

Why Should YOU Repent?

For centuries, evangelists have shouted “REPENT!” From John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and the early apostles; from Luther to Billy Sunday – the cry has been REPENT! But repent of what? How? What does it mean to repent? Why should you be concerned about repenting? Does it make any difference if you don’t?

“I’m going to ask you to come forward!” said the evangelist, nearing the end of an articulate, impassioned address. The huge crowd remained silent as a mighty choir began to sing “Just As I Am.”

“I’m going to ask you to come down here and stand before the stage and join with me and all these others in private prayer. . .” said the evangelist, with just a hint of a quaver in his voice. “From all over this vast auditorium...” he said, with wide-flung hands gesturing to the farthest balcony. “You fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers ...everyone ... get up out of your seats and join these others . . .”

The trickle of people beginning to flow down the aisles grew noticeably. Were some of them planted?

Were some strategically placed, to provide impetus to others, bashful and unsure, afraid to be first? For whatever reason, a handful becomes a few dozen, and finally several hundred.

You’ve all seen it before: the huge throngs in great indoor auditoriums or outdoor bowls and stadiums; the moving, intense sermon about Jesus and the need to repent and receive Him as personal Savior; and then the altar call, the invitation to come forward.

“Just now ... won’t you come?” he says, voice breaking just a little.

No doubt the vast majority of those who gather before evangelists after an emotional sermon are very sincere. The sermon makes them yearn for forgiveness, a way to shed guilt and nagging conscience, a way out of their miseries and troubles.

In recent years there has been a noticeable surge in charismatic movements; tens of thousands seem bent on returning to what is commonly called “that old-time

religion” or “good, old-fashioned preaching.”

Psychologists and sociologists point out that soaring social problems and increasing interest in religion go hand in hand. Runaway inflation, joblessness, personal health problems, feelings of insecurity about the future—these tend to create a need in people for spiritual and emotional anchors. In a chaotic, material world, many people seek inner spiritual peace.

Perhaps many such people find such peace: a new lease on life, the courage to go on with their lives and seek solutions when they were near despair, near quitting entirely. Documented cases of religious experiences preventing suicides are not uncommon.

But did they *repent*?

Jesus Christ preached repentance. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, *Repent*: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Matthew says His message was the gospel of the Kingdom, and His appeal to the people was to *repent*. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

Mark says, “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: *repent* ye, and believe the gospel!” (Mark 1:14, 15).

He said, “. . . Except ye *repent*, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3-5).

But what did He mean? What does it mean to “repent”?

The *New World Dictionary* says “repent” means “to feel sorry or self-reproachful for what one has done or failed to do; be conscience-stricken or contrite ... to feel such regret or dissatisfaction over some past action, intention, etc., as to change one’s mind about ... to feel so contrite over one’s sins as to change or decide to change one’s ways; be penitent ... to feel sorry, self-reproachful, or contrite, over [an error, sin, etc.] ... to feel such regret or dissatisfaction over it as to change one’s mind about.

The real key to the meaning of “repent” is almost buried in this description. Can

you find it? The entire description is true, of course. However, there is a vitally important Bible definition for true repentance that is often ignored or overlooked by even the most sincerely contrite persons.

That missing key is not understood by millions of professing Christians, including countless persons who *believe they have repented!*

Paul explained part of it when he wrote the Corinthian church following a particularly embarrassing case of incest within the congregation. He said, “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed *to repentance*: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow *worketh repentance to salvation* not to be repented of; but the *sorrow of the world* worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:9, 10).

What Is “the Sorrow of the World”?

How many times have you been “sorry”?

Probably, you might confess, nowhere near often enough. The simple words “I’m sorry” seem to be extremely difficult to utter for prideful, carnal human beings. From the time we are children, we learn of the rough-and-tumble, dog-eat-dog competitive world where even little children can turn on their own kind, suffering with handicaps or physical deformities, and attack them mercilessly.

As we grow, and as we learn self-reliance to greater or lesser degrees, we develop individuality. We call it “personality.” But, along with our awareness of our own selves—our discovery of who, and what, we are—come a considerable number of subconscious defense mechanisms.

The most sophisticated “DEW”-line early-warning radar network, constantly monitoring the horizons to detect any Soviet missile launch, cannot compare with our automatic defense mechanisms against shame, embarrassment, reproach and attacks against our ego.

Suggest we are in error, or that we have somehow failed, or that we are inadequate, and we become instantly defensive, perhaps irritated and even angry. It is a rare person who takes criticism easily— and it is far more common place to see us humans bristling at critical remarks. So, as we live this life, we generally develop elaborate defenses against criticisms; we tend to argue, wheedle, whine,

reason, dodge here and there, seek sympathy from others and talk our way around any possible blows to our own ego—we usually hate to admit it when we are wrong.

Therefore, saying “I’m sorry”—and really meaning it—is something rare for most humans.

The prideful refusal to say the simple words “I’m sorry” has caused many a marriage to flounder, destroyed many a friendship and wrecked partnerships and other business relationships.

On the other hand, when a person is truly contrite—truly and sincerely abashed and ashamed over his conduct and sincerely and humbly says “I’m sorry” to another human being—is this repentance?

Not according to the Bible, it isn’t!

Think about it. Being sincerely contrite—even blending that contrition with a humble and heartfelt display of honest emotion, as in marriage when one partner might say, with genuine tears of remorse, “I’m sorry! Please forgive me!”—it’s good to be sorry, good to say so if you mean it, and when it’s necessary. But being sorry does not mean one has *repented*!

Behaviorists have observed it is the child who gets caught who cries the loudest. Criminals, caught in the midst of crime, have been known to become terribly remorseful, only to return to the same kind of crime—If they are released with mild (if any) punishment. You see, much of that kind of sorrow is that of a person *who feels sorry for himself*!

A contrite partner in marriage can say “I’m sorry!” with genuine tears when a good deal of the emotion being felt is directed toward the *self*, feeling self-pity at having to be forced to go through the humiliating and degrading experience of lowering oneself in one’s own estimation by groveling, as it were, in apology. But being sorry because the *other* was hurt, being sorrowful in a completely *outgoing* emotion directed *away* from the self and *toward* the other person, is not quite so common.

A child may gleefully commit the same act—whether abusing a younger brother or sister, stealing change from Mom’s purse or lying—so long as he continues to get

away with it. Caught, and threatened with punishment of some sort, the child may ring the rafters with protests of “I’m sorry, Mom—I’ll never do it again!”

How like children we are.

Living our daily lives without taking God into consideration, we tend to drift through life with a feeling of permanency, of invulnerability and of complete self dependence. Suddenly hurt, shocked, frightened or injured, and we find ourselves calling out for help—even calling to God Himself! Usually, depending on the seriousness of the situation, people will cry out to God in times of extreme fear—times of terrible emotional trauma—and they will put their whole hearts in it, sometimes crying out to God aloud and without any formal introductions whatever!

Safely through the crisis—living a normal daily life again—and the same person may never bother to pray or to thank God for daily blessings.

It’s all part of this thing we call “human nature.” We are *by nature* hostile to the idea that we are *wrong*. With our thick-skinned conscience and thin-skinned ego, we face the world truculently, daring others to disagree with us, to find fault with what we say and do, or to criticize us.

But, when we find the emotion (even selfishly) to “be *sorry*” now and then, we may think we were repentant when we were only experiencing the “sorrow of the world that worketh death.”

What Is Man?

Just what are we? Are we a cosmic accident, the result of aeons of gradual change? Did we begin from a chance strike of lightning in an ancient soup of methane and ammonia? Did we come from “cracks in rocks” or from “brown scum” or “green slime”? (All very “scientific” proposals for the origin of life, by the way.)

God’s Word shows we were *created* by a divine act! That can be *proved* by the laws of the physical sciences themselves; proved that creation demands a great Creator; that laws demand a Law Giver; that life demands a Life Giver, and so on.

God’s Word reveals *what man is!*

God said to our first parent, Adam, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return!” (Genesis 3:19). Does this sound like an ancient “Bible” statement? It is also clinically, technically, scientifically accurate. We are *composed* of the elements of this earth; we are sustained by imbibing those minerals and elements of the soil beneath us, by breathing the air surrounding us and drinking the water God created. When we die, we once again return to those elements, wasting away into soil again, or “dust.”

As a physical, fleshly, temporal human being, we are quite similar to animals. God’s Word says, “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20).

But, while the physical, chemical existence of man and animals is quite similar, there is a vast difference between the mind of man, and the brain and instinct of animals.

Man was made only a little lower than spirit life! “But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands (Hebrews 2:6-8).

When Adam looked around himself in the garden, he saw only plant and animal life—nothing, no one his equal. When Eve was formed, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman [*Ishah*], because she was taken out of Man [*Ish*]” (Genesis 2:23, 24).

Notice that, although the Bible says Adam was surrounded by living creatures (*nephesh*) of every kind, “for Adam there was not found an help meet [fitting for, or ‘answering to’] for him” (Genesis 2:20).

With the creation of Eve, Adam now had an equal partner—another human being, created on a plane far *above* animal life and only “a little lower” than angel life!

Was Adam's Nature Changed?

From the moment of his creation, Adam was human and he possessed human nature. *What* was that nature *before* the original sin, and was it *changed* after Adam sinned?

Adam was human, possessed human nature from the time of breathing the breath of life. Yet he was not possessed of feelings of hostility toward God, nor of guilt. His relationship with God was almost like that of a friend. There was complete acceptance and a definite lack of hostility, or determination to disobey God's first command. "And the Eternal God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Eternal God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shall not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:15-17).

When Eve was tempted of Satan, she explained, matter of factly, the restrictions imposed on them of God without rancor. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Eternal God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

"And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Genesis 3:1-3).

Paul explained, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam *was not deceived*, but the woman being *deceived* was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:13, 14).

Deceived people can be quite sincere—just sincerely *wrong*. Eve allowed her natural physical and emotional appetites (which are vanity, jealousy, lust and greed) to overcome her timidity, and became *deceived*.

A vast *change* came over mankind from the moment of this original sin! Notice what happened to Adam and Eve, "And when the woman saw [she looked, with the eye, and began to lust after the fruit, broke the Tenth Commandment, against *coveting*] that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise [vanity entered in; the desire for superior 'knowledge' and the subtle suggestion that God had been keeping

knowledge and information from them had been lodged in her mind by Satan's lie], she took [stealing, as well as breaking the Fifth Commandment, by dishonoring their only Parent] of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6).

Suddenly a great *change* came over Adam and Eve!

They had been "neutral" toward God; they had no special enmity or resistance to His commands within themselves concerning the one tree whose fruit they should not eat. They were sharing the world's "biggest bedroom" as husband and wife, totally alone, with no human beings anywhere else in the whole universe, and were completely unashamed—having no sex "hang-ups," psychoses, neuroses, fixations, stigmas, fears or embarrassments. Suddenly ". . . the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked: they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:7).

Now their sexuality was something of which they were *ashamed*. A *change* came over their minds. They had been in *close personal proximity* to Satan the devil. They had *listened* to Satan, and Eve had been *deceived*. By following his wife's example, however, Adam was in the greater transgression, for he *should* have recognized Satan's lying subtlety, called upon God to rebuke Satan, *resisted* the devil's suggestions and ordered his wife never to listen to him again!

Instead, he docily followed his wife's lead into original *sin*, the breaking of God's laws! (1 John 3:4).

By admitting Satan's thoughts, his ideas and suggestions, his wily method of reasoning, into their minds they fell under his evil influence! Here was the most powerful spirit being, apart from God (Elohim) and the other two archangels, Gabriel and Michael, with his evil, electrifying, magnetic, powerful, persuasive and subtle personality, actually getting Eve to *think his thoughts*, listen to *his* arguments!

By admitting a little of Satan's *thoughts* into her mind, she became *deceived*, *confused*. Prior to listening to the devil, Eve's mind was clear—clean—unhindered by shame and guilt, uncluttered by doubts or confusion. She knew her husband was right; she knew God was right. Now, after listening to the devil, she was no longer sure. His arguments seemed logical, attractive, reasonable. She thought about it. She entertained the idea of taking the fruit. She *looked* at it. While

looking at it, she thought about it some more. Without her actually realizing it, she was now allowing her emotions to become involved.

Not only was her stomach and her physical *appetite* involved, so was her desire for “knowledge” that Satan had subtly suggested God was “keeping from her.” A blow to her womanly pride, her ego, had been struck!

Surely she was “just as good” as Adam. Did God tell Adam things He was keeping from Eve? Did God know “better” than that which He had told them, “. . . In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die . . .”?

Eve had human nature from the moment of her creation, from the moment of her first breath and mental awareness! Because human nature is composed of vanity, jealousy, lust and greed—as well as the desire to “be good” (without the overriding compulsion to do good!)—Satan was able to appeal to a dormant, as yet unused part of Eve’s nature!

She was carnal—physically and fleshly minded. Still, she looked upon God as her friend, had not been really angry at God, or resentful toward Him, of and *by herself*.

But now Satan began to strike a responsive chord deep within Eve’s nature. Now that side of Eve’s basic humanity, the side of latent, undeveloped, unused “hostility” toward God—not being *subject* to God’s laws—began to respond to Satan’s careful coaching!

Once her mind began probing the depths of lust and of mild agreement with the devil that perhaps God had been a little unjust in keeping desired knowledge from her, Eve began exercising a portion of her nature. The natural trends were already there deep within her being, but they had not yet been used.

Remember, God “breathed the breath of life” into Adam’s nostrils! God Himself, manifesting Himself as a human being, drew into His own lungs the *air* of this physical earth and breathed that same air, from His own lungs, right into the lungs of Adam!

Anyone who claims a part of an alleged “spirit” of Satan could somehow have been involved in this process is treading on dangerous ground indeed!

Satan was not a part of Adam’s and Eve’s nature; he was a separate creature,

standing there clearly visible and only able through his powerful influence to put *thoughts* into our first parents' minds!

Satan had said, "God knows more than that. . ." "He knows better . . ." And then he had told the first lie and began one of the greatest false doctrines and deceptions ever foisted off on an unsuspecting, deceived world: that man will not "surely die," but that we are an "immortal soul" locked inside a physical body; that we do not die—only "our body" does; but we continue on, and merely transfer to another place!

As Eve's mind followed the devil's reasoning, it became *changed*.

Adam's mind became changed.

Now they hid from God when He called. "And they heard the voice of the Eternal God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Eternal God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Eternal God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:8, 9).

Why were they afraid? Because they felt *guilty* and because they were now conscious of *shame*. Now what had previously been perfectly natural, wholesome, healthy and good was filthy, sullied, ugly and evil! Where innocence and a completely willing, "neutral" attitude toward God had been was now fear—coupled with resentment and accusation!

Notice! "And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he [God] said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (Genesis 3:10, 11).

God knew instantly that a dramatic change had come over Adam. Where Adam had *welcomed* God's presence—accepted it automatically, as if a close friend and companion—where Adam had never questioned God's decisions or His commands, now he was *afraid*.

What is fear? It is a complex emotion, sometimes mixed with hatred, suspicion, doubt, anxiety and deep feelings of self-preservation and protection. There "is no fear in love," however (1 John 4:18), so Adam and Eve clearly *did not love God* any

more! Was there not a little tacitly demonstrated accusation? Were they not apprehensive that God would harshly punish them, like a young child found with his hand in the proverbial cookie jar?

Notice that when they were confronted with their sin they tried to dodge responsibility, tried to shift the blame elsewhere!

“And the man said, The woman *whom thou gavest to be with me*, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12).

Here is human nature as we know it in action! Adam is obliquely implying the fault is *God’s*, since the woman was given him by God! He said, “The woman whom thou [God!] gavest to *be with me*. . .”

Adam is *afraid*. He is ashamed of his sex. He willingly places the blame both on God and on his wife!

God turns to Eve. “And the Eternal God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:13).

Eve also tried to shift the blame. She said “the serpent” did it!

Here was a *vast change* in the behavior of our first two parents. Where they had been “neutral” toward God, *without fear*, without apprehension or anxiety, not fearing His wrath, welcoming His talks and instruction to them—where they had been completely unaware of any shame concerning their naked bodies—now they were desperately conscious of the need to *cover up* their sexuality and to *hide* from God!

Not only did the very nature of man change dramatically upon allowing Satan’s mind to influence them, but God *changed* a portion of creation itself!

“And the Eternal God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel [reference is made to *Christ* here, ‘her seed,’ meaning the Lord Jesus Christ, later to be born of the virgin Mary, who would ‘bruise thy’(Satan’s)’head,’ and the death of Christ in the bruising of ‘his

heel’]. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:14-19).

Where Adam had but to harvest every sort of succulent fruit and nut from the trees all about him, God now said he would only eat by the dint of hardscrabble labor, fighting the elements and nature itself, seeing weeds, thorns and thistles spring up in his fields, working with sweat dripping from his brow to survive.

The traditional view of the Garden of Eden is that man “fell” from a completely sinless condition into original sin, and that Adam’s sin is imputed to every human being automatically.

But man didn’t “fall”; he was pushed. Few understand that God *created* Adam with human nature, which is a *mixture* of both the capacity for good and the capacity for evil. Adam had at work in his very nature the human appetites, the *capacity* for sin. Before he gave in to those temptations and *exercised* his innate, latent capacity for sin, he was not directly hostile toward God. He was not “afraid” of God. He was not ashamed of his own physical person.

Yet, after giving his wife the reins of their marriage, after listening to Satan’s lying suggestions, Adam *changed! Notice carefully.* Satan the devil was *right there, in person*, in the Garden of Eden, just as he has been personally involved in major events in history affecting God’s purpose and plan.

He was present at the birth of Christ, trying to destroy Jesus as a baby through Herod. He was present at the beginning of Christ’s ministry (Matthew 4), trying to tempt Jesus to give in to Satan and obey him. He *personally* entered Judas Iscariot and succeeded in betraying Jesus to His death.

Satan has no counterpart of the Holy Spirit of God; Satan is not “omnipresent,” or “everywhere present,” at *once*. He has countless demons (Revelation 12:4; Ezekiel 28:16, 17). Though he is called “the prince of *the power of the air*”

(Ephesians 2:2) and “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience,” the Bible describes Satan *as personally* present in heaven at the trial of Job. Notice it: “Now there was a day when the sons of God [angels are meant here] came to present themselves before the Eternal, and Satan came also among them. And the Eternal said to 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).

Notice Satan described himself as being just as limited in ability to “project” himself beyond his own immediate environment as any human being. He was in heaven, though the Bible reveals he spends most of his time on this earth. He described himself as having been “to and fro,” or from one *place* to another place, in the earth and “walking up and down in it.” This proves Satan is not “omnipresent,” not able to project himself throughout the whole world all at once, not possessive of a “counterpart” of God’s Holy Spirit so that he might be all-pervasive, present *everywhere* at the same time.

Notice that, after the conversation about Job was finished, “Satan went forth from the presence of the Eternal” (Job 1: 12).

Some have come to believe that human nature includes *Satan’s nature*, that, at the moment of a tiny baby taking his very first breath of air, he imbibes a portion of “Satan’s mind” or is somehow afflicted with a satanic attitude and spirit. This reasoning is based upon the description of Satan as the “prince of the power of the air.”

Such reasoning is false.

Neither of the other two archangels, Michael and Gabriel, is said to be “omnipresent.” Each appears in a distinct place at a distinct time. Never does God’s Word indicate that Michael or Gabriel is able to project his “spirit” or his “nature” or attitude beyond himself in an all pervasive, omnipresent sense. Satan, as the former archangel “Lucifer” (meaning “shining star of the dawn” or “light bringer”), would not have suddenly been given near godlike powers, vastly above his former powers, as a result of rebellion toward God and being cast down to this earth with those angels who followed him.

Make no mistake! Satan the devil is an evil genius, a tremendously powerful, magnetic, wily, subtle, convincing spirit being who can exert almost

irresistible *force of* persuasion, of deception and temptation upon human beings.

But Satan cannot be everywhere present! He cannot “impart” a portion of his “nature” into your precious children’s minds! He can influence; he can whisper in our ears; he can even attack human beings (as he did Job, when God *allowed* it) by using the elements of this earth (Job was smitten with boils, and Satan caused a tornado to collapse his house). But his main method of deceiving human beings is by using his demons (countless millions) and by his own personal influence on powerful human leaders and their advisers from time to time.

One cannot *prove*, for example, that Satan the devil entered personally into Adolf Hitler. However, the combination of satanic genius, the brutality and total disregard for human life, the egomaniacal desire for rulership and power, the false vision of becoming like a “Messiah,” promising the world a “thousand-year Reich” (like the Millennium; Revelation 4:4), would lead one to suspect that

Satan entered Hitler *personally*.

Satan is a fallen angel, albeit an archangel. Note that angels may *appear*, and when they do they appear as men, in most cases occupying a specific place at a specific time. (Study Genesis 19.)

Satan has so powerfully influenced leaders over such a vast span of history that this whole civilization is spoken of as “Satan’s kingdoms” (Matthew 4:8-10), and he is called “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

By influencing financiers, musicians, artists, military leaders, dictators, religious leaders—those in key positions responsible for setting the trends in socioeconomic conditions and who establish cultural and religious traditions—Satan has contrived to make *it appear* that he is virtually all-pervasive.

Not so.

There is no such thing as a *counterpart* to God’s power to become all-knowing, all-powerful, all-seeing and everywhere-present, or “omnipresent”! Those are attributes that belong to God exclusively!

Therefore, while human nature may be *powerfully influenced* by Satan and his demons, and while Satan is called the “prince of the power of the air,” he does not, through some alleged “counterpart” of God’s Spirit, actually help form

and *compose* “human nature” in human beings!

When each tiny, helpless child is born, he is completely sinless. He is *incapable* of sin! When he breathes air, that is all (except for possible man-made pollutants, of course) he breathes! He does not “breathe in” a portion of the nature of Satan!

Gradually, because God has constructed human nature with the five senses, with the fleshly *appetites* of those senses, a growing child can come to express some of the “fruits of the flesh,” meaning anger, resentment, jealousy, desire, greed and lust. But that same child can also express the very warmest signs of deep love, joy, happiness, enthusiasm and appreciation.

Growing up in a world that is totally deceived (Revelation 12:9), and becoming that sum total of every experience, teaching, influence and thought that makes up his collection of knowledge, that same child becomes another carnal, natural, physical, fleshly human being—imbued with human (not satanic!) nature!

The Word of God explains what human nature really *is*!

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind [notice ‘carnal’ means completely *fleshly*, *not* allowing for any ‘spiritual’ content!] is *enmity against God*: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be!” (Romans 8:6, 7).

That was the way Adam was! He had not yet sinned when Eve was listening to Satan’s clever lies. But the capacity was there, and he was “*not subject*”—*not in subjection*—to God’s laws!

God had given Adam a command!

Adam was ordered to obey that command! But even God’s laws are not “preventive legislation”! The Ten Commandments do not prevent sin, simply because human nature includes free moral *agency*! God’s laws tell us what *is* sin; they describe *what* we should do and *what* we should not do.

God has decreed it is then up to us, with our human nature and our ability to make a free, uninhibited or non-restrained choice!

Once Eve, being deceived, plunged right ahead in direct disobedience to God, and once Adam, following along after his wife, participated in that disobedience, they

exercised their right of free moral agency—they sinned!

Satan was not “*inside of* them” when they sinned! No, he was standing there *beside* them! Satan did not enter Eve or Adam. He merely talked to them, reasoned with them, influenced Eve to perform a wholly voluntary act.

Suddenly the *awareness of sin* and the terrible feelings of *guilt* struck them! They had the capacity for good, and they had the capacity for evil! They chose the evil, and now their minds were sullied! >From being totally conscience-free, they were now conscience-stricken! From having no guilt, they now felt guilty!

It was not their basic nature that suddenly changed; it was that they had exercised a latent, dormant, not-yet used *part of that nature!*

Had they kept that part of their nature *in subjection*, they would not have sinned! But they were powerless to do so, really. God explains that when He says of the ancient Israelites, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Here, God is speaking of the basic nature of man. He shows there is not the kind of “heart” (volition, will, purpose, attitude and intent of mind) in mankind that willingly submits to God’s laws.

The Hostile Side of Man’s Nature

Since human nature is “not subject” to the laws of God, and it cannot be because it lacks a spiritual dimension which would lead toward such subjection, the basic nature of man is “lawless.”

Remember again the foundational scripture concerning this lawless nature of man. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be!” (Romans 8:7).

Millions of carnal-minded people are professing Christians.

Those same millions of people would feel terribly *insulted* if they were told they remained “hostile” toward God! They would become angry and upset if a minister told them they were filled with animosity toward God, that they were not in subjection and obedience to His will in their lives!

After all, they might argue, do they not *believe* in God? Do they not *worship* God and *worship* Jesus Christ, and *believe* on His name?

Let's notice a Bible example of those who had accepted Jesus Christ, who had come to *believe* on Him! Turn to John's lengthy eighth chapter and read how Jesus was reasoning with the Jews in the temple. He had said, "...When ye have lifted up the Son of man [referring to His crucifixion], then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:28, 29).

Only moments earlier, these religiously inclined people were loudly arguing with Christ. But now notice what happened! "As he spake these words, many *believed* on him!" (John 8:31).

Now they were convinced. Now they believed!

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which *believed* on him, If ye continue in my *word*, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-33).

What was this? Jesus was now implying they *did not know the truth*.

That hurt. That cut against the grain, ruffled their religious feathers and made them angry. Remember, these are people who *believed* on Jesus!

"They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?"

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin ... I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because *my word hath no place* in you" (John 8:33-37).

Notice that these Jews "believed on" Jesus, but they did not believe what He said; they rejected His teaching, *His message! His word* did not find any place to take root within them!

A little later Jesus showed they were seeking to put Him to death! "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father!" (John 8:40). This time Jesus

referred to “their father” in oblique reference to Satan the devil!

Notice now the *hostility*, the anger, the livid wrath and *hatred* expressed by these Jews who “*believe on*” Jesus (but did not believe what He *said*)!

“We be not born of fornication!” they spat (verse 41).

Read the remainder of this remarkable chapter! By the time the conversation was finished, these people, who had moments before “*believed on*” Jesus, flew into a maniacal frenzy and stooped to pick up stones from the temple area and kill Jesus on the spot!

Now turn to James 2:19. “Thou believest that there is one God [or that God is One]; thou doest well; the demons also believe, and tremble!”

What? Demons “believe”? *Of course* they do. More—they know. Demons are fallen angels who followed Lucifer in his rebellion. They are *spirit* beings who were present during the creation of Adam and Eve. As spirit creatures, having the ability to transport themselves without regard to physical barriers, they have complete knowledge of the truth about God’s family; about Jesus being the Christ, and the very Son of God. They *know* He died for the sins of mankind; know He was dead and buried and that He rose again!

In short, demons know *and believe* every essential doctrine and truth that some churches claim is necessary for salvation! They are not “Christian” because of that belief, nor are they headed toward God’s Kingdom! No, they “believe,” but they tremble—because, knowing God’s great plan, they know it is only a matter of time until they will be consigned to “outer darkness” forever!

Is “belief” enough to ensure you are a Christian? Absolutely not! Satan believes. His demons believe. The Jews “believed on” Jesus, but they were totally hostile toward God, not subject to His laws. And, deep down, they *hated* Jesus Christ!

But aren’t loving expressions of adoration and *worship* toward Jesus Christ proof that a person is not “hostile” toward God?

Notice, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but *their heart is far from me*. But *in vain* they do *worship* me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men!” (Matthew 15:7-9).

Why do you not hear that scripture preached?

Jesus warned, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them *by their fruits*. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit ... Wherefore *by their fruits* ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in heaven! Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in *thy* name? and in *thy* name have cast out demons? and *in thy* name done many wonderful works?

“And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you: depart* from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:15-23).

What a statement!

Jesus Christ says those who call Him “Lord” are not doing enough to receive the Kingdom! He plainly says it is possible to worship—to adulate, love, adore, admire and deeply respect Him—and *yet do it all in vain!*

But why? How?

Because Jesus says their *works*, their lives—the way they live—constitute “iniquity”! Iniquity means *sin, lawlessness!*

Those who *do the will* of God, those who do not work “lawlessness” but who are willing to believe, not only “on” Jesus but *believe Jesus—believe what He said* will be known of Him—will not be worshiping Jesus Christ completely in vain!

Notice carefully, then, that your Bible proves there are many who believe on Jesus Christ (including demons!) and who *worship* Christ—and who are doing it all in vain!

Why?

Because they are not “subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be!” They are still carnal-minded; they have *not yet repented!*

We saw the dictionary definition of “repent.” Did you notice the “key” that was

practically buried in the lengthy description? It was *this*: “. . . to feel so contrite over one’s *sins* as to change or decide to change one’s ways . . .”

To be deeply and profoundly sorry, shaken up, devastated, hurt, ashamed, revolted, disgusted over one’s sins—that is repentance!

But what constitutes sin?

What Is Sin?

Few professing Christians are taught from the pulpits what sin really *is*. They are taught it is something that is “displeasing to God,” or “living a life that is apart from God,” or some other equally vague and nebulous descriptions.

Many are led to believe “sin” is an almost endless list of “taboos” and can include drinking, card-playing, dancing, certain kinds of music, books and magazines, pictures, sex, smoking, short skirts, long sideburns, sleeping in church, golf on Sunday, cussing, spitting, cheating, lying, honky-tonking, getting fat, eating meats, marrying, divorcing, speaking to a disfellowshipped person and an almost exhaustive, talmudic encyclopedic list of human deeds, lusts and actions.

To some, singing in church is a sin. To others, singing is mandatory and pleasing to God, but not to the accompaniment of musical instruments. To some, drinking hard liquor is a sin, but a little wine now and then is not—and wine may be taken on the Passover (Lord’s Supper), or on any other occasion.

Millions believe it is wrong to commit certain acts defined in the Ten Commandments but do not believe that to break any one of those Ten Commandments is *a sin*, punishable by *death*, unless it is repented of!

Especially the fourth one! Millions of believing, professing, churchgoing “Christian” people cheerfully break God’s Holy Sabbath Day every single week. They have been deceived into believing God somehow allowed the day into which He put His very presence (and the God of the Old Testament *is the same personality* of the Godhead who became Jesus Christ of the New Testament; read John 1 and Hebrews 1) to be changed, altered, so that “Christians” now observe “Sunday” as if in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ.

Not so. History proves otherwise. Bible proofs abound from proving the Ten

Commandments were in force *before* Moses, to proving how Jesus came to magnify the law, and make it even more binding, to proving Christ is “Lord of the Sabbath day” (Mark 2:28) to proving God’s Sabbaths will be enforced during the Millennium!

Still, those millions of people who “believe on” Jesus (just as the Jews did of John 8) can become *emotional*, can become *angry* and *hostile* when anyone suggests their Sunday *tradition* might be in error!

As Jesus said, “But in vain do they worship me—teaching for doctrines the *commandments of men!*” (Matthew 15:9). There is a *Bible definition* for sin! It is found in 1 John 3:4. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for *sin is the transgression of the law!*”

The only law described here in John’s writings is the Ten Commandments! Notice!

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3, 4).

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

When a young man asked Jesus, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” Jesus answered him, If thou wilt enter into life, *keep the commandments!*” (Matthew 19:16,17).

He then went on to define which commandments, describing the only law known commonly by such term in the Bible, the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses! He summarized the last six after mentioning murder, adultery, theft, bearing false witness and honoring one’s parents by saying, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ”

The Ten Commandments *define sin*. They tell us what *sinis* by specifying various categories of human action (or inaction). Jesus magnified those commandments, made them infinitely more *binding* on us in His famous “Sermon on the Mount.”

Notice this! “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the *least* in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and *teach* them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Notice that Jesus urged men to both “do” and teach others to “do,” even those commandments men considered to be “the least”!

Next He said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [‘vain fellow’], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of Gehennah fire!” (Matthew 5:21, 22).

What a vast difference! According to the “letter” of the Ten Commandments, one would be subject to the death penalty for actually murdering another human being. Now, Jesus described various degrees of danger if one *spoke contemptuously* of his fellowman! Why? Because such sentiments come from *the heart*, out of an *attitude*, and Jesus is here making the Ten Commandments infinitely more binding upon Christians by showing how they apply *spiritually*.

Notice another example. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in *his heart*” (Matthew 5:27, 28).

Does this “do away” with the Ten Commandments, as some claim?

Obviously not. It does the exact opposite: reconfirming, reestablishing and making infinitely more binding; applicable to the spiritual intent of the mind, rather than the physical act! Jesus said, “. . . Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the *heart*; and they defile the man.

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: *These* are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man” (Matthew 15:18-20).

Where the Ten Commandments had been administered in the *letter*, a man was

not actually guilty of sin, punishable by death, until the murder had been committed; now a man was guilty of sin, punishable by *death*, for hating his fellow human being in his heart! Where formerly it required the physical act to constitute sin, *now* Jesus explained the thought constituted sin!

The Ten Commandments point out *what sin is*. Paul said, “. . . I had not known sin [that is, *what sin is*], but by [through] the law: for I had not known lust, except the law [the Ten Commandments] had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Romans 7:7).

Just previously Paul had said, “For the wages of sin [the breaking of the Ten Commandments] is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 6:23).

Speaking analogously, Paul said, “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the *law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good!*” (Romans 7:8-12).

A paraphrase is necessary to understand this analogous passage.

Paul was saying, “Sin, which dwells in my human nature, as the law describes, was working every kind of evil in me. For, when I didn’t know anything about the law, what *sin is*, I was living normally, without any knowledge that I was sinning—the sin within me was dead, and I didn’t recognize it. But, when the knowledge of the Commandments came to mind, sin became instantly, painfully alive, and my life was forfeit. Because sin, as the law explains it, deceived me, and through the penalty of the law it cost me my life—because death is the penalty for sin. Now that I am *dead*, so far as the law is concerned, because *Christ died for me*, I must confess that the law of God is holy, and just, and good.”

That is the way millions of professing Christians are!

They are blissfully *unaware* of the sin that lives within them; their leaders speak “smooth things” (Isaiah 30:9, 10) and the people themselves are *deceived*. Remember, deceived people are very likely “*sincere*,” they *don’t know* they are obliged to keep the Ten Commandments in the spiritual intent of the law, and

what they “don’t know” they “don’t know that they don’t know,” to coin a phrase. They are completely ignorant of the sin that lives within them, as Paul explained.

Notice what Paul further said, “For we know that the law is *spiritual* [as we saw Jesus magnify its intent and make it far more binding upon us]: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:14-19).

What an eloquent explanation of human nature at work in our bodies!

Paul acknowledges that God’s law is *spiritual*.

First, what is the difference between something that is “physical” and something “spiritual”? People speak of “physical laws” and usually mean some law or principle having to do with the known laws of physics and chemistry—laws affecting our health—or laws legislated by man for the purpose of regulating society.

But are the “laws of physics” (i.e., gravity, inertia, properties of minerals and chemicals, etc.) really “physical”? No, they are not. They are *absolute*. The laws governing our physical universe are immutable, implacable, unchangeable; they are stated principles concerning the way things are.

When Paul acknowledges God’s law is “spiritual,” he shows it is unchangeable, immutable; that it is *absolute*.

Jesus said, “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from *the law*, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). Jesus showed God’s *law* will survive long after the world has perished, that not a comma or the crossing of a “t” will be changed!

Can anyone doubt that God's Word—yes, the *New Testament*—upholds, magnifies and commands obedience to the Ten Commandments?

Let's paraphrase the remainder of Paul's statement and understand it. Paul admitted, "I am still fleshly minded, subject to the tugs and pulls of my nature, capable of sinning. The things I find myself doing I wish I wouldn't do. The things I want to do I seem unable to do, but the evil that I don't want to do, I seem to find myself doing!"

Continuing, Paul said (paraphrased), "Now, when I find myself doing things I really wish I weren't doing, it isn't really *me*; the way I really am, and want to be, that is doing it—it is the sin that seems to dwell inside of me.

"I find there is a law of some sort at work, that—when I really want to do good—there is evil present inside of me that prevents it.

"Because, you see, I truly delight in the law of God, when I think about the way I really want to be, the way I really feel about God and His laws, but I see this other law at work in my body as if in conflict against the law of my mind, bringing me into a kind of slavish obedience to this law of sin that lives in my body.

"What a wretched person I really am! Who can deliver me from this conflicting life that can only lead to death, of and by myself'.? I thank God that it can be done through Jesus Christ our Lord! So, then, with my innermost being I serve the law of God, but this fleshly body betrays me now and then and I find it serving the law of sin!" (Romans 7:21-25).

Isn't that the way *you* feel much of the time?

Aren't there countless Christian people who feel the same way? We want to "be good," but we find it so hard to continually "do good!" We slip and slop around; we procrastinate, vacillate and hedge. We make false starts and don't finish what we have begun. We resolve and days later fail to carry through. We make promises to ourselves, and to God, and then break them.

Thank God He has given us the example of one of the most tireless laborers for Him, a great apostle of Jesus Christ: Paul. Paul was human and weak, just like we are! He *wanted* salvation, wanted to continually remain in a repentant attitude, but he found himself slipping back into sinful attitudes and habits. It was

necessary for Paul to go to God for forgiveness on a *daily* basis. Can we do any less?

Sin is the breaking of God's Ten Commandments as they are magnified and made more *binding* by the teachings and the life's example of Jesus Christ, who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet *without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15).

Therefore, sin may include some of the things listed earlier, and sin most certainly is displeasing to God, and is living a life that is separate from God, but sin *is, specifically*, breaking any one of the points of the Ten Commandments as they are magnified and made more binding *in the spirit!*

To break God's Sabbath Day is a *sin*. Millions are deceived, thinking God's Sabbath is done away—so their conscience may remain free while they are nevertheless under the condemnation of God's law and under the penalty of sin!

Can People Sin with a Free Conscience?

Notice again how God's Word explains ignorance is no excuse!

"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died!" (Romans 7:9).

Paul says he was living happily enough, blissfully *unaware* of points of God's law he should have been obeying; "alive without the law," or alive without the conscious knowledge he should be *obeying* that law.

But when "the commandment came"—that is, when God's laws were finally impressed on his conscience, when he came into the full realization he had been *breaking* those laws—"sin revived," was suddenly *obvious* to him, leaped to life in his mind, soiled his conscience, made him aware that he was sinning, and Paul "died."

How did he "die"? Listen. "For I through the law am *dead* to the law, that I might live unto God. I am *crucified with Christ*: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:19, 20).

The law demanded Paul's death (Romans 6:23). To commit sin, even in ignorance, brings the *death penalty*, according to God's law. But Jesus Christ was sent to

suffer and die *in our stead*, to accept upon Himself the penalty, *the consequences* of our sins!

By accepting, in brokenhearted humility and thanksgiving, in deep and abiding repentance, the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ *in his place*, the apostle Paul was “crucified with Christ”; the law was satisfied—he was considered “dead” according to the law and the case closed—yet he still lived; but he lived by the faith of Christ!

God says, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him!” (Romans 5:8, 9).

But sinners, as Paul explained, might not *know* they are sinners!

Most are deceived (Revelation 12:9). They do not know that they are sinning! Their consciences remain relatively untroubled, but their lives are forfeit, their fate sealed, unless they *repent*!

Paul explains further: “For when the Gentiles [the nations], which have not the law, *do by nature* the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another...” (Romans 2:14, 15).

There are many nations and many religions which recognize various points of God’s spiritual law.

Even in Islam it is against the law to commit murder, to bear false witness, to steal or commit adultery. Under strict Islamic code, stern and swift punishment is meted out, not unlike the punishments for sin during the Mosaic period. Westerners may be revolted upon seeing a flyblown, grotesquely swollen, rotting hand hanging from a hook outside a bakery in an Arabic country. It is said there are very few Arabs who have no hands. Perhaps such stern “justice,” though seemingly barbaric to our Western minds, keeps such countries relatively crime-free.

It is said one may walk the darkened streets of Cairo, Egypt, with its teeming millions, and be safer than in the towns of the United States.

In such countries there are concepts of right and wrong, concepts of religion, of good and evil and of conscience. Paul shows their “thoughts” either accuse or excuse one another, quite apart from any action or input from God.

Their conscience may be perfectly clear as they practice their religion, and yet they may be sinning in God’s sight and under condemnation.

To most of us, our way of life is “right.” Very few people can stand the nagging voice of conscience for very long. We need to be comfortable with ourselves.

So, if we find a certain problem in our lives causing us conscience pangs, we usually find some new avenues of thought which can “excuse” us our problems, find a way to assuage that nagging conscience and quiet the pangs of doubt, find a way to coexist with this painful problem of life.

Even a completely foolish man justifies all his actions. “The way of a fool is *right* in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15). Such a person may play the games of quieting his own conscience, but God says he needs the input from outside sources, counsel” and knowledge from outside himself.

“There is a way which seemeth *right* unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Most of us do that which is “right” in our eyes. We need to live with our consciences, so, like the Gentile nations that live in complete ignorance of God’s laws, we either “accuse” ourselves or “excuse” ourselves. We accuse ourselves when our consciences give us trouble, grow irritated and disgusted with our lives and strive to find ways to change.

Those who come forward following a moving sermon are “good” people who are striving (at some cost to dignity and self-esteem) to change their lives. They mean it. They are certainly sincere. They have been convicted of wrongdoing in some form or another and have found their consciences have really been awakened to a need to change!

But have they been *convicted of sin*?

The answer is a resounding no—if that minister did not explain deeply and fully *what sin is* and if that person did not *understand* that he has been breaking the spiritual intent of the Ten Commandments of God and is now brokenheartedly

resolving *not to sin* any more!

They have been convicted of wrongdoing, not of *sin*, in its entirety. They have become sorrowful over sinning in some way but have not been awakened (as was Paul) to the whole picture of sin: what it is and what it is not, how to repent of it and how to avoid it in the future.

After such an experience, many people find new ways to “excuse” themselves where they were previously “accusing” themselves. Now they are able to pick up the pieces of their lives and go on again.

Too many tens of thousands of people have equated the *quieting of their consciences* with repentance! There is a *vast* difference!

One of the bloodiest books in the Bible is the book of Judges. During this period of time the people of Israel fought one war after another; there was every conceivable personal, social, national problem. The summation at the end of the book shows that all this was *caused* by people doing what their *consciences* told them was *right*!

By doing what seemed “right” to them, they suffered every conceivable evil effect: crime, famine, wars, an incredible amount of human suffering spanning a large portion of Israelitish history. No doubt many of them managed to assuage their consciences; they were “doing what was *right*” the way it appeared to them. But they were committing sins, the underlying cause for all the suffering they experienced!

The answer is that people most certainly can, and do, sin with a free conscience. Human conscience is no guide as to what constitutes sin! Sin is defined by God’s Ten Commandments, not by human sociocultural, ethnic, religious and philosophical views!

Your conscience may not bother you when you are living contrary to God’s laws in some important point, just as Paul said, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

He lived without the awareness of sin; his conscience didn’t bother him until that point in his life when God made him *aware* of his sins. Then he *repented*; he accepted Christ’s shed blood to atone for his sins and was *baptized* as a symbol of

the death, burial and resurrection, not only of Jesus Christ, but also of Paul himself.

That's why he said, "I died." So far as the law is concerned, the penalty had been exacted. The law was satisfied. Paul's life was forfeit, but Christ had given His life instead!

Millions of sincere, churchgoing, professing Christian people today are actually *living in sins* of which they are completely ignorant! Their consciences are free; they don't *know* they are sinning. But they are!

Are We Truly Free?

The Jews became angry with Jesus when He suggested that whoever commits sin becomes the "servant" of sin, is enslaved, and in bondage to his own appetites. They hotly retorted that they were never in bondage to anyone!

We like to believe we are truly in command of our own fate—the captain over our own lives and destinies—but we are not.

As creatures of habit, we become very susceptible to the physical appetites. Millions of us are "hooked" on various of the comparatively (!) harmless varieties of stimulants, depressants, and perception-altering substances that we imbibe on a daily basis. Whether coffee or alcohol, cigarettes or snuff, or just a desire for sweets, starches and sugars in our diet, most of us are slavishly obedient to our habits.

This is not a booklet on alcoholism—the subject is vast enough to deserve a whole book—but the incredible hold of alcohol on millions of human beings is one of the most massive physical, economic, social and spiritual problems of our time. Broken homes, shattered bodies and grotesquely borne injuries, job loss, absenteeism, child abuse, wife beating, murder—the monstrous toll of human suffering lying directly at the door of this slavish habit that holds millions captive is incalculable.

Strangely, there are countless "problem drinkers" who kid themselves they can quit any time they care to. They continually promise themselves they will cut down, taper off and bring their drinking under control.

Many people wrestle with this problem all their lives, consuming prodigious quantities of liquor, wine and/or beer—playing the game of pretending they are not *really* in slavish *subjection* to their addictive habit, pretending they are the masters of themselves—and, just to prove it now and then, giving it up for short periods of time.

They manage to live with their consciences, perhaps even justifying their groveling, servile obedience to their appetites and physical senses, by claiming biblical authority for what they do and kidding themselves they are keeping their habit “under control.” They tell themselves (and others) that they are only “moderate” drinkers.

I knew of an example where the man was consuming at least one quart of wine each day, from time to time laced with various cocktails at lunch and dinner, and glasses of champagne. However, when lecturing others on their drinking habits, which he darkly warned might be carried to excess in some cases, he would cite how he drank beer. He claimed he bought one of the tiny, six-ounce aluminum cans of Coors and in the most elaborate fashion explained how he would drink only *half* of that tiny can and promptly pour the remainder down the sink! This example he urged on his followers, always careful not to mention the fact that, while he might have been telling the truth about how much beer he had consumed on that day, he concealed his own total intake of alcohol.

Such are the games people play when they desperately strive to quiet their consciences to sin!

It is not the purpose of this booklet to explain all the scriptures on whether drinking in real moderation is or is not a sin. The point is that the example I cite came from a person who did believe drinking in moderation was allowed in the Bible, but who was rarely moderate in his own drinking. But he kept his conscience quiet.

It is difficult to convince the confirmed smoker that he is slavish, servile, groveling, *obedient* to a physical, lustful appetite of the flesh!

They make it seem so stylish, so universally accepted! Advertising a smelly, burning weed beside fresh, bubbling, sky-blue mountain streams, showing happy skiers puffing away on their favorite cheroot that is very likely called by the deceptive name “Fresh Air” or “Springtime” or other such appellative.

Yet it has been proved over and over again that smoking causes cancer. Not only is it a smelly, dirty habit that enslaves a person—makes a full-grown man get down on his knees and practically grovel in slavish obedience to his own appetites—but it is terribly dangerous to your health!

Millions of “Christian” people smoke, including ministers and priests. Are they sinning?

The Scriptures plainly say they are. While smoking is not mentioned by name, the principle of defiling one’s body, shortening your life and playing a form of “Russian roulette” with cancer, while becoming repugnant and offensive to nonsmokers, is clearly condemned by the Word of God.

But there are hundreds of more subtle forms of sin that are waging continual battle in the physical minds and bodies of professing Christian people!

Hatred, racism, anger, greed, avarice, cunning, lying, cheating, stealing—a mammoth number of unchristian attitudes—are harbored within the hearts of countless people who believe they are “Christian.” Some of the most glaring ironies can be found in Catholics and Protestants shooting, knifing, bludgeoning and bombing each other to bits in Northern Ireland. They both believe in Jesus, they say. They both believe in “turning the other cheek,” then. Really?

Too many Christian-professing people believe God’s law constitutes bondage! To them freedom is freedom from the law, not freedom *within* the law.

What is “*freedom*”?

Perhaps a loose definition, as it applies to our Western democracies, might read, “Freedom is the inviolable right to do whatever you want to do as proscribed by the law, so long as it does not interfere with that same right granted to others.” There are many definitions which could suffice as well, but within this extremely brief framework is a great principle.

Living in a free country is only possible by a system of government which can continue to guarantee those freedoms. Our government, divided into the executive, judiciary and legislative bodies, is constituted according to the founding documents of the United States, called the “Declaration of Independence,” the “Bill of Rights” and the “Constitution.”

The legislative body of government adds amendments to the Constitution from time to time, and such amendments become law.

When you break the law, you are subject to *a penalty*.

Without digressing into the tragedy of the overcrowded, understaffed, beleaguered system of criminal justice and the many abuses, such as “revolving-door” punishment, suffice it to say that, ideally, when you run a stop sign and are caught, you pay a fine. Steal and you pay a fine or go to jail. Murder and your life may be forfeit.

Thus, in many ways our modern system of law is not unlike the ancient system of law under Moses. Simply stated, if you violate the terms and conditions of those documents guaranteeing you your freedom, you may lose that freedom.

You are free, so long as you continue to obey the *laws of* the free land in which you live!

God’s laws are the same!

You are truly *free* only when you live *within* God’s laws, because you are then free from sin! *Sin enslaves* you, captures you, holds you captive and in bondage!

Notice what God’s Word says, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin [the breaking of God’s Ten Commandments] unto death [the wages of sin], or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

When you “obey” the lusts and physical senses of your body, and indulge in acts or habits which injure and pollute that body, you are becoming a *slave* to the passions and appetites of your flesh! You are most certainly not free! You are a slave!

When you break those slavish habits through the power of God’s Holy Spirit—when you repent of sins and call upon Jesus Christ to *forgive* those sins—you become free from sin!

Notice further, “But God be thanked, that ye were the *servants of sin*, but ye have *obeyed from the heart* that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free *from sin*, ye became the servants of righteousness!” (Romans

6:17, 18).

Most have it backwards!

Does Grace Give You Permission to Break the Law?

Millions of professing, churchgoing “Christian” people have believed they are under “grace” when they are forgiven, and, to them, that means they do not have to *obey God’s laws*! Paul responds, “What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

“God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ... Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not *serve* sin. For he that is *dead* is freed from sin ... Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him ... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof!*” (Romans 6:1- 12).

Grace is a quality of the character of God, not the “state” of being a Christian. The clever catch-phrase “law or grace” has confused countless persons into believing the two are at opposite extremes; that one is either “under the law” (made to appear “legalistic,” “repressive,” harsh, unreasonable, “Old Covenant,” “Jewish” and as if one is trying to work for salvation by earning it through repugnant physical deeds) or “under grace,” meaning not obliged to keep God’s law.

But such plays on words will not nullify the plain statements of Scripture! Look again at what Paul said! He asked, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

God forbid!” That means, clearly, that we are not to continue breaking the Ten Commandments, continue doing the *very things that took Christ’s life*, in order that we may bask in God’s forgiveness!

Once we have been *forgiven* of breaking the laws of God, we are then expected to quit doing that for which we needed forgiveness, to *quit sinning*, quit breaking the laws!

Paul said, Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Now the law no longer claims your life; you are out from under the penalties of the law—no longer under the threat of death, the punishment for having broken the law.

Because some might have misunderstood this statement, might have interpreted it to mean not being "under the law" meant free to ignore the law, free to *break* the law, free to go back into sin, *Paul* continued, "What then? Shall we *sin* [break God's Ten Commandments] because we are not 'under the law' but 'under grace'? God forbid!"

When we repent and are forgiven for having lived in our sins, we are expected to come *out* of those sins, to forsake them and to live a life of overcoming our sinful natures!

Notice, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved *by his life*!" (Romans 5:8-10).

If Christians understood this simple scripture, countless millions of them would know far more than they presently do about justification, about reconciliation to God and about salvation! They would know salvation is not a *completed, past action* by "receiving Christ," by confessing that He *is* the Christ, but that it is a present, day-to-day, ongoing process of living a godly, Christian life, with Jesus Christ as a living, acting, interceding High Priest in heaven—that a Christian must live a life of daily overcoming and *will be* saved through the *living* Christ!

Read those verses again and understand!

God shows how much He loves you and me by sending Christ to die for us "while we were yet sinners"! Read the "favorite verse" of many Christian-professing people again, John 3:16. God *loved* this world of sinning human beings enough to allow the greatest risk ever taken to occur: to allow His own Son, the "*Logos*" (John 1:1), the

"Spokesman" or Executive Member of the Godhead, to "empty Himself" (Philippians 2:5, 6), become a human being (Hebrews 2:14), with the *possibility* of

sinning, and *overcome* the temptations of the physical flesh (Hebrews 4:15, 16), living a *perfect* life (Hebrews 5:9) and then dying for the sins of all mankind!

What took Christ's life?

Our *sins*!

And what is sin? It is the breaking of God's Ten Commandments! (1 John 3:4). When *God forgives* you for past acts of disobedience to His laws, He obliterates your guilty *past* and He now expects you to remain free from sin, to quit sinning!

You are now said to be "justified" (past guilt removed!) and reconciled to God. Now you live under the merciful pardon, the *grace*, of God. Does that mean you are now free to go back into a life of disobedience to God, *breaking* the Ten Commandments?

Because you are under "grace," do you now have permission to break the law with impunity? You have seen the answer from the holy Word of God time and time again! Paul says, "*God forbid!*"

Your sins and mine cost Christ His life!

When you *accept* His shed blood in your stead, you are *repenting of sin*! Now you must *quit sinning*, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, and begin living a life of *overcoming* the physical pulls and tugs of human nature.

Repentance: the Starting Point

Jesus said, "*Repent* ye, and believe the Gospel!" John the Baptist shouted, "*Repent!*" Peter, on the day of Pentecost, said, "*Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 2:38). Later he *said*, "*Repent* ye therefore, and be *converted*, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

To repent means to be deeply sorry for having sinned. It means coming to a sincere, honest, deeply felt remorse over having broken God's laws—all of them—totally bereft of any feelings of self-pity; brokenhearted remorse over *what* we have done and what we have been; what we *are*!

Along with being deeply sorry to the point of real emotion expressed toward God for our past sins, it means fervent resolve that, with God's help, we will quit sinning!

Real repentance takes *knowledge* and deep *understanding* mixed with emotion!

It is not an embarrassed, selfish feeling of the "sorrow of the world" which is mixed with feelings of self-pity, but a full, sincere, completely honest understanding of how wrong we have been, how far afield from God's perfect will in our lives, what a *sinner* we have been!

The only way a person can really repent is to understand these major points:

First: What sin *is*; that it is the breaking of God's Ten Commandments in any of the broadest possible applications, as Jesus Christ defined by His life's example and by His teachings, notably the Sermon on the Mount.

Second: To understand that *we have been sinners*, that we were living arrogantly, pridefully, willfully *contrary* to those laws and the teachings of Christ:

Third: To understand that our own personal rejection of God and His Son Jesus Christ, the *way of life* They have willed for us, was what *took Christ's life*. We need to know He died for us *personally*!

Fourth: To see ourselves for the first time *as God sees us*: selfish, prideful, innately rebellious toward God and resisting the suggestion that we may have been wrong. We must come to be disgusted with the self, to say with Job, "I abhor myself," and with Paul, "O wretched man that I am!" and mean it!

Fifth: We must sincerely cry out for *God's forgiveness* that He will remove that burden of guilt we have been carrying.

Sixth: We must *be baptized* (Acts 2:38; Romans 6) as a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and as a symbol of the death and burial of the "old man," the person we *were* in the past.

Seventh: We must receive the "laying on of hands" by the direct representatives of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:17) for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and then know and have the *faith* to believe we *have been forgiven* and that God will now empower us to live a life of *daily overcoming*. We must understand we are no

longer “our own person,” but *belong to God* (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 7:23).

Millions of sincerely contrite persons have come forward to the emotional cries of an evangelist who did not understand these seven vital points!

They were sincere. They may have changed their lives in some important ways. Those changes could have been for the good. But if their sorrow was only the “sorrow of the world,” and if their *understanding* did not include the entire biblical truth about repentance, and if they were not willing to be baptized and receive God’s Holy Spirit *exactly as your Bible requires*, then they did not *really repent!*

Repentance—a Great Change

Peter said, “Repent ye therefore, and *be converted*, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

To be converted is to be *changed*.

Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And *be not conformed to this world*: but be ye transformed [completely changed, converted] by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1, 2).

When one repents, is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit of God, a *profound change* comes over one’s whole character and personality. Let’s notice one of the most outstanding biblical examples, that of Saul of Tarsus.

While a murderous mob stoned Stephen to death (Acts, seventh chapter), a young man named “Saul of Tarsus” stood by and watched with complete approval! “. . . And stoned him [Stephen]: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:58).

“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem . . .” (Acts 8:1).

Saul of Tarsus was a freeborn Roman citizen, but a Benjaminite, brought up in the strictest sect of the Pharisees, and educated under one of the most famous of all

teachers of rabbinical law, Gamaliel. Some scholars take his statement about “giving his voice” against Christians as implying he was a member of the Sanhedrin.

Saul was vehemently determined to stamp out the new “religion” based on the belief that Jesus had died for our sins, been buried and was now alive. He *hated* that concept, and he diligently sought to stamp it out!

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of *this way* [notice Christianity is called a *way of life!*], whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1, 2).

Saul was filled with hatred toward this rabble, these so-called “Christians,” as they would soon be called. He obtained official, written permission to arrest them and bring them in irons to Jerusalem for trial.

Later he was to admit, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were *put to death*, I gave my voice against them” (Acts 26:9, 10).

The Greek word used for “voice” in this case is *psephos*, which means “a *pebble* (as worn smooth by handling), i.e., by implication of use as a *counter*, or *ballot*; a *vote*, stone, voice.”

In dozens of other cases, the Greek for “voice” is *phone*, which means “to tone, or articulate; saying or language, noise, sound, or voice.”

The text should read, “I gave my vote against them!” This seems adequate proof that Paul had a “stone” to cast, as if in balloting or voting, and was therefore a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Paul, in his defense before Agrippa, began acknowledging his wrath against Christians, trying to show Agrippa that he, too, had entertained the same notions that drove the Jews and that Agrippa felt. He said, “And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and *compelled them to blaspheme*; and being exceedingly mad

against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:11).

Think what this means. Saul of Tarsus had a lot to repent of! He had not only stood by at Stephen’s death, and watched the brutal murder of a converted, Christlike human being; he had obtained documents (like warrants) from the priests, and had entered synagogues all over Syria and Palestine, and, finding those who dared to confess the name of Christ, had them arrested and dragged out on the spot.

He invariably voted against acquittal when they were questioned, and helped put many of these poor people to death! He participated directly in murder! Not only this, but he “compelled them to blaspheme,” and that means *torture*! By subjecting completely innocent people—men, women and the aged alike—to unbearable pain, he smirked and laughed as he caused them to curse the name of Jesus Christ before they died!

Read the entire ninth chapter of Acts. It is the story of God’s direct intervention in the life of Saul of Tarsus: how he was blinded and struck down, how he heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Read how Ananias was told in a vision to lay hands on Saul for the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit! “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight [for he had been supernaturally struck blind!], and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and *was baptized*’ (Acts 9:17, 18).

Saul was spiritually blind—and God struck him down and rendered him physically blind. When it seemed “scales” fell away from his eyes *physically*, it also seemed as if scales fell away from his eyes *spiritually*. Now he *saw* clearly. Now he *knew* Jesus Christ was *alive*! No one lives through such a staggering experience as Saul and remains in doubt!

Notice. “And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached *Christ* in the synagogues, that he is the *Son of God*!” (verses 19 and 20).

Now the name he had hated became the name he loved! Now the message that had driven him insane with anger—filled his heart with murder—became the message he loved the most, couldn't wait to preach to others!

"But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

"But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (Acts 9:21, 22).

What a change! What a complete transformation! Peter had preached, "Repent ye therefore, and *be converted!*" When Saul was struck down, all the hatred, the feelings of permanence, personal invincibility, ego, vanity, pride, hatred and self-assurance, were *destroyed!*

From a pompous, hate-filled little despot—like a dictator who reveled in his ability to casually take *human life* with as little remorse as killing a dog—Saul became a frightened little boy. A vast blackness enveloped his eyes—he couldn't see! An awesome, powerful, electrifying voice shouted at him, "SAUL! SAUL!" and he was *shocked* into humble obedience.

Gone were all the anger, pride and vanity.

They were replaced with awe, the fear of God and a shocking realization that these Christians who said Jesus had risen from the dead were *right!* It was *He, Jesus*, talking to Saul!

Instantly he became humble, contrite, deeply sorrowful over what he had done! While he was blind he had time to see, in his mind's eye, an endless parade of the screaming, pain-wracked faces of innocent, helpless human beings he had caused to blaspheme the name of Jesus and to be put to death!

He came to abhor himself, to hate what he had done! His flesh crawled with *revulsion* over the incredible, bestial, hateful brutality he had committed! He cried out to God with broken heart, with a feeling of being more worthless than the offscourings of a filthy garbage can, worth less than dung in the street, worth less than a rotting corpse of a dead dog. He came to detest what he had done, to hate what he had been, what he had become!

He knew he deserved to die!

Then, miraculously, he came to know the very Jesus Christ he had so hated, whose name he had contemptuously used in cursing and foul language and whose name he had caused those suffering Christians to *curse*; that very Jesus Christ, *in spite of how wretched* and how *worthless* and how unfit *and contemptible* Saul had become—that same Jesus Christ of Nazareth was willing to forgive even him, Saul!

That realization nearly broke Saul's heart. It overwhelmed him completely, filled him with an awesome realization of the depths of the limitless love and mercy of God, that Jesus Christ had, *in fact*, been the very Son of that Living God, that Jesus Christ had suffered and died on the stake for *Saul personally*.

So, through a direct intervention from God, a prideful, arrogant, hate-filled Jewish aristocrat, highly educated, vain, imperious, haughty and egomaniacal, was transformed into a contrite, sorrowful, repentant, humble man who could look on his own past, on his own *self*, with feelings of shame and revulsion.

Saul's name meant "destroyer." Later, as God began using Saul more and more powerfully, the brethren began referring to him as "Paul," which meant "worker," as a laborer for Jesus Christ, a worker for his Lord and Savior!

Paul was *converted*.

God used the apostle Paul to enrich the lives of countless millions—he caused him to produce 14 whole books of the Bible—and the life-long humility and self-effacing, nonpresumptuous, unassuming character of Paul shines forth from some of the richest literature of God's Word.

To Paul we owe the entire panorama of the growth of Christianity in the Gentile world, and through his writings we learn of the organization and government in the church—all about the spiritual meanings behind baptism, the real meaning of conversion and the fact that Paul *never forgot* how deeply he had needed God's forgiveness, never *forgot* he had been purged from his old sins!

Read Acts the 13th chapter for examples of Paul's powerful ministry.

At the conclusion of a stirring sermon, he said, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of

sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39).

From hating the sound of Jesus' name, Paul came to love Jesus Christ with all his heart and all his being. He gloried in preaching about that love and forgiveness he had experienced, showing the *reality* of what had happened to him and proclaiming in great power that Jesus Christ was alive, that He was the Son of God, a living High Priest in heaven to make daily intercession for us, and that He was to come again in the power of all the universe to establish His great Kingdom here on this earth!

Paul would say, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). He would say, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:1-4).

What a change!

There is no richer example of a complete conversion *of* a human being from a carnal-minded, sinning rebel to a loving, humble, sincere Christian minister in all of the Word of God.

Paul *repented*. He was *baptized*. He received the Holy Spirit of God, which *changed* his carnal nature.

He wrote, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:6-9).

Paul was transformed, *changed*, *converted*!

Begotten—Not Yet Born

When one is deeply repentant, is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit of God through the laying on of hands, that person is said to be “begotten” of God.

The Bible uses the analogy of human birth to help us humans understand the vast process of salvation. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Ye must be *born again*,” and explained that which is born of the flesh *is* flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit *is, becomes*, Spirit! (For a complete explanation of this vital subject, write for our free booklet *Was Jesus Born Again?*)

Millions of professing Christians have come to call the *experience* of “receiving Christ” as Savior being “born again.” Countless churchgoers believe they have *already been born again*, using the expression to convey their acceptance of Christ’s blood, their belief in Him.

But *only Jesus Christ* has been “born again”!

Notice the proof in the pages of your own Bible.

When Jesus was resurrected, He was *changed* from flesh to *Spirit*! He instantly became *very God* once more and joined His Father as a member of the *Family of God*. Christ had been the “*Logos*” (Greek, Spokesman), the Executive Member of the Godhead, who *did the creating* (John 1: 1-17).

He “counted not equality with God a thing to be grasped at,” but “emptied himself” and “took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. . .” (Philippians 2:6, 7, margin). He became human (Hebrews 2:14-17) and was the “only *begotten*” of the Father! (John 3:16; Hebrews 11:17).

When Jesus was resurrected, He was said to be “born” of God *by a miraculous change, by a resurrection from the dead*! “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the *first fruits*; afterward they that are Christ’s *at his coming*” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23).

Notice the amazing *opposites* to that which most Christians believe contained in this scripture. First, God has determined there is to be an *order* of entrance into His Kingdom. He says Christ has the preeminence; He is the firstfruits from the dead. Next, He says it is only *afterward* Christians may be inducted into His

Kingdom. When? Is it at the moment they die? No! “. . . Afterward, they that are Christ’s *at his coming*,” and not a moment before! In that moment, they too will be *changed*!

“And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [die], but *we shall all be changed*. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trump* [afterward, *at His coming*]: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed!” (1 Corinthians 15:49-52).

We will be *born of God*, just as Jesus said to Nicodemus—changed from human flesh into *divine Spirit*! Jesus is called the firstborn among many *brethren*”(Romans 8:29)..

But, when one is *converted*, he receives but an “earnest,” or “down payment,” of God’s Holy Spirit. We are still fleshly, physical, and there is still a carnal nature against which we must battle. We are “begotten” of God, but *not yet* born! (Read our complete booklet *Was Jesus Born Again?*, which explains thoroughly. It’s free of charge—write for it today.)

What people commonly refer to as a “born again experience” means they believe they became a Christian; believe they “received Christ” as their personal Savior. Perhaps they went forward at a revival or evangelistic campaign. Now, because of the confusion concerning “born again,” millions believe they have already been “born again” when the Bible says no! The Bible clearly shows *Christ* is the “firstborn from the dead” and it is *afterward-at his coming*—that others can be born of God like He was!

Presently we are said to be “begotten of God!”

The confusion stems from the single Greek word *gennao*, which, unlike our English terminology, connotes the entire birth process from begetting through birth. If there had been two different Greek words used in the Bible, such as “begotten” and “born,” then most would understand.

But remember, the Bible must interpret the Bible, and no man! We must not dare to put our ideas, our doctrines and beliefs, into the Bible; we must tremble before

it and seek to drink deeply of its meaning, getting God's truth out of the Bible, letting the Bible teach us!

The beautiful analogy of birth makes it clear!

Just as a human baby is *begotten* in the womb, and, *from that instant* another human being is gradually being developed and maturing toward the moment of final *birth*, so each converted Christian is *begotten* of God and begins developing *toward* the final moment, either at his death or at the time of *instant change* (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52) at the second coming of Jesus Christ!

Once Begotten of God, Can You Still Sin?

Is it possible for Christians to sin?

It is not *only possible*, but it is highly likely! When one is converted, he becomes a "babe in Christ," a bare *beginner* as a Christian. He is now begotten of God, has received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (Acts 19:6). His mind is infused with the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the Christian life is one of *overcoming* on a *daily* basis. It is the *overcomers* who are promised great rewards with Christ in His Kingdom (Revelation 2:26; 3:21). Overcoming is a *process*.

Paul told the Corinthian church, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2). They were newly begotten Christians just making a *start* in the right direction, but they were still *mostly carnal*.

Think of Paul's analogy. Babies must be fed, cuddled, loved, pampered and completely cared for. They are, of all newly born creatures, the most helpless. While most animal species are able to walk within moments after birth, and dolphins begin swimming alongside their mothers, surfacing for air only a second or two after birth, human babies are completely helpless. The mother just does *everything* for them. They are unable to even lift their little heads.

Newly begotten Christians are much like those helpless little babies.

They are now *converted*; they have repented and have God's Holy Spirit. But they are far from experienced, tried, tested, proven, mature Christians! Even as babies crawl before they walk, so newly begotten Christians "crawl," as it were, in learning about the Christian way of life.

And, just like a little toddler who sits down suddenly and falls dozens of times while learning to walk, a newly begotten Christian person makes many mistakes, slips up, forgets, has difficulty living the way he really wants to.

Like the bumper sticker says, "Christians aren't perfect—just forgiven!"

The apostle Paul knew he was slipping up from time to time, knew his own human nature still waged a war within him, causing him to commit various acts, think certain thoughts and come to possess certain attitudes that were not right in God's sight.

He said, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Romans 7:14-17).

Paul knew that even though he had deeply and bitterly *repented* of the atrocities he had committed, had been baptized and received the Holy Spirit of God, he was *not yet perfect*.

He understood the downward pulls of human nature. He recognized that his human appetites and passions were a "natural" result of the physical sensory systems, that the Creator God had made him of *flesh* and that he was endowed with the five *physical* senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and feeling, and that each of these physical senses cried for satisfaction, for fulfillment.

He called it a "law" that human nature would *resist* the determination in his mind to serve and obey God. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that *dwelleth in* me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to

the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord [it shall be done]" (Romans 7:18-25).

This is one of the most comforting, encouraging portions of Scripture!

Surely, when those of us in this final generation of man's governments on this earth, striving to overcome our physical weaknesses and temptations, can come to understand that a man such as Paul, who had *seen Christ*, could so openly admit his physical, human sins and weaknesses, it gives us courage and reassurance to know Jesus Christ can help us overcome just as He helped Paul!

Paul was *converted*, but he was still capable of slipping up and sinning!

Paul knew he needed Jesus Christ *not only* as His personal Savior from all *his past* guilt; he knew he needed Jesus Christ as his *daily* High Priest, sitting at the right hand of God, making daily intercession on Paul's behalf! "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all *points tempted* like as we are, yet *without sin*."

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need!" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Jesus Christ *understands* our human weaknesses. He was tempted in *every* area of human temptation, yet without sinning! When we give in to temptations, Jesus Christ wants us to get on our knees in a private place, pour out our hearts in sorrow and contrition to Him, ask God's forgiveness for our sins and weaknesses and then look to Him, in real *faith*, for the help we need to overcome those weaknesses, to *avoid* those sins in the future!

Paul says living the Christian life is a *fight*, a *struggle* against the carnal human nature within us!

Notice this!

"Don't you understand that those who run in a race are all running, but only one of them receives the prize? So, then, you need to run this 'race,' this Christian life, that you can win the prize. And every athlete who wants to be a champion is

temperate in his life. He does it for a corruptible crown, but we do it for a crown that is incorruptible. Therefore I run not uncertainly; I *fight*. Not as a shadow boxer, but I subdue my physical habits and appetites and bring my own self into subjection lest that by any means, even if I have preached temperate behavior to others, I myself should be cast aside at the last" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, paraphrased).

Paul used the analogy of the Greek and Roman games, the famous athletes who trained so rigorously for the decathlon, the pentathlon and other events. He said a Christian is fighting the same kind of battles, foregoing some of the temporary pleasures of this physical life, but not just for acclaim or a "corruptible crown," but for lasting, *eternal* reward!

Paul knew *salvation* is God's free, loving gift (Romans 6:23). But there comes a time when Jesus Christ is going to give varying degrees of *reward*, depending exactly upon the degree of overcoming. That reward is *beyond and above* salvation; it has to do with *responsibility*. Study Jesus' parables of the talents and the pounds (Matthew 25:15-28, Luke 19:13-25), and read Paul's exposition of varying degrees of reward in 1 Corinthians the third chapter. There Paul shows there are six types of materials subjected to fire: wood, hay and stubble, and gold, silver and precious stones. The analogy he draws concerns the "superstructure" one builds on the "foundation that is Christ" in the Christian life.

Christ is the symbol of *salvation*. He is the foundation. When one is "in Christ" and Jesus Christ is living His life *within* a Christian through the power of God's Spirit, then that person is in a "saved" condition. But beyond that condition, beyond the foundation which is Christ, there is the question of *reward*.

Paul's analogy shows *three* of the materials (wood, hay and stubble) *do not survive* the "fiery trials" of the daily battles in a Christian life. They are "burned up" and lost. Yet the person suffering such loss is said to ". . . suffer loss: but he himself shall be *saved*; yet so as by [or through] fire [type of trials and temptations]" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Paul shows there is a daily fight involved in the Christian life!

You've Got a Fight on Your Hands

It's not all over when you begin a Christian life; it's just beginning.

Though God's Word says, God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," and, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11, 12), this wonderful fact does not mean Christ has forgiven not only your guilty past, but your *whole future*.

Once a person has repented, is baptized and is converted by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, he's got a fight on his hands!

To a large extent, New Testament literature is a series of constant reminders of the manifold ways in which Satan and this world attempt to destroy the faith of Christian people. There are many, many warnings against false prophets, false Christs, false doctrines. The newly begotten Christian is warned repeatedly about "wolves in sheep's clothing" who will try to deceive them into following after some false doctrine or another.

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus contain many warnings about people "heaping to themselves teachers, having itching ears," wanting to *lessen* the responsibilities of Christian life, wanting, somehow, to compromise with sin and to let down their newfound standards.

So *doctrinal purity* and how to maintain it is a major struggle for Christians. Paul, Peter and John warned about false ministers, false doctrines, false brethren.

John said, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh ['is now coming in the flesh' is a better translation, meaning many deny the power of Jesus Christ to live His life over again within us]. This is a deceiver and an antichrist ... If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 7-10).

Jude warned, "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

What is this insidious doctrine: turning “grace into lasciviousness”?

God’s *grace* is the vast *love, mercy and forgiveness* He is willing to lavish upon a repentant sinner. Forgiveness for what? Forgiveness for *having sinned*, having broken God’s Ten Commandments as spiritually magnified!

And what is “lasciviousness”? It means “license” or permission to sin.” It means trying to convince newly begotten Christian people that God’s mercy, His love and pardon, extend to *future acts* of sin! It means cleverly deceiving Christian people to believe God’s mercy is so great that He will allow a person to live a life of sin, yet “forgive” each sinful act by some blanket pardon.

Millions of churchgoing professing “Christian” people have believed “in” Christ, have believed “on” Jesus Christ, but have not believed Christ! They have not believed what He said, what He taught, are not willing to follow His example. He said, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Believing “in” Jesus as personal Savior, millions of persons are not willing to obey Him!

But a truly repentant person is *through arguing* with Christ. A repentant person is so overwhelmed by God’s great mercy, by the realization of the great *price* Jesus Christ paid to purchase that person with His own suffering and blood, that he approaches the Bible with trembling and with awe. God says, “...To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). To such a person, it is unthinkable that one would attempt to compromise with God’s laws, attempt to rationalize away the requirement to *obey* God, to *obey* Jesus Christ and humbly follow His example, as well as believe “on” Him!

And such a spirit of willing obedience toward God soon plunges the newly begotten Christian into a terrible *struggle*.

First come former friends, loved ones, close family members and distant relatives. The Christian person is urged to *live at peace* with all men, not to be contentious and not to attempt to “cram his religion down the other man’s throat.” Yet nearly all newly converted persons make this same mistake!

By trying desperately to open the minds of their loved ones to the newfound truths they have discovered, by trying to *share* their deeply felt experience of

finding their Savior with people they love and respect, they find to their utter dismay they have completely alienated them!

Truths that shine so clearly to the newly converted person seem like incomprehensible Greek to their loved ones! As they try to reason, appeal, convince and convict others, they discover to their complete dismay that their very closest friends, sometimes family members, turn against them!

People who used to come to them for advice now want nothing further to do with them. Lodge, club and social contacts look at them as if they have completely lost their minds. They find themselves ostracized from their former friends and acquaintances, and, the more they attempt to explain and justify their newfound knowledge and spiritual experience, the more their friends scoff.

Didn't Jesus predict this would be so? He said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his stake [Greek, stauroo] and followeth after me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:34-38).

Jesus predicted the world would hate His true disciples. "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). Jesus said, "If they have hated me, they will hate you," and predicted, "In the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Peter recognized this and tried to help the people to whom he wrote to expect rejection from former friends and family. He said the key is to be "armed" with the very mind of Jesus Christ, who suffered horribly.

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Peter 4:1, 2).

The repentant, newly begotten Christian is in the midst of a complete change in

his life. He is changing his habits, associations, convictions and belief; a change in his very personality and *character* is taking place!

Suddenly his whole value system is turned upside down (or, better said, rightside up!). Those things which “*used* to seem important, physical, carnal, material values, now seem relatively unimportant. Those things which formerly didn’t interest him at all, knowledge, wisdom, truth, the Bible, are now vitally important.

That change is *visible*. It will not only change the dour expression into a happy, bubbling, zestful face; it will change your physical habits! You simply cannot participate in the same daily routines with the same friends, in the same society!

Notice what Peter said. “That he no longer should, live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” And have not most of the pursuits of our lives been dictated by the “lusts of men”? Entertainment, business, sports—so much of what we do is totally dedicated to the competitive motives of selfishness, lust, greed, avarice, cunning, vanity and violence. But a repentant, newly begotten Christian person now *sees through* the worldly vices in his surroundings and is repelled by them. It is as if he was peering through a keyhole, having only a stifflingly limited view of a darkened, interior, and, suddenly, someone flung open the door!,

Now he sees *clearly*.

And suddenly his whole value system changes!

That’s what repentance is all about: a total transformation, a complete change!

God says, Be not conformed to this world: but—be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Jesus Christ said, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel!”

He said, “Repent, or you shall all likewise perish!” Peter said, “Repent, and be *converted*!”

Why should you repent?

Because you have been sinning against God, because you have failed to see and

recognize the wonderful sacrifice made on your behalf because of those sins, because, though God does not need you, you need Him!

You should repent because there is no other way to have forgiveness of sins! Sin brings death (Romans 6:23) and is at the root and core of every problem in your life.

Terrible physical problems, mental anguish, loneliness, pain, suffering, financial problems, emotional and spiritual problems—they are all the result of various sins!

God says, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12).

Do you want forgiveness? Do you want to *know* you are completely clean and that your entire guilty past has been wiped away? Then let us help you! Get in touch with a representative of God’s work, a servant of Jesus Christ in your area, and ask him to sit down and talk with you about your life, about your desire to be forgiven and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, your day-by-day High Priest in heaven to intercede for you and your soon-coming King!

Call us at and obtain the number of the “closest minister and servant of Christ. And while you’re at it ask the secretary for our free booklet *How to Get Rid of Guilt*

Jesus Christ says all mankind will have to repent someday, but those who repent now can be saved from the terrible times of global troubles and wars just ahead! He said, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:36).

May God show you your deep personal need.

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