Corinthians 12 is “*dunamis*,” which is normally translated “*power*.” The usual Greek word used for Christ’s miracles is “*sayimon*,” which is normally translated “*sign*.” We can argue over what the “*spiritual gift*” of miracles actually is, but it’s not the same as the “*sign and wonder*” miracles Christ did.

Nowhere in the lists of “*spiritual gifts*” do we find cleansing lepers, raising the dead, or casting out devils. These were “*signs*” Christ and the apostles did. The “*spiritual gifts*,” on the other hand, include “*wisdom*,” “*knowledge*,” “*faith*,” “*helps*,” “*governments*,” and “*tongues*,” i.e. other languages. These are nothing at all to do with “*signs and wonders*” which only Christ and the apostles could do.

So, if aunt Bessie is sick, we don’t go up to her and say, “Be healed in the name of Jesus!” What can we do? We pray. There is a God in heaven who can heal. He is the one we go to. He may heal, or He may not. It may be her time to die. But we still go to Him and accept whatever He has for her. We don’t try to pretend we can heal her miraculously ourselves.

2. What was the Purpose of the Miracles?

The miracles were not an end in themselves. Physical healing is not an end in itself. We are all still going to die:

Hebrews 9:27

It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment....

Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, but he still died again later on. The miracles only pointed to something greater, namely the fact that Jesus was the Christ, the only one who can save us from what our sins deserve. Nicodemus saw exactly that. The miracles proved that Jesus Christ came from God:

John 3:2

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Miracles had hardly ever happened before. The man born blind in John 9 said:

John 9:32

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

We find miracles only occasionally in the Bible, notably the Exodus and in the time of Elijah and Elisha. Other than that, they are few and far between. But throughout the Bible we constantly see the wonderful miracle of Providence. God keeps His people in remarkable ways. That's the real miracle we see all around us every day:

Romans 8:28

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

That's the real Christian life, living our lives trusting in all things working together for good, even when they don't seem to be. Natural processes aren't bypassed, as in a "sign and wonder" miracle. But things work out in remarkable ways, within the laws of nature.

Christ's miracles pointed to something greater, His deity. But the people didn't realise that. They just wanted more miracles now. When people started following Him after miraculously feeding 5,000 men plus women and children from five loaves and two fish:

John 6:26,27

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

They didn't "see the miracles", in other words, what they were pointing to. They were pointing to the fact that He was God, He was the Christ who had come to save His people from the consequences of their sin. The miracles were just pointers, they were never supposed to be an end in themselves. But that's what the people wanted. Free food. Free healthcare. That's it. Something for nothing all the time. They weren't interested in His teaching. They couldn't care less about salvation to eternal life, about having their sins before God forgiven. And that's all people want today as well. Things here, now.

We are called not to labour for things down here, on this earth, "*which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.*"

3. Why Different Ways of Performing the Miracles?

Christ performed the same miracle in different ways. For example, we read of three blind men receiving sight:

With blind Bartimeus in Luke 18, Christ just said the word and he was healed:

Luke 18:42

Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

With a man in Bethsaida in Mark 8 He did it in two stages:

Mark 8:22-25

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After

that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

And with the man born blind in John 9, He again used spit then told him to wash:

John 9:6,7

When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Christ used a variety of methods to do the same thing. Why is that? Each one of these methods must be teaching us something about our spiritual blindness.

These blind men obeyed Christ in every detail, even if it sounded odd to do so. It worked. Suddenly light. And we should just do what Christ tells us. Allow Him to change us. When we first became a Christian, we have to admit that talking to someone whom we can't see is a really odd thing to do. But that's what we did when we first came to know the Lord. And that's what we do now, whenever we pray to Him. We are all born spiritually blind. And when Christ comes into our lives, He makes us see. Suddenly light. The Bible comes alive. The things of God become a reality. We suddenly see the truth. And that's what the miracles are pointing to, a spiritual reality.

With the blind man in Bethsaida, we have the only two-stage miracle in the Bible. It was in two stages, not because Christ didn't do it properly the first time, so He had to try again. God forbid we should think that way. No. It was done in two stages to teach us something. When we come to know the Lord for the first time, we see light. We see something straight away. But we don't see spiritual things completely clearly straight away. This only comes after time.

With both the man born blind and the man in Bethsaida, Christ used His spit. Isn't that strange? What gives us spiritual light? The Word of God, the words from the mouth of Christ. That's the picture. If we want spiritual light, we must come to Jesus Christ. Not me, not a priest,

not Mohammed, not Buddha, but Jesus Christ. His words are living and powerful. They convert the soul.

Psalm 19:7

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

So, that's what the miracles of Christ are all about. Only He and the apostles had the power to do them. They were never meant to be an end in themselves, but served only to point to the divinity of Jesus Christ. And even the way Christ performed the miracles teaches us lessons.

10. The Parables of Christ. *Matthew 13:10-17*

Christ did most of His teaching in parables, i.e. stories meant to teach spiritual things. He would typically say something like, “*The kingdom of heaven is like...*”

“... *a man which sowed good seed in his field*” (Matthew 13:24)

“... *a grain of mustard seed*” (v.31)

“... *unto leaven*” (v.33)

“... *treasure hid in a field*” (v.44)

“... *a merchant man seeking goodly pearls*” (v.45)

“... *a net, that was cast into the sea*” (v.47).

When Christ taught the multitudes, He only used parables:

Matthew 13:34,35

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

This fulfils the prophecy of Psalm 78:2. But isn't it strange that He just told them stories, and never taught them any other way? The disciples thought so too:

[10] And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

Why didn't Christ just teach truth without parables? Many people think it was to help the people understand, but that's not necessarily true, because He never gave them an explanation of the parable. He just told the story, then walked off. Why did He do that? Because it's not for them:

[11] He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. [12] For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall

have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

Mark tells us:

Mark 4:33,34

And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

It says here, “*as they were able to hear it.*” When He spoke to the multitudes, after giving the story to them without explanation, He often said:

Mark 4:9

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

He challenges them. What are you going to do with this parable? And He left them thinking about it. He only spoke “*as they were able to hear it.*” He never gave them anything they were unable to understand. They were able to hear and understand what He said, but the question is, were they willing?

Most of the crowd were only following Him for the free healthcare. They weren’t bothered about His teaching. So those people just drifted off. But if we were there, and wanted to know more, what would we have done? We would have gone up to Him to ask Him. Christ was always approachable. He would never turn anyone away. And that’s why Christ did things like this. He only explained the parables to those who wanted to know more.

Mark 4:10

And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

Do any of us want to know more about God, about the Lord Jesus Christ? Has something been put on our heart to desire to know more about Him? There is something we can do. We can come to church, we can talk to the pastor, we can read our Bible, these are all good things,

but the best thing of all is that we can ask Christ Himself. Pray to Him. Sit at His feet. Learn of Him. He said:

Matthew 7:7,8

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Matthew 11:29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

God is looking for people to seek Him with all their heart, not people after something for nothing:

Jeremiah 29:13

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

[13] Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

If they're not searching, they're never going to understand. And this fulfils prophecy:

[14] And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: [15] For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

But to those who desire to know more, these parables aren't just pretty stories, they teach deep truths about spiritual things:

[16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. [17] For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and

righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

We are blessed. Even prophets and righteous men of old time have longed to know these truths, but never had the opportunity. We have far more revelation today than they ever had. We should be so thankful for the teachings of Christ. Let's long to know more.

11. The Death of Christ. *Romans 5:6-11*

Jesus Christ was put to death on a cross by wicked men.

The prophets prophesied this would happen:

Isaiah 53:7-9

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Christ predicted this would happen:

Matthew 20:18,19

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Men hated Christ, because He told them their works were evil:

John 7:7

The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

So they put Him to death, thinking that was the end of Him. But His death was planned by God. He came to die. It was always God's plan to send His Son into the world to die:

Acts 2:23

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

So we need to know the purpose of His death.

[6] For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

He “***died for the ungodly.***” He died for others. In their place.

And this was “***when we were yet without strength.***” We have no strength to help ourselves. We need a Saviour, and the good news is that Christ has to come to us, when we could never go to Him.

[7] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

History, especially the history of warfare, records occasions when people give their own lives in the place of others. Christ Himself said:

John 15:13

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

[8] But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ died for us “***while we were yet sinners.***” In other words, even though there is nothing in us to commend us to Him at all. We are altogether unlovely. Yet He still laid down His life for us. And He had to come, because there is no other way to reconcile sinners to God other than by a perfect substitute.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

[9] Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

We are “***justified by His blood.***” Justification is the opposite of condemnation. It doesn't mean we are made clean. We'll still be sinners until we die. It means we're no longer condemned for our own sin, but

rather, we are regarded in God's sight as righteous. Our sin is imputed to Christ, and His righteousness to us:

2 Corinthians 5:21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

[10] For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

We are reconciled to God by Christ's death. But not everybody is. We have to come to Jesus Christ. Trust in Him, the Saviour of the world, to save us. We can't just sit back and do nothing. We need to recognise our need of Him. We need to acknowledge our sin, repent and turn to Him. Pray to Him. Begin a relationship with the only one who has paid the price. This is the message we have for the world. He's not just a teacher, but a Saviour of sinners.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

[11] And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Christians are joyful because they know for sure they won't be condemned for their sins, but Christ has paid the price for them. They know for sure that they are going to heaven when they die. That sounds arrogant. But they know it's not because of anything in them, but because of what Jesus Christ has done for them. That makes the Christian humble to the dust.

1 John 5:13

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

2 Corinthians 5:14,15

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

12. The Resurrection of Christ

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Three days after Christ died, He rose again, exactly according to the Scriptures and what He had Himself prophesied. He gave witness to this by appearing at various times throughout forty days, mainly to His disciples, before ascending to heaven:

Acts 1:3

To whom [the apostles] also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The resurrection is important. Many today laugh at the concept of rising from the dead.

[12] Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? [13] But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: [14] And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

We're told that without the resurrection of Christ, our faith collapses, and all we preach is in vain. And there are several reasons for this:

Firstly, people don't believe in the resurrection from the dead, because they've never seen such a thing for themselves. But we've still got sufficient witness. The Bible is all we need. We're told:

Luke 16:31

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Just because nobody has seen anyone come back from the dead is no excuse. There will be a general resurrection at the end of time. We can never think we can escape judgment by dying. Death is not the end:

Acts 24:15

.... there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Daniel 12:2

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

[15] Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. [16] For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: [17] And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

Secondly, we're told here that if Christ has not been raised, we are yet in our sins. Christ's resurrection proves that God the Father accepted His atoning sacrifice. Otherwise we'd never know whether His death had been accepted by God or not, so we would have no assurance, no peace, no joy.

[18] Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

Thirdly, we would have no hope for all those who have already died. But Christ's atonement reaches all believers in all times, not just those after His death:

Hebrews 4:2

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

[19] If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

Christianity is primarily about being reconciled to God, avoiding the punishment for our sins in the next world. We still have a life to live in this world. As long as we're alive here, we have work to do for the Lord. But the most important thing here is to get right with God, because the next world is eternal. Thinking Christianity is for this world

only is a big mistake. People say Christians can be “too heavenly-minded to be any earthly use.” But our problem is our worldliness. We’re not heavenly-minded enough.

[20] But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

And Christ’s resurrection is the firstfruits of God’s harvest. It shows there will be a harvest. A number that no man could number will be saved through Him:

Revelation 7:9,10

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

[21] For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Just as Adam, the first man, ate of the forbidden fruit and died, taking all mankind with him; so Christ, one man, makes all His people alive again by forgiving their sins and making them new creatures in Him.

Romans 5:18,19

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

13. The Word of God. *2 Peter 1:16-21*

Read also Luke 9:28-36

In Luke 9, Peter, James and John saw Christ in a glorious state. Now, if we'd have been there, do we think it would have strengthened our faith? Well, it didn't actually change them at all, at the time. They were half asleep. They still didn't understand Christ had to die, and that He would rise from the dead. And Peter was still to deny Him three times.

After the resurrection, everything changed. The apostles saw and talked with Christ in His resurrection body. They had now become altogether different people. In Peter's second letter, he writes about the importance of what he saw that day when he saw His glory:

[16] For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Peter was an actual eyewitness of Christ's majesty. He now knew for sure that Jesus Christ has all power, and that He will come again, next time in glory. And Peter says that he is not just making all this up. He had to do that, because it was only a personal experience, so why should anyone else believe what he had to say? We can give our testimony of how we became a Christian to an unbeliever, but we should be aware that they are probably going to want more evidence than simply our words, otherwise they might think it's just a "***cunningly devised fable.***" But, if our life is seen to have completely changed, that's going to be the best witness we could ever be.

[17] For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. [18] And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

Peter testifies that when he was on the mountain he heard the voice of God Himself. Maybe we've had some tremendous experience of God in the past. And that's great. Let's recall it, and that can help to strengthen our own faith. But, in difficult times, we can begin to doubt even these real experiences of God that we were once so sure of in the past. In the Lord's goodness, He's given us something far better and far more reliable than our own unprovable experiences of Him to strengthen our faith and to convince others of the truth. At the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, Christ said:

Luke 16:31

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

The heart of man is so dark, even if he saw for himself someone rising from the dead, it will not necessarily convince him of anything. Even if he receives all the physical proof he demands, it still may not be enough to convince an unbeliever. Something far more is needed. The Lord has given us today a far greater witness in this world, even than any experience. He's given us "*Moses and the prophets.*" If we don't hear what they have to say, we won't be convinced by lesser proofs of God, like someone rising from the dead.

[19] We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts

The only way we can know God for ourselves is if He chooses to reveal Himself to us. There are three ways God has done this:

1. Firstly, God has revealed Himself to all men in creation:

Romans 1:20

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

But Creation only reveals that an all-powerful creator God exists, i.e. His "*eternal power and godhead.*" That's enough to render all men without

excuse for their sin, because they know they're responsible to this God. But for us to know anything else about God, His love, His justice, His mercy, His plan of salvation, we need Him to reveal more.

2. The second way He has revealed Himself to us is in Jesus Christ. God became a man:

John 1:14

And the Word was made 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.

But Christ only came into the world for a short period of time. None of us have actually physically seen Him.

3. So the Lord has revealed Himself in a third and final way, by provided a completely reliable witness to Him accessible to everybody in every age. And that's what we've got in the Scriptures. "*Moses and the prophets.*" This is what we need. We do well to take heed to this book. It is like a light that shines in a dark place. It's all we've got. All other writings in the world are purely the ideas of men. But this is altogether different. It's the Word of God Himself. It's a reliable history book. It's an accurate record of what we need to know about the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It's a reliable guide as to what God requires of us. It's a reliable manual of Christian living. It's everything we need.

2 Timothy 3:16,17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The Scriptures weren't written by a single man. If that was the case, it would just be somebody's opinion. Mohammed wrote the whole of the Koran. Joseph Smith wrote the whole of the Book of Mormon. The words of one man can never be a witness to anybody:

2 Corinthians 13:1

In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written over about 1600 years, by many different authors, who all bear testimony to the same one true living God.

But, we may say, aren't there contradictions in the Bible? There are several accounts of the same event, with seemingly different information. But, let's suppose we read a novel or watch a film. It's fine first time around. But read or watch it a second time, and a third time, and we'll soon discover mistakes or continuity errors. And that's what it's like with every work of man. They all contain mistakes. But with the Bible, the opposite is the case. When we first read it, we might think there are lots of contradictions in it, but the more we read it, the more these apparent contradictions are resolved. And that's because, although many human authors wrote the Scriptures, they are not the words of men:

[20] Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. [21] For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Spirit moved the writers of Scripture to write the words God wanted. And so we need the Holy Spirit to understand the words properly. There are many people who know the Bible well, but they're wrong because they don't have the Holy Spirit. And there are many who say they've got the Holy Spirit, but ignore the Bible altogether. We need both. Christians know there's something different about this book. It moves us whenever we read it:

Luke 24:32

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

Jeremiah 20:9

Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

The Word of God is alive. It is living and powerful:

Hebrews 4:12,13

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

The Bible is living and powerful. It's got power to convert the soul, to change hearts, to convince of the truth. And it has power to help the believer grow in the faith:

Psalm 19:7,8

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The Bible is exciting to the believer. It burns within his bones. But there are many others who are totally unmoved by it. Terry Waite was the Archbishop of Canterbury's special envoy during the war in Lebanon in the 1980s. He was captured by muslims and imprisoned in a cellar for five years on his own. Years later he spoke at a Christian convention. He said that after four years of imprisonment, his captors gave him a Bible. What a wonderful provision from God! But he said "I read through it several times (he had nothing else to do), and I found no comfort in it whatsoever." I know we're not supposed to judge people, but, at that time, He can't possibly have known the Lord – because the Bible meant nothing to him. Maybe he has become a Christian since.

Contrast that with a man I met once. When he was young, he was walking with some friends, and they came across an empty church. The door was open and there was nobody around, so they went inside. And, just fooling around, they pretended to play church. His mates all sat in the pews, and he got into the pulpit and pretended to be the preacher. He opened the Bible that was there, and started randomly reading from it, and as he was reading the words, suddenly in his heart he realised that it was all true. None of his other friends had any reaction at all to the words that were read, but his heart had been changed forever. Suddenly, what we've always thought was just a boring stuffy book, comes alive. We realise that it's all true. Then it becomes so precious to

us. Because it's living and powerful. It's got a life of its own. It's God's Word, not man's.

Many want the church to be a higher authority than the Scriptures. So they tell us that the Bible is a product of the church – the church decided in about the fourth century which books would go in the Bible. But that's not true. This verse tells us that. ***“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*** Scripture became Scripture as soon as it came off the pen of the writer, whether church councils recognised it as Scripture or not. The fact it took nearly 400 years for a church council to decide what Scripture was, just proves how long it takes church councils to agree on anything.

And they got it wrong. They got the 27 books of the New Testament right, but they decided that a Greek translation known as the Septuagint was the inspired Word of God. But it was a translation from the original Hebrew, and it contained 14 extra books, which we know today as the Apocrypha. That's why Roman Catholic Bibles contain these extra books. And Eastern Orthodox Bibles contain more. Only the original Hebrew is the inspired Word of God:

Romans 3:1,2

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

How do I know that the Apocrypha is not the Word of God?

- It's got mistakes in it,
- The oracles of God were committed to the Jews not Greeks, and
- It doesn't burn in my bones when I read it.

Let's go back to verse 19:

...ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

This book is more sure than our own experience. It's a light that shines in a dark place. It's the only light we've got. But we've only got it for a short time. ***“until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”*** One day, we'll get to glory, and no longer need it.

1 Corinthians 13:12

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.

While we are here in this world, we need direction. We need guidance. We need the Lord to show us the way. Here, we still only see the things of God through a glass darkly. People disagree on many different Scriptures and their interpretation. And that's always going to be the case. But that doesn't stop the Scriptures being a light shining in a dark place. But the Lord will always make sure that His people have got enough light to see their way through this world, and bring them safely to their home in the next world. Do we want to know what heaven is like? There are glimpses of it in this book. Do we want to know what Christ was like? Do we want to know why He came into the world? He came into the world to save sinners. Let's read this book and find out all we can about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He can change our lives forever through this book. And this book can keep us from sin:

Psalm 119:11

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalm 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Christ said:

John 17:17

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

This book is a far more sure than any experience we can ever have. To the extent that the truth from this book is preached, propagated and lived out in our lives, that's the extent to which the Lord can use us to bring people to Himself.

14. The Holy Spirit. *John 16:7-14*

God is generally regarded as being One God existing as a trinity of Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The “Trinity” is just a human way of trying to explain God. It’s not a very good way, but it’s the best we’ve got. On the one hand there is only one God, but each Person has a specific work to do, and is to be worshipped as God. The Father is in heaven providentially controlling all things. The Son, Jesus Christ, came into this world as a man and died to save His people from their sins. The Holy Spirit comes into the heart of each believer to guide them. Christ mentioned the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples:

[7] Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

The Holy Spirit was only to come after Christ had gone away. Having said that, people in the Old Testament also had the Holy Spirit:

Psalm 51:11

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Isaiah 63:10,11

But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?

But how does the Holy Spirit actually work in a believer? Many people confuse the Holy Spirit with some emotional event, like a nice piece of music, or a good feeling. But we should let the Bible tell us how He works. Firstly, He works **on** (not in) **unbelievers**:

[8] And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment

He reproves the world in three ways:

[9] Of sin, because they believe not on me

He reproves the world of sin. All men know they are sinners against a holy God. We are all without excuse for our sins:

Romans 1:18-20

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

[10] Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more

He reproves the world of righteousness. Christ, when He was on the earth, reproved the world of righteousness. After His departure, this is now the work of the Holy Spirit:

John 3:19,20

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

[11] Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

He reproves the world of judgment. Satan has already been judged by Christ's victory on the cross. No man can avoid the judgment to come:

1 John 3:8

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[12] I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

And then we see how the Holy Spirit works *in believers*. Christ was only in this world for a short time. But He sent the Holy Spirit to live within every believer as a continual teacher:

Psalm 32:8

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

1. Instead of teaching us through words, He puts the law in our hearts:

Psalm 119:11

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Jeremiah 31:33,34

After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

[13] Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

2. He also guides His people into the truth:

1 John 2:27

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

[14] He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

3. And He glorifies Christ. He does this by working in us to live Christ-like lives:

Romans 8:13,14

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Galatians 5:16-18

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

15. Guidance. *Acts 16:6-12*

A common problem that many Christians have is understanding how we are guided by God. After becoming a Christian, we no longer live for ourselves:

Galatians 2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Now we live our life for God, we need to know what His will is in every situation we find ourselves in. Because that is what we need to follow.

The first rule we must live by is the law of God. God gave us a moral law in the Ten Commandments, and this should always be our guide:

John 14:15

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

God may wish to allow evil to come to pass, for His own higher and holy ends, but that is His prerogative and never ours:

Genesis 50:20

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

Acts 2:23

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

So, if a moral decision is to be made, then the decision is easy. But what if a decision needs to be made which has no moral content, such as choosing a job, or choosing where to live? Neither is morally wrong, so which is God's will? Paul had this problem:

[6] Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia

He was guided by the Holy Spirit. But that means many different things to many people. In the end, we are responsible as individuals for our actions, and our discernment of the Holy Spirit's guidance within us. It certainly does not mean following men, whoever they are, whatever leadership position they have got for themselves:

Psalm 146:3

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

Micah 7:5

Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

We should follow the Holy Spirit in His directly dealing with us. Paul went through Phrygia and Galatia, which were regions of Asia. But they were somehow uneasy preaching there, and never settled. By this, Paul discerned that the Holy Spirit had forbidden them to preach there altogether, and was positively looking for the place the Lord was leading them.

[7] After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

They came to Mysia, another province of Asia. They tried to go into Bithynia, another province of Asia, ***“but the Spirit suffered them not.”*** The Holy Spirit again gave them unease, and this time didn't even allow them to go into Bithynia at all. So where were they to go? Furthermore, what about the poor souls in all these Asian provinces? Who was going to preach the gospel to them if Paul and his colleagues were forbidden

to go there? Actually, that's not their problem. They leave that with the Lord. We just go where He sends us. They continued through Mysia:

[8] And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

Troas was on the coast. They'd run out of places to go. Where was the Lord leading?

[9] And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Paul had a vision. Many people say they've had a dream or a vision or a prophecy. But we're not to follow them.

Jeremiah 23:28

The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.

We must stick close to the Word of God. In Acts 1:16-26, the apostles choose a replacement for Judas. How were they guided? Firstly, Peter, reading Scripture, realises their need to do this:

Acts 1:16

Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

Then they got a shortlist of qualified candidates together:

Acts 1:21,22

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Then they prayed:

Acts 1:24

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.

That's the pattern to follow. Their casting the lot then put an end to any strife.

Here, Paul has this vision of a Macedonian saying, "***Come over into Macedonia, and help us.***" That alone is not guidance.

[10] And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Paul told His companions the dream. And all of them immediately were comfortable with it, realising that was where the Lord was leading them. We are not told they prayed, but I'm sure they did.

[11] Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; [12] And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

After making the decision, they looked for confirmatory signs from the Lord. They sailed "***with a straight course***" all the way. On a return journey it took five days:

Acts 20:6

And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

The facts that everyone was agreed, and that the wind was in the right direction, was confirmation of the course of action they took. Guidance is very tricky to discern, but we must stick close to the Lord, His Word and prayer, and not do anything until we are completely sure, and even then continue to look for confirmation from the Lord.

16. The Last Judgment and Future Glory

Revelation 20:12-21:4

There is going to be a general resurrection and final judgment at the end of time:

John 5:28,29

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall bear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

And Christ will be our judge:

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

[12] And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Nobody will be excluded from the judgment. And we will all be judged according to our works in this life. These have all been recorded in the books of our deeds, which are opened at this point. That should trouble us, because we are all going to be found guilty.

[13] And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

This judgment will include everyone who has ever lived. We will all be judged according to how we have lived in the one life that we have

been given on this earth. And nobody will be able to escape it by killing themselves.

[14] And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

There will no longer be any death as we know it, i.e. the soul leaving the body. For the final judgment, our souls will be united to an everlasting resurrection body, and then we will face our final, eternal destiny. The word **“hell”** here is *“Hades,”* the holding place of wicked souls between death and the final judgment. That will no longer be needed, so that too is destroyed. There is a **“lake of fire”** mentioned here, which is called the **“second death”**. We need to make sure we don’t end up there. That’s where the devil, his angels and all the wicked go:

Matthew 25:41

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

[15] And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

The **“lake of fire”** is actually where we all deserve to go. But, thankfully, whether we go to the lake of fire or not, does not depend on our entry in the books of our deeds, but it depends on whether our names are written in the **“book of life”** or not. Thank God! Because the **“book of life”** is Christ’s:

Revelation 13:8

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the beast], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

So, those not written in the **“book of life”**, justly go for ever into the lake of fire for their sins:

2 Thessalonians 1:9

... who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power

[22:1] And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

But for those who are written in the “**book of life**”, there is “**a new heaven and a new earth**” to look forward to. And there is “**no more sea**”. The “**sea**” is often in the Bible used as a metaphor for the mob, the nations. No more will any mob or movement lead us astray.

[2] And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Christ’s people are described in the Bible as His “**bride**”.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Here, we have a slightly different analogy. The new Jerusalem, our final resting place, is here described as the bride of Christ’s people.

[3] And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

This will be our final resting place, where God finally dwells with men. He dwells with His people in their hearts here, in this world, but down here we live in a world of sin and evil. In the new Jerusalem, there will be no more sin, and indeed no more sin in our hearts either.

[4] And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Let's make sure that we avoid the "second death", the "lake of fire", by putting all our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation. Otherwise there is no hope for anybody.
