

REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

by

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REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

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PREFACE

We read in Proverbs 1:7 that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...” Here we learn that in order to begin to have “knowledge” – which must include knowledge about the Person of God – we must have something. This essential something is called “the fear of the Lord.”

What then is this fear? It is a reverent respect for God. It is a realization of His unlimited power. It is a consciousness of His purity and holiness which present a standard by which we are required to live (I Pet 1:16). It is the inner knowing that some day we will be judged by Him for our actions, words, and even thoughts. It is something which, if rightly understood, causes us to tremble before His almighty presence. It is a sentiment which impels us to seek Him to cleanse our lives so that we will be ready when He comes.

Yet much of the church of our day seems to lack this fear. Those who “tremble at [His] word” (Is 66:5) seem to be in the minority. The fear of the Lord, which should be fundamental to everything, is treated as if it were out of date or something only for severe, uptight, legalistic Christians.

The result of this lack of godly fear is that many believers are involved in sin. Their lives are not pure and holy. They do not reflect the character of Christ in their daily living. Many are committing sexual sins. Others are addicted to prescription or illegal drugs. Others are dishonest, angry, irritable, do not keep their promises, and/or think only about themselves. Still others have secret abortions, spend hours sucking in online pornography, hate other believers, do not forgive those who offend them, and yet still proclaim that they are converted to Christ.

How can it be that the church which Jesus wants to present to Himself without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27) seems to be overflowing with such impurity, filthiness, and sin? How is it that those who “name the name of Christ” have not departed from iniquity (II Tim 2:19)? Not only have they not departed, it seems that many, even from the pulpits, are justifying ungodly behavior.

Yet there is hope. Believers today need to pray, urgently seeking God, that by His mercy we His people might come to know the fear of the Lord. We read: “... by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil” (Pr 16:6). If, by God’s grace we can experience this holy fear, it will change our lives. It will cause us to seek His face. It will impel us to cry out for His salvation and purification of our beings.

How is it that we can have more of the fear of the Lord? It is by seeing Him. It is by understanding more about who He is. It is by glimps-

ing His power and glory. It comes by a true understanding of His word, receiving more revelation concerning His purposes, and knowing more perfectly His will for His people.

This small volume is an attempt to address this need. It is a short writing about what this author understands to be some of the lost fundamentals of the gospel.

It is his prayer that God will use it to speak into the lives of the readers and draw them ever more into an intimate relationship with Him which will transform their lives.

DWD

“For they have healed the hurt
of the daughter of my people slightly,
saying, ‘Peace, peace!’
When there is no peace” (Jer 8:11).

“When you walk through the fire,
you shall not be burned, nor shall the
flame scorch you” (Is 43:2).

1.

REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

“Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18).

The preceeding verse demonstrates a progression of activity. It indicates an action which results in the receiving of some benefit. The action here is called “repentance.” The benefit is termed “life.”

This “progression” was experienced by all the participants of the early church. The fact that this included both the Jews and the Gentiles is indicated by the word “also.” It was something basic and essential through which they had passed and which they considered fundamental to their being believers in Jesus.

It was this experience that provided the proof for the Jewish believers that they, and then later the Gentiles, had been genuinely converted. It was this repentance and the receiving of this Life, which was at the core of their understanding of what the message of Jesus was.

As it was in the days of the book of Acts, so today it is essential that every believer both understands and experiences this progression.

In order for our faith to be genuine and the benefits of our faith to be fully realized, all of us need to pass through this process.

For us to receive the fulness of all the blessings which are ours in Christ, it is essential that we comprehend precisely what is being said in the above verse. To this end we will spend a little time and investigate some of these terms.

WHAT IS THIS LIFE?

To begin, exactly what is meant by the word "life?" Every inhabitant of the earth already has a kind of life or they would not be here. Just what variety of life is this then which requires our repentance to obtain? Obviously it is something which natural people do not yet have. It is something which they yet need to receive.

Perhaps some would think that this "life" refers to a future life in heaven. But this is not the case. Others might imagine that this is some extension of their human life so that it will not die but will go on living forever. However, this too is not what is meant.

Still others might suppose that this life is an improvement of their human existence, sort of like a gasoline additive which might give them more power and better mileage. Yet, this also is not what is meant by "life."

The life spoken of here in this verse is the very life of God! It is, in fact, the life of another being, not our own life at all.

We can be certain of this fact due to the use of a special word for "life" in the original Greek

texts. It is this specific word which gives us true understanding. This word “life” is translated from a unique Greek word, “ZOË.” The Greek word ZOË was chosen by the writers of the New Testament to refer to God’s own life. So we understand that the life which we are intended to receive is the life of Another – the very life of God Himself.

Although the English language only has one word for life, the Greek language is much richer. It has several words which refer to unique varieties of life and distinguishes between them. All believers should be aware of this distinction because it greatly influences our understanding of what certain Bible passages mean.

For example, when we read in John 10:10 that Jesus came to give us life, what sort of life could this be? If the Greek word here were BIOS, for example, then Jesus might have come to improve our physical existence, helping us be healthy or prosperous. If this word were PSUCHË, which is also translated “soul,” then we could assume that He came to make us happy and well-adjusted.

However, the word used here is neither BIOS nor PSUCHË but ZOË which refers to the uncreated life of God the Father. Jesus came to make available to us the Father’s life and make it available abundantly! Jesus goal was not to improve our own “life” at all, but to give us another life which is infinitely superior. This same distinction is critical to understanding other passages of the Holy Scriptures also.

ETERNAL LIFE

This ZOË life is described in other parts of the New Testament as being “eternal” (I Jn 1:2). This word eternal in the Greek is very special. It means “spanning the eons” or “ages.” It signifies a kind of life which is without beginning and also without end. It is a variety of life which was never born and can never die. It is a special sort of life which has always existed, is now today existing, and will exist forever.

Only God possesses this kind of life. The Bible says that only He has “immortality” (I Tim 6:16); the variety of life being described here. Throughout the ages God has been the only immortal being. Not only does His life not die or grow old, it cannot be killed. It is immortal and immutable. We read: “...it was not possible that he should be held by it [death]” (Acts 2:24).

Now there is some good news. It is news so wonderful that it is almost impossible to believe, yet it is true. God has decided to share His very own life with human beings. He has made a decision to make this never-beginning, never-ending life available to mere mortals (Jn 3:16). When they receive this life, they too can become immortal (II Tim 1:10). They too can have His eternal life. This means that they also will never and can never die. They have “...passed from death into [the immortal] life” (Jn 5:24).

If we take a minute and meditate upon this idea, it seems almost unthinkable. The possibil-

ity that we, mere human beings, could receive within ourselves the life of an infinitely superior being is just incredible.

What seems to be being offered to us here is the opportunity to leave the human race and become part of another race. This new race consists of people who have received an immortal, uncreated life – a life so superior to their human one it is beyond natural comprehension. Those who are part of this new race are called “the sons of God.” This is, in fact, a newly created species, a new variety of being which the Bible calls a “new creation” (II Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

Men and women could hardly dream up such a thing. Science fiction also falls short of what this really means. But the truth is that the God of the universe has opened the door for anyone who is able to hear, understand, and believe, to become something unprecedented in the universe – something which has never been heard of before.

They can receive into themselves the life of an immeasurably superior being, allow this life to completely fill them, and then permit this new life to express itself through them in every aspect of their living.

Even though some may not have understood this yet, it is in fact the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

ONE IMPEDIMENT

Yet, there is one problem. There is one thing which blocks men and women from receiving

this unspeakable gift. There exists an impediment to this process of experiencing this new life. There is something which bars us from receiving this life and, even if we have already received it, also inhibits us from being ever more full of this life. This problem is called sin.

You see, God is supremely holy. He is not just a little holy or partially holy. He is so intensely holy that a sinful person who somehow or another came into His presence would be consumed. They would be in terrible agony. His holiness is so pure, so concentrated, so extreme that anything which was unholy could not endure His presence. No one who is sinful can stand being anywhere near God.

God's life is holy. His life is righteous by definition. His life is as spontaneously holy as our human life is naturally sinful. God does not have to try not to sin. He is not trying to resist temptation. He naturally abhors sin since it is contrary to His nature. His holiness is simply who and what He is. It is His very essence.

Of course this explains why sinners like to keep away from Him. This is the reason that they find every excuse to deny His existence. Even the thought that God might be real already impacts the conscience of an unholy person.

To understand our God better, perhaps we could think of the analogy of the sun. The sun is actually a continual nuclear explosion. It is so intense that we cannot look at it for more than a few seconds with unprotected eyes. Imagine then, not just looking, but coming up close to

the sun. A person would be consumed by its fiery intensity.

Now our universe consists of billions of such stars. There may be, in fact, billions of galaxies, each filled with countless stars. And each of these stars is burning with an unimaginable intensity like the sun. Yet our God, who created all this, is much greater still! He is much more powerful and the glory of His holy presence is still more intense.

We read in Isaiah 33:14 concerning what it will be like in God's presence: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: [They ask] 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?'"

Here the prophet is contemplating what it will be like in the very presence of God. This passage clearly indicates that God's presence is intensely powerful and burning. Confirming this we read in another place: "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). The presence of the Creator is a location where no sinner will be able to endure. It will cause any such person extreme agony and destruction. Just like the sun's effect on our natural body, the intensity of God's presence is too much for a sinner to bear.

A further proof of this is the way in which the coming Beast will be destroyed. He will come to his end simply by the appearing of Jesus. We read about: "...the lawless one...whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His

coming" (II Th 2:8). It is the intense, glorious, "brightness" of His appearing which will utterly destroy the man of sin.

When we stand before God, truth – powerful, pure, undiluted truth – will permeate the atmosphere. There all our "refuge of lies" will be swept away (Is 28:17). All our excuses for our behavior; all our self-justification concerning our words, thoughts, attitudes, and actions; all our blaming others for our condition; all our imagining that we are better than we truly are will be seen with the utmost clarity.

It is God's very presence which will produce this effect. Nothing will be secret or hidden. All we have said, done, or thought will be evident before the entire universe. The conscience of any sinner will be in the most extreme agony with no way of escape. We read that He will: "...bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts" (I Cor 4:5). Everything secret will be exposed. It is the light of the presence of God which will do this.

Today God hides Himself (Is 45:15). He is not clearly revealing Himself to the world. No doubt He does this for our benefit. It is so that we will not be consumed. When and if God reveals Himself in all His fulness, any and all sinners will be destroyed.

This is not just because God is angry with these people. It will simply be a natural consequence of sin coming into contact with His holiness. The nature of His person is just so extreme that anything which would be contrary to it

simply could not withstand the experience. This is something which cannot be altered. God does not change (Mal 3:6). He simply is who He is.

For another example of this truth, we can look at what will happen when Jesus appears in His glory at the end of this age. Here we find that when the heavens open and He begins to descend, the unbelievers and sinners are going to suddenly invent a new religion. They are going to begin to pray.

But instead of praying to God, they will pray to the rocks and hills. They begin to desperately plead with these mountains and rocks saying: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! (Rev 6:16).

At this point in time, death by having a huge rock fall on them will seem preferable to the agony and torment which the presence of Jesus will create in their minds.

I hope that this is abundantly clear for every reader. Sin and God do not combine. They cannot coexist. God's presence will destroy all sin.

This is not because God has some intolerant attitude about the weakness of mankind. It is not because He is uptight about "a few little sins." It is not because He does not understand or is not sympathetic about our faults and failures. It is simply a fact. It is a result of who God, our creator, is. The intensity of holiness which defines His nature, combined with the awesome, unlimited power of who He is, will simply destroy any sinner.

GOD'S APPEARING

One day God is planning to reveal His presence to the universe. Sometime soon He will hide Himself no more. God is not content to simply exist in an eternally concealed fashion. His will is to be revealed in His greatness to all creation.

However, God loves the human race which He made. He does not want to simply extinguish them all by revealing Himself in His fullness without them having some sort of preparation which would enable them to survive this event.

This then brings us back to our original thought. God's plan for us to endure His coming is to make an exchange of life. His idea is for us to receive His own life and by doing so become a variety of being which would welcome and enjoy His appearing.

We must become the same kind of creature that He is. We must receive and become saturated with His holy life and nature. We must become holy as He is holy. Such a creature would suffer no negative impact when He appears. Not only would this kind of being survive in the presence of God, it would thrive there.

It is our sin which today separates us from God. It is also our sin which will cause us future agony and destruction when we are in His immediate presence. Therefore, it is necessary for us to become free from our sin. It is only by

becoming liberated from sin that we will be able to endure in God's presence when He appears.

REPENTANCE

The first step of God's solution to our sin problem is called "repentance." This is a step which we must take. While it is true that God Himself helps us with this necessary procedure, it is a decision that only we can make.

Repentance is an essential part of the salvation process. In fact, it is so crucial to our experience of the new life, that without it we can go nowhere. Since this is so, it seems important for us to take some time and examine this process carefully.

When John the Baptist came, he came preaching one thing: repentance. He said: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mk 3:2).

As Jesus began His ministry on earth, He too proclaimed this same message. We read: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' " (Mt 4:17). This repentance then is the first and essential step for us to be able to receive the life of God which He is offering to us.

There are many today who seem to want to skip this step. They urge many to accept Jesus, but without the initial repentance necessary to proceed very far or with much success. They seem to believe that simply "accepting" Jesus and all that He has done for us is enough for the sinner to later "go to heaven." They present a

truly wide and easy way, but it doesn't lead to the variety of life [God's own life] about which we have been speaking (Mt 7:14).

The fact is that Jesus does not need "acceptance." He is not craving acceptance from you or anybody else. God is not waiting nervously, anxiously hoping that someone, anyone will accept Him. And then, if they will only accept Him, He will forget all His uptightness about their sins and their sinful condition. Our desperate need is not to accept God but rather for Him to accept us! We need to be accepted by Him! And His acceptance of us requires an initial step on our part – repentance. A full, thorough, complete, deep, heartfelt repentance.

What then does repentance mean? It means that we realize the many sinful things which we have done. We also begin to see what we are. In God's light, we become convicted of our deeds and of our natural tendency to do a great variety of evil things which are contrary to God's nature.

Next, we confess before God what we have done and what we are and then acknowledge that, due to our sin, we are worthy of death. True repentance involves this realization: in the eyes of God, we are worthy of death. Yes, genuine repentance means that we realize that we deserve to die for what we have thought, said, done and, in fact, are. This is an important part of the repentance process.

Reason with me for a moment. If we are not worthy of death or do not think that we are,

what possible reason could there be for someone to die in our place? If we are not guilty enough to deserve the death penalty, what need would there be for anyone to substitute for us in this execution? If our guilt is not sufficient to warrant our death, then why would we need Jesus to die instead of us? Therefore, it must be impossible for anyone to receive a Savior which they neither want or feel as if they need.

Baptism is meant to be a symbol of this very fact. It is not simply a dunking or a bath. It is a declaration to the universe that we have understood and accepted our need to die. In true baptism, we recognize our sin and are proclaiming that we are joining ourselves with Christ in His death and looking to His resurrection for our salvation. We are stating publicly that who and what we are is worthy only of death and that we are believing in Christ to change us through the substitution of His life for ours.

Any "repentance" which has not been profound enough for the person involved to understand that they are worthy to die, is faulty. Such "repentance" will not take someone very far in their Christian walk. Without true, deep, thorough repentance, such people have no way for God to cleanse them and substitute His life for theirs. Therefore, they will make very little progress in the spiritual life.

Why, for example, would anyone want to have their life taken away and exchanged for that of Another if they still believe theirs to be pretty good? If, in their own estimation their life

is serving them well, there is no logical need for it to be replaced. No one would want to be dominated by the life of Another if they still like and approve of the one they have. They would never wish to die to themselves and have God live in their place.

But concerning God's judgment on those who sin we read: "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Heb 10:28). It was God who gave this law. His penalty for sin is death. This death was applied for many different offenses, even ones which we consider insignificant. For example, the Old Testament gives us the example of a man stoned to death, following the direction of God Himself, for collecting firewood on the Sabbath (Num 15:32-36).

This same judgment was also mandated for those who committed adultery, used drugs, practiced homosexuality, consulted spirits, committed incest, had sex with animals, blasphemed, murdered, were rebellious sons and many other such things. In short, just as Adam and Eve's sin resulted in death, so any and all who sin reveal that they are worthy of death. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:4).

The physical death which was mandated by the Old Testament law is simply a prefiguring or a shadow of the future. As we have seen, death or the destruction of the sinful soul will be an unavoidable result of the direct presence of God. It is when He appears that the sinful life and nature will be burned up.

God's "sentence" upon sin is death. Sin and God cannot coexist. "The wages of sin [any and all sin] is death" (Rm 6:23). We have clearly understood from the beginning of this chapter that the very presence of God will judge who and what we are. So we easily understand that someone full of sin or even with a natural tendency toward sin, will have His judgment executed upon them. These individuals, merely appearing before a holy God, will suffer judgment by His presence.

Therefore, our repentance – the acknowledgment of our deeds and our condition and the recognition of our worthiness to die – is essential for us to escape His wrath by receiving His new life. Our repentance opens the way for us to become dead to ourselves and full of His life.

Part of God's plan is to fill us to overflowing with His own life. But there is not "space" in us for two lives to be living fully at the same time. One life must go. This is something which God provided for us in Jesus' crucifixion. There, we too died with Him. Now, we can allow Him to apply this death, which happened in the past, to our own lives today. As we enter into Christ, what we are can actually die and something entirely new can be resurrected in its place.

Thus, we prepare ourselves for the coming day when Jesus will appear in His intense, blazing glory. It is when we truly repent that we open our hearts for God to do His glorious substitution work in us, changing us into His own image.

If we do not really see our sin, it is because we lack light. The only way we can truly repent is if God in His mercy shines His light into us. When He draws near to us, the light of His presence exposes who and what we are. When we lack this light and the accompanying conviction of sin, it is a proof that we are not truly intimate with our Creator. But when, through God's favor, we are able to see Him with more clarity, we also see our sin. This then enables us to repent.

SORROW

Repentance is something we do when we finally see our sin. When we realize in the light of God the evil of our ways, we begin to be sorry. When we understand how we have offended others; when we see how we have grieved God; when we know how our words and actions have caused pain and suffering to those around us, then we are in a condition of being ready to repent.

True repentance involves sorrow. We read about Paul saying to the Corinthians: "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance... For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted..." (II Co 7:9,10).

Repentance means that we have a great sense of remorse concerning the sins which we have committed and even our very condition of being sinful. We become truly convicted of the gravity of our sins and their consequences.

Genuine repentance involves the realization of the ugliness of our condition. When we truly see ourselves we will see something very abhorrent. The experience of Job is an example of this truth. He was, in his own estimation, a righteous man. In fact, from a superficial standpoint he was doing pretty well. He helped the poor. He succored the homeless. He did not speak evil of others. He did not lie, cheat, steal, take advantage, or make commitments to others and then break them. In many, many ways he was much more righteous than many who call themselves Christians today.

But at the end of his trial, God revealed Himself to Job. God's genuine righteousness was seen, and in this brilliant, intense light Job saw that his own efforts were merely human and defective. He says: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear. But now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5,6).

Please note Job's reaction. When he saw true holiness he abhorred himself. He realized that what he was, even though in human terms it was esteemed, was really rotten. It was worthy of repudiation. He abhorred what he saw in himself. He hated the flesh, the fallen nature, and even the self-righteousness which he had seen in himself. The result was repentance – sincere, heart-rending repentance. This is the only reaction which is acceptable to God.

When Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, his hearers had a similar reaction.

They were “cut to the heart.” Peter had accused them of participating in the murder of Christ. In verse 23 of chapter 2 of the book of Acts, speaking about the death of Jesus, he proclaims: “Him... you have taken by lawless hands, [and] have crucified.”

No doubt these were not the very men who held and pounded the nails. Yet they were convicted by the Holy Spirit of being just the sort of person who would do such a thing. They had consented to His death. Through the preaching of Peter, they sensed a deep inward guilt, cutting straight to the heart. The direct result of such conviction of sin was repentance (vs 38).

Another biblical reaction to the revelation of God’s person is self-loathing. In Ezekiel chapter 20 verse 43 we read about something which will occur in the coming millennial kingdom of Christ when He will restore all those from the nation of Israel to their land. There He will reveal Himself to them. And what will their reaction be? They will realize their sin and loath themselves. We read: “And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall *loath yourselves in your own sight* because of all the evils that you have committed.” True repentance also involves self-loathing.

There are many today in the church who are preaching positive thinking. They imagine that you should “love yourself.” Dear brothers and sisters, let me tell you as plainly as I can: This is a serious mistake. This will take you nowhere

spiritually. While it might give you some false sense of “self-worth” in the psychological realm (which is merely the human soul) it will not promote one iota of spiritual growth. It might adjust your mind humanly speaking and perhaps give you some emotional consolation but it will not transform you into the image of Christ through the operation of His life in us.

In fact, according to the gospel of John, self-love will result in the loss of your life or “soul.” We read: “He who loves his life [self or soul, Gk] will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for [have it exchanged for] [God’s] eternal life (Jn 12:25).

Now why would this be? It is because when we approve of and love what we are, we will not repent. We will not loathe and detest ourselves. We will not sense the need for Someone superior to live within us taking the place of our natural life. Therefore, when Jesus appears, we will not be very transformed. Then and there the intense holiness of who He is will consume what is natural, human, and sinful. It is not possible for the sinful life to endure in His presence.

Here we find a reliable promise of God. This is a fact upon which we can depend. If we love who and what we are; if we approve of ourselves, if we imagine that we are pretty good, if we do not loathe and detest ourselves, then we will lose our natural (PSUCHÊ) self-life the hard way.

It will be lost at His coming. It will be consumed by the intensity of His holiness.

But if we hate our life because we have seen what it really is in the light of Jesus' countenance, then He will work in us to exchange it for His own eternal life.

True repentance – something which occurs when we see ourselves in the light of God – generates sorrow, self-abhorrence, and self-loathing accompanied by a willingness to be rid of what we see. It means that we now understand our need to die and have our own life replaced by God's divine one. We agree with God's judgment on our flesh and open ourselves to receive His great salvation.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

As we have been seeing, true repentance depends upon the revelation of God. Jesus is "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). When we draw near to Him or He comes near to us, His light shines in us. As this light dawns, we begin to see ourselves with much more clarity.

A person in a completely dark room sees nothing. This is like our condition before we know Christ. But as a small light begins to shine, then the person in the room begins to see their surroundings. The brighter the light, the more clearly everything is seen.

In the same way, the closer we come to Jesus, the brighter His light shines and the more clearly we see our sin. In fact, this is an excellent test for us to know if we are genuinely becoming more intimate with Jesus: if we are increasingly seeing our sin.

As a young believer I imagined that after more than 40 years of walking with the Lord I would almost be walking without touching the ground, really feeling holy. But my experience has been that, with the passing of time, I see more and more of my sin. This has given me an ever deepening opportunity to repent more completely and have God's new life grow within me.

Repentance is not merely a one time thing. It is not something which we do once at the beginning of our Christian walk and then it's over. Instead, genuine Christianity involves an ever deepening sense of our need for a Savior. It means that we see more and more clearly what we are as natural humans and how much we need our life exchanged for His.

The more thoroughly we repent, the more completely we can be transformed. The more we understand how much our old life is worthy of death, the more we can be changed into His image. An ever increasing repentance makes way for the life of God to fill us and replace what we are.

Now why is this so? It is because unless and until we see the need for our old life to die, God will not – in fact cannot – do His work in us. He is certainly not going to force us to experience this transformation. He will not apply the death of Jesus to us in the areas of our life where we are unwilling to die.

Jesus will never force transformation upon us. Our lack of willingness to be crucified will

always stop His work. Therefore, we must first see ourselves in His light and then agree with God's sentence upon us. Then He will operate in our interior to apply both the death and resurrection of Jesus to our soul life (PSUCHÊ).

As long as we approve of what we are, we will want to hold on to it. While we think we are O.K. then there is no need whatsoever for any change. Certainly we would not feel a need for a death sentence to be executed upon us. Therefore, we remain as we are: untransformed, natural men and women.

True progress in the spiritual life – genuine, eternal transformation into the image of God – can only come to the degree to which we see ourselves in the light of God. Then, and only then, are we willing to “deny ourselves and take up our cross.” This means that we are willing for our own life to be put to death.

2.

THE REPENTANCE PROCESS

A few people begin their Christian walk with a blaze of sin-revealing, soul-searching transformation. They are, from the beginning of their experience with Jesus, repentant in a profound way. Their sin has been deeply exposed and they are ready and willing to experience both the death and resurrection of Christ.

These believers have entered deeply into the presence of a holy God and there they have seen themselves in His light. This revelation of their "self" and sin generated in them a profound repentance which allows the Holy Spirit to do His work in them quickly and without much resistance. Such people progress very rapidly in the spiritual walk.

Virtually all of what are known as powerful "revivals" throughout church history have been accompanied by this tremendous conviction of sin. Deep, heart-searching repentance has been the result. These "visitations" of God have brought a blazing light which convicted men and women both of their sins and their sin – of

the error of their actions and words and also of the nature of their flesh which produces such sins.

Those converted during these times of God's visitations almost always become God fearing, holy people whose testimony continued strong until their physical deaths. This is because the transforming work of God – the exchange of His life for theirs – is greatly facilitated by a deep, soul-searching repentance.

But many, if not most believers today, are not brought to Christ in this manner. They have not come to Him with much, if any, conviction of sin. Instead, they are urged to come to Jesus for any number of benefits.

Perhaps they are seeking healings, blessings, solutions to personal problems, financial prosperity, or any other such things. Many, instead of seeking to be free from who they are and what they do, are instead looking for help to continue on living as before, except without so many problems. Such converts will make very little real progress spiritually.

As a note here, I would like to state with the utmost clarity that most of the so-called "revival" experiences of our modern day can do very little to aid the transformation process. Falling down, barking like a dog, jiggling, laughing or any other such phenomena, do not transform anyone.

They do not convict of sin and, therefore, do not generate repentance. Consequently, they are at best a waste of time. Worse still, they are

often simply a delusion – an emotional experience which many mistake for something spiritual. Such experiences are not the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

As we saw in the beginning of this chapter, in order to survive the coming appearing of Jesus Christ in His power and glory, we must be changed to be like Him. We need to be transformed from what we are into what He is. We must have our life exchanged for His.

The key which opens the way into this most necessary experience is repentance. We must realize what we are and repent, crying out for deliverance from ourselves. We must be willing to die so that our sinful self will live no more and so the life of Jesus can fill our entire being.

Repentance is directly related to our transformation. Simply put: little repentance = little transformation; more repentance = more transformation; deep, thorough repentance = unlimited transformation into the image of Christ.

We should never imagine that admitting and repenting for our sins is a negative thing. Instead, it is an act which opens up wide vistas of new spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ.

WHAT IF WE DID NOT BEGIN WELL?

Even if we did not have a proper beginning to our Christian life – that is to say we were not deeply convicted of sin and, therefore, have had a very shallow and insufficient repentance – there is still hope. It is not too late. Today we can

seek God's help so that we can come to a complete repentance.

You see, it is He who actually makes our repentance possible. Remembering again the verse with which we began this book we see that God "granted" the Gentiles repentance unto ZOE life. They did not come to this on their own. It was He who arranged it for them. Those in darkness do not and, in fact, cannot see their true condition. It is only by the mercy of God when He shines upon us that we see how fallen we are and how much we need salvation. It is when we begin to glimpse His extreme holiness that we understand our filthy sinfulness.

Genuine repentance is not something which we can generate ourselves. It is not an act of scrutinizing our past or present and trying to work up some kind of sorrow. There is no value in self-effort, attempting to feel guilty or trying to remember every single, little sin which we might have committed.

True repentance needs the light of God to work. It is only His presence which can generate it. Although we all too easily can resist this work of His conviction of sin, we cannot produce it ourselves. Our greatest need is to seek His presence. It is from Him that the necessary light will come. As we walk in intimacy with Him we will increasingly see sin in ourselves. Then we will have the wonderful privilege of repenting and being cleansed by Him.

Even if we began poorly in our spiritual walk, even if we never have really repented,

today God can guide us into this glorious blessing. He can still shine His light upon us. If we are genuinely hungering and thirsting after His righteousness, He will make sure that we are satisfied (Mt 5:6).

We should always be seeking the face of Jesus. In this light, we can see just what we are and repent. This repentance opens the way for His death and His life to be applied to us. This application of crucifixion and resurrection, results in something called "transformation," which is an eternal change wrought by God upon our soul. This means being changed to be like He is.

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

It is as we see His glory that we are both exposed and transformed. It is in the light of His countenance that we see ourselves compared to His exalted pattern. Our repentance then opens the door for His life to fill what we once were.

AN ILLUSTRATION

I would like to share with you a little story that may help to illustrate this point. Many years ago my wife and I were in the Florida Keys. One Sunday, we went to visit a church meeting. I was surprised to find that I was the only man there. The rest were women and children. When the pastor began to preach, I began

to understand why. That dear brother speaking, preached a legalism and condemnation you could almost feel. Needless to say, we did not return for another dose. One of those kind of meetings was enough.

A couple of years later we were back in the same area again and we ran into a woman from that church in a parking lot. She began urging us to come to a meeting. I was quietly thinking, "That's about the last thing I could imagine doing." Yet she kept insisting and insisting. She said that the preacher had changed. He had had an experience with God which made him different.

I must confess that it was with much reluctance that I went to that meeting again. Yet, when the pastor spoke, it was obvious that something had changed. Now he was filled with the love of God. He was ministering by the Holy Spirit. Something significant had happened to this brother. In my curiosity I had to know what had taken place, so I arranged to spend some time with him and ask him about his experience.

What he told me was something like this: He had been fasting and praying for a greater experience with the Lord. One morning he woke up about six o'clock and stood up beside his bed. There he became transfixed by the presence of God. The only way he could describe the experience was by saying that he came face to face with the Spirit of Truth – undiluted, pure, burning truth.

His experience was as if the Spirit reached inside of him turning over, uncovering, and exposing many things. These “things” were attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. He became intensely convicted of his sin. This “Truth” shone brightly into him. Then and there he was brought to a profound repentance.

When this experience ended, he again looked at his clock. He had been standing there by his bed for about one half hour. But this thirty minutes had made him a changed man. His time in the presence of God had convicted him and transformed him. Now his life was much more full of the love and life of Jesus. How much all of us need more of just such an experience!

REPENTANCE IS AN ONGOING EXPERIENCE

Repentance is not a once-and-for-all type of experience. It is not something which we do once at the beginning of our Christian walk, and then never have to do again. It should be an ongoing process in the life of every believer.

Why is this? It is because the closer we get to Jesus, the more light we should see. He is the light of this world (Jn 9:5). His presence is noted for its intensity of light. Therefore, if we are genuinely getting closer to Him, we should see ourselves with ever increasing clarity. The light should be getting brighter.

In fact, this could be considered a test of the sincerity of our walk with Jesus. Are we truly

seeing more sin? Is our sinful nature being exposed in an ever expanding way? Is there a deepening repentance in our life?

If not, then something is wrong. Somehow, somewhere, we have stalled in our Christian experience. We are not moving closer to God. If our repentance is, in fact, increasing then we can have confidence that our relationship with our Creator is becoming very much more intimate.

CONVICTION AND CONDEMNATION

There is certainly a difference between conviction of sin and condemnation. Many believers suffer from a lot of condemnation but very little conviction. Condemnation can come from several sources. No doubt the devil and his minions work in our mind to condemn us. Many also waste a lot of time condemning themselves. Others, sometimes friends and relatives or even Christian brothers and sisters, may also help to condemn us or make us feel condemned.

But true conviction of sin comes from the Spirit of God. A large part of His mission is to “convict the world of sin” (Jn 16:8). So today, He is working to expose our sin and help us to repent.

When God convicts us, there is nothing general or fuzzy about it. He always convicts us of something specific and concrete. His light exposes something which really happened in the past or today exists in our lives. This is not a vague feeling of guilt. God’s light always comes with a penetrating clarity.

It is not possible to completely define the difference between conviction which comes from God and condemnation from another source. Ultimately, this requires spiritual discernment. We must learn to know the voice of our Shepherd and follow Him (Jn 10:27).

We need to develop an intimacy with our Creator which enables us to discern which things come from Him and which do not. There is no substitute for this intimacy and discernment.

Although no one should spend their lives under condemnation from sources other than God, there is also another danger. Far too many believers label the conviction of the Holy Spirit as "condemnation." God is trying to convict them of sin, but they resist this work of the Holy Spirit calling it condemnation. This is a common ailment but one that is spiritually dangerous.

When we reject the conviction of the Spirit, labeling it as "condemnation of the devil" we resist the work of God in our lives. We block the wonderful things which He wants to do in us. The transformation process is halted. Since the Lord respects our will, when we resist His work to convict us of sin and then change us, His work will simply stop.

Therefore, we should be very careful not to err on this point, quickly and lightly rejecting something which may be from God. Walking in the fear of the Lord, we must prayerfully consider before Him thoughts which might be genuinely convincing us of sin.

I realize that there are many today who suffer under a lot of "condemnation." However, one cause of this may actually be a lack of repentance. When we have repented of some specific sin for example, then we can have absolute assurance that it has been forgiven. Once we have confessed our error before God and acknowledged the gravity of it, then it is removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). It is gone. God does not remember it. Consequently, we should not allow thoughts about it to torment us.

The more thoroughly we allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and, therefore, repent, the less there is in our lives for the devil or others to condemn us about. Once we have confessed and forsaken a specific sin, then we should not allow our minds to dwell on it.

We do not need to constantly be confessing the same sins over and over again. If we find ourselves in this situation, always feeling grieved over sins for which we have already repented, this is a sure sign that condemnation is at work.

There are more than a few believers who labor under a tremendous feeling of guilt. However, in my experience, many such cases are the result of not having truly repented.

There are frequently many, many things in these believers' past which have not been brought into the light. There are things which they are trying to forget and leave behind without bringing them to God in confession and

repentance. Therefore, their consciences continually condemn them. They are not truly at peace with God. This causes them to feel generally guilty about little things in the present because they have never really cleared up other things, perhaps much more serious things, in the past.

Far too many believers are trying to move forward in the Christian life without having cleared up the past. They are struggling to move on while dragging a huge burden of sins for which they have not repented.

Needless to say, they go nowhere. Their spiritual progress is blocked. They never seem to grow spiritually. Due to their weakened conscience many such believers are also vulnerable to the influence of evil spirits, especially in the area of condemnation.

These sins of the past could be: sexual sins, murder, abortion, lies and deception, prostitution, hatred, unforgiveness, drug use, thefts, unkind words or acts, or any number of other sins. No matter what sins we have committed, it is a great relief to confess them before God. A tremendous burden will be lifted from our shoulders.

Confessing may be embarrassing. It might be humiliating. It might even mean going to prison for something which we have done. Yet it will generate great joy. It will liberate much more of the salvation of God. It will unlock the spiritual progress which we need so much.

While we resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit and refuse to confess and repent, we

remain in our private little prison of condemnation and defeat. Our troubled conscience will not allow us to remain in the presence of God for very long. But once we repent, what liberation and freedom will be ours to enjoy! What great joy and transformation will be ours coming from the presence of our Savior!

What often hinders our repentance is pride. Our pride does not want anyone to know how ugly we really are inside. If others knew what we did or thought, we would be humiliated. So, pride works to keep us bound in sin and away from the salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus.

While our sin remains unconfessed and unrepented of, it inhibits our relationship with Jesus. It limits our access to His intense holiness. When we try to approach Him, still carrying our sins, we may manage to touch “the hem of His garment” once in a while, but we won’t be able to stay in His presence.

We may be able to “feel” His blessing from time to time – for example during a time of worship – but we will not feel comfortable around His extreme purity for long periods of time.

This is because in Jesus’ presence, our conscience is touched. As we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, who He is will certainly impact who and what we are. So the only way to stay in the presence of God, the only way to walk continually in His presence is to be thoroughly repentant.

We must respond to and repent for everything which His light is exposing. To remain in

intimacy with God, we must respond to what the Holy Spirit is touching within us.

We must be very careful not to resist the work of God when we sense that we are being convicted of sin. It is very common, when we begin to see our faults and errors, to immediately try and find an excuse for them. It is the tendency of the natural man to try and get out of any feeling of guilt which might generate discomfort or shame.

Consequently, many people, when they begin to sense conviction regarding some sin or other, try to think up reasons why they are not guilty. Perhaps they try to think that it is really others who caused the problem, probably it is their environment or upbringing which had this negative effect on them, or even that everybody else is the same way and so they are really O.K. Using every possible excuse, they try to free themselves of any sense of guilt or conviction.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must be very careful not to adopt this type of attitude. Maybe we can convince ourselves of our own innocence. Possibly, we can argue in such a way that we persuade others of our own lack of culpability. Perhaps, using some very clever thinking, we can assure ourselves that our behavior is only normal and acceptable. But how about God? Does He really think that we are innocent? Is it possible that our excuses and arguments have convinced Him?

When we justify ourselves in our own minds and in front of others, we run the risk of

not experiencing the genuine justification which comes from God. We are in jeopardy of resisting the true conviction of sin and then, as a consequence of this, the genuine repentance which brings the glorious transformation of our soul.

When we behave this way, we lose the blessing which God has for us and we block the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our lack of repentance frustrates our spiritual progress.

The natural human tendency is to avoid conviction of sin. The first reaction of the sinful soul, as seen in the case of Adam and Eve, is to try to cover up the results of our sin. These two sewed together some flimsy clothing of fig leaves to hide their nakedness and shame.

Next, when they heard God coming near, they hid themselves. Instead of coming clean and admitting what they had done, they tried to hide it from themselves and from God.

Next, when they finally had nowhere to hide and were confronted by God with their error, they immediately began to blame others for what they had done. Adam blamed Eve. She in turn blamed the serpent. This too is the spontaneous reaction of the fallen soul: to blame others instead of admitting our own guilt in any situation.

Yet what we all need is not to excuse ourselves in our own minds or to blame others. True freedom lies in confessing our sins before God. Our liberation from what we have done, and especially from what we are, is in our confessing and repenting. It is in our allowing the

light of God to shine in us and agreeing with everything that it exposes. When we truly repent, totally and thoroughly, then, and only then, are we in a position to receive the wonderful salvation work of transformation in our souls.

The result of such repentance is an ever more intimate communion with God. When our consciences are cleansed by our repentance and His forgiveness, new vistas of fellowship with the Almighty are opened up. In this way we will encounter new spiritual delights and be much more fruitful in our work for Him.

Dear friends, please don't resist the work of the Holy Spirit when He convicts you of sin. For your own sake, don't try to escape or hide. Admit before Him everything which you have said, done, and thought. Confess what you are – the natural, carnal tendencies of your flesh. In this way, you can be forgiven and cleansed.

Following this path, you will have your own life replaced with His and begin from today onward to walk in "newness of [the Father's] life" (Rm 6:4).

3.

THE TRUTH WHICH FREES US

Inevitably, we come now to a very difficult part of our discussion. In order to really grasp the importance of repentance it is essential to unmask a few of today's Christian teachings which impede such repentance. These teachings seem to indicate that sincere, thorough repentance is unnecessary. They offer a kind of substitute, teaching an easier and less costly way to be accepted by God.

The process of arriving at the truth of these things may be a little difficult. This is mainly because there are so many entrenched notions about these subjects. But please, read the following sections carefully. These things are of the utmost importance if we are to be found acceptable to Him when He comes. We dare not err when trying to understand these precious, eternal truths.

Unfortunately, not a few modern concepts concerning the work which Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross are wrong. Yet they are prevalent among congregations of believers all over the world.

I am convinced that these erroneous teachings are largely responsible for the fact that many believers do not seem to be making very much spiritual progress. There are very few Christians whose lives reflect, in any significant way, the pure life of Jesus Christ.

There are several doctrines common among us today which seem to be good and even attractive but they are not completely true. They do not accurately reflect the heart of God or the gospel message. They are a subtle twisting and, therefore, a corruption of the truth. They are ways of thinking – quasi-biblical concepts – which have crept into the body of Christ and robbed her of her spiritual vitality and power.

The reason for exposing these errors is not merely to discredit them or to try to show that this author is “more right.” This examination is exceedingly important because these teachings all have a similar effect.

Such doctrines all serve to diminish conviction of sin. They work to deceptively free believers from any and all sense of guilt when they have not yet truly made things right with God. They provide Christians with many plausible excuses to justify the fact that their lives do not reflect the supremely holy nature of their Creator. They combine to form a web of theology which eliminates, almost completely, any need for a deep, heart-searching repentance.

Therefore, these errors are responsible for much weakness in the church today. They turn people’s hearts from real repentance. They justi-

fy continued sin. They “superficially heal” the sin of God’s people (Jer 8:11) providing a kind of spiritual Band-Aid for their unholy condition, therefore, retarding the cleansing from sin which we so desperately need to become really holy and intimate with God. These erroneous doctrines are like malicious computer code which have invaded the church and robbed it of its overcoming power.

TODAY’S CHURCH IS NOT HEALTHY

If we are honest we must admit that the spiritual health of today’s church is not good. She is not well. The proof of this is the rampant sin in today’s congregations.

Adultery, sex outside of marriage, lies, deception, abortions, cheating, power struggles, gossip, backbiting, hatred, envy, chasing after money, and self-seeking of every kind is abundant. The dress, habits, values, and sins of the world are invading the church.

In the struggle for righteousness, the world is winning. The influence of the world over the church is far greater than the influence of the church on the world. Instead of the world becoming ever more righteous, the church is becoming ever more worldly and sinful.

Although there are a few precious exceptions, the general trend is obvious. Anyone who cannot admit this is simply being willfully blind.

Something is definitely wrong. But what is it? It is that Satan has succeeded in insinuating

into the church some ideas which are erroneous. He has managed to twist some fundamental Christian truths into partial lies which rob believers of their relationship with Christ.

Instead of deep repentance, we have a weak-kneed, watered-down, pusillanimous sort of message which makes God into the one who is seeking people to accept Him. No holiness is demanded. No fear of God is sought or taught. We have accepted a variety of "easy believism" which all but eliminates the question of sin from our thinking.

How did this happen? Where did the church go wrong? Since these errors about which we are speaking are deeply entrenched and have been instilled into the church over a long period of time, our discussion of necessity will take some time and thought. There is no quick, simple answer to our present dilemma.

Yet I believe as we look into the scriptures together, His light will shine upon us to show us a new and living way. We will try to take each false idea in its turn and show how the scriptures have been insidiously twisted to eliminate the power of God and keep it from impacting our lives. By the grace of God, we can come to a new understanding of His will which will impel us into His arms.

SELF EFFORT

One misunderstanding which inhibits many from seeking true holiness, is the idea that this objective must be accomplished by our own

efforts. In the beginning of their Christian lives, many converts have a great zeal and determination to stop sinning. However, as time goes on or as their flesh rises up, they realize that this goal is impossible.

Looking around them, they see many others who are also failing to conquer sin. Then, many teachings come along which seem to explain and excuse this phenomenon. These are teachings which we are about to investigate.

The major problem here is that these believers are failing to understand the gospel. God's plan is not for our flesh to become holy. His plan for our old nature and sin is death. It must be killed off in order not to sin anymore. His plan is to eliminate it completely through the experience of our co-crucifixion with Christ.

So we see that it is by His own life living in us and through us that we express His own holy nature and righteousness. Understanding this, we can now examine some other truths.

ELIMINATING SIN

God's plan for sin is to eliminate it from our lives. The devil's tactic tries to eliminate it from our vocabulary and our minds. God's idea is to change us into His likeness so that we no longer sin. He intends to actually make us holy.

The enemy's diversion is to make us imagine that Jesus is no longer worried about what we do, think, say, or even are. The devil would like us to believe that no matter what the real situation is, God thinks that we are holy.

Today's church seems to preach a message that God is not very concerned about your sin. Perhaps this is not something directly stated, but there is a generalized, subtle thought conveyed that perhaps previous generations of Christians were too severe. Maybe things in the past have been too legalistic.

Perhaps the God of the Old Testament who appeared in fire, smoke, earthquake, and an insupportable trumpet blast on Mount Sinai has changed. Maybe He has rethought His position and has decided that He would be more acceptable and popular if He simply became more lenient. Possibly, He has "moved on" from His previously intolerant attitude.

Contributing to this impression is an errant understanding of forgiveness. The church's general teaching concerning this theme has stretched God's forgiveness far beyond what He meant it to be. Today, it seems if we will only receive Jesus, He will immediately forgive all our sins – past, present, and future. Further, once we do this "accepting," He no longer pays any attention to whether we sin or not but has suddenly become blind to what is going on. According to the doctrine which is so popular today, once we become God's child then sin no longer is of any consequence to us or to Him.

While it is true that Jesus can pardon any and all sin, it is not equally true that He will do so without regard to our motives. The blood of Jesus is of the highest value to us and to God. This blood is a result of the death of God's only

Son, the most precious, intimate, special thing to Him. Jesus did not donate blood as someone might do at the Red Cross. He was tortured, suffered, and died to shed His blood. It came at the highest cost. Therefore, this blood is invaluable in God's sight.

This means that when we apply to God for forgiveness on the basis of this blood we must do so with the utmost sincerity. There can be no playing around. We cannot be partially repentant or not be wholly willing to forsake our sin.

God knows the motives of our hearts. He understands our secret thoughts from afar off (Ps 139:2). This means then, that without sincerity of heart in our asking for forgiveness, we cannot be forgiven. We read: "...let us draw near [to God] with a true {sincere} heart..." (Heb 10:22). Anything less than this will not work.

God will not forgive a hypocrite. Anyone who thinks they can fool Him or simply use His forgiveness as a way of escaping the consequence of their actions is in for an unpleasant surprise. "God is not mocked" (Gal 6:7).

There can be no forgiveness without one hundred percent sincerity. We read: "And you will seek Me and find Me, *when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jer 29:13). We also read of King David admonishing his son saying: "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts" (I Ch 28:9).

LACK OF REPENTANCE

It is also true that God will not forgive sins for which we have not repented. If we have in our lives, either in our past or present experience, sins for which we have not yet repented, they are not forgiven. It is not true that once we "receive Jesus" the heavenly slate is wiped clean and we can just start over as if nothing had ever gone wrong. Instead, we must repent of those sins of which we are conscious.

Further, we need to repent of those hidden or forgotten things which He brings to light as we walk with Him. Then, and only then, are they forgiven and forgotten by God. "And God requires an account of what is past" (Ecc 3:15).

I am not urging a whole lot of introspection here. I do not mean that we must spend a lot of time in digging around in our past to find every tiny little error. I am simply saying the obvious. Nothing in the past or present is hidden from Him. We must be sensitive to His Spirit so He can convict us of our sin and our sins so that we can repent and be cleansed.

Further, it is important for us to continue to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit to bring these things to our remembrance so that we can enjoy further repentance and transformation. No known, unrepented sin is forgiven before God!

Sinning, unholy believers are NOT forgiven and will not be unless and until they repent. It is

complete foolishness for us to imagine that they are. This is a serious error.

There is no possibility that the Father would accept the infinitely precious blood of His own Son as an offering to excuse an insincere, sinning believer: "...for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts" (I Ch 28:9).

JUSTIFICATION

Another doctrine which has been stretched far beyond the truth is that of justification by faith. Today, many seem to think that this means that if they believe a few facts about Jesus, such as things concerning His deity, His death and resurrection, etc. then, from that point onward, they are completely justified before God. They imagine that from then on, God "can't see their sin but only the blood of Jesus." Nothing could be further from the truth.

God always knows when we sin. That's right. Every time we sin, He knows all about it. Our Father keeps constant count of the number of hairs on our head (Mt 10:30). How could it be that He would not notice when we sin? Since this is true, just what does it mean to be justified?

To be justified means that God considers us to be just. He has a relationship with us and interacts with us as if we were, in fact, just. He has fellowship with us on this basis because of the blood of His Son. He does this, indeed He has "legal" grounds to act in this way because of

something which is called "faith." We are justified before God by our faith in Jesus Christ.

Just what then is faith? This is a subject which is extremely important for us to understand since it is by this we are justified. If we have it, then God will consider us to be just. Without it, He will not. So it is essential that we have this faith and know what it is so that we can continue to enjoy this blessed relationship with God.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Simply put, faith is our response when God reveals Himself. He shows us something about Who He is and we respond by affirming that this is indeed He. We read that Jesus: "...manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (Jn 2:11).

Please notice the order of these things. First Jesus manifested Himself. Then, the disciples believed. Unless and until God reveals something of Himself to us, it is impossible to believe. We cannot define with human words just how God reveals Himself to each person. With Him there is an infinite variety of ways and means.

I firmly believe that each and every human being has had, or will have, the Person of Christ shown to him during his life in one way or another. Faith is when that individual has a positive reaction. Disobedience is when someone rejects what he perceives. When God reveals Himself, the human heart either loves and approves of what it perceives or hates it and rejects it.

Faith is not a mental exercise. It is not simply affirming some facts concerning Jesus. We are converted because we have somehow glimpsed and believed in the Person of Christ and not merely believed some doctrinal truths concerning Him. We are saved by our faith in Him and not by a theology about Him.

True faith is our response to God's revealing Himself. When He does so and we affirm that it is indeed Himself, then, and only then, we are justified. When He speaks, we listen. When He reveals His character, we love Him. When He shows us His ways, we approve of them. When He convicts us of sin, we agree with what we see. This is our faith response to His revelation. God, on His part, then interacts with us on the basis of Jesus' blood, considering us just.

But let us suppose that we sin. We do or say something which offends our Lord. In our spirit, God reveals His displeasure. We sense His speaking in our conscience. He reveals to us how our error has offended Him. But maybe we do not respond in faith. Possibly, we reject His voice in our conscience. It could be that we resist what He is revealing concerning His justice and our failure in relationship to it. We, in our thoughts, justify ourselves. Instead of believing – responding in repentance and then being justified by Him – we reject His revelation.

Thus we are no longer living by faith. We are not responding positively to His revelation of Himself. He is speaking but we aren't listen-

ing. He is revealing something, but we are resisting this revelation. We are not believing and affirming what He is showing us. He is convicting us of sin, but we are rejecting this conviction.

Can it be then that He still considers us just? Are we still walking by faith? Is our past faith enough to fool Him into not realizing that we are rebelling against Him at this moment? Are we justified before Him in our current rebellion? Certainly not!

LIVING FAITH WHICH JUSTIFIES

In order for our faith to be genuine, it must be up-to-date. It must be active today, right now. James makes this very clear when he says: "...faith without works is dead" (Js 2:20). What he means is that if our faith is living and, therefore, genuine, it will manifest itself today in our actions. Our "works," – the things which we do and say – will reflect our living faith. They will prove that we are in living contact with our Creator.

Our present faith is alive when it brings us into an intimate relationship with God and God into communion with us. It is in this way that we "walk by faith" (II Cor 5:7). We walk in moment by moment communion with Him, responding continuously in faith to what He is revealing of Himself to us each moment. The results of this faith-generated communion are our actions or "works" which reveal that our faith is living.

On the other hand dead faith will not justify us! A faith that is not up-to-date, a faith which is not at this moment responding to what God is revealing, cannot please God. It is dead and useless.

Even demons have a kind of faith, perhaps more than many Christians. They believe many facts about the Most High. They even have the good sense to tremble when they think about them. But they do not have communion with God. They are not in a faith relationship with Him. They are not responding moment by moment to His leading. They are not being justified. In the same way, a Christian's dead faith cannot justify him or her before God either.

Dead faith is something merely of the past. It is something which we once believed when we responded to the Lord. Dead faith is a static, mental thing of which we were once convinced. But such facts of the past do not constitute a faith which justifies us right now before God.

For example, let us suppose that one day you believed in Jesus. He revealed Himself to you and you responded positively to this revelation. You believed into Him and became born again. At that time, your faith was living. You were justified by Him.

But how about today? Is your faith still active and living. Are you still responding to all that He is revealing to you concerning Himself and His will? Are you enjoying a living communion with Him? Are you obeying Him? Is your faith at this minute the kind which is justi-

fying you? Or do you find yourself in a position of being somewhat distant from Him?

To be justified by faith today, you must have a faith which is active today. Let us take as an example someone who received the Lord some years ago. But in the interval between then and now, they began to live in sin. Let us suppose that they began having sex outside of marriage, began lying about something, started cheating or stealing money at work, began using drugs and/or any number of other such things. Can it be that God considers this person just and righteous? Has He gone blind and become a fool?

In order for this person to again be justified, they must repent. They must reactivate their faith and become obedient. They must respond to what God is speaking to them in their spirit at this moment and repent. If and when they do so, then God will again consider them justified. He will again have communion with them based on the blood of Jesus.

But if and when someone continues on in sin, if they oppose the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, if they resist His conviction, then they do not have a living faith. Therefore, they are not being justified.

Such persons need to repent. They need to seek forgiveness from God by repudiating their sin and actually experiencing of the death of their sinful soul which was crucified with Jesus. Then, and only then, can they again qualify to be considered justified in the eyes of God. This is genuine justification by faith.

We are told clearly: "The just shall live by faith" (Gal 3:11). It is only when we are "living by faith" in the manner which we have been discussing that God considers us just.

CAN WE GO TOO FAR?

This then raises an important question. Can someone go too far? Can a child of God sin and keep on sinning in such a manner that he or she can no longer repent? The answer seems to be "Yes." It appears to be possible for people to harden their hearts, go against their conscience and resist God to the point where they can no longer repent. They can no longer be sorry before the Lord with sincerity.

We read in Hebrews 6:4-6 and verse 8: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame...whose end is to be burned."

Please notice here that the end of such believers is "to be burned." Perhaps you will remember the beginning of this book when we spoke of the intense, burning presence of God.

Also, you will recall how anything sinful and not transformed will be consumed there. The presence of a Holy God will burn up anything which does not correspond to His nature.

This verse verifies the truths about which we have been speaking.

Therefore, we all should have a good amount of godly fear. We should treat our precious relationship with Jesus as a serious and extremely important thing. We should never play with sin or with our Lord's sacrifice for us.

Let us live with an awareness of the serious consequences of sin. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor 5:11). (Please note that the context of this verse is speaking only about believers.)

Esau is an example of someone who could not repent. He had come to this point of hardness of heart where he could not make himself genuinely repentant. His heart was not soft toward the Lord. He had treated the precious things of God lightly and traded them for temporary, earthly gratification. Yet one day he realized what he had lost and wanted it back.

However, it seemed as if he wanted it back without truly recognizing his sin. Perhaps he was sorry he had lost something but was not willing to humbly confess his error in doing so. He was willing to tear his garments, but not rend his heart (Joel 2:13).

Even crying and weeping before God could not get him back what he had lost. He could not bring himself to genuinely repent. "For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears" (Heb 12:17).

This terrible story should be a warning to us all. We never should play around with the precious things of God. We must come to Him with reverence and godly fear. We must pay the highest respect to what He has done for us. Our repentance must be sincere. Our faith must be living. Only in this way will we be found to be pleasing to Him when He comes.

Still another passage from the Bible confirms this same truth. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and *fiery indignation* which will devour the adversaries."

"Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:26-31).

This passage is clearly speaking about Christians. Only they could qualify to be "we," already having "received the knowledge of the truth," and being "His people." Once again we are told of the "fiery indignation" of Jesus toward the unrepentant and the "devouring" of

those who are disobedient. The word “adversaries” here does not have to be “enemies” or unbelievers but those who have set themselves against or in opposition to Jesus.

The “sinning willfully” about which we read here cannot mean that we occasionally do things which we know are wrong. The truth is that all believers do this once in a while. It must mean that this individual persists in known sin.

He or she continues rebelling, resisting the conviction of the Holy Spirit over a long period of time. Such stubborn rebellion seems to produce a hardness of heart which, over time, makes it impossible for such a believer to repent with sincerity.

A MODERN EXAMPLE

We have had a recent experience with someone in a similar situation. A man we know committed adultery with another man’s wife, a sister in the church.

When we went to speak to this brother, we urged him to repent – not just to say a quick “I’m sorry” but to arrive at remorse and self-abhorrence.

We suggested that his actions might, as other similar situations have done: destroy the marriage of this other woman; precipitate divorce; leave children without one parent and perhaps without financial support and cause any number of other devastating, painful, evil, long-lasting consequences for others. Like ripples in a pond from a thrown stone, sin, any and

all sin, has consequences which impact many other lives around us.

As our conversation progressed, it came to light that this man's life had a long history of adultery and sexual sin. It was something which had dominated him for a significant number of years. It seems that he had never been able to arrive at a profound, genuine repentance which would have enabled God to cleanse him. So we suggested that this was his need – to arrive at an abhorrence of himself and his lusts and truly repent.

His response to us was something like this: "I'm already restored." "I'm already back with God." "I don't need anything like you're suggesting." "I reject this idea!" Sadly, we had no choice but to leave him with his rejection of a heart-rending, soul-searching repentance.

It seems entirely possible that without such a repentance, this sin will continue to operate in his life and impact the lives of others also. The latest news I have heard about him is that he is now pastoring a church in a nearby city.

John teaches that there "...is sin leading to death" (I Jn 5:16). This does not necessarily refer only to physical death, but could certainly also refer to the ultimate destruction of the sinning soul. It seems that there is a point beyond which a Christian can go which makes them unable to repent any more.

John explains that we do not need to pray for such a person. Any such prayers would be of no use. Their destiny is sealed. While prayer for

other sinning believers will result in God's "life" growing in them (as we also see in this verse), prayer for such an unrepentant person would have no positive result.

The truth is that it is almost impossible for us to know when someone has gone too far. There is no humanly definable point when we can be sure that someone can no longer repent.

Only God knows our hearts. Only He knows where that point is. So, dear brothers and sisters, let us stay away from that line. Let us not let our faith waver. Let us maintain a living faith relationship with our Creator and let Him lead us in ever deepening repentance.

YOU CAN'T REALLY BE HOLY

Still another lie which is very common today is that Christians can't really be holy. It seems that many, if not most believers, think we can put aside a few of our grosser sins but that actual, visible holiness is not possible.

They seem to believe that they can be improved a little in this life, but to be genuinely holy is just a pie-in-the-sky dream. Combined with this belief seems to be another thought that God doesn't really care. It doesn't matter very much to Him if we are completely holy or not.

This lie then disarms believers from ever achieving the goal. They never hope to be truly purified from sin. They never expect to be changed dramatically and so they simply accommodate themselves to a life of imperfection and sin.

Yet God in His word admonishes us to be holy. We read: "...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in *all* your conduct because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy' " (1 Pet 1:15,16). We also are taught to: "Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). II Corinthians 7:1 admonishes us to be: "...perfecting holiness in the fear of God." These are just a few of the many verses in the Bible exhorting us to righteousness and holiness.

This holiness to which our Master is calling us is not something which only exists in the mind of God. It is not something merely theoretical, mental, or doctrinal. It is not merely "positional."

This is a kind of holiness which is real, tangible, and lived out through us. It is a purity which others notice. It is a righteousness which is visible to those who live with us and in relationship with us.

Such superhuman living, such genuine righteousness, is not something which we can produce. It is not a result of human effort. It is not gained by will power, determination, or dedication.

The standard of righteousness which is required is far too high for any human being to attain. Instead, it is the result of another Life. It is accomplished by Someone truly righteous living in us and manifesting Himself through us.

As we have been seeing, God's plan is to give us His own life. Next, His life will grow up

inside of us. As it grows, it will express itself more and more clearly. His own nature, which is supremely holy, will begin to be seen in us. Thus, we will begin to exhibit a genuine, visible righteousness. We will actually think, say, and do holy things.

Yet this righteousness is not something which "we" do. The source of it is not ourselves (Php 3:9). It is something which comes from God. It is the result of His own life living, moving, thinking, and feeling inside of us. This is His plan.

To insist that we cannot be perfect is to insist that Jesus' work of salvation was also imperfect. It is to say that it was incomplete. Thinking in this way, we affirm that although we can perhaps be changed a little, God's work on the cross lacks the force and potency to complete the job in our lives. This of course cannot be true. He clearly said: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

Further, to imagine that we cannot be perfected is to declare that Jesus' life is not perfect. This is because it is actually *His* life which should be lived out through us. If the demand were for us to work up some kind of personal righteousness, then of course, we could never be perfect. But since it is *His* perfect life which will live in us, then certainly we can reflect His nature in every way. Our old life has been completely crucified with Him and His new life has been made one hundred percent available to us.

The way to obtain such an exalted life is repentance. All of us need to experience an ever

deepening repentance unto life. The more God enables us to repent, the more we will experience His death and resurrection. The more His life grows within us and begins to predominate in our interior, the more we will have the privilege of enjoying and exhibiting genuine holiness.

We must never look at the behavior of those around us and justify our sins by their failure to be holy. We must look only and intently into the face of Jesus Christ, allowing Him to transform us into all that He is.

INSTANTANEOUS TRANSFORMATION

Another common error found in today's church is the thought that our present condition is not important because we will be suddenly changed later on. Many believe that when Jesus returns, we will all be instantly transformed to be like He is. Perhaps He will touch us on the head with a magic wand, and poof, we will be immediately changed to be holy and righteous.

So, many reason, why should we need to be holy today? It seems "so hard." What difference does it make if we are still somewhat sinful; if we indulge ourselves in a little sensual pleasure; if we slip up once in a while; if we let ourselves go and do things which we know are wrong? If we are all going to be transformed instantly later, what possible difference could it make today if we are holy or not?

This error seems to be largely based on the following verse. We read: "Behold, I tell you a

mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”(I Cor 15:51-52). Certainly, this is a true verse. This will happen.

But, we must realize the context. This passage is speaking about the glorification of our body. It is not addressing the question of our souls. Our *bodies* will be immediately and instantly changed.

But concerning our interior, our soul, everywhere the Bible speaks of this being a process, not an event. It is an operation which we need to “work out” with fear and trembling in cooperation with God (Php 2:12). It is something which takes time.

There is nowhere in the scriptures the notion that the transformation of the soul is a future, instantaneous event. Throughout the New Testament, we are urged to press on, to obtain, to carry the cross, to deny ourselves, to become holy here and now.

The life of God must grow up and mature in us. This process takes time and our willingness. No life matures instantly. Only a mushroom, an inconsequential, mushy fungus, sprouts overnight. It is only through our ever-deepening repentance that we can be full of God’s life and not be ashamed to meet Him when He comes.

Since true holiness is a result of the divine life of God growing in us, how could it be possible that this life would grow instantly? How

could we imagine that: after resisting transformation for many years; after being unwilling for our own life to be put to death; after stubbornly refusing to yield to Jesus' words; suddenly, at the coming of Christ, He would overpower us and change us instantly?

Surely this is only foolishness and wishful thinking. It is a misunderstanding of how the transformation process works.

MISUNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. We all need it. We are blessed that our God is a God of compassion and forgiveness. Without the forgiveness which Jesus provides for us, we would be completely lost. The forgiving power of the blood of Jesus is beyond estimation. It is of truly unimaginable value.

Even though this is true, many believers misunderstand forgiveness. They suppose that Jesus' mission in coming to earth and dying for our sins was merely to forgive us. Perhaps they imagine that the coming new creation will be filled with a bunch of sinners who still sin and will still be needing to be forgiven every day. Maybe they think that they will just go on sinning forever and God will just keep forgiving them forever and ever.

But the truth is that anyone who sins cannot enter into the future new world. They are totally and completely excluded. If they did enter, they might sin. In fact, it is inevitable. Sooner or later they *would* sin. And this sin would destroy

God's new creation. Therefore, they won't be allowed in.

Let us look at the example of Adam and Eve. How many sins were necessary to destroy God's present creation? Just one. But this one sin perhaps doesn't seem too bad in our eyes. Eve did not murder anyone. She did not commit sexual sin (as many try to believe she did). She stole nothing. Instead, her sin was a simple disobedience.

Even though this sin seems relatively "small" it was enough to devastate God's newly created earth. Everything went bad. Death began. An infinite variety of sins began to grow in men's hearts and eventually express themselves. Murder came shortly behind. War, rape, stealing, hatred, strife, and all the evil which fills our world today came from this one "small" event.

Even the course of nature was changed. The earth grew weeds. Animals began to kill and eat one another. Insect pests began to torment man and beast. Diseases sprung up. Famines and plagues occurred. Wickedness of every kind appeared.

So it is easy to conclude that no sinner will enter the new creation. They simply cannot be allowed in. If they were, they would soon sin and demolish it as our forefathers ruined this one.

Therefore, before the new creation begins, the problem of sin in our lives must be resolved. Something needs to happen. We must be

changed so that we no longer sin. We need to be transformed into the image of a holy Christ.

Blessedly, our loving God has a plan. He has made complete provision for us so that we can be transformed absolutely. His plan is called: "repentance unto life."

We read: "If we confess our sin He is righteous and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This verse shows us that God will do two things. When we repent, i.e. "confess," He will certainly forgive us. Yet He will also do something more. He will "cleanse" us.

This word "cleanse" is not just a synonym for "forgive." This means that He will work in our lives to clean us up so that we no longer sin. The sin which contaminated us will be cleansed from our lives. God will co-labor with us to crucify our sinful life and nature and replace it with His own holy life and divine nature. This is exactly what His wonderful plan is for every believer.

Interestingly, this word "confess" in the Greek means "to speak together" as if two people were speaking the same thing at the same time. So, once again we see that when we agree (speak together) with God concerning our sin and His judgment of death upon us, he will forgive and cleanse us.

You see, forgiveness is not God's ultimate purpose. It is not the end. It is not His final intention. Instead, it is the means to an end. This "end" is the complete transformation of our

soul. He forgives us so that He can enter into a relationship with us. His pardon, based upon the blood of Jesus, permits His holiness to interact with us.

But this interaction is not simply to tolerate or overlook our sin. There is a much higher purpose here. It is to change us, to cleanse our lives completely so that we no longer sin. It is to make us like Himself. It is to prepare us for His appearing. Praise God, He promises to cleanse us from all sin!

Forgiveness, which is abundantly available to everyone, is what opens the way for us to enter into God. It can perhaps be compared to a kind of ticket which gets us into a show or sports event. The actual "show" is the transformation of, or saving of, our souls. This is the result that forgiveness opens the way for us to experience.

It is through the forgiveness of God that we have access to His salvation. Forgiveness is the avenue through which we enter into all that Jesus has for us. May we not abuse this forgiveness by imagining that it is an easy way out of God's future judgment, but rather use it to obtain all that He has made available to us.

4.

THE COMING JUDGMENT

All believers will someday stand before the undiluted presence of God. "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rm 14:10). There, what we are and what we have done will be tested by the intense, fiery presence of Who He is. All of us will pass through this divine fire.

It is clear that not only our actions, our words, and our "deeds," will be analyzed by the holy fire, but we too will be tested by it. The scriptures teach us: "...each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, *yet so as through fire*" (I Cor 3:13-15).

Most believers already know that their works will be tested by this fire. But many perhaps think, "I may lose out on a few rewards, but so what?" "What difference will it make to me if some of my works are burned?" Yet what they fail to see is that *they too will be tested by the same fire*. He or she may still be "saved" but they will appear, without protection or excuse, in the intense, fiery presence of God almighty.

For some this will be an awful experience. They will suffer shame and loss. Their unconfessed sins will be exposed and their sinful nature will be consumed. It will be burned up.

For others it will be an awesome experience. There they will see face to face the One who has transformed and cleansed their lives. There they will be rejoicing with joy which is beyond human words to express.

When we stand before God, all the unholy, sinful "parts" of our soul will be destroyed. The untransformed portions of our being will be consumed. These sinful areas of our soul will not enter into the new creation because they will be destroyed or "lost" at His coming. This is an important, biblical fact of which far too many believers are unaware. Yet it is crucial to understand. How can we be sure of such a fact?

To begin, we must remember the beginning of our discussion about the unimaginably concentrated essence of who God is. In His direct presence, His holiness, purity, honesty, love – in short all of His divine nature will be manifested without dilution. Nothing which is not like Him

will be able to pass this test. Anything different will be consumed by this “fire.” No sin, no self, no unrighteousness of any kind can exist there. Only something which is of the same nature could pass the test.

If I were to tell you that I could put a piece of newspaper into an intense fire and it would not burn, you would not believe me. In the same way, no “natural” man will be able to stand in the presence of God. He would be consumed.

At that time, it will be too late to simply ask for forgiveness. On that day, even repentance will not work. There will simply be no more time or opportunity for the transformation process to work. There will be no more time for God’s life to grow. No amount of forgiveness at that time could protect our untransformed soul from the intensity of who God is.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

Moses loved God. So he was curious to see Him. Consequently, one day he made a request. He said: “Please, show me your glory” (Ex 33:18). But God had to explain something to him. What he was asking just was not possible. Moses could not see His face. He was unable to stand in His direct presence. Why was this? God explained saying: “...for no man shall see Me and live” (Ex 33:20).

Now why would this be? Is it that if someone accidentally sees God, then God must kill him? Could it be a punishment for peeking somewhere where we shouldn’t be looking? No,

it is just the natural consequence of the holy presence of God. No mere human could withstand it. It is simply not possible to survive this experience. So in the end God revealed to Moses His "back," but not His face.

The natural man with the sinful nature will not be able to endure in the presence of a holy God. Anything in us which does not correspond to the divine nature will be burned up. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). This is the only possible result of any man or women's encounter with Him. Whatever remains of the natural, sinful life will be consumed.

This will be the fulfillment of the sure promise of Jesus. He teaches us: "For whoever desires to save his life [soul] shall lose it" (Mt 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; Lk 17:33; Jn 12:25). Any of the old life which we do not yield to crucifixion today will be "lost" tomorrow when Jesus comes. This is not an obscure teaching.

The writers of the Gospels thought this truth so important that it is repeated five times. Anyone who refuses to yield his old life and nature to death through the cross of Christ, will most certainly lose it, without recourse, on the day when Jesus comes.

This is the only possibility. We have absolute certainty that nothing sinful will enter into the new creation. We also know that sin will not endure the presence of God.

We understand too that instant spiritual growth or transformation is not possible. So, the only option is that our old "life," "soul," or

“self” will be lost at the judgment seat, just as Jesus has promised us.

Today is the time of preparation for this event. Our Creator does not want us to perish, so He has provided salvation for us – His own eternal life. This eternal, indestructible life can substitute for our own. We can die, and He can live in our place. We can be crucified with Him and also resurrected.

In this way, we become fireproof. We are transformed into a variety of creature which can survive in the presence of God. We become what He is by the saving power of His life which He gave to us. In this way we become prepared to meet Him face to face.

It seems that many believers, like Moses, are satisfied seeing only the “back” of God. When Moses looked, he saw God’s mercy, His graciousness, long-suffering, abundant goodness and truth (Ex 34:6). Truly, these aspects of God are wonderful. They are precious virtues which we all need to see and understand.

Yet there is more to God than this. Although we may delight in what we see in His “back,” one day we will see His face. There we will gaze upon His extreme holiness; His burning, consuming righteousness; His undiluted, blazing justice; and much more.

All Christians need to get to know God intimately – not only the “easier to take” aspects of His “back,” such as mercy and forgiveness – but also begin to know Him face to face. Through repentance and forgiveness, we must enter into

an intimacy with Him. We must gaze into His glorious face so that we can be changed into His image (II Cor 3:18).

It is only by drawing near to Him that all of our sin can be exposed and eliminated. It is only through intimacy with Him that His life can saturate and permeate us with all that He is. Only such believers who are intimate with Him will be comfortable in the presence of the eternal fire and suffer no loss at His coming.

TESTED BY FIRE

Will believers really be tested by fire? Certainly they will. We have already read about those whose works will be burned yet they themselves will be saved "yet so as through fire" (I Cor 3:15) Also we have studied the case of those who harden their hearts against God and can no longer repent. These are they "...whose end is to be burned" (Heb 6:8).

Further, Jesus Himself taught us that we should pay careful attention to maintain our intimate relationship with Him. If not, then there will be some serious consequences. We read: "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn 15:6).

John the Baptist also warns us about the importance of bearing fruit. This fruit is simply a result of our continued, intimate relationship with Jesus. But if and when we ignore this privilege, the results are catastrophic. He proclaims:

“And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 3:10).

Although many have tried to use these verses to show that believers can lose their salvation and “go to hell,” here we understand a different truth. It is the fire of the very presence of God about which these passages speak. There His intense, burning presence will consume anything which is not like Himself.

PARTIAL TRANSFORMATION

But let us suppose that we are only partially transformed. Let us imagine that someone has not yielded completely to Jesus during his lifetime and so is only changed a little. While God’s life is filling some parts of his being, other areas are still full of the natural, sinful life. What then will be the result when this person appears before the judgment seat? What will happen in this case?

The answer is quite simple. That “part” of any believer which has been transformed into the image of Christ will certainly survive in the presence of God. The “fire” will have no effect on it. It has become eternal by the operation of His eternal life.

But that portion of any believer which still remains natural and sinful will be consumed by the fire of God. There is no other possibility. It will not be instantly changed. It will not be overlooked. It will not at that moment simply be

“forgiven” and ignored. Instead, it will be burned up by the intensity of who God is. It will be “lost,” fulfilling the promise of Jesus.

The years of rebellion against the transforming work of the Holy Spirit will bear fruit. Any time which we spent resisting the conviction of sin in our conscience will be revealed. Our lack of repentance and our unwillingness to be put to death will be seen clearly when we “lose” that portion of our soul which was untransformed by the Holy Spirit.

HOW WOULD THIS LOOK?

What then would such a person look like who was only partially transformed and therefore lost “part” of their soul? Would we see “half a person” or someone without arms or legs? Of course not! How then could someone be “fractionally” saved? How would this manifest itself?

To begin, we must remember that we are not speaking about the body of a person, but their soul. This then is a question of growth, a question of spiritual maturity.

Since we are transformed by the maturing of the supernatural life within us, then our “degree” of transformation must be intimately linked to how much this life has grown up within us.

In the natural world every kind of life grows and matures. This is a process which takes time. Humans, for example, are born as infants, grow to be children, next they become adolescents, then young adults and finally fully mature indi-

viduals. In the Bible we have evidence that the spiritual life also has these stages. This process takes many years.

In 1 John 2:12-14 John writes about three degrees of maturity: "little children," "young men," and "fathers." There are also many other places in the New Testament where various writers refer to "babes in Christ," problems of immaturity, spiritual growth, the need for maturity, etc. So there is no doubt that the spiritual maturation process parallels that of the natural world.

It seems, therefore, very logical to imagine that if this growth process were interrupted or incomplete, the individual involved would not be fully mature. They would remain at the stage of maturity where this process was halted. They would possess only that degree of maturity to which they had attained.

Consequently, when the natural man is consumed what would be left would be the transformed "part" or aspect of their soul. For example, a baby believer would be a baby, a young believer would still be young, and a mature believer would appear as mature.

The stage or degree of spiritual growth to which they had attained would be their eternal condition. Whatever "level" of maturity they had obtained would be theirs forever. The rest will be burned up and lost.

I hope that this is perfectly clear. In "eternity" believers will appear in many different stages of spiritual development. It will not mat-

ter what their age was on earth. Their physical, earthly maturity will not be a factor. What will govern in this case will be how much they cooperated with God so that His life could mature within them. It will be the development of our spiritual life which will translate into our eternal condition.

It would seem likely then that in eternity we will encounter baby believers, young believers, and mature believers. Their appearance will be linked to how much progress in the spiritual life they attained. Everyone will not be the same. Each one will receive his or her "reward" based upon their growth in the life of God.

The spiritual maturity of each one will actually be all of, or at least a large part of, our reward. This is because just as in this earthly life, our maturity will enable us to enjoy things more fully.

Children might be happy, but there are many things they cannot do. Young people are also limited in their ability to appreciate or savor many experiences. So too in the future, our maturity will govern the depth to which we will enjoy God and all that He will create.

My guess is that for each one, their new glorified body which they will receive will also reflect their degree of maturity. It is possible that as we grow spiritually, these new bodies are "growing" also, demonstrating a greater degree of maturity. Jesus is now preparing this "place" for us (Jn 14:2). These new bodies are now being prepared for us to dwell in (Jn 14:2).

Joining two adjacent verses together in I Corinthians 15:41,42 we read: "...for [as] one star differs from another star in glory. So also is [will be] the resurrection of the dead." (Please remember the original Greek was not divided into verses or sentences by punctuation.)

There certainly will be a difference between believers in eternity future. Just as the brilliance of each star is different from the others, so believers will exhibit a different degree of glory depending upon their maturity.

Of course this is a mystery. We only see these things imperfectly while we are on this earth. But we have ample scriptural evidence demonstrating that the untransformed portions of the soul will be lost. It is simple logic to understand that what will remain is what has been saturated and permeated with the life and nature of the eternal God.

BUT GOD IS LOVE

Some may argue against the fact that the untransformed part of a believer's soul will be destroyed by the presence of God, or "lost." They might insist that since God is full of love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and long-suffering, He could not judge one of His children in this severe way.

It is certainly true that our God is full of all these wonderful attributes. So, when He appears, these virtues will also be manifested in all their intensity and fullness. For example, the atmosphere around Him will be permeated

with an unbelievable love. But in the light of this love, all our lack of love will be exposed. Our self-love will be seen with utmost clarity. The many times when we did not act in His love toward each other will be painfully evident.

This will not be a result of a lack of love on God's part but rather of the greatness of the love which defines His nature. This will have an unavoidable impact on what we are at that moment.

In the same way, the times when we did not have mercy towards others, the moments when we lacked compassion, the situations in which we refused to forgive others and our shortage of long-suffering will be exposed by what He is. What He is will reveal with startling clarity all that we are. If we have not been changed by His life to be like Him, then we will experience loss.

Further, the fact that He offered us freely, at so great a cost, the opportunity to change and be full of His nature instead of our own, will stand out with the utmost clarity. If we suffer loss when Jesus comes, it will not be because He lacked love or that He failed to show love for us, but because of our own negligence and disobedience. It will be because we did not take advantage of His love. We will have no excuses or arguments. The universe will see and agree that His judgment upon us is just.

It is true that God is good. He is not judging us today. He is interacting with us based upon His goodness, love, and grace. In this church age He is reserving His judgment while giving

us every chance to use our time and be changed into His image.

Yet we must not misunderstand His goodness and grace. We must not imagine that this means judgment will never come. This interlude, this time of blessing, should be an opportunity to prepare ourselves for what is coming.

Instead of relaxing and using this present lack of judgment to indulge our flesh, we should use this short period of time to gain the maximum amount of transformation through an ever-deepening repentance.

Paul admonishes us saying: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God *leads you to repentance*" (Rom 2:4)?

Instead of imagining that God's goodness will excuse us from future judgment, we must realize that it is this very goodness which is drawing us to repentance to save us *from* this judgment.

When the time of judgment comes, forgiveness will no longer be an option. The age of grace will have ended. The opportunity to repent and be transformed will have passed. May God have mercy upon us so that we will be prepared to receive Him with joy and open arms.

THE SECOND COMING

Jesus Christ is coming again. He will return someday soon in His glory to destroy the kingdom of the coming man of sin and to establish

His kingdom here on the earth. In the same way He ascended, He will descend again to receive us to Himself (Acts 1:11). It is at this time that He will judge His people. We will all appear before His judgment seat (Rm 14:10). That will be the hour in which our true spiritual condition will be exposed – whether it is good or bad.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

The early Christians thought that the return of Christ would be within a few short years. They were expecting Him to come again at any minute.

Therefore, many lived as if He might come right then. The majority did not involve themselves in sin. They were always seeking to be pleasing to Him. They kept themselves pure from the world and other distractions. They cooperated with the work of the Holy Spirit to transform them. In short, they lived with the expectation of Jesus' return and judgment at any moment.

But as time went on, things changed. Soon it became clear that His return was not as imminent as they at first believed. So, following the natural tendency of the human race, this immediacy and expectancy waned in the hearts of some.

They began to go about their lives as usual. Sin became more evident in the early churches. The human tendencies towards self and sin began to express themselves more and more.

These same natural inclinations are very much in evidence in the churches of today.

There are many believers today for example, who might sing "Come Lord Jesus" during a time of worship. But how many of us really want Him to come right now? I mean right this minute? Or are there other priorities which we have in our lives?

Perhaps we'd like to get married. Maybe we are anxiously saving to buy something we want, like a house or car. Possibly there are some events in the future which we would like to enjoy first. These other things which attract our hearts are evidence that we are not where we should be in relationship to Him.

Another thing which would hinder us from longing for His appearing is our involvement in some sin.

It could be that we know something which we are doing is wrong. We realize that it grieves the Lord but somehow our fleshly enjoyment of it hinders us from repenting and making a clear break from it. Our conscience bothers us but we just shrug it off and harden our heart a little more. Of course anyone in such a condition will not be anxious for the Lord to come today.

This reminds me of an experience we had many years ago during some meetings which we had in our home. Every once in a while the presence of God would be manifested in an especially powerful, glorious way.

So I thought, "Next week, this place will be full of people." "This meeting was so fantastic,

everybody will want to come next time.” But instead, the next week almost nobody was there. It took two or three weeks for everyone to come back again. This experience happened more than once. I found this very perplexing. While meditating on this phenomenon, I came to the following realization.

Many Christians are not really comfortable in the presence of God. They enjoy being there for a little while, but they are not really at peace with Him enough to live there all the time.

They like to get a little “dose” of God every once in a while – to touch the hem of His garment so to speak – but their troubled conscience and their lack of repentance from sin will not allow them to stay in His presence for a long period of time. They do not live in the Spirit.

Still another situation comes to mind. Many years ago when I was a young single believer, I lived in a house with several other Christian young men. One day another brother who had a reputation for tending toward really “spiritual” experiences asked me to pray with him. So, there in the living room, we began to seek the face of God.

And we found Him! His presence began to be felt more and more strongly. We began to enter into the heavenly places together in Christ (Eph 2:6). The sense of Jesus’ presence grew ever more real. The glory of the Lord was shining around us. It almost seemed as if He would appear physically in front of us. Suddenly, to my complete surprise, I heard this other brother

screaming "Stop, stop!" He had reached his limit. He wanted no more of this "presence." He was not comfortable with so much of the Lord at one time.

And Jesus did stop. The experience rapidly faded away. God respected his limitations at that time. In the same way today, Jesus will never push past our barriers which we have between us and Him.

WE WILL ALL APPEAR BEFORE HIM

Yet, one day we will all appear before Him. There will be no "stopping" on that day. Then will be the day when we will stand in His undiluted, intense, burning presence. Then there will be no place to hide. No one who has not made themselves ready will have any way to escape. There, whatever is in our hearts will be exposed.

Now how about you? How are you living today? Are you living in the fear of God? Would you be ashamed if He appeared right now? Would He be pleased to find you doing what you are doing and living in the way you are living?

Are you using your time wisely getting yourself and others ready for His coming? Are you repenting ever more thoroughly so that you can be changed into His likeness? Are you someone who truly "loves His appearing" (II Tim 4:8) or does the thought make you afraid?

If so, then you will hear Him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt 25:23). If not, then you will

be ashamed and suffer irrecoverable loss in His presence and in front of the watching universe.

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls” (Heb 10:39 RSV).

Dear brothers and sisters. Let us take advantage of the time which is left and make ourselves ready.

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