

Must You LOATHE Yourself To Become A Christian?

So said Job upon repentance. These words are recorded in Job 42:6. To *abhor* means "to shrink from in fear, disgust or *hatred*; to *detest*." It is perhaps one of the strongest English words to connote total *revulsion* and loathing.

This powerful scripture, together with Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, *and desperately wicked...*" has been one of the most potent "proof texts" concerning *what* is repentance, and what is human nature!

Is complete *revulsion* toward self; utter *loathing* of one's self what Job experienced?

Is it a *sin* to have even the slightest amount of self-respect, self-confidence, self-love? Does human nature contain a part of *Satan's* nature?

By Garner Ted Armstrong

"REPENT!" Surely this has been the single most important word at the conclusion of countless thousands of sermons.

Jesus said, "REPENT, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 4:17). John the Baptist cried, "*Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" (Matthew 3:2), and Peter said, at the conclusion of his famous sermon on the Day of Pentecost, ". . . *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38).

"Repent" means to "feel sorry or self-reproachful for what one has done or failed to do; be conscience-stricken or contrite, or to feel such regret or dissatisfaction over some past action, intention or thought as to *change one's mind*."

A third dictionary definition is "to feel so contrite over one's sins as to *change, or decide to change, one's way; be penitent*."

The Bible gives outstanding examples of what repentance wrought in the lives of men. When Job finally saw through his self-righteousness and *repented*, he used the famous words, "Wherefore I *abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes*!" David's famous Psalm of repentance (Psalm 51) is a particularly heartrending example of self-deprecation, sorrow, contrition and humble prayer to God for forgiveness.

The apostle Paul became the writer of 14 books of the Bible, one of the most famous of all the apostles and the man to whom we are indebted for a *great share* of the New Testament of the Word of God, due to the miraculous CHANGE wrought in his character after repentance, by the power of God's Holy Spirit!

Paul never abandoned the subject of that miraculous change, flavoring his sermons and his writings liberally with the fact that where, formerly, he had been "Saul the destroyer," hailing terrified men and women into prison, *persecuting* "that way" of God, now he had been completely *converted*, and was preaching the name of the very Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom he had formerly hated.

Paul referred to himself as "not fit to be an apostle," as "chief among sinners," and said, on one occasion, "O wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:24).

Repent of WHAT?

The apostle Paul said that, upon repentance, one was to be baptized "for the remission of SINS . . ." Surely the simplest Bible definition of *sin* is found in I John 3:4: ". . . Sin is the *transgression of the law*."

However, remember that Jesus Christ came to "magnify the law and make it honorable." He did magnify the Ten Commandments of God by His entire life's work, teaching and example. The most outstanding evidence of this is in the beautiful and moving "sermon on the mount," found in Matthew 5,6 and 7. Here, again and again, Christ illustrates the vast difference between the technical "letter of the law" (thou shalt not kill) and **MAGNIFIES** God's law by showing that whereas it was formerly a *sin to murder*, now it is a sin of *equal gravity* to HATE your brother!

Time and time again, Jesus Christ lifts the law of God to an exalted plane of *spiritual applicability*.

Where formerly the *deed* was that which constituted sin, now the *lust* for the deed, or the THOUGHT of the deed, constitutes sin!

Clearly, when one *repents*, one must feel, *deeply*, sorrow and contrition over having broken the many tenets and ramifications of *God's law*! It must be a far more profound repentance than the human sorrow directed *inward* as SELF-PITY! (II Corinthians 7:10).

However, the word "repent" does not deal *only* with the *past*. It does not mean merely to repent of *past sins*, but connotes the heartfelt desire and determination to CHANGE.

It is a twofold decision.

It is an emotional feeling of disgust directed toward oneself over *past acts and thoughts*, and it is a careful, fully considered, intelligent CHOICE to *quit sinning—in* the FUTURE. As such, it is obvious that repentance has everything to do with *human nature*.

Just What IS Human Nature?

Your Bible says Jesus Christ was *human*.

But did He have what we commonly call "human nature"?

IF human nature contains, in any small measure, a part of the "*nature of Satan*," as some have *assumed*, the question above takes on the gravest significance.

Let's begin at the beginning.

When God placed the first man and woman on this earth, He made them in His exact *physical image*, and He breathed into their nostrils and lungs the *breath of life*.

They became living, breathing creatures (*nephesh*, in the Hebrew), and they had *human nature*.

They were completely *neutral* toward God. God walked and talked with them, and they evinced no fear, but willingly and cheerfully listened to His instructions.

The Bible does not tell us how many hours of conversation ensued, but it was sufficient following the creation of *man* on the sixth day and that first *Sabbath day* during creation week that it could have constituted far more than 24 hours of repeated contact with *God*.

Eventually, perhaps on the *very next day* (was it the very first "Sunday"?), Satan the devil entered the scene.

In their blithe innocence, the man and woman (the woman taking the lead) listened, willingly, to the voice of Satan, who appeared as a serpentine (dragon-like, standing *upright*) creature.

He subtly began implying that God had *withheld* vital knowledge from them. In effect, he called God a *liar*.

He asked them leading questions, and began appealing to their sense of *vanity*; to human lust and *appetite*.

Especially he attempted to appeal to *intellect*, subtly implying that God was withholding vital secrets, piquant and interesting information, and that God "knew better" than what He had said!

Desiring this new knowledge (illustrated by the fruit of the forbidden tree), Eve ate, gave to her husband, and he followed her in *original sin!*

Now notice the *shocking change*.

Prior to this time, the original couple had been completely "neutral" toward God. They were not in terror of Him; did not find His presence or His voice foreboding, threatening or frightening. Adam cheerfully named all the animals and creatures as God caused them to pass before him, and the two of them listened to His instructions with equanimity. They were unaware of shame, or fear, or guilt. Though naked, they were unembarrassed.

Now, following original sin, a TREMENDOUS CHANGE had been wrought!

But was this a CHANGE in the *nature* of MAN? Or was it a change in man's *relationship* to God? We shall see!

Your Bible says, "The carnal mind is *enmity* against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"! (Romans 8:7).

Now, when God called out to Adam and Eve, He found them *hiding*, *fearful* of His presence, *ashamed* of their nakedness (they had made "aprons" out of large leaves) and their timorous reply seems to contain a partial spirit of *accusation*. They heard His voice, they were *afraid* and, therefore, they *hid* themselves.

Like naughty children, each attempted to absolve himself of blame. Adam pointed to Eve, Eve pointed to the serpent, and each attempted to point the finger of guilt *away* from himself.

Is any story of the Bible more familiar than that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

Yet how *misunderstood* is this account of *original sin!*

That it was SIN they committed we are sure!

For example: They *disobeyed* their only Parent, therefore breaking the Fifth Commandment; they reached out and *stole* that which was not *theirs* to take, breaking the Eighth Commandment; they lusted and *coveted*, thus breaking the Tenth Commandment; and they allowed Satan the devil to become their *final authority*, allowed him to stand *in place of God*, and therefore broke the *First* Commandment!

Of course, if you break even *one point* of the law of God, you are guilty of all! (James 2:10),.

But what about human nature PRIOR to the encounter with Satan in the Garden of Eden?

Many thousands have been taught that human nature contains a part of *Satan's nature*.

The teaching goes something like this: "We know that Satan is the god of *this world* [II Corinthians 4:4]. He is also called the 'prince of the power of the *air...*'" (Ephesians 2:2).

"Satan somehow 'broadcasts' his evil spirit and nature, his mind and his thoughts and attitudes through the air.

"Since all of us human beings breath in this air; since we are *surrounded* at all times by an envelope of *air* as a part of the physical sphere (atmosphere) of this earth, it is obvious that we live, move and breath in *Satan's world*.

"Human nature, therefore, contains a part of the very *nature* of Satan the devil!"

There may be far greater elaborations on this teaching, but, in a nutshell, that is the essence of it.

But is it *true*?

Can it be *proved from the Bible*?

It is absolutely essential for you to realize one vital TRUTH concerning Satan the devil!

One Satan, in One Place, at One Time!

From the very beginning of the Bible it is clear that Satan the devil can only be in *one place at one time!*

Immediately, at the end of creation week, we see Satan the devil physically manifesting himself in serpentine form to Adam and Eve, in his desperate attempt to *wreck and destroy* God's creation!

When we study Isaiah 14 with Ezekiel 28, and come to understand that the world was created in total, flawless *perfection*; that there was an original "Star Wars" billions of years *prior* to the creation week of Genesis the first chapter, we can also understand how Satan was once a great archangel who *ruled over* this earth!

The aforementioned scriptures, together with others, prove that Satan was one of the three angels of "archangel" rank! There are only *three* angels of this supreme rank who are at the level of "cherubs" who are mentioned *by name*.

They are Lucifer (who became Satan), Michael and Gabriel.

Apparently (Revelation 12:4), each one of these great angelic beings was placed over *one third* of the *angels*.

Satan *rebelled* against God (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28) and literally attempted to *overthrow* the Creator, exalting his (Satan's) throne *above* the throne of God!

The original, flawless creation was NOT created in chaos and confusion (Isaiah 45:18). Yet, when we are ushered upon the scene in the second verse of Genesis, the very first chapter, we find that the earth had become totally "tohu and bohu" (Hebrew words meaning "chaotic, vain, empty, waste, confused").

Now, as we witness the end of what is truly a "*recreation*," we see Satan the devil standing *immediately* at the center of events, attempting once more to *destroy* God's *greatest* creation, man. Satan was personally present—in one place at one time—in Eden.

Now turn to and read segments of the first and second chapters of Job.

"Now there was a day when the sons of God [angels] came to present themselves before the Eternal, and *Satan* came also among them.

"And the Eternal said unto Satan, whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Eternal, and said, from going *to and fro in the earth*, and from *walking up and down* in it" (Job 1:6, 7).

Now notice chapter 2: "Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Eternal, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Eternal.

"And the Eternal said unto Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? And still he holdest fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job 2:1-3).

These scriptures *absolutely prove* that Satan the devil is in *one* place, at *one time*!

The *concept* outlined earlier concerning Satan being able to "broadcast" via the "air" is absolutely *false*.

This concept *assumes* that Satan the devil has a counterfeit" of the very Spirit of God! In other words, it *assumes* that Satan is able to *project his mind* and his *power*; that he is able to emit "thought waves" or, through some powerful spiritual means, such as the invisible waves of radio or television in the air, *project his mind*, his *influence* and his *power* in all directions *away from himself*!

This is Simply NOT TRUE!

You will see this clearly *proved*, once and for all!

Notice that Satan had to go *from* the presence of God back down *to* earth, and to be instantly and immediately *in the vicinity* of Job in order to wreak his terrible afflictions upon him. He could not *will* this to happen from afar.

Now turn to and read the fourth chapter of Matthew.

Here you find Satan once again literally, "physically" (for he manifested himself so he could be seen) *present* with Jesus Christ at the end of Christ's 40-day fast!

Satan was no doubt *literally present* with Herod when he attempted to have Jesus slain by killing *all* of the newborn children in Judea about one year from the time of Jesus' birth!

In Revelation the 12th chapter, you see *two* attempts of Satan the devil to mount up an offensive against God in heaven!

On *both* occasions, Satan the devil is *cast down* to the *earth*!

Read James 4:7! This scripture plainly tells you that, if you are *close to God*; if you have the presence of God's Holy Spirit *within you*; you can by the name and the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth "resist the devil and he will FLEE FROM you"! He will be *no more* in your immediate vicinity.

You need not fear the *false* concept that Satan the devil is able to "broadcast" through some strange "spiritual brain waves his evil nature and his evil temptations through the *air*!

Human nature, believe it or not, is a *mixture* of good and evil!

Yes, though some refuse to admit it, there is some GOOD mixed with a very unhealthy amount of *evil* within human nature!

On the other hand, David said, "There is none good, no not one," and Jesus Christ said to the young nobleman, "Why callest thou me *good*?" (Matthew 19:17).

Did this mean that Jesus was "*bad*"?

The Greek word which is used in Matthew 19:17 is "agathos." The root "aga" is used for 16 different Greek words, including the word "agape," which is the most common word used in the New Testament for *love*.

Examples are "agathoergeon" (to work good, or do good), "agathopoiia" (well-doing, virtue), "agalliasis" (exultation; gladness, exceeding joy).

The word Jesus used which is translated "good" means nothing more than any other common English expression such as "It is a good day"; "this is good food"; "He is a good boy"; or "I had a good time."

However, by its emphasis and its position in the sentence, it is obvious Jesus is using the word "good" in its superlative form!

In English we say something is "good, better, best." "Best" is the superlative, and the other two are *relative* terms.

In Jesus' usage, He is insisting that only God is "good," meaning *wholly* good, *completely* good, *thoroughly* good, on an exalted, spiritual, holy level!

Here He is contrasting Himself in *human form*, as a *human* being, with human limitations and a human, physical lifespan, with the eternal glories of GOD!

His disclaimer was not false humility.

This does not mean we, in this age, or the disciples who knew Jesus personally should not have referred to Him as *good*!

For, not only was He "good," He was PERFECT!

As you well know, the word "good" is capable of *many* subtle shadings of meanings; becomes a completely *relative* term in judging the value, beauty, purity, efficacy or qualities of some word, deed, thought, object or person.

Jesus is not saying there was *nothing good* about Him; that there was "no *good thing*" within Him, and was *most certainly* not saying that He was "bad"!

Jesus was *human*. He was ". . . in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. . ." (Hebrews 4:15).

***Must We Feel Utter
Revulsion Toward Ourselves?***

Probably you are familiar with a few of the following scriptures: ". . . Verily every man at his best state is *altogether vanity!* (Psalms 39:5).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and *desperately wicked* [sick]: who can know it? I the Eternal; search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that *doeth good* ... *every one* of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, *not one*" (Psalms 53:1-3).

For all *have sinned*, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 7:18).

And, finally, "*O wretched man that I am!* Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

Many a powerful sermon has been preached using these and other scriptures as "proof texts" concerning the horrible EVIL, to be found in human nature!

The enormity of sin; the utter depravity, brutality, mercilessness, savagery and bitter cynicism and *hypocrisy* of human nature has been poignantly illustrated.

Certainly a sermon buttressed by the aforementioned scriptures, together with a liberal number of examples of child abuse, theft, sexual perversions, arson and *murder*, plus references to the holocaust perpetrated against the Jews by Adolf Hitler and his gang, would be sufficient to convince many an audience of the abysmal depths to which humankind has sunk.

But is it a "sin" for one to have even the slightest amount of SELF-confidence, *self-awareness*, *self-appreciation* or love *toward oneself*

When Job said, "Wherefore I abhor myself," did he imply a life-long exercise of daily abhorrence, utter rejection, hatred, denial and feelings of *repulsion* toward himself?

Or was his feeling more a *temporary* one, seeing himself, for the first time, in glaring *comparison* with the greatness and divinity of God; seeing his *self-* will; his SELF-righteousness and, temporarily, being thoroughly DISGUSTED with himself, which could then become *replaced* with feelings of self-satisfaction and a growing and gradual feeling of *self-worth and value*?

Is there, after all, *nothing good whatsoever* in human nature?

Is human nature *WHOLLY EVIL*,?

Why Did God Call it GOOD?

On the evening of the sixth day of creation (RE-CREATION, actually) "...God saw everything that He had made [*including Adam and Eve*], and, behold, it was VERY GOOD"!

Genesis 1:27 refers to the creation of Adam and Eve, and we are given a few more *details* in the second chapter.

"And the Eternal God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"(Hebrew *nephesh*) (Genesis 2:7).

Notice especially Genesis 2:25: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and *were not ashamed*."

WHY does God tell us this?

First He tells us that He, the member of the God family who *became* Jesus Christ (read John 1 and Hebrews 1) formed the "clay model" out of the mud of this earth—shaping, modeling, sculpting, if you will, a *human form*, as if a *replica* of Almighty God *Himself*!

Was this *good*? Is there anything "evil" or "satanic" about the human physiological aspect?

No, God beheld His creation and said that it is "very *good*"! No doubt Adam and Eve were given human bodies! They were created *flawless*, for they were the *only* human beings from that time to this who were created directly out of the ground by the very *hands of God*!

Could there have been the slightest flaw, imperfection, error or deformity in these two perfect human beings?

Was there something about their bodies which was inherently *evil*?

No! Not only does God tell us His creation was "very *good*," but we are given the further information that the *minds* of Adam and Eve were completely *innocent*, happily and contentedly *neutral* toward God (without any fear, hostility or antagonism), and that, looking upon each other, though naked, they were completely without SHAME!

No GUILT was present!

No concept of ugliness, embarrassment or the feeling that they were in some way "exposed."

By analogy, consider a tiny, sweet, innocent baby.

Do our little children, prior to the months and years we spend *training* them to keep their bodies clothed; reminding little girls of how they are expected to sit; how they should wear their skirts and dresses, the different manner in which a girl crosses her legs as compared to a boy; become *embarrassed* when we are changing their diapers, giving them a bath, or carrying them about without a *stitch of clothing* on their little bodies?

Naturally not. It has never entered their innocent little minds that their nakedness carries with it any shame.

In that sense, Adam and Eve were completely "*childlike*" in their innocence!

Like a trusting baby, they looked toward their only *Father*, God Almighty Himself, with wide-eyed innocence, trust, faith, love and without any feelings of fear, hostility or shame.

However, just as there lies buried deep within the subconsciousness of even the sweetest little child a capacity for anger, resentment, hostility, embarrassment, shame and *guilt*, so there was, inherently *within* Adam and Eve (for they were merely *human*, after all), the *capacity* for evil and fearful emotions and motives.

Notice that God forbade them to partake of a specific tree! It was not the tree of merely the knowledge of EVIL, but the tree of the knowledge of a *MIXTURE* of *BOTH* "*good* and evil"!

Few have noticed this, tending to place all the emphasis on the fact that they were forbidden to eat of the fruit; that it was a sin for them to do so; that this represented the "fall of man"; and that their natures became contaminated, and *evil*, as a result.

But notice!

The tree contained the knowledge of an admixture of TWO things!

It contained both GOOD and EVIL!

Notice what God said! "And the Eternal God said, 'Behold, the man has become *as one of us*, to know GOOD and EVIL: and now, LEST he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'; therefore the Eternal God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden. . ." (Genesis 3:22, 23).

Notice that your Bible plainly says the Almighty Creator God KNOWS "*both good and evil*"!

Does God here say that Adam and Eve had become *AS ONE OF US*!

What's the difference?

God, in His flawless, divine *perfection*, though KNOWING what is evil; recognizing it instantly, knowing the glaring *difference* between good and evil, is nevertheless supreme, divine and of righteous *character*!

Almighty God has the *character* and the *ability* to CHOOSE the good; to *reject* the evil, and to RULE HIMSELF with a PERFECT divine control!

Was Satan "In the Air" Adam Breathed?

Remember the false teaching revealed earlier?

Some have assumed that, when our newborn babies gasp their first breath of air, they somehow imbibe a part of the very "nature of the devil," since he is called the "prince of the power of the *air*" (Ephesians 2: 2).

What a *hideous* concept!

Consider! When the divine member of the God family (who became Jesus Christ and was manifested as a *human being*) had finished forming and shaping the first man out of the clay of this earth, He, that divine member of the God family, "breathed into his nostrils the *breath of life*"! One pictures the process of artificial respiration; where, as later developments in first aid have proven it is *most* effective to place your mouth directly over the mouth of a victim who is no longer breathing and *blow* directly *into* the lungs of that person, thus inflating the lungs in the most direct and instantaneous fashion.

This method of "mouth-to-mouth resuscitation" has completely replaced the old method of pressure on the rib cage.

The "breath of life" which filled Adam's lungs came *directly from God*!

One should *tremble in fear* to even THINK such a

thing.

No, AFTER God had breathed the breath of life into Adam's lungs, he beheld His creation and called it "*very good*."

What About the Patriarchs and the Prophets?

Now, what about the famous patriarchs and prophets of the Bible? We are given the *absolute guarantee*, from Jesus Christ *Himself*, that they will be in the Kingdom of God!

Hebrews the 11th chapter is a chronicle of the great *faith* of men from the time of Noah and Enoch to Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and a host of others including Samson, Jephtha, Barach and David!

Jesus said, "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God and you yourself cast out" to the Pharisees!

During the transfiguration, the startled eyes of Peter, James and John SAW Moses and Elijah *in vision*, as if they were already inside the *Kingdom of God!*

But, remember not ONE of these great men of the past were begotten with the Holy Spirit of God *from the Father!*

Jesus Christ of Nazareth is plainly called the "first " begotten," and the Bible says that He must have the "*preeminence*" in everything!

Prior to Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit from God the Father was NEVER available to humankind!

Yet David prayed, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." How do you understand this? Notice! "Of which salvation the *prophets* have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

"Searching what, or what manner of time the *Spirit of Christ* which was *in them* did signify, when it [the Spirit of Christ] testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (I Peter 1:10,11).

Few among this world's churches know the simple truth that the God of the Old Testament was in fact, the Jesus Christ of the *New!* (I Corinthians 10:4, John 1, Hebrews 1). The member of the divine family of God who created Adam, who spared Noah, and who wrote the Ten commandments with His own finger was that member of the Godhead who later "emptied Himself and became of no report" and was "made flesh and dwelled among us"! (Philippians 2:6-8; John 1:14).

The only *God* who had *revealed Himself* to the ancient world, including the patriarchs and the *prophets*, was that member of the divine family who later came to this earth to redeem *His own creation* in the person of Jesus Christ!

In some way *different* from the manner in which *we* may be "begotten" from the FATHER, that divine member of the Godhead placed His Spirit *within* men who dwelt thousands of years the other side of the first century A.D.

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that we cannot "question God"! (Romans 11:33-35). The manner in which Almighty God accomplishes His perfect work is not always going to conform with logical, easy-to-understand "analogies" or formulas of us limited, flawed, imperfect human beings.

However, the Bible makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit of God, the *Father* was Not available to mankind prior to PENTECOST!

What does this *mean*?

The obvious *truth* with which we are dealing has escaped the minds of God's ministers—yes, even the *leadership* of the church—for decades!

Consider carefully!

We know that the righteous patriarchs, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and a host of others are going to be *in the Kingdom of God*. Also, the Bible plainly tells us that *David*, a man after God's own heart, will be *in God's Kingdom*.

A part of the very *foundation* of God's church consists of these righteous patriarchs and prophets of old (Ephesians 2:20). The Bible even goes to some pains to inform us that *we*, of this modern, end-time generation, have *no preeminence* above those ancient prophets and patriarchs! "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which *are asleep*) [the prophets, patriarchs and righteous saints of former years] that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with Him.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [*precede*] them which are asleep.

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together *with them* in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1:3-17).

Those who will be resurrected at the precise *instant* of the second coming of Christ include those ancient patriarchs and prophets!

But "*how*" will God do this? Have not many assumed that the *only way* that any person can enter into God's Kingdom is through repentance, water- baptism, the laying on of hands and the receiving of the Holy Spirit?

But if the Holy Spirit was not available until Pentecost and thereafter; if none CAN be saved except through the name and by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: then HOW can this be?

If we are to *assume* that, so long as we do not have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of *God the Father* we can have "NO GOOD THING" dwelling within us; if we *assume* that human nature contains a part of the "nature of SATAN," and that there is "none that doeth good, no not one," then HOW, by what process does Almighty God induct into His Kingdom these hundreds and thousands of men and women who lived and died *long BEFORE* the time of Christ?

Did Abraham Qualify for the Kingdom?

Notice what God said to Abraham!

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Eternal appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God [El Shaddai]; walk before me, and *be thou perfect*, and I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly...As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations"! (Genesis 17:1-3).

Earlier, God had said, "...Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding *great reward*" (Genesis 15:1?).

And the Bible plainly says that he (Abraham) "...believed in the Eternal; and he counted it to him for *righteousness*"! (Genesis 15:6).

Later the apostle Paul cites this very scripture in Romans 4 verses 3, 9 and 22.

Abraham is called "the father of the FAITHFUL"!

Yet we know that Jesus Christ was the "first begotten" among all mankind! Jesus Christ was the "ONLY begotten" from the FATHER!

The question we must now ask is a profound one, and must be answered *honestly, and scripturally, from the Bible.*

Question: Is it possible to *build righteous character* as a mortal human being WITHOUT, having been *begotten* of God's Holy Spirit?

The answer is a resounding, *BIBLICALLY proved YES!*

Let's understand!

The personage of the Godhead who dealt with the patriarchs, the prophets and righteous men and women of old was the member of the God family who *did the speaking* to Abraham, and who calls Himself the great "I AM"; "El Shaddai," "Yahveh Ropheka" (God our Healer), and by many, many other divine names and titles.

He became the "logos" of the New Testament! He was the one who *did the commanding* during the creation week!

He is VERY GOD!

Yet, when He "became flesh and dwelled among us," He, Himself, revealed there is a Father-Son *relationship* between the two revealed members of the God *family!*

Jesus plainly said, "My Father is GREATER than I," and said, "The Father that dwelleth in me, HE doeth the works"!

Jesus said He came to REVEAL (for the first time in all history) the Father!

He was the exact similitude; the "stamped impress," or the exact *likeness* of the Father!

He said, "If ye have seen me, ye have seen the Father." And yet He also said, "No man hath seen God at any time."

Prior to His human birth, as a member of the very God family, Jesus Christ was the CREATOR!

Somehow, lodged in the minds of *millions*, is the *false concept* that the "God of the Old Testament" is the FATHER, while Jesus Christ is the member of the divine family with whom we are dealing in the New Testament!

This is NOT TRUE!

We ONLY know about the Father; we only know of His personality, His nature, His character, His greatness and His divine power, *THROUGH* and *by* the life, teaching and message of Jesus Christ of Nazareth!

It was only through the death, burial and resurrection—and then the ascension—of Jesus Christ to heaven to SEND the "other comforter" (the Spirit of the FATHER) that humankind could have *access* to the divine *nature* (through the Holy Spirit) of the FATHER!

The "Us-Them" Syndrome

Unfortunately, a complete *misunderstanding* about what human nature IS; a *misunderstanding* about the "fall of man," and, in some cases, even a *misunderstanding* about the subject Of CONVERSION, has led toward feelings of party spirit, exclusivity and a "siege mentality."

Jesus Christ of Nazareth did not commission His true church to spread the message that "we are the *ONLY ONES*!" To the *unconverted*, constant claims of being "the only true church," and constant swipes at other church organizations ("all others are of SATAN THE DEVIL!"), *anger* people; it causes them to *stumble*, insults them and turns them *away* from receiving the truth of God.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth commissioned His apostles to offer *wholesale*, universal REPENTANCE; to say to the world, "Come unto me YE THAT ARE WEARY AND HEAVY-LADEN, and I will give ye rest"; to say to the unbelieving, "*Repent ye, and believe* the gospel!" *NOT* to continually say, "*YOU* are of the devil and I am of *God!*"

Jesus did not preach a *closed* church; a *closed* gospel; a *closed* Kingdom, or even a *closed* divine Godhead!

Your Bible tells you that God is "not willing that *any* should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance," and strongly hints that the *vast majority* of all humankind will eventually be SAVED!

The Pharisees, during Jesus' day, had sunk into narrow-minded exclusivity!

Certainly they did not *begin* that way.

However, as the years passed, and the leadership of the Pharisees continued to add to their interminable "*Good Housekeeping* seal of approval" on each little human deed, thought and activity; as the Talmud grew, so their own concept of THEMSELVES, in contrast to the infidels, gentiles and unbelievers, also *grew*.

By the time Jesus informs us of the incredible *hypocrisy* of the Pharisees, we are brought face to face with the realization that the *religious leaders* who "sat in Moses' seat" were nevertheless "binding *grievous burdens, and heavy to be borne*" and laying them on men's shoulders! Christ called their doctrines "leaven," and angrily denounced them as "a generation of *vipers*, and "hypocrites," and "whited sepulchres"!

Why these indictments?

Simply because they had the *outward appearance* of true religion; they truly *were* the legal successors to Moses and "sat in Moses' seat." To them pertained the law, the prophets and the oracles of God.

Yet, for all that, they were human, carnal and corruptible.

Their continual racism; their downgrading of the unbelievers, infidels and gentiles; their haughty SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, led them into a narrowminded, cloistered religion of total *exclusivity*.

They became an "elite corps" of "insiders," viewing with contempt and disdain all who were not of their own number.

Parading before each other, they enjoyed making the borders and embroidery of their priestly robes larger and larger; they reveled in insuring they had the "chief seats" at important public and religious meetings; and, though they preached an autocratic, unresilient, unloving, harsh and unforgiving religion, they themselves were far above the blood, sweat and tears they enjoined upon the common lay members, and would not "lift one of them with their fingers."

Because of their egotistical exclusivity, they viewed Jesus Christ as a *rebel*; said He was "of Satan," and even dared to blaspheme God by claiming the miracles the Father accomplished through Jesus Christ were accomplished by "Baalzebub, the prince of demons"!

Notice, in many confrontations with the Pharisees, how the Pharisees doted upon whether Jesus was "of God" or not! Their standard labels which they placed on every human being, organization, human act or thought was whether or not it was "of God" or "of the devil."

Jesus Christ of Nazareth, their contemporary, did not take issue with the basic BODY OF BELIEF of the Pharisees! He plainly told His followers, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after their *works*: for *they say*, and do not" (Matthew 23:3).

He had just said "the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. . ." and was plainly showing that, so long as their teachings conformed to the law and the prophets; so long as they taught within the broad framework of the *law of Moses*, then the people were required to obey!

BUT, though these were the legal successors to the priesthood dating from Moses' time, when their own humanly devised doctrines, commandments, edicts and autocratic whims *ran contrary* to the broad parameters of the law of God, Jesus said His followers *did not* have to obey!

Think about some of the "Christians" you know.

Do they believe they must follow a *human leader* "NO MATTER WHAT"? Are they *fearful*, mistrusting, afraid of being overheard? Are they afraid of asking an "inappropriate" question? Are there quite a number of "taboos" enforced upon them involving *personal* and *private* choices?

Do they labor under any heavy burdens?

Do they view "strangers" with suspicion, and perhaps even a little bit of hostility? Are they *easy* to know; *easy* to be entreated, easy to be with?

Do they have an *outgoing love* toward those who are NOT members of their own group?

Or do you know of any "Christians" who have become so *narrow* in their exclusive, cloistered mentality that they recoil with a mixture of contempt and fear from any who are not of their own "inside" group?

Believe it or not, the spirit of the Pharisees is alive and well in entirely *too many* hearts today!

What of John the Baptist?

Remember, John the Baptist did not have the Holy Spirit from *God the Father*!

Jesus said, "John did no miracle," and yet plainly said, "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a *greater* than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). Here Jesus contrasts even the *greatest* among human beings as decidedly inferior to even the "least" in the *Kingdom of God!*

He also said, "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come" (Matthew 11:14).

John the Baptist fulfilled a *typical* ministry of "Elijah," in *preparing the way* for the first coming of Jesus Christ! His was a *great* ministry. Andrew (Peter's brother) and perhaps Peter himself were John's disciples. John preached a message of *repentance*, and baptized hundreds and hundreds of individuals!

How do you understand the ministry of John the Baptist, since it *preceded* that of Jesus Christ; since it came *before Pentecost*, and since John the Baptist could not have had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of *God the Father*? (He had the Holy Spirit from birth [Luke 1: 15], but, since Christ was the first-begotten from the FATHER, John could not have been "begotten," spiritually, as was Christ.)

IF you take the narrow view that it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God prior to baptism and conversion; that there is "no good thing" in human, carnal nature PRIOR to conversion and the receiving of the Holy Spirit from God the Father, then you *simply cannot understand any* of the ancient patriarchs, prophets or righteous men and women being "*saved*" PRIOR, to the time of Jesus Christ!

Yet they *WILL BE* in the Kingdom of God!

How? It is not for us to insist that God accomplish His perfect will in ways and means which are "pleasing" to us! God warns us that the ax shall not boast itself against the hand that heweth therewith; that the saw cannot say to the arm that wields it, "What doest thou?" And Paul says some questions (such as "With what body are the dead raised?") constitute *foolish questions*.

The point is, God says He *WILL* induct these righteous men and women into His Kingdom! Certainly, since it was that member of the Godhead who *became* Jesus Christ who dealt with them; since it is Christ who died *for them* as well as for that living generation and for *us* in this end-time generation; God can induct them into His Kingdom through and by the powerful name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth at the *instant* of the resurrection from the dead!

Just "*how*" God does this is perhaps not for us to inquire, nor to be concerned.

BUT, obviously, it was possible for these men and women to BUILD CHARACTER, and for that character to reach the final summation of "righteousness" during their human lifetimes!

Then, IF this was possible (and the Bible plainly *says it was*), there must be SOME GOOD inside "human nature" after all!

Could anything "good" come from a nature which allegedly had a part of the very nature of SATAN?

Can anyone be "righteous" who has not yet been begotten of God—or who is not in God's church?

What Is "Righteousness"?

Is it possible to attain to "righteousness" *only* after baptism, the laying on of hands, and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit? Does God have a double standard? Were there those, *prior* to Pentecost, who were "righteous" in only a human, "carnal" manner; as contrasted with those who, today, can be "righteous" in a *spiritual* sense?

Consider the parents of John the Baptist. "There was in the days of Herod, the King of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abbia: And his wife as of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

"And they were both *righteous before God*, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord BLAMELESS"! (Luke 1:5, 6).

What a marvelous testimony as to the CHARACTER of Zecharias and Elisabeth! How would you like to have it said of you that you are "righteous before God," walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord BLAMELESS"? And what of Mary, the mother of Jesus? Was not she *very special* among all women? Notice!

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, 'Hail, thou that are *highly favored, the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou* among women [some of the best manuscripts omit this last phrase, though it is included in some English versions] ... And the angel said unto her, 'Fear not, Mary: For thou hast *found favor with God* (Luke 1:26-30).

Those who take the very *narrow* view that the Holy Spirit of God was ONLY available *after Pentecost* simply do not know how to cope with this and many other verses!

For example, the Bible plainly says that *Joseph* was a JUST man (Matthew 1: 19). Joseph was a "*good*" man! He had righteous *character*! So did Mary. So did Zacharias and Elisabeth! Notice further: "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and *devout*, waiting for the consolation of Israel: And the *Holy Spirit* was upon him, and it was revealed unto him *by the Holy Spirit* that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord Christ.

"And he came *by the spirit* into the temple: ... Then took he him up in his arms [the baby Jesus], and blessed God, and said, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . .'" (Luke 2:25-30).

The point of all this is obvious!

God has, on numerous special occasions, placed the Holy Spirit *within the minds* of various human beings! His Holy Spirit has been "*with*" numerous men and women down through the ages! Perhaps it may be said, *technically*, that these men and women were not "begotten" of the FATHER in the same manner in which Jesus Christ was begotten from the Father, even from His birth; or in the same fashion that one may become a "begotten son of God" from the time of Pentecost until now.

Yet it is not for us to question the *methods* Almighty God chooses to use in working out His perfect plan!

Notice what the Bible says of John the Baptist! "For he shall be *great* in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine or strong drink: And *he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb*"! (Luke 1:15).

David prayed, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and *take not thy Holy Spirit from me*"! (Psalms 51:11).

Obviously, then, there were any number of men and women who did *build character*; who were *righteous* and "just" (meaning GOOD), in God's sight! *Technically*, perhaps it is correct to say that these men and women were not "begotten" in the same fashion as was Christ, or as were those from Pentecost and thereafter. A "proof text" generally cited for this (and this assumption *may be* accurate) is I Peter 1:11: "Searching what, or what manner of time the *Spirit of Christ* which was *in them* [the prophets] did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

That men could be "just," and "good," in God's sight stands absolutely PROVED!

Notice another example: "And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a *GOOD MAN*, and a JUST.. ." (Luke 23:50).

Remember what Jesus said of Nathaniel? He said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, *in whom is no guile*" (John 1:47).

Nathaniel had human nature. Did his very nature include a part of the "nature of the devil"? *Of course not!* Otherwise, Jesus would have discerned it, and could never have said that Nathaniel was absolutely *guileless!*

And what about the "saints" who had lived and died *prior* to the time of the death of Jesus Christ? "And the graves were opened [just at the time of Jesus' death]; and many bodies of the *saints* which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matthew 27:52, 53).

These were "righteous" individuals called *SAINTS*.

This does not mean they were resurrected to spiritual, eternal life. Rather, they were resurrected to be given a few more years of *physical* life, as a great sign and a *witness* concerning the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

But your Bible calls them *SAINTS!*

Now, finally, *do you see?*

There was no "Change" in Human Nature

There was no basic CHANGE in the *nature* of man at the so-called "fall of man" in the garden! Adam and Eve were absolutely NEUTRAL toward God! Their basic, human natures contained the CAPACITY for evil. However, Satan had not yet entered the scene, and had not "struck the note" of that particular discordant, evil part of human nature. Once that discordant note had been struck; once Satan had appealed to vanity, lust, resentment and intellect, that portion of their natures and characters came into play.

God said, after Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, that they had become LIKE GOD, now having the understanding of "both *good and evil!*" *But they were imperfect. God knew that they could not yet RULE over themselves!* God made it specifically clear that, to PREVENT them from reaching out and partaking of the *tree of life*, and thus obtaining *eternal life*, prior to having built *righteous character*, He thrust them out of the garden!

Man did not "fall"; he was PUSHED, by Satan the devil!

Human nature IS, in fact, a mixture of both "good and evil"!

There is, even in the worst, the capacity for good. There is, even in the best, the capacity for *evil!*

Unfortunately, it is the *evil* which tends to predominate! Human nature seems to be primarily a collection of vanity, jealousy, lust and greed! It is selfish, self-centered, egotistical to the point of being narcissistic!

It is filled with *vanity*; and is very much centered around total SELF! But consider some outstanding examples: How many thousands and thousands of men and women have *dedicated their lives* to caring for the sick? How

many Albert Schweitzers and Florence Nightingales have there truly been? There are truly *thousands* of examples which make even professing Christians open their mouths in awe and amazement!

Consider those who literally *sacrificed their lives* in *service* to handicapped children; to the mentally deficient, to the infirm, and the poor.

What *causes* a person to dedicate his entire life to working with pitifully deformed, handicapped children? Is it really only "vanity"? Would one DARE to say that there is no such thing as a "*good person*" who is not a member of his or her own *church organization*?

Unfortunately, the *narrow* view portrayed earlier has left many members of God's own true church with but ONE CHOICE in their attempts to understand this basic "goodness" they see in action all around them! Unfortunately, many have made the *wrong choice*. Because they simply cannot understand the decency, the mercy, friendliness, kindness, happiness, forgiveness, patience and other *good qualities* in professing "Christian" people, they begin to assume these people must also be members of *God's true church*! They begin to reason that, even though others do not understand the TRUTH; do not keep the Sabbath, or understand prophecy; but are "good" people—then they must be "*Christian*."

Having been taught there is absolutely "*no good thing*" in human nature; having been taught that human nature contains a part of "the nature of the DEVIL," they cannot understand how these people can be "*good*" (and they ARE "good people"!), they "decide" they must, in some way, be members of the *Church of God*!

NOT SO! You can be GOOD, without being a *Christian*!

But the teaching that human nature contains a part of the "nature" of Satan the devil is FALSE!

My grandfather was a GOOD man! He was not *perfect*—but he *was good*!

I have known many GOOD people! I am not speaking, now, of the *members of God's church*; I am talking of people who were good in many ways; who exemplified many of the very attributes of the *divine nature*, meaning mercy, generosity, kindness patience and HIGH CHARACTER!

You, also, have known such people!

Did the *GOOD character* they built count for naught?

Now, finally, what about *yourself*?

Must You Truly ABHOR YOURSELF?

Make no mistake! Almighty God *hates* SIN! When we sin (break God's Ten Commandments, even in their *spiritual intent*), we *violate* God's sacred and holy *law*! In a very real sense, we flagrantly *defy* our heavenly Father; we trample His holy laws underfoot; we resist, sneer at, contemptuously scorn and deny the loving, tender mercy and deep concern of our heavenly Father!

John the Baptist preached "*REPENT!*" Jesus continually cried, "REPENT YE!" Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Job, upon repentance, said, "Wherefore I *abhor myself*. . ."

The apostle Paul cried, *O wretched* man that I am. . ." David prayed, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: And my sin is ever before me. Against *thee, thee only*, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight ... Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy way; and sinners shall be converted unto thee ... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalms 51:1-17).

Almighty God says He is our FATHER. In this Father-child relationship, He must, from time to time, *punish* His children!

God says, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:5-7).

Repentance is certainly a feeling of self-DISGUST. It is a feeling of deep *remorse*, far deeper than merely the "sorrow of this world" which works *death*—true repentance is a genuine CHANGE OF HEART!

But is it deep, total *self-revulsion*; *self-rejection*; a continual, day-in, day-out feeling of self-HATRED and *loathing*?

Notice that God punishes every son whom He LOVES! Just as God would have loving parents properly *discipline* their children, so He *disciplines* every son (or daughter) whom HE LOVES!

And how should we discipline our children? Surely, not only God's Word but common sense and any intelligent teacher of child rearing would tell us that, when we have disciplined our children, we should immediately show them our most loving FORGIVENESS! We should pick them up, show them how much we *love* them, dry their tears and give them positive encouragement.

It is a *terrible mistake* for parents to punish in anger, then go away and leave the child without following up the punishment with a great deal of love, affection and *forgiveness*.

To utterly *crush* or *CONQUER* a child; breaking a child's spirit so that the child can have absolutely NO confidence; no sense of self-worth or personal value, but feel whipped, discouraged, defeated and fearful is a great CRIME!

Almighty God has not given us the spirit of "fear," but of power, and of *love*, and of a *sound mind* (II Timothy 1: 7). Does He expect us to *hate our own selves*? No. "So ought men to love their wives *as their own bodies*. He that loveth his wife *loveth himself!*" (Ephesians 5:28)

What? Here, in using the analogy of Christ's love *toward the church*, God says men ought to love their wives AS THEMSELVES!

In other words, the love of a man toward his wife is to at least *equal* the amount of SELF-RESPECT, *self*-appreciation and self-LOVE he feels toward his own SELF! Jesus Christ of Nazareth calls upon men for no higher form of love toward their *wives!* If men *hate themselves*, how can they love their wives?

Notice further: "For no man ever yet *hated his own flesh*; but nourishes and cherishes it, *even as the Lord the church*"! (Ephesians 5:29).

Naturally! Then, in the light of these plain scriptures, is it really true, after all, that we are to go through life, after conversion, feeling nothing but *rejection*, abhorrence, disgust, disdain, denial, contempt and *loathing* toward our own *selves*?

Is it a SIN to have ANY self-respect?

You have seen biblical proof that clearly says it is NOT!

Notice the final scriptures concerning Christ's analogy of His love toward the church and the love of a husband toward a wife: "This is a great mystery: But I speak concerning Christ and the church.

"Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife *even as himself*; And the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Ephesians 5:32, 33).

Yes, repentance is deep remorse, and even a temporary feeling of loathing and disgust toward ourselves for things we have said, thought and *done*! But repentance is NOT the beginning of a lifetime of self-*loathing*, contempt, rejection, and feelings of terrible inferiority and *failure*!

The highest form of love Christ says we are to attain toward our neighbors is the same *degree of love* we possess for *ourselves*!

This is absolutely *fundamental* to the Bible, *fundamental to your salvation*!

". . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor AS THYSELF"! (Matthew 19:19).

Jesus Christ summarizes the intent and spirit of the TEN COMMANDMENTS as loving God, our Father, with all our hearts, all our being and all our minds, and loving our neighbors AS *OURSELVES*!

There you have it!

No matter what you have heard, or what you have been taught, God Almighty does not demand of His beloved children that they go through their Christian lives with feelings of self-contempt, failure, rejection and *loathing*!

-End-

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