

# **One Heartbeat from Hell**

*Plus*

## ***11 Other Compelling Reasons to Become a Christian***

By Dr. David H. Stone

Copyright 2011 by Dr. David H. Stone

This material cannot be reprinted or copied onto electronic media without the expressed written permission of the author.

**Self-Published by**

Dr. David H. Stone

*who can be contacted via:*

<http://truthreallymatters.com>

[drdave@truthreallymatters.com](mailto:drdave@truthreallymatters.com)

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

**Other books by Dr. David H. Stone**

Available at the free ebook store on [truthreallymatters.com](http://truthreallymatters.com)

*How Should a Man Live? Christian Manhood in America Today*

*Evangelism 1-2-1: How to do it Biblically, Boldly, and Compassionately*

*Creation vs. Evolution? No Contest!*

## Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Preface	4
Introduction: Just who is <u>not</u> a Christian?	6
1. Because it's true!	21
2. One Heartbeat from Hell	33
3. Heaven Part 1: Heaven is more than a place.	43
4. Heaven Part 2: The Millennium, New Heaven, and New Earth	53
5. The 2 <sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ: What's in it for you?	64
6 & 7. It's right to love righteousness and it's wrong to love evil.	74
8. The cross and the resurrection: What "God is love" actually means	83
9. The indwelling Holy Spirit: Eternal life starts now.	98
10. Best friends for life, eternity	108
11. The alternatives are insane, illogical, and deliberate lies	115
12. You can choose right now.	123
Conclusion: What next?	126
Appendix: Author's Biographical Sketch	137

## Preface

Perhaps you received this book as a gift. If so, why do you suppose it was given to you? I guarantee that the reason was not to provoke an argument, nor to irritate you, nor to “shove religion down your throat.” Rather, it’s because someone cares about preserving your life, not just your life in this world, but in the infinitely longer eternity to come. If you have rejected the message of the Bible up to this point in your life, do you even know why? Do you understand just what it is that you are rejecting?

I talk to thousands of non-Christians about the issues of life & death, Heaven & Hell. It is extremely rare to find a skeptic who even understands the basic message of the Bible. If you see yourself as an educated man or woman, you should at least have some competent understanding of what you scoff at. And at least do your friend the honor of reading through the book so you can say something intelligent to him or her when they ask, “So what did you think about the book?”

Here are some truly unthinking responses that you should avoid:

“Well, you have your beliefs and I have mine.”

“Yeah, thanks. Very interesting.”

“The Bible is full of contradictions so why should I believe it?”

“Hey, I go to church. I’m a Christian, too! We just disagree about some of the details.”

“Well, all roads lead to Heaven” . . . or . . . “We all worship the same God.”

“Anyone who is educated knows that evolution proves that God doesn’t exist.”

Please, at least face up to the specific arguments and respond with specific objections. In my experience with multitudes of Bible-rejecters, whether atheist or Muslim or Roman Catholic (and many other religious types – see the next chapter), I have found that most objections are merely visceral and uninformed. Years can go by before I hear anything new. Look, this subject is the most vital of human existence – when you die, is that it? If this is all there is, what’s the point of it all? Is there a God? What does God expect of me? If I can live again what must I do to be saved? Why are there so many religions and if one of them is right, how can I figure it out?

Don’t you think the subject is worth a little study and thought? How much time have you invested in coursework, training, reading, etc., that hasn’t benefited you in any way you can remember? What if there were someone extremely credible who owns the exclusive license on the technology to resurrect your dead body? I’ll give you the answer to the last question now. The Lord Jesus Christ not only invented that technology, He loves you enough to offer it to you as a free gift. Come on, how about checking it out? If you’re sane, you will invest a bit of effort.

Now, if you bought this book on your own (before it became a free ebook), then you must already be thinking about these issues. Congratulations! But don’t dawdle! You have a chance, if you’re willing to recognize truth when you see it. Just don’t quit before you make a completely informed decision. Do

recognize this: There is no neutral ground. There are presently two teams in this world engaged in a battle to the death. Have you noticed that this world is messed up? Whose fault is it? Those that practice Good in this world are few, while Evil abounds. Jesus Christ – Judge, Lawgiver, and Savior, said:

*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. Luke 11:23*

You will have to decide just whom to follow, the Lord Jesus Christ or Satan. You may insist that you are merely going your own way. Yep, that's what Lucifer thought. He didn't want God telling him what to do. He wanted to sit on the throne himself, making up his own rules and doing his own thing. How is that working out for humanity, while you follow quite religiously in Satan's footsteps? The Lake of Fire awaits that rebel, along with all who tread the same path. Choose wisely.

God is gracious to provide for you many motivations to come to know Him. That's what this book is about. I want to try to reach you with the whole spectrum of Biblical motivations. If just one motivation works on you, then you can pass from lost to found, from death to life, from pointless to purposeful, and from eternal misery to eternal, rational, constructive, creative joy. I write this book to beg you to forsake your willful sins, trust the loving Savior, and join the family of God. You will live forever as a child of God almighty, enjoying the inheritance that He promises to all of His children, which includes a gloriously restored Earth and the riches of a universe that are unimaginable at present . . . and I can imagine a lot!

So dig in. Don't be shy about corresponding with me, even while you're in the midst of reading. You can find me through the paths below:

*Dr. Dave*

<http://truthreallymatters.com>  
[drdave@truthreallymatters.com](mailto:drdave@truthreallymatters.com)

## Introduction

### *Just who is not a Christian?*

Mod (Modern Professing Christian): “Your message is offensive. Jesus preached love and tolerance. He was all about us loving each other. Who are you to say whether someone is a Christian? Don’t you even know that Jesus said, ‘Judge not’?”

DD (Dr. Dave): “How do you know anything at all about Jesus Christ? What are your sources? Or do you just make it up?”

Mod: “I’ve got the same Bible you have. I’m talking about the Sermon on the Mount, for example.”

DD: “Great. So you and I can agree that the Bible is our authority on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.”

Mod: “Hmmm . . . well . . . yeah, sure!”

DD: “Let’s look at the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 7, where Jesus preached that we should judge.”

Mod: “No, no, he said Judge not.”

DD: “See the context here? He’s teaching that we should avoid judging hypocritically, but that we should indeed help our brother in error, judging him, as long as we’re not hypocritically guilty of the same or worse. His main point is that we should judge to help correct someone in error.”

Mod: “I never noticed the context before, but that must be an isolated instance.”

DD: “On the contrary, in the same chapter we see Jesus teaching us to identify unholy rebels against God’s word, whom He calls ‘dogs’ and ‘swine.’ Then He goes on to warn us to identify and call out false teachers, and even to recognize that many who profess Christ don’t actually know Him. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us to judge not simply according to appearance, but to judge righteously. And the apostle Paul writes that if we are spiritual we are qualified to judge all things.”

Mod: “Well, of course there are mistakes in the Bible and different interpretations.”

DD: “So you don’t trust the Bible as God’s word! But Jesus says that His words will judge you and that if you reject His words in Scripture you have proven to be part of the Devil’s family. Most importantly for you, Jesus warned repeatedly of Hell for those who reject Him. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Like you. The primary expression of God’s love to us is through the cross. If you fail to humble yourself, repent, and follow Christ – and that’s what Jesus taught – then you have missed everything and will land in Hell. I’m really worried about you.”

Mod: “You see, that’s what I’m talking about. That’s really offensive!”

If you find yourself described in the latter part of this chapter, you may be tempted to anger. I ask you to resist yielding – after all, anger is sin – and rather determine to be thoughtful. I won’t be exhaustive on any of the subtopics addressed below, but will give you a starting point to examine yourself, especially if you fall into the category of “religious but lost,” which is the largest demographic in America today.

Before we tackle the list of “who is not a Christian,” we’ll start with the basics of how to become a Christian, along with the types of evidence that Scripture associates with a true conversion. You (like me and everyone else on the planet) are a sinner in need of the one and only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The most important issue in your life is your standing with God. Face it: Life is full of problems, but none compare with death. Whatever you accomplish in life, death takes it away. Then you face God and will be judged for everything you have done, for every word you have said, and for every thought. Imagine a microchip attached to your brain that records EVERYTHING! Scary, isn’t it? Especially because God is holy, just, and righteous . . . He will not let sin dwell in His presence. You and I have sinned against God thousands of times. Ever lied? Liars will be cast into Hell. Ever committed adultery or even thought about it? Pornography counts, too. Adulterers – even if only in the mind – will be judged. Have you insulted someone or gotten angry without just cause? God judges you guilty of murder in your heart and unworthy of Heaven. (See Matthew 5:20-28.)

How many sins does it take to earn citizenship in Hell? One is quite sufficient. (James 2:10) I’m sure you’ve noticed that this world is messed up. Whose fault is it? Yours, mine, and everyone on the planet. We are all rebels, defying God every time we sin and caring far more about our selfish selves than anyone around us. You have sinned countless thousands of times and couldn’t even remember most of your transgressions if you tried.

Is there a way out? Your greatest need in life is forgiveness from God. Here is some good news. God so loved the world that He was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago. Jesus lived 33 years and never sinned. He made people angry by preaching repentance (“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!”) and angrier yet by proclaiming that He is the only way to find God. Jesus was crucified on a cruel cross – He walked into Jerusalem knowing what He must do – to pay the punishment for your sins. He was innocent, but loves you that much! Three days later He rose from the dead. Nobody else ever did that! Do you want to live again? Jesus, God Himself, the Author of life, can give you everlasting life. What is your part? Confess your sins to God and forsake them (Repent!). Then trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You will be born again, a new creation, with a home in Heaven. God will give you the strength to live right, follow Him, and get rid of the sins that you have been addicted to.

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Indeed, even a child can understand and respond in simple humility and faith. If you do repent and trust in Christ, God will *regenerate* you – bring your spirit to life, give you new attitudes, help you to understand the differences between right and wrong at levels you never comprehended before, give you hope for the future, and motivate you to serve the Lord and reach out to others for the rest of your life.

How can you know that you have repented, trusted Christ, and been born again? There are many Scriptural evidences for such assurance. Here is a sampling:

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17*

The differences before and after are startling. You begin to agree with God about righteousness and wickedness. Your music changes from sensual to godly. Your language changes from foul to encouraging. What you let into your eyes changes. Your attitude toward others changes. You see sin and selfishness as stupid and a life of service to God and to others as the only rational choice.

*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:16-18*

From the beginning of your new life and increasingly so as the weeks press on, you sense a communion between your spirit and the Holy Spirit, a fellowship that was simply inconceivable before. You have an assured hope that all of God's promises, including your eternal inheritance, are settled. You also begin to experience what it is like to go against the world's flow for the first time. If you're in a Muslim or Communist or heavily Roman Catholic country, the friction will turn into suffering. In a free America, you'll still get some grief, but likely not as severe.

*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:12-13*

A guarantee that you weren't looking for: If you follow Jesus Christ you *shall suffer persecution*. You don't have to look for it. It will find you. Also, note the prophetic promise, relating to the last of the last days – where you have the privilege to live in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The world is getting more and more evil, with religious and political charlatans on the rise. Take advantage of this privilege by being one of the few who see things for what they are.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 5:6-10*

Marks of the Christian are now evident in your life. You thirst for righteousness. You are gentle, forgiving, and merciful to others. Your mind and heart strive for purity because you agree with God about what is right and what is vile. You work to help men find peace with God and with each other according to God's principles. When persecution comes, you find comfort because the Lord knows all about it, and He is there to comfort you.

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Matthew 7:13-14*



There are two roads. You have just changed from the deadly path to the one that is headed for eternal life in a resurrected body, dwelling in a New Heaven and a New Earth. Your new road is narrow, accessed only by your saving faith in Jesus Christ, which includes such a change of mind that you learn to walk the way He did when He trod the Earth's soil. Note that not many want to change roads and so few find the Way.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10*

Your part is faith – believing God's word about your need for the Savior and agreeing that God's way is the right way and the only way. God's part is grace – unmerited favor. God's grace here is the gift of salvation. You didn't earn it. What could you possibly bribe God with? You were a condemned criminal thousands of times over. What does the Judge require? That you humble yourself, confess your sins, repent, and trust this Judge – Jesus – to be your Savior and deliver you from the certain judgment you earned. Don't fail to appreciate what a great deal this is!! You change the attitudes of your heart and God forgives you, makes you His child, and grants you an everlasting inheritance as fellow-heir with the incarnate Son of God, God the Son, Jesus Christ. Finally, in that last verse above, what is the purpose of your new life in Christ? Good works! Think right, speak right, do right, be a blessing to others, love the Lord with all your heart, and point others to the Savior.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Titus 2:11-14*

God's grace teaches us – it is instructive. The new believer sees ungodliness and lusts as destructive and undesirable. He embraces Biblical principles for his day-to-day life, and is amazed that he was so blind before. He looks forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will straighten up this mess we have made of the world that He gave us. Note especially in that last verse above that when we depart from iniquity, a life of moral lawlessness, we work to purify ourselves because we truly want to emulate our Savior. We *agree* with Him about how to live. Indeed, we are *zealous* to do so.

*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. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. 1 John 2:3-5*

True Christians show the evidence of being obedient to the Lord's commands in Scripture. These include such basic principles as honesty in business, loving your wife and being faithful to her, avoiding such poisons as alcohol and drugs, encouraging other Christians, and helping the lost to find the Savior for themselves. There are multitudes of people who profess to be Christians, who sing "Praise Jesus!"

every Sunday, but who demonstrate their rebellion and unbelief every day of their lives. You can't fool God, of course, but you really can't fool others around you, either. Are you a Christian? Your enthusiastic obedience will prove it.

*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? James 2:14-20*

Genuine, *saving* faith produces a changed life, demonstrated by good works. A professed faith that doesn't show it is simply hypocrisy and is dead as a doornail. Men will see the good works of a true believer, which on the outside reflect the changed heart within.

*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:13-18*

A clear mark of a Christian is his care for other believers. I meet people who claim to be Christians, but have no interest in finding a church, a fellowship of believers, so that they can both extend and receive encouragement. God's plan for the New Testament age is for His children to band together in a local church for mutual fellowship, teaching, and spiritual growth. "Christians" disinterested in this plan are not Christians at all. The first verse above warns the believer to expect trouble from the world. Those who love wickedness are quickly offended at those who abhor it.

*Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. Mark 1:16-18*

Another mark of a true believer is his willingness and eagerness to follow the Lord, particularly in the "Great Commission," the mission given to us to reach out to others and to share the Gospel with them. Those multitudes of churchgoers who have no care for the salvation of others are obviously not followers of Jesus Christ. If you have been saved from a justly deserved Hell, promised an assured inheritance in the New Heaven and New Earth, and love to walk with the Lord each day, it is simply inconceivable that you would not want to share God's grace with others.

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Matthew 28:18-20*

This Great Commission was delivered five times in the forty days between Christ's resurrection and His bodily ascension. It was the MAIN message on His heart to motivate the hearts of His disciples. It is the principal work of every believer throughout history. If any generation fails, it's all over. Thank God that the last generation was faithful so that the Gospel is still preached today. If you become a Christian, you will be part of this great work.

*He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. John 8:47*

*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 1 John 5:10*

Lots of people like to pick and choose. They like part of what the Bible teaches, but can't stomach other parts. These two verses represent tests of genuine faith. Picking and choosing is no different from calling God a liar. You can't believe in the God of the Bible unless you believe His word – the Bible.

.....

That has been a quick survey of how to become a Christian and how life changes when you pass from spiritual death to eternal life. When you repent, you leave the stupid behavior behind. When you believe in Jesus, that changes everything. Life is as different as if you have been living in darkness, but now there is light everywhere.

**So exactly who is NOT a Christian?** Namely, who are the lost, walking the broad road to destruction, headed for Hell, already condemned for the thousands of willful sins that weave the pattern of their lives? Clearly, anyone who doesn't meet the criteria above qualifies. Yet it is apparent that many see themselves as Christians, and yet are clearly not, based on the Biblical principles above. Let's start with some easy cases before we move on to the more subtle.

**Atheists and agnostics are lost.** Someone who denies the very existence of God is called a fool in God's word. To deny that this incredible creation came into existence without a Creator is abominably foolish, regardless of whatever academic degrees may be attached to your name. In Chapter 1 we deal specifically with compelling arguments to help an atheist (if he has enough curiosity to care about finding the truth) to overcome his blind and insane unbelief.

Why exactly is the atheist lost, though? He lives a life serving self, doing whatever he wants, at the expense of others and in defiance of his Maker, who holds the very atoms of his body together while he

perpetrates his vile deeds. He is unrepentant, determined to be the god of his own life, and will die in his sins. Judgment is assured. He wants to avoid God in this life, and so God will cast him for eternity out of the presence of the Lord and out of the presence of all of those who have yearned for God's fellowship. He will ultimately get his wish – to focus wholly on self, he will be left utterly alone in a place called Hell. He will not be able to enjoy the benefits of God's creation at all – not in the possession of a single atom of it or in fellowship with any other creature.

**Muslims are lost.** In one sense, Muslims are representative of all the religions of the world. They construct a system of duties, rituals, and moral standards that must be met in order to *earn* salvation. Salvation through Jesus Christ is entirely different, although most seem to miss the point or insist that the difference is small or subtle. Biblical salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned. God's demand on us is a matter of the mind and heart. Repentance and faith are willful changes of mind that *produce* a subsequent change of actions that carry through life.

The religions of the world, whether Muslim or Roman Catholic or Mormon, etc., demand performance over time which is then weighed in the balances to determine who might be worthy of salvation. In fact, no one is worthy of eternity with a perfect God in a perfect Heaven. Only Jesus Christ lived the perfect sinless life. The true believer has repented and trusted Him, and seeks to follow Him, albeit quite imperfectly through the rest of life. As a Christian myself for over 40 years, I confess that I have sinned many times *since* changing roads. Nevertheless, the pattern of my life has changed drastically – by the grace of God and by His ever-present help since I became part of His family. What sins I used to leap into I now abhor. When I have sinned anyway, my heart is gripped with conviction. If I persist in rebellion as a child of God, the Lord promises to chastise me, perhaps by touching my health, my prosperity, or other circumstances. But I cannot get kicked out of the family due to poor performance. Otherwise, one sin, one failure to love God with all my heart or my neighbor as myself, and I would be toast once again. "Eternal" life would last only minutes at best. Yet the Bible assures me that once I was born again, I have eternal life as a present possession (John 3:16, 1 John 5:13). How long is eternal?

Islam, like all the other works-based religions, offers no assurance. Despite a lifetime of prayers, alms, and the obligatory pilgrimage, Allah may choose to damn any given Muslim or save any other. Assurance is non-existent. On the other hand, works-based religions produce considerable arrogance. Those who work hard at their religion tend to wallow in self-righteousness. Jesus made it clear to the religious zealots of His day:

*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Luke 5:32*

The self-righteous, hoping to earn their way to paradise, spurn God's offer of salvation through the sacrificial death and the shed blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ. They have no hope of forgiveness. No list of good deeds can cancel out crimes against man and sins against God. Justice and judgment are assured.

Scripture speaks much of examining the “fruit” produced by an individual’s life. See, for example, Jeremiah 17:5-10, Luke 3:7-14, Matthew 7:15-23, and John 15:1-6 for just a sampling. Islam has, from its inception, produced the following fruit: wars, oppression, the slavery of women, the persecution of Jews and Christians, and a culture of anger and retribution. I need not amplify. If this isn’t already clear to you, then you must be willfully blind to the facts.

Let me be clear. I love Muslim people. I have gone out of my way to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them. They are lost in their sins, just like I was when I was a young man. They have no assured hope, even within their own system. God offers them forgiveness, love, and fellowship. If they come to Christ, they become my own brothers. My personal experience, however, is that the concern and compassion flow only one way when I have the opportunity to discuss the issues of eternity with an individual Muslim. Yes, Muslims on occasion do repent from their false religion and trust Christ. But it’s rare.

**Hindus and New Agers and Buddhists and Mormons are lost.** The details are different among religions, but the common overriding theme is self-righteousness, striving to earn whatever salvation is imagined. In the case of Buddhists salvation may be to lose all fleshly desire and to merge one’s consciousness with the universe . . . whatever that really means. A Hindu or New Ager may aspire to become an Ascended Master or a god among the millions of previously enlightened acolytes through the ages. Mormonism is particularly horrific in that the devotee strives to become god over his own planet, just like he believes that the god over this planet was once a man somewhere else in the universe: “As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.” If God actually is as the Bible describes . . . and He is . . . it is difficult to imagine a more despicable blasphemy.

In all such religions, it’s “all about me.” The focus is intensely on self and selfish ambition. Much of the abject poverty and disease in India for centuries derives from the attention given to one’s spiritual journey while children may be starving ten feet away in the street. American New Agers tap into the occult, looking for “secrets” that may enable them to change reality by meditation, incantation, and force of will. Imagine if millions of people were successful in their quest. Millions of powerful little gods would walk the Earth, bending reality and the lives of others to their enlightened wills. When two of these little gods come into conflict, you had better duck before the lightning bolts start to fly. What about morals? Morals are for the little people, not for gods. Where do such ambitious ideas come from? Check out Lucifer’s ambitions in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

**Jews who reject the Messiah are lost.** The toughest sermon ever recorded is the extemporaneous verbal whipping administered by Jesus in Matthew 23. Who was on the receiving end? The most fervent religious crowd on the planet, the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, were also the most self-righteous, despising the offer of the Messiah promised to them for millennia past. Individual Jews have become followers of Jesus Christ – Christians – but the majority continue to reject the grace offered to them through the shed blood of the perfect Lamb of God, a symbol at the center of their religious system since the first Passover was celebrated in Egyptian captivity 2,500 years ago. When Christ died on the cross, the temple veil was rent in twain, ending the religious priesthood, declaring direct access

between the penitent sinner and His Savior. Jesus warned the Jews that their temple would be destroyed. The New Testament book written to the Hebrews explains (especially in chapters 9 and 10) that if the Jews despise Christ's sacrificial death, they have nowhere else to go to atone for their sins.

Most Jews around the world today are functional atheists. The most devout Jews still despise the Messiah and, like all other false religions, trust their own vaunted self-righteousness for salvation. During the 7-year Tribulation, the time of "Jacob's trouble" and unimaginable devastation for the entire lost world, many of the Jews will finally repent and trust the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. I regularly make the attempt to talk to devout Jews. They despise Christians so much that it is almost impossible to even start a conversation. Yet, like Peter, Paul, and multitudes of Jewish individuals since, any given Jew can repent and trust Christ . . . that is His only path for reconciliation with God (John 14:6).

**Roman Catholics are lost.** In recent years many Roman Catholics have been trained to speak with language that sounds "evangelical." Some may say that they have "accepted Jesus into their hearts." Many profess that all of the diverse denominations are populated by real Christians, but differ in relatively unimportant doctrines. Many "evangelical Christians" agree. Nevertheless, the RC Church has not changed in any of its core beliefs for centuries.

Here is what your serious Roman Catholic believes, regardless of what he may say at times: He believes he became a Christian when sprinkled ("baptized") as a baby. He believes that the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Mass, provide grace that contributes to salvation. He hopes that he is good enough to merit Heaven, although he may have to spend centuries in Purgatory to pay for many of his sins. He bows to the authority of his pope, cardinals, bishops, and priests. He is relatively confident, but has no assurance of salvation.

In short, his salvation is based on practice of religious duties, performance of "good works" (although most don't do any particular "work" for the Lord at all), and avoidance of too many big sins. His list of religious details is different from that of the Muslim or Mormon, but the philosophy is the same: self-righteousness earns salvation. Thus the cross of Christ is spurned . . . in fact, it is insulted: Just as Jesus was about to "give up the ghost" on the cross, He cried, "It is finished." Scripture teaches repeatedly (Hebrews chapters 9 and 10, for example) that Christ died *once* for the sins of the world. The RC Mass purports to repeat the sacrifice countless thousands of times, denying that once was sufficient. Thus the Roman Catholic's alleged faith in Christ is no faith at all.

**Jehovah's Witnesses, "Oneness" Pentecostals, Apostolic Lutherans, and other cult members are lost.**

The first two groups above deny the deity of Jesus Christ. The third – to be distinguished from mainstream Lutherans – doesn't share this heresy, but shares the dominant characteristic of all cults: Salvation is to be found *only* in their membership. All share a self-righteous, *works-based* philosophy of salvation. Many have peculiarities: JWs believe in "soul-sleep," that when anyone dies his soul rests in an unconscious state until the final resurrection and judgment. Oneness Pentecostals, often call "United Pentecostals," believe that if you are a true believer you will demonstrate it by speaking

incomprehensible gibberish at times – a perversion of the miracle of speaking foreign languages (with no previous study) that occurred rarely in the 1<sup>st</sup> century under the apostles' leadership. No "tongues" means no salvation to this crowd. Apostolic Lutherans are split into several camps that share essentially all of the same doctrines. But each camp is certain that only its camp guarantees salvation – all of the other Apostolic Lutheran groups are heretics. (I agree with them *all* on that last point.)

A detailed study of the cults is both fascinating and horrifying, but the huge and tragic issue is the lost condition of all those who deny the simplicity of the Gospel. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the churches in Galatia, rebuked those among them who worked to pervert the Gospel:

*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:6-12*

Could Scripture be clearer? The stakes are infinite and eternal. You and I and every other human being in history have rebelled willfully and wickedly against a perfect and holy God. God, Who is loving and merciful in the face of our rebellion, offers pardon, paying for it Himself on a cruel cross, and merely asks for a change of heart and mind, a turn from rebellion, and a trust in Him Who dwells in eternity . . . Someone indeed worthy of trust. Yet we invent religion on top of religion, with ever changing rules, but always denying God's simple revelation: salvation is not to be earned by us, but is offered freely as a gift. How utterly foolish to imagine that keeping a few laws, in the face of many that we break, will earn an eternal salvation. Paul goes on . . .

*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Galatians 2:16*

*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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. Galatians 2:20-21*

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith. Galatians 3:10-11*

It is simply unbelievable, by merely human reasoning, that multitudes believe the Bible teaches that to be saved one must live a good enough life. The entire message of the Bible is that none of us qualify, by our willful rebellion, and so we need the one and only Savior. How many are righteous in God's sight?

*As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Romans 3:10-12*

*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; Romans 3:23-25*

Sin is the willful transgression of the law (1 John 3:4) and the only remedy, the only way to be justified – made right in God's sight – is through the blood of Jesus Christ. So what about all those laws? Yes, they make practical sense. Life is better, safer, and more fulfilling if you are honest, faithful, respectful, etc. But it's deeper than that. Scripture is clear about the ultimate purpose of God's laws:

*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:24-26*

The law teaches us that we are lawbreakers. Once we see how hopeless our position is, we can humble ourselves, come to Christ by faith, receive complete forgiveness, and join the family of God.

### **Multitudes of Protestants – Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians – are lost.**

I have talked to many Protestants who believe, like Roman Catholics, that they have been Christians all of their lives. After all, they were baptized as babies, weren't they? Many attend church faithfully every week. Doesn't that prove they are Christians? They often scoff at the idea of being "one of those born again Christians." When challenged that Jesus Christ said that you must be born again or you cannot inherit the kingdom of God (John 3), they aren't impressed. Religious, but lost.

Why don't they read their Bibles and find out just what God requires from sinners in order to be saved? Most American churchgoers are completely Bible-illiterate. Their "ministers" stroke their egos and tickle their ears. The weekly Sunday show is pleasant and soothing. The "sheep" (not knowing they are termed "goats" in Scripture) have done their duty by showing up and putting a few bucks in the offering. God should be grateful, they figure. How horrifying it will be when they pass from life to death and realize they have bought into lies, deception, and a self-obsessed religion.

### **Multitudes in seeker-sensitive churches, mega-churches, and emergent churches are lost.**



The most successful of modern churches deliberately work to please the crowds. Give them what they want and they will keep coming back. Feature the hottest band in town. Put your best-looking women in the “worship team.” The preacher is your buddy. Hey, he’s wearing sandals and preaches from a stool. Don’t worry, he’ll only preach love. He’ll NEVER use words like sin, judgment, and Hell. He wants to invite you into a relationship with Jesus, who is supposedly begging you to be His friend.

So what’s the big deal? If you don’t know you’re a sinner and that repentance is required by God, then you cannot be saved. At these churches you will never even accidentally run into enough truth to challenge you in your lost condition. But you say that you know you’re saved even though the church culture is a bit soft. Nope. If you are content in that church, there is no Holy Spirit in the residence of your heart. Your spirit should be under conviction enough to leave immediately. No conviction, no Holy Spirit, no salvation.

### **Multitudes of Evangelicals and fundamental Baptists are lost.**

Lots of folks believe the “right doctrine.” You may understand salvation by faith. You may believe that the Bible is the word of God and even claim to take it seriously. You embrace core truths such as the trinity, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the Second Coming of Christ. But you are as cold as an iceberg. You have no burden for lost souls. The world is going to Hell around you and you are more interested in office politics or Monday night football or how your yard looks compared to your neighbor’s. Your prayer life is pitiful. You don’t know the burdens on the hearts of the people who sit with you in church and you don’t really care. In fact, you don’t know the Christians around you hardly at all. “Hi, good to see you. How’s it going?” That’s about the extent of the fellowship you desire.

Have you really been born again? That should have changed everything! What are you doing for the Lord? He’s coming back. Are you preparing for the Judgment Seat of Christ? I often ask professing Christians, “So what are you doing for the Lord?” The most common answer is, “I go to church.” Wrong. You do that for yourself. If I asked the college student what he was doing to contribute to society, he might just as well answer, “I’m going to college.” Why is he in college? For himself, of course, so he can learn and prepare for a career. His college life is all about him, not anybody else. The fellowship of believers in a local church is for mutual encouragement, prayer, learning, training, and preparation for doing the Great Commission in the community. All of that is for the edifying of the believers. You’re not doing anything for the Lord until you get *out there* and make use of the training. Well, there is not much of that going on.

### **If you’re a committed Calvinist, then you are lost.**

Why am I going to camp a little longer on this point than on others? Because the doctrines of John Calvin / Augustine / Martin Luther / John Gill / Arthur Pink / John MacArthur / John Piper and others have infested multitudes of churches and drawn many from the simple saving Gospel of repentance from sins and faith in Jesus Christ. Calvinism produces a deceitful imitation of Christianity that sends many to Hell.

What do Calvinists believe? (I recommend the book *What Love is This?* by Dave Hunt for an extensive analysis.) Calvinists create a warped perspective of a few passages of Scripture to argue that God has ordained just a small percentage of people, the “elect,” from eternity past, to be saved. The rest are damned with no, zero, zilch, nada opportunity to repent and trust Christ. The “elect” have already been chosen and are zapped with “irresistible grace” so that they believe the Gospel. God’s “sovereign will” is invoked for the entirely arbitrary nature of who gets to be “elect.” Neither the “elect” nor the inevitably damned have even the *ability* to repent and believe on their own. That’s what their doctrine of “total depravity” means . . . not just sinful wickedness, but total inability, with only irresistible grace available to provoke the “elect” to salvation.

Now, it is possible to become a truly born again Christian and then later get your thinking corrupted, and start to buy into Calvinist doctrines. Sadly. Much damage follows which hinders the service of Christians who are led astray. But those that are committed to these doctrines . . . especially those who have been taught from the beginning that this is what Christianity is all about . . . will never see their need to *willfully* turn from sins and depend on the cross of Christ. Those who teach these doctrines through a lifetime of ministry are in deep trouble. The “dupers” cannot claim to be “duped.” (See 2 Peter 2:1-3 and the book of Jude.)

Libraries of books have been written to debate the Calvinist vs. Biblical positions. But it’s not that hard to figure out on your own. A straightforward reading of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, makes clear man’s personal and willful responsibility, God’s pleas to repent and His offer of forgiveness, and man’s deliberate choice to believe or not. Some compromising Calvinists, the “moderate” variety, claim to believe in Unconditional Election AND man’s personal responsibility to repent and believe. They call this contradiction a “mystery.” No. A mystery is something that we don’t know. It is simply a contradiction to claim that “election” and “inability” are true and at the same time claim that a man is completely responsible. Not even human judges and juries would hold a man responsible for what he did not and cannot do.

However, in this short space, I’ll speak to your heart. Consider this scenario. You live on a rocky coastline and own a large, rugged fishing boat. One very stormy night you see that the cruise ship that regularly passes by has foundered and is sinking. You know that there are shortly going to be 100 souls in the water with no hope unless you save them. Your boat is well able to do the job and can easily handle 100 passengers. You have state-of-the-art rescue equipment with well over 100 life preservers and a hoist to pluck people right out of the water.

By the time you reach the scene, the ship has gone down and all 100 of its passengers and crew are alive, but in the water. They have crude life vests on, but it is clear they won’t last through the night. Most are unconscious and not even aware that rescue is at hand. You are looking for two people in particular, based on criteria that you never do share with those who question you later. There they are! One is a 45-year-old woman and the other is a 22-year-old young man. You quickly extend your gear, plucking them out of the water and into the safety of your boat. Then you immediately rev up your

engines and head for shore. You have saved two people who had no hope except for your generous decision to use your boat, operate your equipment, and spend your time and effort to save them from certain death. Unfortunately, the other 98 drown during the night.

The next day, civil authorities and reporters have arrived, and the two lucky ones you rescued have regained their consciousness and strength. Even though you don't require it, you look forward to the appreciation of those who have discovered your heroics. After all, you are a hero, aren't you? Shockingly, the response is very different from what you expected, with questions and comments like . . .

"You're admitting that your boat and gear were up to the task and you quit after 2!?!"

"Are you saying that you could have saved all 100 but you saved only 2? Are you heartless?"

"How can you say that you cared for those people and just let them drown?"

The worst questions were from the two you rescued:

"Why didn't you save my husband and my children? My four children are dead and you could have saved them? Why did you save me and not them? Don't you have any compassion at all!?!"

"But my bride! We had just gotten married and were on our honeymoon. Why didn't you save her? What kind of man are you?"

Based on careful national polling over the last decade and from my own experience I believe that no more than 2% of Americans are born again Christians. The Bible is repeatedly clear about God's universal offer of salvation and of His great desire for everyone to be saved. A doctrine that specifies that God saves only 2 out of 100 for arbitrary reasons and condemns the rest to Hell is nothing less than blasphemy. God offers salvation freely to all 100. Most choose rebellion, but *whosoever will* may come.

Please read thoughtfully the small sampling of Scriptures below, representative of the entire message from God to man throughout the Bible, that He desires ALL men to be saved and has paid the price through the cross for ALL.

*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Revelation 22:17*

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9*

*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 1 Timothy 2:3-6*

*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. John 12:32-33*

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

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:16-18*

.....

### **So where do you stand?**

Since you likely received this book as a gift, someone thinks that you are lost and need the Savior. Perhaps you fit into one of the categories above. Perhaps not. Nevertheless, it should be easy for you to examine yourself to determine whether you are an active, serious follower of Jesus Christ, a student of God's word, and whether the pattern of your daily life would offer enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian, if that suddenly became illegal in this country. So where do you stand?

The chapters to follow offer 12 major motivations to induce you to make a personal, willful decision to repent from your sins and trust and follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You don't need all 12! One is enough. In fact, if you are under conviction right now – at this very moment – then join the family now! You'll enjoy the rest of the book more if you become a Christian first.

No? Not ready yet? Ok, stick with me and ponder the material ahead. If you want to correspond or chat at any time, my contact info is on the title page of this book.

## Chapter 1

### *Because it's true!*

PM (Post-Modernist): "Well, you have your truth and I have mine."

DD (Dr. Dave): "You believe that truth is relative . . . it's up to the individual?"

PM: "Absolutely! We each decide what reality is. Nobody can say what truth is for someone else. You Bible believers are so dogmatic, trying to impose your views on everyone else!"

DD: "I'm dogmatic? Didn't you just say 'absolutely' and 'nobody can say'? Sounds like you are being *absolutely* dogmatic. So let me ask you. Suppose someone injects a large dose of arsenic into your lunch. Not knowing this, you simply believe that your hamburger and fries are spicy, but safe. Does it matter what you believe when you have eaten your lunch?"

PM: "Well, that's different. You're talking about the physical."

DD: "Hold on there. In your atheistic worldview there is nothing but the physical. Protons, neutrons, electrons, gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and weak nuclear forces . . . to you, that's all there is. My point is that your post-modern philosophy doesn't work. And you don't live that way. You live as if there is an objective reality that matters. For example, you look both ways before you cross a street. You want to check out reality despite whatever feeling you might have about whether a bus is coming. It's either you or the bus, so reality is more important than whatever you choose to imagine."

PM: "Ok, that's an interesting point. I'll have to think about that one and get back to you."

DD: "Oh, by the way, someone told me that your wife has been cheating on you."

PM: "What!! What are you talking about? No way, there is absolutely no way she has!"

DD: "Hey, maybe that's just reality for the guy who told me. Or maybe your wife has a different truth about what marriage is all about. What does it matter? You have your reality and she has hers. You aren't going to dogmatically impose your views about marriage on her, are you?"

PM: "But this is important! It hits at the core of my life!"

DD: "What is even bigger than your marriage is whether you and your family will live again. Is death the end? Is God real and is He the God revealed in the Bible? The answers matter for now and for eternity. And you can find the answers, if you want to."

The stakes are infinite, aren't they? Life is short and fragile – it's guaranteed that you don't get off this planet alive (unless you qualify for the rapture). If there is any possibility that there is life after death, and furthermore, that such life involves only two destinies – Heaven or Hell – isn't it worth doing some research??!!?

In this short treatment of the subject, I'll make a case that *THE TRUTH* is found in the Bible based on four lines of reasoning:

1. Logic
2. History

3. Science
4. Experience

I encourage you to examine these areas yourself. If you are a true Christian, you should know why and be ready to explain it. If you are not a Christian, I assure you that you are basing your life and eternal destiny on a worldview void of evidence.

*1. The Bible is true because logic demands it.*

Everything about your life screams, “Purpose!” The very design of the earth and its relation to a stable sun, the ocean / land / weather systems, seasons for agriculture, the beauty of a sunset, the warmth of a kitten, an eagle in flight, the activity of an ant colony, the taste of strawberries, the handy design of a banana . . . you shouldn’t take such things for granted. Did you ever think about the abundance of trees providing wood for construction, without which civilization couldn’t exist?

We see startling differences in the lives of plants and animals on the one hand, and humans on the other. For human beings, life is far more than food acquisition and reproduction. You strive to fit in with your family and community. You spend many years of your life in school to learn / learn / learn – much of which has nothing to do with earning a living. You spend enormous effort to find love and fulfillment, not just a mate. You want a career, not just a job. You want to lavish love on your children and grandchildren. You want respect and even admiration. You have a strong moral compass. Some things are *right*. Some things are *wrong*. You see evil in the world and your heart cries out for justice. You feel guilt when you do things that violate your own conscience. You take pleasure when good deeds are rewarded. You lament that evil deeds often go unpunished. You love and spend money on things of beauty. You despise and discard ugly or broken objects.

Above all, you can *think* – construct reasonable, logical arguments. You live as if you are more than a collection of molecules in motion. You can discern between sensible and stupid ideas. There is a *you* that is more than just brain chemistry.

The Bible claims that we are made in the image of God. Qualities of our own lives that are characteristic of God include love, justice, logic, beauty, morality (righteousness), pleasure, sadness, determination, thoughtfulness, and purpose. These qualities are not properties of matter; yet they are real to us. Would a creative God care about His creation and His thinking creatures? Do we not care about our children, our houses, our furniture, our poetry, our paintings, and everything that we put our energy, time, and creativity into?

God, as revealed in the Bible, is just and holy. Do we not respect most greatly those among us that have the highest integrity and spend their lives on good and constructive activities? What man respects most and to what he most aspires, are characteristics found perfectly only in the Biblical God. The gods of the Muslims or the Hindus or the Calvinists or the Roman Catholics are often capricious and arbitrary. Such false gods choose who will be saved based on unknowable criteria. Assurance is impossible.

The Bible lays out repetitively and in detail what is required to please God and how to attain eternal life. Would not God do just that? Even human parents make clear to their children what is expected of them. The Biblical God makes clear what you must do to be adopted into His family – no mystery, no excuses, all perfectly reasonable.

All of the false religions of the world – namely, anything outside of Biblical Christianity – offer some hope for salvation based on some types of good works. Logically, what ratio of good to evil deeds would earn life forever in the presence of a perfect, holy God for eternity? Biblically, one sin is enough to merit separation from God. When I ask non-Christians how many sins it takes to deserve Hell, most get it right the first time – just one. We all have a God-given sense of justice, whereby we know that murderers should be punished, along with rapists, child-molesters, and violent thieves. But how about your sins? Consider the teachings of Jesus Christ. Anger is judged as murder in the heart. Lust is judged as adultery. What you think is what you are. Liars will be cast into Hell along with Satan and the angels (now demons) who rebelled against God. Did you ever tell one lie? Ten lies? Thousands? Or perhaps you just “spin” the truth a bit. Thus you even lie about your lying.

Is not every one of your sins an act of rebellion against God? Can you remember even a fraction of the tens of thousands of willful sins in your life? Do you have any possible escape from judgment?

Logically, only the Bible offers you rescue. God is perfectly just and so must find you guilty and punish your sins. Yet God is love and so offers you a way out. Justice and love met at the cross.

The perfect Son of God (God incarnate in the flesh) offered Himself as the unblemished sacrificial lamb (foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament) to satisfy justice in your place. Three days later He rose from the dead – the most historically verified event in ancient history. (See Chapter 8 for more discussion on this.)

*Do you want the technology to live forever? Only Jesus Christ has the license for that technology.*

God offers you salvation, eternal life, as a gift. Don't you have a strong will to live? Like everyone else, you abhor the thought of dying, yet such thoughts come often. God gave you a will to live – forever. Living forever in God's presence – on a reborn earth (2 Peter 3, Revelation 21, 22) – is only possible if you have been forgiven. Don't you want forgiveness? If you don't, you must be crazy – illogical. Repent from your sins and trust the Savior. You can have eternal life right now, as a present possession, and spend the rest of your life in logical, constructive, joyful activities in obedience to the word of God – the Bible.

Then your desire for a loving family will be multiplied and fulfilled – many times in this life because you become brother or sister to many other believers, and for eternity in the ages to come, when you become joint-heir with Christ of everything that God owns. Logically, that's a good deal!

Your desire to love and to be loved is multiplied in this life and in the ages to come in fellowship with the saints of God – all those who have repented from their stupid and wicked sins and trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Your desire to spend time with wife / husband / children / grandchildren will be fulfilled in the ages to come when there will be no more sorrow, sickness, or death.

Your desire to acquire knowledge, appreciate beauty, and learn amazing things will be fulfilled for eternity. This universe is big and God is infinitely brilliant and creative. God has made a lot of “stuff.” If you like stuff, there will be a lot of it to work with, if you repent now from making stuff your god and seek the true God, who owns all the stuff.

Your desire to have a clean conscience and avoid the morally ugly, the vicious, the cruel, the selfish, the wasteful, will be fulfilled because God will clean up your mind perfectly when He gives you a new body, along with everyone else who is part of the family. You won't have to associate with the determinedly wicked and ungodly. They will be cast into a prison called the “Lake of Fire,” off in some corner of the universe, never to bother anyone again.

Logically, do you really have any reason to hesitate? Repentance is changing your mind from insanity and stupidity to that which is right, sensible, and beautiful. You can repent now, before even reading the rest of this chapter.

## *2. I know the Bible is true because of overwhelming historical evidence.*

I write this section with great trepidation because of the injustice I do to libraries worth of information on the subject. My hope is to whet your appetite a bit. If you're a Christian already, you have an obligation to grow in the knowledge of history and prophecy so that you can be a more useful servant. If you're not a Christian, then you are missing out on the keys to understanding human history – past, present, and future – and your place in it.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books inspired by God, written down over a period of about 4,000 years by about 50 different human authors. Its perfect consistency on such subjects as the nature and character of God and man, God's laws for human behavior, requirements for salvation, and the fate of the nations is miraculous. There is nothing comparable among human “religious” writings. The Koran, for example, both plagiarizes and distorts portions of the Bible, was written down by one man, has numerous internal inconsistencies, and clearly demonstrates its non-divine origin by the actions of its sword-wielding followers over the last 14 centuries.

The book of Genesis contains the eye-witness account of creation. We see the creation of separate kinds of creatures. According to the Bible, the following are entirely unrelated to each other: man, chimps, bananas, petunias, lizards, turtles, and dust mites. According to evolutionary fantasies, we all share a common grandpa. The flood of Noah's time produced such destruction that you would expect



to find billions of dead things (fossils), buried in rock layers, laid down by water, all over the earth. What you find is exactly that – fossils representing the extinction of separate kinds of creatures buried in sedimentary layers up to miles thick. The extinct creatures clearly group into separate kinds, quite opposed to a Darwinian fantasy in which creatures morph gradually into other types over time. Thus Biblical Earth history is validated. (But more on this in the next section.)

Bill Cooper's book "After the Flood" compiles genealogical records of nations all over the world. Kings took much care in preserving genealogies, in order to establish their right to rule. Cooper shows that nations and kings from Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Africa, China, and the Middle East trace their lineage back to the three sons of Noah. Cooper (and many others) also describe historical accounts of man living with and battling with dinosaurs, namely the descendants of creatures that survived the flood on the ark. Consider ancient Chinese drawings and "legends" of dragons, ancient European and Native American (both North and South American) drawings of dinosaurs, Native North American accounts of flying reptiles (pteranodons), and the numerous accounts of heroes battling dragons.

The Bible is unique among the writings of man in its detailed and fulfilled prophecies. Over 300 specific Old Testament prophecies relate to the first coming of Jesus Christ including the place of His birth (Bethlehem), the miraculous nature of His birth (of a virgin), His manner of death (crucifixion prophesied before its invention), His lineage (from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, on down through the descendants of David), that He would have the legal right to rule, and that He would have the very nature, power, and character of God in the flesh. Also, the prophet Daniel was given the insight precisely when, to the day, that the Messiah would present Himself to His people. (See Linton below for details.) The prophecy specified that 69 weeks (literally, "sevens") of prophetic years (360 days each) would pass between a Persian king's decree to rebuild the Jewish temple and the presentation of the Messiah. The decree was proclaimed by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C., long after Daniel's death. Counting the prescribed 173,880 days leads us to the day in history that Jesus Christ entered the gates of Jerusalem, loudly cheered by the Jews from all over the world (in town for the annual high feast of the Passover). Several days later, He was rejected and crucified, as detailed by King David as Psalmist 1000 years before, and by another prophet, Isaiah, 700 years before.

The perfection of Christ, and His death as a perfect sacrificial Lamb, was typified by the original Passover in Exodus Chapter 12, as the Jews prepared to leave Egypt. The annual date for each Passover was established by God. Jesus' death occurred on just the right day in history. The location of Jesus' crucifixion on Mount Moriah was shown prophetically in the offering of Isaac by Abraham (2,000 years before) in Genesis 22 – also on Mount Moriah. The giving of God's laws to Moses on Mount Sinai was celebrated in the feast of Pentecost for 1,500 years. On the day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit visited the disciples in an awesome display of power, proclaiming the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Study up — the parallels are incredible, yet not editorialized by the Biblical writers – it's up to you to see the supernatural character of these historical records.

Other amazing prophecies include Ezekiel's prediction (Ch. 26) of the destruction of the fortress city of Tyre, fulfilled over the next 250 years in painstaking detail by Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great. Other prophecies fulfilled in ancient history include the destruction of the cities of Samaria, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Jericho. Perhaps the most dramatic "political" prophecies are associated with the Jewish people, nation, and the "city of God" – Jerusalem. Over 2,500 years ago, the prophet Zechariah foretold that in the last days Jerusalem would become a "cup of trembling" and a "burdensome stone" for the world and that all the nations would come against it. Been watching the news lately?

Several prophets foretold that the Jews would be scattered around the world for their rejection of God's laws and His Messiah, but that they would be regathered to their land in the last days. What tribal people in history has suffered such consistent dispersion and persecution and has yet remained intact – and reacquired their nation's land? Furthermore, the prophecy was clear that their return would be in unbelief before their eventual repentance and faith in Christ. (Don't wait for the Jews to turn to Christ as a nation. That will be late in the Tribulation. You will likely be dead by then, along with over half of the world's population.) Consider the events of the last 100 years in this context, especially since 1948. We're getting close to the Lord's return. You don't want to be on the "other team" when He comes back to clean up this mess and take charge.

The prophets, apostles, and the Lord Himself predicted that the followers of Christ would suffer persecution in every age. This continues today all over the world. Many Biblical writers foretold of a false version of Christianity that would fool multitudes. Roman Catholicism and many pseudo-Christian cults fulfill this. The book of Hebrews (chapter 11) describes some heroes of the faith, and their determined and devoted behavior in the face of persecution. What we see in that chapter of the Bible is typical of the millions of martyrs over the last 2,000 years. I recommend Cloud's book below for a synopsis of Christian history and the development of Roman Catholic apostasy, the centuries-long inquisitions, the events of the so-called Reformation, the propagation of true and independent Bible-believing churches, and the birth of modern foreign missions. I also heartily recommend some missionary biographies below so you can thrill in more recent demonstrations of the ancient truths and heroes of the Christian faith.

The imminence of the return of Jesus Christ is shown by Biblical prophecies such as: Arab nations plus Russia collaborating to attack Israel, an increasing rate of natural disasters and wars, the onset of global government, worldwide communications and the explosion of knowledge, religions coming together in an ecumenical movement, the rise of evolutionary philosophies, hatred for the Jewish people . . . there are many others.

History only makes sense in light of the historical record that God has provided in the Bible.

### *3. The Bible is true scientifically.*

Only the Biblical account of creation explains what we observe – from subatomic particles to planets to life to the distribution of stars and galaxies. Evolutionary ideas about star formation are refuted from

basic physics. The collapse of a large gas cloud of hydrogen and helium requires very stringent conditions on the temperature of the gas (low) and its density (high). Simple physics demonstrates that gas clouds expand in vacuum – they don't collapse into stars and rocky planets. The postulated conditions associated with a "Big Bang" don't connect. The formation of individual stars would be extremely rare under any naturalistic view of the origin of the universe. Yet we see up to hundreds of billions of stars in each of trillions of galaxies.

The existence of elements in the periodic table above helium is alleged to be the result of sequential generations of supernovas and new star formation. There should be evidence of many large clouds from such supernovas within the Milky Way, considering the evolutionary age of this galaxy – oops, the numbers are consistent with an age of only thousands of years. The Hubble telescope was deployed in part to find the "oldest stars" – containing just hydrogen and helium – in the "oldest galaxies" billions of light years away. But spectroscopic data indicate that the most distant galaxies have the same types of "young stars" that we see nearby.

The orbits of stars around galactic centers of mass are wonderfully ordered. But a barred-spiral galaxy (like our own) could not possibly be stable in shape over billions of years. Yet they abound. Stars in many star clusters and galaxies in certain galactic clusters don't show the velocities required to hang together over the alleged age of the universe. Yet they are there. The universe is expanding at an accelerating rate, consistent with the seventeen proclamations by God in the Old Testament that He is stretching out the Heavens. This mystery has a name, "dark energy," that shows the utter cluelessness of Big Bang cosmologists.

If you insist on a naturalistic view, consider this: The very existence of all the matter and energy in the universe violates the most powerful law of science – the first law of thermodynamics: conservation of matter / energy. The incredibly ordered structures of galaxies, solar systems, planets, ecologies, living creatures, and the human brain violate the next most powerful law of science – the second law of thermodynamics: entropy (disorder) continually increases in either closed systems or open systems that don't have well-designed machines to convert energy and materials into functional systems.

The location of our solar system within our galaxy is wonderfully special. Much closer to the center and harmful radiation would threaten us. Also, too close to the center or too close to the galactic plane and we would be surrounded by obscuring interstellar gases. This would destroy much of the science of astronomy. Too far out and the sky would be depressingly dark, and it would be much harder to understand the dynamics of our own galaxy or the created wonders of the universe.

Within our own solar system, the Earth is in a nicely circular orbit comfortably within a narrow "habitable zone." Note how much we depend on liquid water and our thin, but "just right" atmosphere. The earthly climate is simply not possible much closer to or much farther from the sun. The Earth's magnetic field protects us from harmful radiation, our moon produces rich ecological tidal zones, and the moon's size produces perfect solar eclipses – which has provoked a multitude of scientific discoveries and validations; for example, in the fields of atomic spectroscopy and general relativity.

Life is only possible because of the design of carbon atoms, which depend on the perfect design of protons, neutrons, and electrons – and whatever may comprise them. (Quarks are still model constructs – they haven’t been “seen” yet.) The atmospheric ratio of oxygen to nitrogen is well-designed. Too low and respiration is limited, thus limiting the types of life forms possible on the earth. Too high and spontaneous fires break out and destroy everything. It’s fascinating that all of modern civilization depends on our ability to control fire. The relevant gases, the chemistry of combustion, the existence of wood, and the physical size of humans are all designed to make fire a tool, and not just a threat. Note that intelligent ants would be too small to control fire. But fires have to be big enough to generate heat on scales appropriate for comfort and industry. People are just the right size.

If you want to increase your awe at the brilliance of our Creator God, just read a book on cell biology, ignoring whatever silly panderings to evolution may crop up in the preface. The nano-technology of the cell goes far beyond human technology.

Regarding life’s “Biblical kinds”: The advent of molecular biology with the technology to sequence DNA gave evolutionists hope that the Darwinian tree of life could be derived from genetic similarities. Denton, in the second book of his cited below, does a wonderful job showing the impossibility of constructing an evolutionary tree at the molecular level. Note: to have a “scientific theory of evolution” it must be constructed and proven at the molecular level – life is intrinsically a system of nano-machines. (It is simply not good enough to compare bone shapes – even though the fossil record provides no joy for evolutionists either!) For example, from an evolutionary point of view, you would expect to trace gradual DNA changes from fish to amphibians to reptiles to mammals. What invariably occurs, however, is that such creatures are equally well-separated in their DNA sequences, with no hint of evolutionary descent. One example Denton cites is the percent differences in the protein cyclostome C between carp (fish) and the following animals: bullfrog, turtle, chicken, rabbit, and horse. The percent differences all turn out to be about the same. Clearly, this was a shock to those who thought that the amphibian frog is a much closer relative to fish than a rabbit would be.

The Biblical account of the flood of Noah’s time has generated creationist scientific models that consistently explain the observable data. Uniformitarian geology is left with a multitude of mysteries. The nature of fossilization makes it clear that under normal conditions it rarely happens. But there are enormous fossil graveyards, with billions of specimens, covering hundreds of square miles. Some of the sedimentary layers that contain similar fossils can be traced across and even between continents. These observables are only consistent with a worldwide flood catastrophe. Snelling (below) details the observable facts of geology and does comparisons of creationist and evolutionary models.

Deposition layers that were supposed to have been laid down over millions of years have been found with tree trunks standing vertically within them. Clearly, such “polystrate trees” were buried suddenly. Worldwide, there are many examples of “unconformities,” where one sedimentary layer is topped by another very smoothly, but with allegedly millions of years separating the times of deposition. In real life, a smooth, broad plain will suffer much erosion over the course of even a few decades, not to mention millions of years. Clearly, many such unconformities can be explained only if very little time

elapsed between deposition of the layers. Even the existence of such smooth boundaries covering tens of thousands of square miles can be explained only by sheet flow of global proportions.

I know that I can only touch the surface in this chapter to proclaim that all of creation cries out that God must get the glory for what we see. People spend lifetimes in the study of particular sub-branches of astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and geology. Wherever you look in the study of science you will see purpose and design. Where we see disease and death we also find the only rational explanation in the Bible. When man chose rebellion, man chose to separate himself from God. God cursed this world, allowing decay and death, but promises ultimate restoration and resurrection for His creation and those of us who repent and believe. If you insist that all of creation arose from some unexplainable Big Bang, and all of the design since is simply the result of random physical processes, then you truly have a blind faith – in opposition to rational science – with no purpose and no hope. Worse, you will be proven wrong and admit it when you kneel before your Lord, but it will be too late. Wake up! Think! If you have some intellectual stumbling blocks, investigate! I recommend the book I recently published for a more comprehensive treatment of this subject: *Creation vs. Evolution? No Contest!* Contact me and we'll correspond.

#### *4. The Bible is true because I know it experientially.*

Becoming a Christian, according to the Bible, is as straightforward as drinking water (John chapters 4 & 7), eating bread (John 6), or walking through a door (John 10). The transformation that takes place is like being born again (John 3), passing from death to life (John 5), acquiring life everlasting in this present world (John 3 & 10), becoming an entirely new creature (2 Corinthians 5), being cured from blindness unto perfect sight (John 9), and experiencing a peace that passes human understanding (Philippians 4). I could go on for quite a while, because the Bible is quite clear that there are only two types of people: saved and lost. The lost are wrapped up in this world and its trivial concerns, whereas the saved have an inheritance that is assured, and live in gratitude to the Savior who purchased it for them.

I was raised to be “religious” — which typically means some system of manmade beliefs and ritual behaviors with the purpose of earning salvation. My Roman Catholicism had quite a list of do's and don'ts, just like all other human religions, including Islam, Hinduism, the JW Kingdom Hall, Mormonism, Christian Science, Baha'ism, and Buddhism.

Ironically, the pseudo-intellectual scam of false science — evolution — coupled with a weak understanding of history foisted on me by the RC Church (see my article on “The 10 Most Deadly Heresies . . .,” section #10, on TruthReallyMatters.com) led me to a life of atheistic beliefs and behavior as a young man. I recall that as an atheist, I told a religious classmate that I considered it impossible that anyone could ever convince me that God existed. I was right, of course, because my heart was hard. I was determined to live life by my own rules, making myself god.

Patient Christians befriended me and gave me much to think about in discussion and reading materials. I wised up enough about pseudo-science and revisionist history to open myself up to TRUTH. I highly recommend the Gospel of John, which was written specifically to reveal the truth of the Gospel: that Jesus Christ, God incarnate, suffered the wrath of God on the cross in payment for my specific wicked and vile sins, that He rose from the dead offering me eternal life, and that my part is to humble myself, repent, and follow Him for the rest of this life and for eternity. The words of Jesus Christ are designed to connect with the God-fashioned spirit of man so that we can recognize truth when it hits us in the eyes or ears. You'll see that principle again and again in the book of John, if you read it with an open heart.

When I realized that the Bible is true, I knew that I would be insane to continue on my own self-destructive path. How about you? Sane or willfully insane?

What I discovered experientially is that God is real and that Jesus Christ is my Savior. From the time of my conversion, the Lord began a wonderfully patient work on me, transforming my attitudes, my speech, my purposes in life, my music, my care for others with less for myself, and an ever increasing desire to know God and to please Him. I wouldn't go back to my self-absorbed life if I could. Furthermore, it's impossible to go back. Once you're in God's family, born again with an everlasting life that starts right now, you can't get kicked out of the family. And God won't let you go. Scripture teaches that when a child of God starts to rebel, God will convict his conscience and even bring chastisement as necessary. But you can't escape the family. That's good. If you could sin your way out of salvation, then none of us would last through a fraction of a day. Yet the true Christian shows a transformed life, because he has changed roads and directions completely.

That's the trouble with most of American Christendom. There is much profession and little action. Namely, there are many false converts who will wake up in Hell. Salvation brings a change of worldview. Everything that's important in this world makes sense under a Biblical worldview. In any other system, whether atheistic or pantheistic evolution, Marxism, false religions, or secular humanism, mysteries abound and inconsistencies reign.

For example, the following areas often evoke a sense of confusion or mystery in the non-Christian, but make perfect sense to the Bible believer:

- a. The origin, purpose, and destiny of human life – for all of humanity and for each one of us.
- b. Why mathematics and science even work, in all ages and in all times.
- c. Conscience and morality – where do they come from? Why are there so many universal constants of right and wrong? Why such a distinction between right and wrong in the human heart?
- d. The existence of consciousness – if it's just brain chemistry, then why should anyone listen to anyone else? I may as well listen to a rock as to someone who admits that the next argument he makes is just the result of chemical reactions in his brain.

e. Pervasive occult and psychic phenomena throughout human history, and with common elements in thousands of well-separated human cultures – physics and secular history cannot explain it, but rather the existence of demonic spirits.

f. UFOs – see part “e” above.

g. Why “liberals” are more interested in saving whales or seals or “Mother Earth” than unborn babies.

h. Why feminists despise the Christian model for the family, but don’t lift a finger to relieve the slavery of the half-billion women in Muslim countries.

i. Why the Biblical instruction on marriage and child-raising works, producing stable societies with minimal crime.

j. Why individual liberty brings prosperity and why “liberal” / socialist / Marxist / Keynesian schemes bring poverty. Note that most non-Christian worldviews are complicit with despotism and true Christians despise despotic government practices.

k. Why true Christians are so consistently persecuted, even though they insist on religious liberty for everyone else. (Recall that Roman Catholicism’s inquisitions are perfectly consistent with its extremely anti-Biblical worldview. If that is a new thought to you, see “The 10 Most Deadly Heresies . . .” article.)

l. Why there are so many anti-Christian religions and why they are all so similar philosophically – namely, they are works-based and driven by self-righteousness.

m. Why the Arab-Israeli conflict is so persistent.

n. Why there are such powerful and universal human aspirations in concepts such as justice, selflessness, beauty, and love.

o. Why the world is so messed up and irrationality, corruption, and evil are so widespread, especially among the most “educated” of the human race.

p. Why death is so feared and man has such a strong desire to live – forever.

I could go on for a long time, but you should get the idea that whatever worldview is TRUE should explain everything that’s important under the sun. What do you believe? Does it really make sense? Does it satisfy your longings for purpose and give you peace from day to day? Will you be content to die with your beliefs intact? Where will you be the moment after you die?

Do something about it!

## **Tiny Bibliography:**

- Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*, Master Books, 2009.
- Bill Cooper, *After the Flood – The early post-flood history of Europe traced back to Noah*, New Wine Press, 1995.
- Irwin H. Linton, *A Lawyer Examines the Bible – a defense of the Christian faith*, Appendix A, Baker Book House, 1977.
- Dave Hunt, *In Defense of the Faith – Biblical Answers to Challenging Questions*, Harvest House, 1996.
- David Cloud, *Defense of the Faith*, Way of Life Literature, 2002.
- David Cloud, *History of the Churches*, Way of Life Literature, 2005.
- Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, The Moody Bible Institute, 1989.
- Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore – the life of Adoniram Judson*, Judson Press, 1987.
- Don DeYoung, *Thousands . . . Not Billions*, Master Books, 2005.
- Ken Ham, ed., *The New Answers Book – Over 25 questions on creation/evolution and the Bible*, Master Books, 2006.
- Ken Ham, ed., *The New Answers Book 2 – Over 30 questions on creation/evolution and the Bible*, Master Books, 2008.
- Ken Ham, ed., *The New Answers Book 3 – Over 35 questions on creation/evolution and the Bible*, Master Books, 2010.
- Bruce Malone, *Censored Science – the suppressed evidence*, Search for the Truth Publications, 2009.
- Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet – How our place in the cosmos is designed for discovery*, Regnery Publishing, 2004.
- Michael J. Denton, *Nature's Destiny – How the laws of biology reveal purpose in the universe*, Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- Michael J. Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis – How developments in science are challenging orthodox Darwinism*, Adler & Adler, 1986.
- Andrew A. Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past – Geology, creation, & the flood*, Volumes 1 & 2, Institute for Creation Research, 2009.



## Chapter 2

### *One Heartbeat from Hell*

DJ (Don't Judge): "Why do you say I'm not a Christian? I believe in God and I believe in Jesus. I just don't believe a loving god would send anyone to Hell."

DD: "What do you know about Jesus?"

DJ: "Well, I know what everyone knows about Him. He was born in Bethlehem and had twelve disciples. He went about healing the sick and taught that everyone should love one another."

DD: "Did you know that Jesus taught more about Hell than anyone else in the Bible? He taught more about Hell than about Heaven."

DJ: "Maybe the writers just made up that stuff to scare people. My god wouldn't send anyone to Hell for ever and ever and ever. It just doesn't make sense!"

DD: "You're right that your god won't send anyone to Hell. Your god can't because he doesn't exist. What about Heaven? Do you believe in Heaven? Who gets to go to Heaven?"

DJ: "Sure, Heaven exists. I feel like everyone who treats others right and believes in god will go to Heaven."

DD: "So you don't have a problem with Heaven forever and ever and ever for those folks who are reasonably nice and don't get into too much trouble. What happens to the nasty people . . . the Hitlers, Stalins, serial murderers, rapists, child molesters, and lying politicians?"

DJ: "I feel like god maybe just dematerializes them or maybe he gives them another chance."

DD: "If you would take God at His word and believe His entire revelation in the Bible, you wouldn't have to depend on your feelings. What is unreasonable is to expect that you can earn a perfect Heaven with a perfect God forever and ever and ever. Hell is much more reasonable. This whole planet has rebelled against God, even while He holds its atoms in His hand. He would be within His rights to burn it to a cinder for our crimes against Him."

DJ: "But everlasting fire? Ugghh . . . it's too horrible to contemplate."

DD: "What you don't understand is the seriousness of your sins – crimes – against God. Your standard for salvation is ridiculously low so that you can be comfortable with your own lifestyle, whatever selfish and embarrassing sins you like to indulge in. If you're honest with yourself you'll see that you don't treat people right and you disrespect God terribly. You're selfish with respect to man and you call God a liar by disbelieving His very words. What God demands for His perfect and holy presence is perfection. You don't measure up!"

DJ: "Hey, you don't either!"

DD: "You're absolutely right. That's why I'm so grateful that salvation is a gift. But the first thing to understand is that you are lost, a willful sinner, condemned, headed for Hell, and in need of the Savior. That's the bad news. Would you like to hear the Good News?"

DJ: "Ok, lay it on me."

Do you believe in justice? If so, what kind of judge would you be? Would your fellow citizens be content with you in charge of handing out sentences to local criminals? How about a shoplifter who was caught trying to leave a store with a \$200 watch? Let's say that this is his fourth offense. Will you give him some jail time? How about if he tells you that he has heard that you are a kind, forgiving fellow? Do you buy that?

How about a convicted rapist and murderer, guilty of snuffing out the lives of several young women? Does he get the same sentence from you as the shoplifter? What if he compliments you on how tolerant you are? Let's say that he is entirely unrepentant. (Would it matter?) He hopes that he can get out of prison someday so he can resume his crimes. By the way, you have capital punishment as a sentencing option. What do you do? What do your law-abiding constituents expect?

How about your crimes before both God and man? Have you ever stolen anything? How about on the job, taking home a pen or printing something personal on your office printer? Have you spent any minutes or hours on the job surfing the net for your own entertainment, or responding to personal emails? Did you stay extra hours to make up the time? Over the years how many "\$200 watches" worth of time have you stolen from employers?

The Lord Jesus Christ established a standard higher than the 10 commandments, just to help you understand how seriously God views your selfishness and rebellion. For example, on the subjects of murder and adultery, sins of which you may claim to be innocent:

*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, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of Hell fire. Matthew 5:21-22*

*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. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell. Matthew 5:27-30*

Who you really are is what you think, what you feel, what you are on the inside. All crimes visible to man certainly start in the mind. God judges the intent, regardless of whether you have the "courage" to follow through and do someone harm, whether little or great. Anger is judged as murder. What if human justice were so severe? Human justice is incredibly lenient. By the time you run afoul of man's criminal code, you are in really sad shape. God's justice is perfect. The question is, "What is the appropriate sentence?" Be patient. We'll answer that shortly.

How about adultery of the mind? Scripture equates adultery with fornication and any sexual activity outside of marriage. Pornography counts, too. “Soft” pornography counts, too. I know what you’re thinking . . . I talk to lots of people, so I have some experience. What’s wrong with looking at or appreciating the beauty of a young woman? (If my reader is a woman, please translate accordingly.) Your conscience will tell you when you have crossed the line between admiration and lust. When your eyes and mind linger and move from simple observation to lust, you know. What if God were observing your thoughts, or your thoughts were displayed on a wide screen for multitudes to see? Would others be able to tell whether you crossed the line?

Notice in the quotes above from your Creator, Judge, and potential Savior, that the sentence is Hell for such crimes. Too severe for your tastes? Of course, and I’m sure that the shoplifter and the murderer count their sentences too severe, also. What about other “crimes”? How many times have you lied? Did you dishonor your parents at times by disobedience when you were growing up? Stealing starts with coveting – desiring things that belong to others and not to you. The tenth commandment forbids coveting. In Ephesians 5:5 God equates covetousness with idolatry, worshiping the created thing – made out of dirt – rather than the Creator. God counts all of these as crimes.

Jesus was once asked by a lawyer:

*Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:36-40*

Just do those two things, day by day. Of course, you must define “love” and practice it as the Bible teaches it. It’s not complicated. It’s just that few are willing even to try. Clearly, the above summary of all of the laws of God is connected to the so-called “Golden Rule”:

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12*

How do you expect others to treat you? Is it OK if people lie to you? Are you comfortable with other men lusting after your wife or daughters? Do you enjoy others being angry with you? So when you are guilty of these sins, what justice do you expect from God?

But Hell? The Lake of Fire for eternity? How is that reasonable? Well, let’s talk about that. First of all, God did not create Hell for you and me.

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: Matthew 25:41*

Satan (originally named Lucifer) and the other angels that rebelled against God are *unredeemable*. They cannot be saved. They are not in the same category as humankind – we are God’s “image-bearers,” made in the image of God. The rebellious angels (about 1/3 of the angelic population) knew exactly who God was and what He expected from them. They made an unsuccessful power play and are condemned to a Lake of Fire (we’ll speculate on just what that means later). For the time being, most of them run amok on this earth. When Adam disobeyed God, he did so by accepting Satan’s word over God’s. By following Satan, Adam effectively ceded control over man’s earthly domain to the devil. We have been paying for that crime for 6,000 years to date.

Furthermore, every one of us has willfully rebelled, also. None of us are any different from Adam in that regard. We are all rebels. When Lucifer rebelled, his heart’s attitude was reflected in these words of his:

*. . . I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Isaiah 14:12-14*

Notice all the “I”s? It was all about him, wasn’t it? His will, his ambition, his envy, his lust for power and prestige. He didn’t want God or anyone else telling him what to do. When you sin, the rebellion is the same. You don’t want God or anyone else telling you what to do. Thousands and thousands of times, over and over again. You defy the will of the One who created the very atoms of your body, holds them together moment by moment, gives you life, provides for you air and water and food, and offers you eternal fellowship / friendship / love with the One who invented them all. Nope – God has no “rights” in your universe. You’d rather do your own thing. You may get by with it until your heartbeats run out.

Satan and his demons have caused a lot of trouble through the ages. Fomenting wars, lusts, murders, thievery, idolatry, and insanity of all kinds. You, along with everyone else on Earth, are all individually accountable. Satan works hard behind the scenes to fight against everything good. That’s why he is called the “Devil” – literally, the “adversary.” His condemnation is assured:

*Yet thou shalt be brought down to Hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? Isaiah 14:15-17*

You can share the Devil’s fate by staying in your rebellion and dying in your sins, without the forgiveness offered to you freely, purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, wherein He suffered the wrath of God, both physically and spiritually, in your place. The final judgments described in the book of Revelation tie Satan’s fate to all of those who follow him:

*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white*

*throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the Heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hell were cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire.*  
*Revelation 20:10-15*

Most people don't seem to have a problem with Heaven being "forever." But Hell "forever" seems unreasonable. Just the opposite is true. There is nothing in our rebellious lives that warrants a perfect Heaven with a perfect God forever. Hell makes much more sense. God gave us life, senses to enjoy His creation, the ability to appreciate love, beauty, justice, and everything good, and we told God to get lost. God would be perfectly in His rights to reduce this planet and all of its rebellious inhabitants to a cinder. Yet He offers pardon for anyone who humbles himself.

Note how the judgment described above works. Everything you do in life is recorded. God's sensors are all-seeing and His records don't miss a thing. If you die in your sins, without forgiveness, without your record being washed clean by faith in Jesus Christ, then you will be judged according to your works.

Some fools have told me that they are content to be so judged. What's the problem? Good deeds don't earn salvation. One sin, on the other hand, is enough to condemn. Recall the parable of the "Good Samaritan" in Luke 10. This Samaritan rescued a Jewish man who had fallen prey to a violent robbery. He treated his wounds, clothed him, put him up at a hotel at his own expense, and opened an account for the innkeeper to spend whatever was needed to help the man. All this, despite the fact that Jews despised Samaritans. What was the lesson that Jesus was teaching? This Samaritan's "good deed" was merely in keeping with the law – God's baseline expectations for how people are to treat each other. *That was the expected norm!* In another parable (Luke 17) about a hard-working servant, employed by a landowner, the conclusion was that the servant was merely doing his duty in serving his lord. Nothing special.

We ought to do right! Doing so occasionally doesn't earn salvation. Yet your sins will earn you perfect justice. What's wrong with the world and how are you guilty? Where does the depravity of our culture come from? Who is responsible for the murders, thefts, greed, robberies, adulteries, fornications, unwed pregnancies, abandoned children, abortions, pornography, foul language, dirty thinking, unkindness, selfishness, dishonesty, drunkenness, addictions, divorces, and massive political corruption? Why is so much money spent on alcohol, illegal drugs, law enforcement, jails, prisons, courthouses, locks, security systems (including all the passwords you have to memorize), bank vaults, weapons, and national defense? Why is advertising so raunchy? Why are there so many highly paid political lobbyists? Do a study of history and you will be horrified at the utter pervasiveness of war, despotism, and brutality – led by the MOST educated among us.

Who is responsible? You are! Yes, me too, and 7 billion other people on the planet. And all those who came before. Every time you speak unkindly you sow pain and sorrow. Every raunchy TV show you watch or every blasphemous rock / rap / country music song you listen to helps to degrade the culture. Anger feeds anger, lust feeds lewdness & adultery and rape, and selfishness multiplies and is the center of our “self-esteem” culture.

What should be the penalty for those responsible for the poverty, disease, and death that pervades our existence on this Earth? Death and the Lake of Fire forever are the only answer. Give the rebels life sentences and incarcerate them in an inescapable prison where they will bother no one ever again.

Just what is the Lake of Fire and where is it? Scripture draws a veil on the details. Note in the language above that “the Earth and the Heaven fled away” from God and His throne at this judgment. This may hint that this place of judgment, probably in immediate proximity to the Lake of Fire, is in some completely remote corner of this universe (or beyond). Although our imaginations are limited, a dark star might serve as a suitable Lake of Fire. Dark to fit other descriptors for Hell (Jude 13), but plenty hot enough to warrant the term “fire.” Such a star would make a perfect prison. No guards would be required – the gravity well would be inescapable. A star made out of hydrogen and helium would offer no materials to offer any hope of escape or even distraction. A star is huge enough to guarantee loneliness, regardless of population. And the gravity well may also serve to insure proportionality in the sentence. Heavier objects (perhaps laden down somewhat literally by sin?) would sink deeper toward the center.

Prisoners of the Lake of Fire will cause no more trouble. They won’t offend, intimidate, lie, curse, or pollute anymore. They will have nothing but their own self-centered selves to live with forever. They don’t get any consideration once they have rejected God’s grace. The love and forgiveness of God was offered to them and they thoughtfully, willfully, and repeatedly rejected it.

Proportionality is Biblical and certainly fits our sense of fairness. More heinous criminals should receive harsher sentences. What about the basic sentence of Hell for any lost individual? Just how bad are your sins against God? We have already discussed the disaster we humans have made of this Earth. Try on this analogy, if it may be of help . . .

Imagine you are walking down a deserted street and happen upon a homeless man, clothed in rags, and obviously drunk, yet with a sign asking for money. In your disgust you kick him in the foot, curse him, spit on him, and then walk away. Now, you have violated the law in assaulting this man. Do you expect any consequences? Of course not. There are no witnesses and the drunk could not identify you if he tried.

Next imagine that you are walking by a police officer and are offended by his apparent arrogance and authority. So you kick him in the foot, curse him, and spit on him. Consequences? You will certainly do jail time and may suffer a few bruises before being hauled away.

What's the point? It matters WHOM you sin against, even though the same law may apply in either case.

Now imagine that you are part of a huge crowd in a foreign country, during an event televised nationwide. The King of this nation, an absolute monarch and beloved of his subjects, is part of a parade that includes his princes, his generals, and leaders from all over the realm. As he walks by, you step out, kick him, curse him, and spit on him. Consequences? Your life is forfeit. It matters whom you offend.

Every time you sin, you effectively kick, curse, and spit in the face of your Creator, and in the presence of the holy angels, and – eventually – for the record to show when the books are opened for all the universe to see. You simply don't want to take your own sins seriously. You are quick to sneer at the disgusting sins of others, but you refuse to admit how offensive your own sins are. You had better change your perspective. You have wrecked yourself, you have broken the opportunity for the relationship with God that He created you for, you have hurt many other image-bearers, and your sins are key elements of the destruction that this entire world suffers. You continue to be proud instead of humble, still self-righteous, and thereby reject the only way out, through the cross of Jesus Christ.

*Your offense is infinite. Your punishment is infinite.*

When you die in your sins, you are not sent promptly to the final judgment or to the Lake of Fire. That is in the future, as recorded in Biblical prophecy. Your immediate destiny is a holding jail, usually called "Hell." The word "Hell" is sometimes synonymous with the eternal Lake of Fire, but often associated with the holding jail. Let's discuss this a little more, also painting a picture of what a "living death" is like. Jesus recounted a specific case study (not a parable, but a bit of real history) below:

*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in Hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*

*Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear*

*not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Luke 16:19-31*

Before we get into some of the characteristics of “life” in Hell, let me point out that the wealth or the poverty of the two men was not relevant to their salvation. Although there is some correlation in practice. Throughout history, the rich have often despised the message of the Gospel and have mistreated true Christians. For our purposes, allow me to suggest several lessons concerning your future in Hell if you don’t repent.

- a. Moment by moment, day by day, the resident of Hell is in torments.
- b. He is aware of what he is missing, in this particular case having the special opportunity to view a bit of Paradise from afar.
- c. He thirsts, but has no opportunity to quench that thirst. By extension, his other senses operate, but are never satisfied.
- d. The “great gulf” makes clear there is no escape.
- e. He still cares about those he loved on Earth. Particularly, he fears that they will join him in Hell.
- f. He is unrepentant. There is nothing in that lost man’s conversation about guilt. He still just cares about himself and his brothers.
- f. He has no opportunity to reach out to those still living. Their opportunity is the same as his was – to respond to the prophets, apostles, and Scripture, by believing the Gospel.

Note the irony at the end. Abraham points out that to the stubborn, even the greatest conceivable miracle – a resurrection – will not persuade. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most documented event in ancient history. Has it convinced you? Shouldn’t even the possibility of Hell get your attention? Don’t die stupid!

Try to imagine yourself in the situation of the lost, formerly rich man. It is clear that there is some type of body that you will have. You will have all the physical sensations and desires that you had in life. Thirst, but nothing to drink. Hunger, but no food. Sexual desire, but no way to gratify it. Yearning for comfort, but nothing in the environment but that which torments.

Where is this Hell, this temporary jail? I’ll warn you up front – you’re not going to believe this. The answer is . . . the center of the Earth. Hell is a real place in a real location. Once you figure out that the Bible is perfectly reliable in every subject that it touches, you won’t have a hard time accepting what makes perfect sense, after all.

Here is some Scriptural support for the center-of-Earth location:

*Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are*



*famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore Hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it. Isaiah 5:11-14*

Party animals “shall descend into it.” Descent – downward. Is sensual gratification the reason for your existence? God describes your lifestyle as having “no knowledge” – stupid. Again we see that hunger and thirst are part of your Hell-bound existence, with no hope of satisfaction. Do you love ungodly music now? You won’t hear any there. Whatever enjoyment you have in a drunken, fornicating lifestyle now, will only increase your withdrawal symptoms in eternity.

*Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit. Ezekiel 32:18*

“Nether parts of the earth” – “nether” means “lying beneath the earth’s surface.” The “pit” is referenced repeatedly in the book of Revelation as the “bottomless pit.” Physically, where could you find a literal bottomless pit? Anywhere on the Earth, in its crust, or in its mantle or outer core, any pit will have a bottom, defined by the pull of gravity. At the Earth’s center, there is no bottom. Gravity is negligible near the center of the Earth. Consider also that many ancient religions, distorting Biblical truths as the ages rolled by, believed that Hell or Hades was located in the center of the Earth. They didn’t get everything wrong.

In the passage below, rebels challenged the authority of Moses as he led Israel out of Egypt and through the Sinai and Arabian wilderness.

*And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. Numbers 16:28-33*

If you continue to reject the free gift of salvation that God offers you, you will be able to prove for yourself exactly where Hell is located. The Lord Jesus Christ warned against this fate in the strongest possible terms:

*And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into Hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than*

*having two feet to be cast into Hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into Hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Mark 9:43-48*

Jesus is not recommending that you maim yourself, but rather that such an act would be better for you than to continue in your sins. Hell is connected to literal fire repeatedly. "Their worm dieth not" pictures your body in continual disintegration, dying yet never completely dead. Come on! Get sane and repent!

Important point: You cannot be saved simply by fearing Hell and wanting to avoid it. Fearing Hell is a good thing, by increasing your motivation to find the truth and respond accordingly. What God wants from you is *agreement*, an honest and willful turn from destructive sins and a heart in accord with the Author of all righteousness, love, and fellowship. What are you waiting for?

If you die in your sins, your rebellious attitudes will be locked in. The last chapter of the Bible describes the stark difference between the saved and the lost throughout eternity:

*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. Revelation 22:11-15*

Which family are you going to belong to?

### Chapter 3

#### *Heaven Part 1: Heaven is more than a place.*

HD (Hopelessly Depressed): "I used to believe in God. I don't think I do anymore. Even if there is a God, I'm sure He doesn't care about me."

DD: "You look like you've had some trouble in this life. What's happened?"

HD: "A couple of years ago our little baby girl died. We hadn't baptized her yet and our priest said that now it's too late. My wife couldn't handle it and I wasn't any use to her, either. That was our baby girl! Our hearts broke. We started fighting a lot and she divorced me. I started drinking and then lost my job. I'm broke, but whenever I've got a few bucks, I just get drunk again. What's the point of it all? I just wish I could go back and have my wife and baby again."

DD: "You can't go back, but you can have your wife and baby again, if you really want that."

HD: "What are you talking about?"

DD: "The Bible teaches that when little children die, they go to be with the Lord. They are innocent in God's eyes because they don't understand sin and repentance. They don't know enough to embrace the Gospel. Baptism has nothing to do with it. Baptism is for believers, old enough to repent and trust Christ, as a ceremony, a symbol, to show others that they are professing Christ. Your daughter is with the Lord."

HD: "That would be great, but what does that have to do with me?"

DD: "You've got to turn from your sins, trust Christ and follow Him. Be born again, a child of God, and you'll be reunited with your daughter forever in Heaven at first, and then on a brand New Earth when Jesus comes back to establish His kingdom."

HD: "What about my wife? I still love her even though she won't even talk to me."

DD: "The first thing is for you to get into agreement with Jesus Christ. When you come to Him, He becomes not just your Savior, but your Comforter, your Helper, and your Friend. He will clean you up and turn you into a man whom your wife could love again. It doesn't do you any good to ask God to give you your wife back if you're not willing to be the man God wants you to be."

HD: "You really think Jesus would help me that much?"

DD: "Absolutely. He changed my heart and mind and life completely. He loves you just as much, but you have to come to Him on His terms. By the way, why do you want your wife back?"

HD: "Well, she and I were so great together. We really got along. We made each other happy."

DD: "So you want to make her happy and you care about her getting the best out of life."

HD: "Yeah, definitely. What's your point?"

DD: "Do you care whether she goes to Heaven or Hell?"

HD: "Yes, of course I do."

DD: "Then you've got to get right with God and get saved first. Only then can you help her to find Christ. Look, there just aren't that many Christians out there telling people they need to be saved. You are probably the only chance your wife has to understand and believe the Gospel. There's no time to waste. Only with God's help are you going to get your marriage back. Only through Christ are you and

your wife going to get your daughter back. Only by you lining up with Jesus and her lining up with Jesus will you both be lined up together. The Lord Jesus Christ offers you hope and purpose in this life, and a wonderful relationship with Him for eternity. But it starts today . . . this moment. Confess your sins to God now, repent from them, and trust Christ for salvation. Don't cross the street until you're part of the family."

*What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?  
Psalm 89:48*

*If a man die, shall he live again? Job 14:14*

*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. Mark 8:36-38*

Step outside on a beautiful Spring day. The "roof" you live under is a beautiful shade of blue, the breeze is refreshing, and the flowers are beginning to bloom. Somehow you have forgotten that you live on death row. You're not getting off this planet alive. You are part of the mutinous crew of spaceship Earth and have been justly condemned. But wait . . . the Owner of this ship that you stole offers you a full pardon. Moreover, He offers to adopt you into His family and promises you inherited riches beyond imagination. What an incredible offer! You're not sure that you believe it, but if you have a shred of sanity, you will investigate whether the offer is true. One thing you're sure of: your death sentence, your execution, is assured. It could be today. Over 150,000 others under this same sky will die today. It could be years from now. But it is coming.

Don't you want to live? As I write this chapter our daughter, Elizabeth, 28 years old, suffers from a particularly virulent form of brain cancer, from which no one has ever recovered. The most modern diagnostic techniques and treatments run the medical bills to over \$100,000, yet it is clear that the preeminent oncologists in this field are clueless with regard to both causes and cures. They disagree with each other about what the residual MRI shadows represent, not to mention what to do next, other than to simply cut away more brain tissue. The reason that medical science is so primitive and void of remedies is because the top researchers do not even understand how the cell operates at a fundamental level, and so are even more mystified when it behaves in atypical, cancerous modes. They don't understand the cell. They don't understand the brain. There is no hope . . . they say.

We love our daughter. We don't want to lose her. If she dies in the near future, we will miss her greatly, as will her husband and many others. Are we depressed, gloomy, and listless? No. We pray for God to heal her. He may or He may not. We trust the Lord to keep her here as long as He chooses. She works to make her days count. She is using her terminal condition to open up dialogue with healthy people who have no hope at all. Everyone is on "death row" but few have accepted the "pardon."

What sustains our spirits? We all know that we shall see each other again. Heaven, a real place presently in an unknown location, perhaps beyond this observable universe, is home for the Lord's children, all who have been born again into His family. Heaven will eventually be relocated to a restored New Earth . . . we'll discuss that in the next chapter. Those who die "in the Lord" will be with the Lord immediately. As the apostle Paul professed while he was in a Roman prison:

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. Philippians 1:21-26*

Paul is torn between two desires. He wants to be released from prison so he can travel to encourage the Christians in the church he founded at Philippi. Yet his overriding desire is to depart this life to be with Christ. Paul's sense of duty prevails. He is quite willing to suffer the troubles of this life so that he can serve the Lord by preaching the Gospel to the lost and by bolstering the faith of the new believers.

Are there people in this world that you would like to see again? Do you love some people enough that you would tell them how they could live again? Many people in your life have effectively no chance for salvation unless you repent and trust Christ first. You could be the missionary to your loved ones. As long as you scoff at the truth, you strengthen their hopeless unbelief. If you and your family and friends were all on death row and you were offered a pardon, might you mention it to the rest?

When I think about my own relatives, I have nothing but sadness. Neither my grandparents nor the generations before them, as much as I have any knowledge, were followers of Jesus Christ. My ancestry is Roman Catholic as far back as I know. Their trust was in their pope, their priests, their religious ceremonies, and a self-righteous view of their own alleged goodness. They all thought they were saving themselves through a convenient form of religion. Thus they despised the cross of Jesus Christ and died lost. My parents, who are still alive but in failing health, cling to the same old beliefs. My sister is a skeptical ex-Catholic, very successful in this world, but she and her two grown sons have no interest in the Gospel. As far as I know, I am the only one from my blood line that ever came out from Roman Catholicism to be born again.

Would I like to enjoy Heaven with my relatives? Oh, so much! But they all chose their own way, instead of *the only Way*. I marvel at Christians who were raised in genuine Christian families. They will certainly share a special joy when they are reunited on that golden shore.

Yet I am promised many brothers and sisters in my adopted family, the family of God. Consider the account below thoughtfully. Who is wise, who is successful, who is investing intelligently?

*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*

*And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*

*Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. Mark 10:17-31*

This was a “good man,” a rich and successful man, no doubt a pillar in the community. The Gospel of Luke identifies him as a ruler, part of the governing elite. He was moral and law-abiding. He came to the right man – Jesus Christ – with the right question. Jesus probed his self-righteousness, but then camped on the *big sin* of this man – his idolatry. He loved his riches, his possessions, all made out of the dust of the ground. The Lord does not command everyone to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. But this man’s god was his stuff, and repentance starts with the biggest sin in one’s life. Stupid, short-sighted, self-absorbed man. He wouldn’t repent. He walked away lost.

The disciples were shocked. If this “good” and successful and moral man wouldn’t be saved, then who could? Yet God will save anyone who repents or is even willing to repent. In the latter case, God will help provide repentance and faith. In the previous chapter, a desperate man pleaded, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Take a step toward the Lord. He’ll help you the rest of the way. But you must execute that turn and take that step, not looking back.

Getting to the heart of our present discussion, we see Peter analyzing the situation and comparing the rich man’s case with his own, in which he left behind a small but successful fishing business with his family, in order to follow Jesus wherever He would lead. The Lord’s promise is marvelous: A hundredfold increase in family members plus houses plus lands . . . plus persecutions. Walking beside

the Lord through this life guarantees trouble with a world devoted to Satanic rebellion. But from a merely personal point of view, the rewards promised are immense. Where is that rich young ruler now? He has been in Hell for over 1900 years. Where is that poor ex-fisherman who became an itinerant preacher and was viciously executed? He is now part of a huge, loving, joyful family, in Heaven where mansions abound and friendships are everlasting.

There are brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers of mine who are already waiting for me in Heaven. Willie P owned a small chain of barbecue restaurants in Albuquerque and worked with me in our church's "bus ministry," as we reached out to families and brought hundreds of kids to church every Sunday to hear the Gospel. Jimmie R was an ace mechanic who volunteered many of his hours every week to keeping those buses running. He also served as my "bouncer" when boys would get unruly during Junior Church. Many of those boys came to know Christ as they spent quality time with Jimmie. Todd H was probably the most cheerful Christian I ever knew . . . and the most energetic song leader. He also gave many hours each week to fill up a bus with young people. Those three men are in Heaven now. I miss them, but we'll have much time to catch up when I get home.

Recently, I got a call from another old friend, Rudy J, I worked with on a Sunday School bus route 30 years ago. Our church in Albuquerque had 10 bus routes that covered the entire city area. "Bus workers" would meet together on Saturday morning for mutual encouragement and whatever organizational business we had to transact, and then visit the routes. After the meeting, we called on the "regulars" – the families of the kids who normally rode the bus to church on Sunday – and often spent some time knocking on new doors, to preach the Gospel and to invite families to attend.

I remember one visiting preacher who criticized us for bringing kids instead of whole families on the bus. The way I see it, we tried hard to reach out to and bring entire families to Christ (first) and to be part of the church (second). But when adults would typically refuse, they would, nevertheless, be willing to send their kids. So my choice was either to let the whole family go to Hell or to try and reach the kids first. I chose the kids. And sometimes, over the course of months or years, parents would repent, too.

My old friend and partner called to tell me about a call he got from a 40-year-old man who had been a young child when he rode our bus. He had gotten saved as a youngster and wanted to let us know that he grew up to serve the Lord faithfully, was married to a fine Christian woman, and was raising his children to follow the Lord, too. What a joy to hear such a report! I remember working with hundreds of kids in those years who gave every evidence of responding to the Gospel by faith in Christ. But I have no idea what happened to them. God knows. There will be much rejoicing in Heaven.

*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Luke 15:7-10*

Just like the woman in the parable, we searched that city from end to end, week after week, to find precious “lost coins” to bring into the family.

My wife and I have a grandmother in Heaven. Bonnie’s grandma Ethel, at a very old age, spent a few days with us while we shared truth with her. We were privileged to see her trust Christ in her 80s and show much evidence of a grateful, converted heart. She is waiting up ahead, too.

Jerry B, the father of my high school buddy who introduced me to Christ, was a faithful dad, husband, and witness for the Gospel throughout his life. Sometimes when I’m talking to the Lord I ask Him to say “hi” to Jerry for me . . . along with Willie and Jimmie and Todd.

Pete D lived next door to us in Mississippi 15 years ago. He was in his 70s, still running a very successful business, but was afflicted with cancer that finally took his life. Once per week for months we would spend a couple of hours together talking about everything under the sun. He was educated by Jesuits in his youth, but had turned from Roman Catholicism to skepticism as an adult. After several months of discussion, he came to realize the truth when contrasted with all of the errors and fantasies he had formerly embraced. He trusted Christ and I’m looking forward to seeing him again.

Yet I know of many . . . oh so many precious souls who defied God’s offer of grace and died in their sins. My wife and I have no hope that we will see her deceased parents in Heaven. I have shared the Gospel with more than one old man suffering a terminal disease, who hoped to beat his sickness and continue in sin. Gone now with no hope. Years ago, when I began teaching at Michigan Tech, I was in the process of befriending a talented young engineering professor, an ex-Hindu skeptic from India, when he died while swimming in a local lake. I had not “gotten around to” pressing him with his need for salvation. I determined never to make that mistake again.

*The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 1 Corinthians 15:26*

Death is our biggest enemy. Whatever problems you face today, this week, this year, or in your entire life . . . *nothing measures up to the finality and horror of death.* Yet Jesus Christ offers you life, eternal life, starting now and extending into eternity. For the believer death is just a momentary transition into glory, with true family and friends . . . friends which include the Lord Jesus, now eternally resident in a human body, so you can have fellowship with the One who invented love. So tell me again what it is that holds you back?

Heaven, both now while it’s beyond the stars, and in eternity when Heaven and Earth become one (more on this in the next chapter), is first and foremost the home of Jesus Christ. Who is this Jesus who demands your allegiance? Let’s review just a small sampling of His names and titles as revealed in Scripture. I’ll offer a brief comment relating each name / title to your purpose in life.



**Emmanuel** . . . Literally, “God with us.” The Creator, in the person of Jesus Christ, became man to enjoy perfect fellowship with you, if you want Him.

**Son of Man** . . . Becoming man and, in His resurrected body, inhabiting flesh for eternity, He knows by experience everything about you and what gives joy, peace, contentment, satisfaction, and love. He also knows how to provide such gifts. Would you like to know Him?

**Son of God** . . . The father / son relationship among men on earth – at its absolute best – is just a shadow of the perfect fellowship among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the trinity. God as Father showed His love for you in offering His only begotten Son (born of a woman) to satisfy eternal justice, so that you can be adopted into His family. How about getting introduced to the ultimate adoptive Parent?

**Creator** . . . The Lord Jesus invented protons, electrons, atoms, planets, stars, bananas, strawberries, leopards, sequoias, and human beings. He created art, literature, music, logic, mathematics, justice, and history. Are you curious about *anything* in life? Wouldn't you like to spend some time with Him?

**Light** . . . He invented photons. He removes darkness – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He offers you His own perspective so that you can see and understand the way it *really* is. Get real and get to know the Author of reality.

**Life** . . . The source of all life, He offers you spiritual life, eternal life, which can start now and endure forever, ever growing, ever strengthening, and indestructible.

**The Way** . . . Not “a way”, but *the way* – no other path through life to God, to life, to joy, to love, to fulfilled existence. It's amazing that God offers *any way* to a wicked and rebellious people.

**Savior** . . . You are lost in your sins. You *need* a Savior. There is only one.

**Advocate** . . . Within the trinity, where holiness and justice reign, you have an Advocate, the eternal Son of God Himself. When God demands justice, God as Advocate satisfies justice in your place through the cross.

**Bridegroom** . . . The born again believers, the saints of God, are pictured collectively as the bride of Christ, denoting an everlasting spiritual bond, and a love for which the earthly marriage relationship is but a shadow.

**Lamb** . . . He walked purposefully, willingly into Jerusalem, his face set “like flint” toward the cross, as the sacrificial Lamb for the forgiveness of your vile sins. For whom would you do such a thing?

**Shepherd** . . . Like dumb sheep, we stumble and fumble through life. The “Good Shepherd” offers you guidance, protection, and care, day by day.

**Friend** . . . Who is your best friend? How does he / she stack up against the Lord Jesus Christ? If you have the sense to see His virtue, His love, His righteousness, He will be your Friend. If not, He will be your . . .

**Judge** . . . Judgment is reserved for the Son of God. He knows your every thought, word, and deed. Do you want to be judged without mercy? Are you crazy?

**King** . . . Wake up. Jesus is the King of all of creation. Bow the knee now, repent, and trust Him for salvation. Continue to refuse and you will lose this opportunity for eternity. At the final judgment you *will bow* before Him, in the presence of the angels, the saints of God, and all of creation, guilty and condemned with no hope . . . forever.

**Worthy** . . . He is worthy of your worship, your devotion, and your love. Heaven is where Jesus is. That is the *first thing* about Heaven. The born again believer, thankful to His Savior, desires to be with Him, to learn from Him, to enjoy His presence, to grow in knowledge and understanding, and to experience the only peace that passes understanding.

The night before the cross Jesus invested several hours in teaching His disciples what must come to pass in the days and even in the millennia ahead. At one point He prayed to His Heavenly Father while His disciples listened. Note especially the identification of *eternal life* with *knowing* Jesus, and the promised intimacy and immortal glory which He yearns to share with us pitiful mortals.

*These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. . . . Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. John 17:1-5 . . . 20-24*

The gods of pagan religions know nothing about the 3-in-1 triune God. And I cannot explain exactly how there can be three separate persons in the Godhead, yet they are but one God. The Scripture teaches in many ways that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have distinction, and yet have such perfect unity that Jesus is called the "Father," for example. The Bible tells believers that we are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. Jesus is in us because the Holy Spirit is in us. Can my puny, finite, time-bound self get my head around that? Nope. But the implications are clear enough for me to make the correct life-altering

decisions. God is love and invented love, and can only know love before the creation of the world if there were *relationships* within the Godhead. The perfect love *within* God from eternity past is offered boldly and freely to all who believe . . . that could be you. I was adopted into that relationship over 40 years ago. I wouldn't go back even if it were possible. You and I were created to desire love and to share love. That can only be fulfilled in the one and only God who is love!

What is Heaven all about? Wouldn't you like to *know* Jesus? Would you like to experience the perfect fellowship and joy and glory of the almighty triune God? I confess that I don't know what that really means. It certainly goes far beyond my imagination. The greatest joys and glories of the most spectacular pageants and banquets and kingdoms in Earth's history are just muddy images of what God can and will do. I can imagine a lot, but am content to suspend such imaginations in anticipation of the reality ahead.

Most people hope there is life after death, and even unbelievers will express the hope that a deceased loved one "is in a better place." You don't get to Heaven by wanting to go there. You don't avoid Hell by fearing it. Heaven includes the throne of Jesus Christ. You must want *Him* – not just a nice place to live after you depart this Earth. Eternal life is in the person of Jesus Christ. He alone knows the way because He is the Way. You become part of the family when you agree with the family's principles. Consider the so-called "beatitudes" (plus a few more verses) at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

*And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.*

*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

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

*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.*

*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

*Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine*

*before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. Matthew 5:1-16*

Why does the sermon lead off with these truths? These are key characteristics of the followers of Jesus Christ. Born again believers manifest humility (poor in spirit), are often grievously persecuted, are never arrogant, love righteousness and purity, seek peace between men, and rejoice under tribulation. They fight against decay in the culture (salt), their works are “good,” and the “light” of their testimony shines boldly before men.

Any believer in this present life continually falls short, but is most definitely aimed in this direction. When you get to Heaven, the Lord will purify your flesh and your desires so that you can be the Heavenly citizen you were meant to be. Those that want to live in God’s kingdom, but have no desire for righteousness and are consumed with their puny little *selves*, do not qualify.

## Chapter 4

### *Heaven Part 2: The Millennium, New Heaven, and New Earth*

GS (Great Scientist): "I only believe in what I can measure. Physics is the queen of the sciences. Searching out the reality of nature – that's what excites me . . . electrons, protons, neutrons, atoms, and forces like gravity and electromagnetism which obey precise mathematical laws. You talk of a Heaven and Hell that you can't prove to me."

DD: "So how much do you really know? Let's take the simplest of all physical systems: a hydrogen atom consisting of just one proton and one electron. Can you tell me just what that electron is doing as it moves in proximity to that proton?"

GS: "Oh, that's elementary. You simply solve Schroedinger's equation to find the eigenfunctions . . ."

DD: "Hang on, there. I've studied quantum mechanics, too. All you will come up with are probability functions suggesting where the electron *might be* if you actually try to measure it. Quantum mechanics gives you probabilities that are useful for engineering, for example. But neither you nor any Nobel prize winner on the planet knows what that electron is really doing. Or even what it is, other than just listing a few simple characteristics like mass, charge, and spin."

GS: "Well yeah, sure. That's the nature of science. Newtonian mechanics was superseded by relativity and quantum theory. We're always searching for a deeper level of understanding. That's what string theory is about. Let me tell you about strings . . ."

DD: "Come on, you know how wildly speculative that is. And the point of quantum theory is that you *can't know* what's going on at the next level. Many have tried. Don't you have a desire to find out what really is going on? What really underpins reality? How gravity really works? Whether dark matter exists? What the real explanation is behind what everybody calls dark energy because they don't have a clue what's going on as the galaxies race away from each other?"

GS: "Sure, who wouldn't. I'm investing my life to do just that."

DD: "So how many years have you been at this?"

GS: "Ever since I started my Ph.D. research 30 years ago."

DD: "How many years do you have left?"

GS: "Maybe . . . who knows? Nobody knows that!"

DD: "Be honest. Your best years are behind you. A theorist's most creative and productive years are in his late twenties and thirties. You just start to wear out. And how much of 'reality' have you actually discovered in the last 30 years?"

GS: "Don't you remember who I am? I've been called one of the greatest scientists of our time. Hey, look at my publication list! I have over 200 serious journal articles, plus several books, not to mention hundreds of conference presentations. I've won the award for . . ."

DD: "Like I thought. Lots of incremental, hopeful progress, but my point is that the great mysteries of the universe will escape you. Your life is too short and some of the mysteries are certainly beyond mankind's ability or resources to properly explore. On the other hand, although I don't have anywhere

near the reputation you have, I expect to search out many of these mysteries and get some real answers.”

GS: “Yeah, right. If you were that good, you would already have the reputation.”

DD: “I’m talking about during the Millennium and the ages to come. As I’ve explained to you before, I expect to have a new body, with significantly enhanced mental abilities. I look forward to finding out what that electron is doing, why the galaxies are structured the way they are, and even what’s inside the proton – quarks, strings, who knows? God brilliantly designed an immense and complex universe and it’s going to be great fun to explore it. If you really had the thirst for knowledge that you claim to have, you would be open-minded enough at least to investigate whether you might have the same opportunity.”

GS: “Look, I rejected ‘religion’ when I was a very young man. I’m not about to start down that road again.”

DD: “You just admitted that you rejected your only hope for an eternity of growth, exploration, and excitement when you were too young to know anything about the issues at all. Is that the way you do science: make arbitrary and uninformed decisions when the stakes are truly immense?”

The man that dies with the most fame and the most money wins! Right? Certainly, it seems that many live as though this is the rule of life. How much of your life do you trade for money or prestige? Certainly, to live comfortably and to have freedom to travel, acquire, learn, etc., you need to earn a living. But there are few ambitious men and women who are merely satisfied to earn a living. “Ambitious people” – you know who you are. You have no time for God, no respect for the Bible. You want it all now! Ironically, you spend almost all of your life *investing* for those – at most – few years when you’re old and frail and retired, because *then* you can do anything you want to do . . . in your rapidly aging, infirm body, with declining mental abilities.

I spend a good bit of time in downtown Chicago. I see a lot of “suits” striding hurriedly and purposefully between the government buildings, the banks, and the various corporate headquarters. I note the deference paid by the younger suits to the older suits when in their presence. Ambition permeates suit culture. Young suits are spending their lives in order to become old suits. Old suits are still driving for the next bonus, the next promotion, the next bit of power or prestige. Young graduate students eagerly follow their faculty advisors, worshiping the tenure, the prestige, the awards, and the adulation they hope to acquire during their careers.

What is the end of their ambition? Many of those skyscrapers have been there for decades. Does anyone even know the names of the bank presidents, senior law partners, district attorneys, police chiefs, or corporate CEOs, CFOs, or board chairmen that walked these streets in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, or even 1980s? Apart from a *very few names*, how many scientists, engineers, and academics of a half-century ago still enjoy any notoriety? If this world persists another few decades, what remembrance will be left by today’s suits? And just where are those superstars of former decades? Most of them are in Hell, awaiting the final judgment. Not many of the rich and powerful . . . or even the poor and greedy . . . repent from self-centeredness and follow Jesus.

I'm certain that many of the older suits have far more net worth than I do. Yet I was blessed to "retire" from the paycheck six years ago, *at my earliest opportunity*, so I could prioritize my time to make the days count. Why don't they retire? Whether it's the next deal, the next promotion, the next lifetime achievement award, a bigger yacht, or just more bucks, why can't they see it's all vanity?

Consider the wealthiest, smartest, most successful man in the history of the world: King Solomon of Israel, who reigned over the world's richest kingdom about 3,000 years ago. The book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon's own confession about the end of ambition. I encourage you to read the entire, albeit short, book, in which Solomon confesses that everything he acquired and experienced in the lusts of his flesh was just *vanity* . . . pointless, worthless, temporary self-gratification.

You're not going to outdo Solomon. Read the historical record in the books of Kings and Chronicles. He had the resources to acquire and experience EVERYTHING his little heart desired. Today's suits are pikers in comparison. Solomon literally had 1000 women to choose from at bedtime. Seven hundred official wives weren't enough. So he added 300 concubines to the harem. How frustrating it must have been to grow old!

The closest I've met with respect to "having it all" in America is a near-billionaire with whom I had some professional interaction over a period of a few years. We'll call him "Mr. Pyramid," (not his real name) because he climbed to the top of several corporate and financial pyramids. When I knew him he was in his mid-sixties, divorced but with a new, young, augmented trophy wife. Mr. P was still good looking and athletic, and still looking to make a difference. He had been raised the son of a preacher, but had rejected the person of Jesus Christ (yes, the rejection is personal, not philosophical) when he got conned by the anti-scientific fantasy of evolution during his college years.

Despite being an atheist, Mr. Pyramid was driven to establish a charitable foundation to help various disadvantaged groups. I find it interesting that rich atheists, despite their materialistic worldview – physics and chemistry supposedly explain everything – feel the need to find meaning by charitable giving. Where is the impulse for charity and the satisfaction thereof in the DNA molecule, or in nuclear or electromagnetic forces? Mr. Pyramid was also actively and financially involved in trying to rebuild the reputation of his alma mater, where I taught as an engineering professor.

I was part of a cadre that spent a couple of days with him at an "off-site" conference which he graciously paid for at a mountain resort. (I still have the monogrammed jacket!) At the opening dinner, he had a video loop playing that showed some of the activities in his life, notably auto racing, skiing, hang gliding, sailing . . . and my memory fails to recall the rest. I had the clear impression that he felt that life was desperately short and he had to squeeze as much excitement, experience, and meaning as he could into the remaining days of his life. How frustrating it must be to be ridiculously wealthy by earthly standards and have so few days to take pleasure. Without the hope established by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, how pitiful to believe that life ends in oblivion. It's worse than that, of course, for the unbeliever. Life ends in perfect judgment. Oblivion would be an upgrade.

The Lord Jesus spoke to this scenario in a parable found in the Gospel of Luke:

*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. Luke 12:15-21*

What does Mr. Pyramid really want to do? He wants to live forever, of course! And he clearly wants life to have meaning. Atheistic materialism doesn't actually work for him on a day-to-day basis. What is the physics of meaning? What are the equations for joy? Where in the DNA molecule do you find kindness, or charity, or love, or justice, or truth, or beauty? The vitally essential aspects of life are *non-material*. The concept of hope is wired into us and yet hope is entirely *immaterial*, along with the rest of the list above. Concepts, thoughts, purposes, meanings . . . we understand such things because we are made in the image of God, who also is immaterial, a Spirit. God created the universe – a lot of stuff – but most importantly He created image bearers, you and me, to walk with Him and make our days count.

Face it: everything you own, even your body itself is made out of dirt! We can spend many hard-working hours in exchange for money in order to buy nicely shaped dirt in the form of bigger TVs, cars, houses, jewelry – but it's still dirt! Get some perspective.

*Most ironic of all is that Mr. Pyramid – and YOU – could have literally EVERYTHING by making the investment of humility and faith in the OWNER of everything under the suns of all the galaxies.*

In the last chapter we discussed the more spiritual aspects of Heaven. Now let's sample some of the more material and experiential aspects. At the end of the final judgments reported in Revelation 20, which take place after the 7-year Tribulation and after the 1,000 year Millennium, God establishes a New Heaven and a New Earth. Peter refers to this in his second letter, as he pleads for believers to get some perspective on the brevity of their current lives and the value of investing in the "real estate" that will endure forever.

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the Heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new Heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth*



*righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. 2 Peter 3:10-14*

What is described is clearly both a planet-wide and a universe-wide purification. Death and disease will be expunged from God's creation. No more plagues, nor more graves, no more hurricanes, no more supernovas, no more sorrow, and no more pain. Revelation chapter 21 addresses this beginning of the "ages to come."

*And I saw a new Heaven and a new earth: for the first Heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. Revelation 21:1-5*

The capital city of the universe will be New Jerusalem, located *perhaps* in orbit about the New Earth. The Lord Jesus Christ has been preparing this city as a home for His followers for almost 2,000 years now. The night before His death He reassured His disciples:

*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. John 14:1-6*

The place He promised to prepare is none other than New Jerusalem. God took only six days to create and fashion the earth, the oceans, the continents, the atmosphere, weather, fish, dinosaurs, fruit, giraffes, and man, plus the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars of trillions of galaxies, and an unknown number of planets about those stars. I make just a mild assumption in expecting that the care He takes in preparing our future capital city will amaze its inhabitants in both majesty and personal detail. Here is the short description from the revelator, John, when he was given a glimpse of his inheritance:

*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.*

*And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.*

*And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.*

*And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: Revelation 21:10 – 22:3*

On this present Earth men do not count building materials as precious. Asphalt, concrete, stone, iron, and wood are inexpensive and can be produced in abundance. What we now count as precious, the Lord uses as mere structural materials: gold, sapphire, emerald, topaz, etc. In this vision John says nothing about what might be used to denote the *precious* items within the city. I suggest that such is beyond our present imagination and I look forward to awestruck surprise. I won't expand on the entire passage above. Do notice that there will be trees along this pure river (do you know of any pure rivers in your country?) that produce a different kind of fruit every month! The revelation of John on this city is way too short! I so much want to see what the Lord has been working on.

There is one particular point I want you to consider if you have a mind for investing in your future. The city is described as having a square base, 12,000 furlongs on a side. Conservatively, this would be at least 1380 miles on a side. Since the height, length, and breadth are equal, some envision the city as a cube; others see it as perhaps a pyramid in overall shape. Scripture does not prescribe such constraints. The height, for example, could peak at 1380 miles, but be irregular. The downtown areas of New York or Chicago could be described as so many square miles in length by width, by 1,000 feet or more in

height, based on the tallest of the skyscrapers. I suspect that New Jerusalem will amaze us in both macroscopic and microscopic architecture. The Lord is clever enough to construct views and sightlines that are spectacular from any point in the city.

Let's do a little arithmetic and speculate a bit. I'll assume (for reasons beyond the scope of this book) that there might be two billion saints from the ages, including the multitudes of new converts during the Tribulation, that will enjoy an inheritance in the New Jerusalem. I believe that the Lord will have His followers engaged in many locations throughout the Earth during the Millennium, and throughout the New Heaven (universe) and the New Earth in the ages to come. But I think that it is clear that we will have personal estates in New Jerusalem. If we allocate a cubic volume 1380 miles on each side to two billion saints, there will be 1.3 cubic miles per capita. Let's further assume that a generous half of New Jerusalem is devoted to government and public space. Then an individual estate could enjoy a full 1.3 square miles of real estate with an "air space" of a half mile above its base.

Please humor me now and allow me to go beyond speculation and fantasize a little. I love to play tennis in this present life (although my aging body restricts me considerably now). If I were granted an average estate equipped with "stuff" from the Lord for my enjoyment, I might enjoy several tennis courts: one grass, one clay, one hard court, one carpeted, and a couple with surfaces that I haven't even thought of yet. I love books and would love to have a library integrated with my house (mansion). I think fondly of those old movies showing mansions with a library / study lined with dark wood book shelves, huge bay windows, and an oversized cherry wood desk. I might also find time for golf (I haven't taken the time to play in over 30 years) . . . there is plenty of room for a custom-designed golf course. I certainly would desire facilities for banquets, "movie nights" (featuring true histories of the propagation of the Gospel), and couches with attached refrigerators (Pepsi on ice) for stimulating discussions with good friends. My life-long love for astronomy might be enjoyed with an observatory and a planetarium. As a scientist / engineer, I would love to have a laboratory to play around in, building new types of lasers, and trying to figure out just what's going on in the quantum world.

What types of fellowships and societies might be organized to stimulate learning, art, music, culture, and technology? I might learn to paint or play the piano . . . I have zero skill and zero interest now, but I will have some time to invest then. I could go on fantasizing for a long time. I'm sure you could, too. How much would you invest now in order to enjoy a thousand years . . . a million years . . . eternity . . . in whatever lifestyle would make you most joyful and satisfied? The Lord specifies the investment required:

*Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Matthew 13:44-46*

If you **know** that there is treasure hidden in a field that exceeds the wealth of nations, how much would you sell in order to purchase that field? Citizenship in the kingdom of Heaven entitles you to so much

more. Your part is to sell all you have . . . your self-will, your self-destructive sins, your petty short-sighted lusts . . . and trust the Savior, the King of Heaven. How can you **know** that the treasure is there? That's easy. Go back to Chapter 1. If you still have some specific questions that need answering, write them down and contact me. I haven't heard any really good questions in many years.

Why do you continue to invest in that which you cannot keep, when you are offered a gift that you cannot lose? In the Christian film, *The Perfect Stranger*, the skeptical main character is challenged: "You're like a little kid who refuses to go to Disneyworld because she's having too much fun making mudpies at the curb."

What about that last verse in the passage I quoted from Revelation above . . . Revelation 22:3: ". . . and His servants shall serve Him." We're talking about work! Work can be enormously satisfying if we have the skills, the tasks are interesting, and we see the benefits from successful completion. There have been times in my career when I was actually excited to get up in the morning and go to work because the job was so stimulating.

Let me illustrate the difference between "fun" and "satisfaction" from my background as a university professor. I had the satisfaction of helping to create an academic program for engineering students in which they formed "virtual companies," ran the companies themselves, secured contracts with industry and government, invented patentable technology, and paid themselves cash bonuses for projects that were financially profitable. My job as academic advisor was to create the environment in which they could "do their thing," advise the company presidents and project leaders when they ran into apparently insurmountable problems, and hold the students accountable to academic standards. I succeeded best when the students noticed me the least, when they were designing, inventing, marketing, managing, building, testing, briefing, reporting, and negotiating. Was my job big and challenging? Indeed. Did I find it satisfying? Yes! Was it fun? No. It was a lot of work, but I had enormous satisfaction by having a part in the intellectual growth and professional maturation of those students.

Before deciding to join our Enterprise, students would ask me if it was fun. I would tell them that it was much better than fun. Fun is a roller coaster ride. Fun is attending a football game and watching the home team win. The satisfaction in learning, building, and accomplishing – both as an individual and as part of a highly motivated team – is enormous. And all of that was but the shadow of the Enterprises the Lord has in store for His servants in the future.

Regarding the future "career" of the child of God, let's talk about the Millennium first. After the seven years of Tribulation described in many passages of Scripture, and most notably in the book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to establish His kingdom on this Earth for a thousand years. This period is a transition period, pending the final judgments, the purification of this universe, and the establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Only believers and their young children will enter into the Millennium, but generations will be born and multitudes – likely billions – will make their own decisions about whether to yield to the Kingship of their Creator, Jesus Christ. The Millennium will end

with Satan loosed temporarily from captivity in Hell, initiating a rebellion that will culminate in the destruction and everlasting judgment of the rebels. (See Revelation chapter 20.)

During the Millennium, Jesus will reign in person from His throne in (old) Jerusalem. Ever wonder why the land of Israel and Jerusalem is such a contentious place for the nations of Earth? Satan knows that Jerusalem is God's city and he is jealous of the coming Kingship of his enemy, the Son of God. Satan will stir up the nations in desperation to prevent the events that must surely come to pass.

If you become a follower of Jesus Christ, what will you be doing during the Millennium? This is man's chance, under the direct supervision of his King, to get it right. The League of Nations, the United Nations, the G7, the G8, the G20, and all efforts of man to make a utopian Earth are hopeless. How is it going in the world today? Corruption, greed, and all forms of wickedness abound, stimulated by the most intelligent, the most educated, and the most talented rebels in positions of authority everywhere. But in the Millennium, we will get to do it right.

*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:1-9*

The "stem of Jesse" – the descendent of Jesse (the father of King David) is none other than Jesus Christ. He will rule with perfect knowledge and judgment. No deceitful lawyers to confound justice, no plea bargains, no foolish juries . . . the Judge is also the King and the Executioner. Peace will reign among men because evil will not be tolerated. Even the animal kingdom will enjoy peace among its constituents and fellowship with man. Wouldn't you like to live in a neighborhood like that?

However, like any wise king, the Lord delegates His authority to those He can trust. What type of position might you hold in that Kingdom? What do you need on your resume for the best jobs?

*And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain*

*nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.*

*Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. Luke 19:11-27*

This parable is the Bible in a nutshell. God created everything, including people made in His own image to enjoy fellowship with Him and with each other. Yet most say, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” They have chosen rebellion and will be judged accordingly. Of the ones who serve, the Lord gives us the privilege to work with our modest gifts and resources. Those that serve most faithfully will be rewarded with responsibilities to help fashion the coming Kingdom to glorify God and bring joy to men and women. More service in this life is correlated with more reward in the next. The third fellow above professes to be a servant, but his actions and his words betray his selfishness, rebellion, and unbelief. He sees his Lord as austere, harsh, and undeserving of any service. He accuses his Lord of reaping what someone else has sown . . . namely, that the Lord is a thief. In a modern application, this is typically a churchgoer who pays lip service to his “Christian faith,” but he lives for himself. Self, self, self . . . That was Lucifer’s problem and all that follow that path will have nothing but them-selves for miserable self-contemplation in Hell.

The Millennial Kingdom will be a time of rebuilding a world wrecked by the sins and wars of man and the physical judgments of God delivered during the Tribulation. We will have the opportunity to make it right for the first time! Government will be efficient and just. Education will serve to teach truth and expose the lies of the past for what they are. Perhaps the Lord would grant me the privilege of helping to build and direct a university, or a science or engineering department within one, or at least teach a science course! Finally, the glories of the intricate and deliberate design of God’s created order will be examined in every school. The old indoctrination of evolutionary lies and fantasies will be no more. Still

holding on to evolutionary philosophy? You must not have read my book, *Creation vs. Evolution: No Contest!*

Movies, television, music, art, and other media will educate, inspire, and encourage, without any trace of the obscene or disgusting. Historians will have the resources to unveil the truth of past ages, while revisionist agendas will disappear. Sports of all kinds will develop, with athletes who thank God for their abilities, instead of thumping their chests in childish pride. The occult will be illegal. The most dangerous place for any human being today – a mother's womb – will become the safest place . . . no more abortions.

Don't you want to be part of that Kingdom? What if you could choose to do anything you want for the rest of your present life? And have any material possessions that you desire? And have the most satisfying relationships that you could imagine? No matter how fertile your imagination, the reality of the Millennial Kingdom and, more importantly, the ages to come in the New Heaven and the New Earth, will be infinitely greater.

So just what is holding you back? What sins are so precious to you that you won't leave them behind? There are only two kingdoms in this reality. That of Satan and this present world is going to be burned up. Wouldn't you say it is time to change your allegiance?

## Chapter 5

### *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ: What's in it for you?*

DD: "For any ancient period in history, how hard is it to figure out what actually happened, especially when you have competing accounts?"

GH (Great Historian): "It's extremely hard. That's why it takes great scholars to weigh the evidence, read between the lines, compare written accounts with archeological evidence, and then make our judgments."

DD: "Even in the best of cases, I imagine that ancient records are extremely sketchy. And written by the victors or the survivors. How valuable would it be if you could make use of a time machine to observe actual events?"

GH: "I've often fantasized about that. Imagine being there with Wellington at Waterloo, or watching the debates leading up to the Declaration of Independence, or just walking through the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. And I would love to spy on the backroom strategizing at Teheran when Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill began to plan for the post-war world. Memoirs are so self-serving. You wonder what real skullduggery took place."

DD: "I don't imagine they would take kindly to your looking on and publishing the results."

GH: "That's the joy of history. They're gone and they can't sue."

DD: "You know I've shared with you my Biblical historical worldview. Scripture states that God has books that have recorded every deed in world history. I would think that you would like to get a look at those volumes. My opinion is that those 'books' are more than that, perhaps full-scale holographic reconstructions of events."

GH: "If I thought that were true I would be tempted to become a Christian just so that I could fulfill my dream to really know the past."

DD: "Consider that those books will be opened for everyone in the universe to see, including your neighbors, your mother and father, your children, your friends, your enemies, all of the Christians you disrespect, the angels, and God almighty. Every thought, word, and action in your life will be exposed fully and judged. Are you ready for that?"

GH: "I can't think of anything that would be more frightening."

DD: "Consider also that the prophecies that detail this future history were written by the same prophets who foretold the rise of the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece, and Rome. They foretold the destruction of the island city of Tyre by Alexander and the actions of specific kings between the Old Testament and New Testament periods. They foretold the scattering of the Jewish people, their persecution through the last two millennia, and their eventual restoration to the land. They foretold the key role that the city of Jerusalem would play as a source of conflict for the nations in the last days. They foretold the virgin birth of Christ, His place of birth, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. They predicted that in these last days worldwide knowledge and information would explode, communications would be instantaneous, religions would begin to come together, and the world's economies would be knit together."



GH: "Perhaps I should examine such claims more closely."

DD: "Especially because this isn't just an academic issue. Your very soul is at stake."

Are you still with me? I hope you are already convinced, have confessed your sins to God, repented from your old death-style to new life, and have been born again. But if not, this chapter may provoke a sense of urgency.

Imagine that you and your family are living in Warsaw, Poland, in the summer of 1939. You have a good job, you're enjoying life, making friends, eating, drinking, and raising your kids, when suddenly a fairly gloomy neighbor approaches you . . .

"Sir, don't you know that war is about to engulf Poland? You must get your things together, and take your wife and children to safety!"

You reply, "What are you talking about? Look at the pretty blue sky. And there is another concert tonight that we have tickets for. Come on, have a glass of wine and join us for dinner."

With urgency, he retorts: "Can't you see what's happening around us? Germany and Russia are going to decimate this land. Many will die. The land will be devastated. You're not likely to make it out alive."

"I simply don't believe you. Yeah, I've heard the rumors about war, but there have always been wars and rumors of wars. Besides, even if it were true, what could we do about it?"

"I'll tell you what you can do. Here are free tickets for your entire family to fly out of Poland on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Go ahead, take them. It's a gift – already paid for. I don't want to hear that you're among the dead, not to mention your beloved wife and little children."

"If I wanted to go, I would pay for the tickets out of my own wages. I have more pride than to accept such a gift. Besides, there's plenty of time. Tomorrow will be much like today. Life goes on. Now go on, get lost!"

How will you deal with your situation on September 1<sup>st</sup>? Strangely, your neighbor disappeared yesterday with his family, leaving everything behind. You thought he was a fool, but now the enemy tank divisions are rolling across the countryside, the airports are shut down, and death is in the air. Who is the fool now?

The Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (and throughout most of history) were under continual persecution, both by the Jews wherever they held power, and by the Romans who demanded allegiance to their pagan emperor "god." The young church at Thessalonica, Greece, was under particularly acute pressure. The apostle Paul wrote both of his New Testament letters in this context. His most potent element of comfort for them was the promise that Jesus Christ made to return to this Earth and establish His kingdom. In particular, he wrote . . .

*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the*

*Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

In the first verse, “asleep” is a euphemism for death. For the Christian death is merely the sleep of the body, while the soul / the spirit / the “you” is with the Lord. Paul is telling the believers that those who have already died will be resurrected in new bodies and will return with the Lord. Those Christians alive at the time will not “prevent” (an old word that means “pre-event” or “come before”) those that are already in Heaven. Together, the saints alive who are “raptured” or “caught up” will meet the resurrected saints in the air. Paul adds details when he writes to Corinth:

*Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54*

The rapture will occur in “the twinkling of an eye.” If you are in the presence of a believer when it occurs . . . instantaneously, he will be gone. You will know why, unless you buy into the lies propagated from that point by the government, religious leaders, and various crackpots. Jesus was talking about the rapture when he emphasized how startling it would be, in the midst of normal day-to-day activities:

*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of Heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Matthew 24:36-44*

For the last 2,000 years, every generation of Christians has hoped that it would have the privilege to miss death and enjoy an incorruptible body from the moment of the Lord’s return. Notice in the 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians passage that the believers are to meet in the air. The Lord doesn’t touch down to establish His kingdom for another seven years. This period, called “the Tribulation,” will be the most horrific in Earth’s history. Even the flood of Noah’s time produced its destruction quickly. If you manage to live through the seven years of Tribulation, it will seem immensely longer.

What purpose does the rapture serve? It removes the believers before God's wrath is visited upon Earth's rebellious inhabitants. Scripture is deliberately silent regarding the date of the rapture. But many "signs of the times" are offered to indicate when it is getting close. Paul goes on in his Thessalonian letter:

*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.*

*For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 1 Thessalonians 5:1 – 5:11*

Believers should see that the times of God's final judgments are approaching. Many, including both sincere preachers and charlatans, have periodically claimed that the time is at hand. I'll provide some indicators that should give you some concern about the present time. Note in the paragraph above that God has not appointed believers to wrath, but to salvation. My salvation will be complete, not just spiritually, but physically. If I live long enough to experience the rapture, I will receive my incorruptible body right away. Jesus affirmed that times of prophetic fulfillment could be anticipated when he rebuked the clueless in His day:

*And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Luke 12:54-56*

What are the "signs of the times"? Jesus was asked that by His disciples while He yet walked the Earth. I'm not going to do an exhaustive study of prophecy for you. If you're interested, you can get into this yourself. Get yourself a good study Bible. I'd recommend *The New Defender's Study Bible*, King James Version (don't use any modern, watered down version), edited by Henry Morris. Study the Scriptures yourself. Morris' study notes will help you organize your thinking along the way. In this short chapter, you're getting just the tiniest sampling. The night before the crucifixion, Jesus unveiled much of what the world in general, and the Jews in particular, could expect in the last days:

*And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name,*

*saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*  
*Matthew 24:3-12*

In our day we can certainly see the foreshadowing of these events. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the bloodiest in mankind's history and the carnage continues into the 21<sup>st</sup>. Virtually every nation is armed to the teeth, often for defense against neighbors, but also typically to suppress dissent within their own borders. In this age of the "United Nations," there is more hatred, greed, and conflict than at any time in history. Modern technology serves to increase the speed and scope of trouble.

Amidst the most robust economies, famines are still common. Pestilences – diseases – are on the increase. Antibiotics are failing and both old and new viruses afflict multitudes. Genetic diseases are more prevalent today than in previous generations.

On the "religious" front, false prophets and false messiahs abound. Under the umbrella of "Christendom" you can find pope / cardinal / priest – centered Roman Catholicism, all historic branches of Protestantism, plus the usual cults like Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh Day Adventists. Evangelicalism is dominated by entertainment-oriented megachurches and the "ministries" of popular TV personalities. Most fundamentalists have either withdrawn from the spiritual battle or have succumbed to a watered-down Gospel message.

Just this morning, as I write this, I watched a TV special sponsored by Franklin Graham (son of Billy) who heads their evangelistic ministry. All over the world they are conducting large scale evangelistic campaigns, in addition to getting videos and other materials into the hands of small churches and families to reach their villages, tribes, or cities with "the gospel." They preach a message that goes like this:

"Jesus loves you and wants to have a sweet relationship with you. He can help you change your life. You can enjoy peace now and go to Heaven someday. All you have to do is ask Jesus into your heart and you'll be saved."

Sin is rarely mentioned. Repentance is nonexistent. Lost sinners are not confronted with their Number 1 problem: they are on their way to Hell because they have willfully broken God's laws and deserve their judgment. The modern "evangelistic" message is man-centered: Look what Jesus can do for you and wouldn't you like to go to Heaven? This man-centered, sweet message will be used to build the antichrist's worldwide religious system during the Tribulation. All of the denominations are beginning to get together by emphasizing "love" and refusing to acknowledge Biblical doctrines. Such "love" is

merely tolerance for sin and idolatry. A god who merely loves rebels and tolerates sin, with no promise of justice, is a god of man's invention. That's idolatry.

In the same passage, Jesus gives a hint of when the last of the last days is about to get underway:

*Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Matthew 24:32-35*

The fig tree is occasionally used in Old Testament prophecy as a symbol for the nation of Israel. The Lord is warning that the Tribulation is near, within a generation, when the nation of Israel again begins to show life. Here is the millennia sweeping context in a nutshell: In ancient times God warned Israel that if they went into idolatry their nation would be conquered and their people taken into captivity -- slavery. This was fulfilled in the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. When the Jews repented, many returned to the land to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Yet the Jews had lost their independence. Under the Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks, and Romans, they were continually subject to occupying armies and their pagan emperors.

When Jesus Christ arrived in human flesh the nation was given yet another chance. Many hoped that the Old Testament prophecies describing the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom would be fulfilled through Jesus. But they missed the whole point of redemption described throughout the Old Testament, that a perfect sacrificial Lamb was necessary to pay for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles, before such a kingdom could form. For 1,500 years the Jewish priests had been sacrificing lambs without blemish, and then missed it when the true Lamb showed up. Finally, after 3 ½ years of ministry in which Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah in hundreds of ways, He was rejected, crucified, and rose again. The Jews and the Romans didn't crucify Him for any noble purpose, but rather because they rejected His message of repentance and salvation *exclusively* through Him. Jesus walked into Jerusalem *knowing* what was going to happen. He yielded Himself up as the Lamb of God in order to offer salvation to everyone, individually, who would believe. Just before the crucifixion, Jesus foretold that the temple would be utterly destroyed and the Jews slaughtered and scattered. The Roman army obliged in 70 A.D.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the Jews have miraculously remained intact as a people for the last 2,000 years, despite being hated, oppressed, enslaved, and regularly slaughtered throughout history. The OT prophets foretold that the nation would be reborn, yet in unbelief. This happened in 1948. We're in the terminal generation. Don't believe me? Just hang around long enough and watch what unfolds.

I promise you that you don't want to be left behind to endure the Tribulation. Yes, you could be saved during this period, but isn't your choice a tad easier now? In addition to judgment against the rebels of this Earth, the Tribulation also serves as God's last chance offered to those who hate Him. Multitudes will humble themselves and repent . . . and then will be martyred by the Antichrist, Satan's dictator who

will make it his primary mission to destroy every Jew and every believer in Christ. At least half of the Earth's population will be killed in a terrible series of God-ordained disasters. Here is a list of these calamities from the book of Revelation:

- World war
- Economic collapse
- Famine
- Plague
- Widespread attacks by wild animals . . . These first five judgments kill one-fourth of the world's population, close to two billion people.
- Global earthquakes and volcanic eruptions intense enough to move islands and continents
- Sun and moon darkened by worldwide dust clouds
- Intense meteor showers
- Cessation of winds, atmospheric circulation
- Hail storms mingled with blood
- A third of Earth's trees is burned up along with all of the grass.
- An asteroid crashes into an ocean, destroying a third of all shipping and ocean life.
- Another asteroid or comet falls and contaminates a third of the rivers.
- The sun's radiation is reduced by a third.
- A locust-like swarm of scorpion-like creatures attack men for five months.
- A demon-possessed horde of monstrous creatures kill one third of Earth's remaining population.
- Another earthquake destroys a tenth of Jerusalem, killing 7,000 people.
- A painful skin disease breaks out across the globe.
- The oceans are turned into blood, killing every creature in the seas.
- The rivers and springs of water are turned into blood – in retribution for the blood of the millions of martyrs at the hands of rebellious men.
- The sun increases its radiant output, scorching anyone outdoors.
- Darkness envelops the Earth.
- Satan and his forces stir up the nations of the world for yet another global war.
- The largest earthquake in world history shakes the Earth; mountains are razed and islands sink into the seas.
- A hailstorm with ice rocks averaging 100 pounds pummels the Earth.
- The political leaders, which have been in bed with the religious leaders, are provoked to double-cross them and destroy the worldwide religious system.
- The remaining centers of economic power are destroyed.
- The largest combined armies in world's history are gathered in the valley of Armageddon and are destroyed by the Lord as he returns at the end of the Tribulation. The blood flows up to the level of a horse's bridle.

So, do you want to hang around for all of this? If you reject Christ, you just might have the opportunity, but you're not likely to survive for very long. Those who do will have seven years of "bad days."

Now, when the rapture hits, you're going to be assured by the political powers, the religious leaders, the academics, and the media that *of course it wasn't the rapture!* I speculate (can't be dogmatic about this one) that the principal lie will be that the disappearances are due to alien abduction. How many movies, TV shows, novels, and comic books promote this idea? When I was a teenager in the 1960s and began to read sci-fi, the genre was still in the minor leagues. In the last fifty years, however, it has come to dominate the box office and the TV screen. I find it to be no coincidence that sci-fi began to grow in popularity around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Jews were beginning to find their way back to the land of Israel. Satan is an expert in Biblical prophecy. He knows perfectly well that the rebirth of Israel signifies the times of his prophesied defeat. He does not know exactly when the rapture will take place, but he knows that it must be close. When Israel made it official in 1948, the succeeding decade experienced an explosion of sci-fi and horror movies, TV shows, and comic books.

Throughout man's history, the occult and, in particular, demonic possession, oppression, and appearances have been recorded. In the "civilized" West, you have to look a bit harder to find openly demonic acts. If you were to travel to many 3<sup>rd</sup> world locations, you wouldn't have to wait at all. Witch doctors and shamans continue to invoke occultic "miracles," with startling similarities throughout the world and throughout history, despite no apparent means of inter-cultural communication.

What is new in the last century, and especially in the last several decades, is the demonic tactic to impersonate alien beings. Do some research. This is a worldwide phenomenon, involving literally millions of events in our lifetime. Take away the hoaxes, odd atmospheric phenomena, and mistakes, and you are still left with UFO sightings and alien visitations that are utterly unexplainable by secular reasoning. Large numbers of people in various places throughout the world have seen what appears to be large spacecraft moving at terrific velocities. And many credible individuals have been visited, accosted, or abducted by inhuman beings that have convinced their victims they are aliens. Additionally, many New Age devotees report communing with aliens who promise that they are coming to help earthlings usher in an era of peace and prosperity.

Let me put on my scientist hat for a minute. There is no question but that Earth is not being visited by aliens from other planets. The other planets within our own solar system are ridiculously uninhabitable, so they cannot be "local" aliens. Looking to the stars, even the closest are at least light years away. The speed of light is a hard physical limit for moving mass around. Despite fantasies about warp drives, wormholes, Bergenholms, and other FTL "inventions," *everything* that is known about physics makes it impossible for spaceships to travel among the stars. And I don't want to waste the time to talk about the *technological* challenges (like antimatter fuel), apart from the physical barriers.

Satan is getting ready. The day the rapture hits there will be millions who disappear around the world. Satan's forces will spring into action, having practiced for decades. I don't know what "technology" demons have, but they will generate as many UFO sightings and alien visitations as they can.

America will be hard hit by the disappearances, losing about 5 million truly born again Christians. Authors like Tim LaHaye (*Left Behind* series) are much too optimistic, imagining that America is filled

with Christians. My guess of 5 million is based on many years of talking to Americans on the street and at their doors. My personal experience is consistent with national polling that reveals just how (un)serious Americans are about their faith. Europe will lose a small fraction of 1 percent of its population. Africa and Latin America may be consistent with the U.S. numbers. China may lose 60 to 100 million of its people when the Lord takes His children home before the temporal judgments begin. But most of those believers in China are poor and persecuted. You can't be a power broker in a Communist country and be a Christian at the same time.

Let's get back to America. Many of those left behind will suggest that the rapture occurred. If you're here at that time, you will *know* that is the situation, because you read this chapter. Immediately, religious leaders, media pundits, and New Agers will start speculating . . .

"It certainly cannot be the so-called rapture. Look around. The Pope is still here and the churches are still full. 'America's pastor', Rick Warren, is here and he says it can't be the rapture. Joel Osteen and Franklin Graham and Benny Hinn and all of the most famous preachers are still here. Look at who is missing. They're mostly nobodies. A lot of them are those narrow-minded Bible thumpers who said that there is only one way to Heaven. Well, good riddance. If aliens took them away, then it will be easier for all of the religions to finally get along."

As the Tribulation begins to heat up, which includes global catastrophes and the appearance of monstrous creatures, the alien abduction / alien invasion story will continue to work for many who absolutely, positively, don't want to repent and submit to God. We human beings don't need many facts or much logic in order to rationalize. Especially when you are in life-long rebellion against God, you will invariably decide what you want to do and how you want to live, and then come up with whatever rationale you need.

Just this year I have noticed an exponential increase in media culture preparing the world for "the lie." Movies about Green Lantern and The Avengers promote admiration of people with special powers. Green Lantern is pure New Age. Whatever he can think of becomes reality. "Avengers" like Thor and Captain America, plus genetic mutants like X-Men and those who inhabit "The Sanctuary" will be represented during the Tribulation by demon-possessed individuals who can perform signs and wonders. The new sci-fi show "Alphas" features likable mutants with special powers. The series "Warehouse 13" along with the Harry Potter movies bring the occult to any little guy who wants to experiment with artifacts and magic potions. Play with the occult and you are likely to acquire a new "spirit guide" who claims to come from another planet.

Note that Superman got his start way back in the 1930s. The pens of H.G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and E.E. "Doc" Smith launched hordes of aliens to threaten humanity. The foundation was laid long ago. The sci-fi culture has taught several generations that aliens are out there, some good, some bad. Superheroes are always matched up against supervillains. Don't be misled to think that Satan always puts on dark and repulsive persona. The Bible calls him an "angel of light," because he wants to impersonate and replace the source of light and life. He rebelled because he desires to be worshiped.



Through demonically energized heroes and through his antichrist and false prophet, he will receive adulation and even worship from billions. Will you be one of those saps?

Why have I devoted so much space to “the lie”? Simply because if you find yourself on Earth during the Tribulation, you are down to your last chance. Your life and your eternity hang by a thread. If you are devoted to self-worship and fleshly sins, you are very likely to believe “the lie.” As Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church on this subject, when the antichrist, “that Wicked” one, is revealed, God will permit Satan to propagate lies to reinforce the rebellious hearts of those who don’t want to see the truth anyway:

*And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12*

I conclude this chapter with a parable given by Jesus the night before He went to the cross. You really should read Matthew, chapters 24 and 25 in their entirety. The passage serves both as poignant prophecy and as a warning. The “oil” in the parable is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, given to those who have prepared themselves by saving faith in the “Bridegroom,” the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

*And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*

*And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. Matthew 25:1-13*

## Chapters 6 & 7

*It's right to love righteousness and it's wrong to love evil.*

DD: "So how are you doing?"

PC (Professing Christian): "Well, I'm trying to hang in there."

DD: "What do you mean?"

PC: "Hey, you know how hard it is to resist temptation. That old partying life is so appealing. My friends are always trying to get me back into it."

DD: "So you really haven't changed your mind about those sins, have you? You haven't really repented. Don't you realize that fornication, drunkenness, and foul language . . . among other sins . . . are all stupid and destructive? How are you going to be tempted next? Maybe to molest children?"

PD: "Of course not! I would never do such a thing!"

DD: "Why not? Seriously, why wouldn't you be tempted there?"

PC: "Well, that's disgusting . . . and harmful. It's evil."

DD: "But these other sins aren't? You need to see sin the way God sees it. Yes, there will always be temptations in this flesh. But once you truly repent and agree with God about what's good and what's evil, you'll begin to see your old sins as disgusting and harmful and you won't dream of going back there. So the real question is . . . Have you truly repented and trusted Christ? Is there evidence of a radical change of mind and behavior in you?"

I meet professing Christians who claim to be "hanging in there." They decided to profess Christian beliefs because they don't want to go to Hell, they believe that Jesus is who He said He was, and they believe that the Bible is God's word in principle – but they don't take it very seriously. If they were truly followers of Jesus Christ and His word, they would discover that the Bible is filled with teachings on the difference in attitudes between the unbeliever and the believer, the lost and the saved, the righteous and the unrighteous. Here is a tiny sampling:

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6*

*Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes. Psalm 119:155*

*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy*

*commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. Psalm 119:1-12*

*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Psalm 19:8-10*

Salvation does not depend on good works or keeping the commandments of God. Salvation produces a changed heart, mind, and life that produces good works and agrees with the commandments of God. Biblical repentance necessitates a change of mind. When you repent you have decided to agree with God about what is right and what is wrong.

The subject of this chapter is not complicated. Even a child can understand it. Often in Scripture, God must talk to us as if we are little children in order for us to “get it.” In the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Israel was deep into apostasy, immorality, and corruption, and the Lord, through His prophet Amos, was warning them that severe national judgment was coming if they didn’t “get it.” Here is a sample of that message:

*Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Amos 5:14-15*

Simple, huh? You already know the difference between right and wrong, due to your God-given conscience, but I want to be helpful by being very clear and practical on some of the most popular sins. Then you can decide where you want to stand.

Let’s talk first about sex in the context of good and evil. Scripture is clear that sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman for life. Husband and wife are to enjoy each other sexually and without reservation. In addition to reviewing the sampling of Scriptures below, I encourage you to read the short book of the Song of Solomon, which describes the emotional and sexual love between husband and wife. (Solomon started off well with one beloved wife. His troubles started when he violated God’s laws for marriage.) You’ll also note in this poetic book the graphic descriptions of sexual love, if you pay attention to the metaphorical types. God isn’t embarrassed about sex. He invented it for our pleasure.

Did you ever think about one of the most startling differences between human beings and the rest of the animal kingdom? Other mammals are hairy and furry and reptiles are scaly. All creatures, except man, walk around in their own protection – their own clothing. Not men and women. Our skin was designed for sensuality. Sex for humans is far more than mechanical coupling. Clothes are necessary for the harsh environments we live in, especially since the Fall – when Adam and Eve got kicked out of the

Garden of Eden and Earth began to deteriorate. Also obvious is the God-ordained necessity of clothing to give people a chance to avoid lustful thoughts, if they choose to do so.

From the beginning, God made the pattern clear, and warned strongly against sex outside of marriage. Here is a small sampling of relevant Scriptures.

*And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:21-25*

*Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. 1 Corinthians 7:3-4*

*Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Hebrews 13:4*

*Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray. Proverbs 5:18-23*

*For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts. Proverbs 6:23-35*

From the man's point of view, God provides a woman – a wife – to be “an help meet for him.” The right woman is indeed a suitable helper for a lifetime of work, service, and joy. A wise, but unknown author

once penned, “Woman was taken out of man; not out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled underfoot; but out of his side to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.” A husband and wife are to be partners for life, teammates, friends, and lovers. My best friend has always been my wife. We love to go out to dinner together, not just to enjoy restaurant food, but to talk at length about everything under the sun. I sometimes feel like I should bring a sign along for the table to assure the waiter that he doesn’t need to keep checking on us – we’re just two friends spending time together.

Sex within a marriage is to be the ultimate act of sharing, intimacy, and unabashed mutual pleasure. Sex is something to be shared with the one you’re committed to contractually before God and man, as part of the relationship. It is well-documented that sex in a loving marriage is the most enjoyable sex.

***Note that I’m giving you some of the reasons behind God’s commandments. He designed us. He knows what works and what brings pain and destruction. If you start thinking about the correlation between righteousness and what actually works, you will find it logical to repent from your old ways of thinking.***

The Lord Jesus affirms in the Gospel accounts (Mark 10, for example) what God explained to Adam at the beginning, that in marriage a man and a woman become one flesh. “One flesh” is achieved literally in the sex act. It’s clear from experience that sex generates strong emotional bonds between husband and wife. When sex occurs outside of marriage, such bonds also begin to form. Rending those bonds by hook-up and break-up causes much emotional and spiritual damage.

One of the reasons that God hates fornication, adultery, and divorce is that they break the beautiful *type* that marriage represents. The redeemed souls of the saints comprise the “bride of Christ.” We’re going to rejoice some day at the “Marriage Supper of the Lamb.” The Lord Jesus promises us that we will have a wonderfully intimate spiritual relationship with Him. Marriage on this earth is a picture of that. We destroy the picture by leaping into physical intimacy without the bonds and commitments of marriage. On the spiritual side, our salvation and bond with the Lord is eternal. It can’t be broken. Breaking the marriage relationship or defiling its beauty by illicit pleasures is a great offense.

How much heartbreak, abuse, legal trouble, and even murder are caused by illicit sexual relationships? Unlawful sex is dangerous. And it always hurts. Although King David and Bathsheba were forgiven by God when they confessed their sins, much damage resulted. As a result of their sins, David’s family suffered such disasters as incest, rape, murder, open rebellion, the death of a beloved son, and even the temporary loss of his kingdom – along with much death and destruction in a civil war.

If you just want to do the selfish thing, then reserve sex for marriage only. Numerous studies have demonstrated that sex in marriage is far more satisfying than “casual” sex. The Hollywood culture promotes much lying to the contrary. If you and your wife can come to the marriage bed without any sexual memories from other partners, your sexual relationship will truly be happy. If it’s too late for that, ask God for forgiveness and be sin-free from this point.

As everyone knows, sex is addictive, but so is any sin. I've shared the Gospel with many young men who have made it clear that they are hooked on fornication and so are not willing to repent and be born again. So they live in addiction, risk STDs, age prematurely, eventually become impotent, die, and go to Hell. Sounds like a really good deal.

Pornography counts, too. If you have a wife, a daughter, a sister, a mother . . . I am confident that you would be distressed to discover them engaged in sexual acts on pornographic display for men and boys in your neighborhood (and around the world) to lust after. Yet by wallowing in porn yourself, you spend hours lusting after the wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of others. You know it's evil. Unless you are hopelessly addicted and your conscience burned out, you keep your sin addiction a secret from others. The billion-dollar porn industry makes its money in the dark and behind closed doors. Although mainstream TV and movies continually promote sex outside of marriage, everyone still knows it's wrong.

How should the universe be? Wouldn't you like to live in a world where commitments are honored, where people are respected because they act honorably, where a young lady could walk down a city street late at night in perfect safety? Would you be comfortable living in a neighborhood where everyone does exactly what he feels like, acting on every lust, every impulse, saying whatever comes to mind, totally focused on self and disdainful of how his actions affect others?

I recall (with less than perfect clarity – please forgive me) an account of a debate between an atheist and a Christian. The atheist challenged the Christian whether there would be any practical benefits for society if Christians were in the majority. The Christian posed the following scenario directly to his opponent:

“Suppose that you are on a car trip, traveling through Baltimore around midnight when you accidentally exit the interstate. You quickly find yourself in one of the most undesirable portions of the inner city and immediately get lost. Then your car breaks down. You have no phone. Getting out of the car you start walking along the sidewalk, clueless about where to go or how far away help might be. Suddenly, the front door of the next building bursts open and you see ten young black men walking directly toward you . . . Now pause a moment and imagine yourself in this situation and what you would be feeling, regardless of how educated, liberal, and experienced you are in the ways of the world. Ready? So here is your question: Would it make any difference to you that these young men just came out of a Bible study?”

The atheist in the debate had the character to yield the point. Now that you're thinking about racial issues, consider where they come from. It is evolutionary fantasy that has proposed over the last 150 years that some races are more or less evolved than others. It is no coincidence that Africa is still proposed for the evolutionary origin of man. Racial arguments, coupled with evolutionary ideas, have fueled wars and genocides. Hitler's arguments to justify the Jewish Holocaust were primarily racial. The American eugenics movement which promoted the sterilization of black men and women was racially motivated. Modern “liberal” politics work hard to *distinguish* between races, emphasizing differences.

Yet the Bible is clear that we are all of one human race, all descended from Adam and Eve, and all accountable to God on the same terms. When Paul made the “one race” argument to the Greek intellectuals on Mars Hill (Acts 17), he was scoffed at just like Christians are today who decry racism. Christians decry racism by emphasizing our utter equality in God’s eyes. Those who emphasize differences, especially by legal and economic preferences, continue to fuel racism.

Which team do you want to be on? Doesn’t it make sense to you that men are created equal and should treat each other by the Golden Rule . . . taught by the Lord Jesus Himself:

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12*

God sees men and women as co-laborers, “as being heirs together of the grace of life.” Christian men are commanded to give honor to their wives, and to love them with the same sacrificial love that Christ displayed for the church when He gave His life on the cross. Atheistic societies are ruled by men and have no such respect for women. I have just read a comprehensive biography of Josef Stalin. He and his atheistic thugs were guilty of the starvation, torture, imprisonment, exile (Siberia), and execution of millions of their own citizens. Their entire agenda was about power and control. How were women treated in that culture? The Communist ruling class took advantage of their power to rape multitudes of women, in addition to enslaving and torturing them.

One telling anecdote relates to 1945 when Soviet armies were decimating Germany and . . . literally millions . . . of German women were raped. When the Western Allies brought complaints to Stalin about this, he laughed it off and explained that he saw no harm if his army had a little fun with women along the way.

So which team do you swear allegiance to? There are only two. I find it fascinating that “liberals” in the West despise Biblical Christianity but make excuses for Islam. I grew up in the Cold War and found it maddening that the American “intelligentsia” continually made excuses for the barbarism of Communists around the world. Now the emphasis is on Islam. Why don’t non-Christian “feminists” get riled up about the literal slavery suffered by half a billion Muslim women around the world? (I’ll tell you in a minute.)

My wife and I recently visited a university campus to pass out tracts and share the Gospel with students. Nearby, the local “atheists / freethinkers” club set up a table. They sold water balloons for a dollar so that passersby could “stone a heathen” – one of their own dressed up like an ancient Biblical character. These “freethinkers” included both male and female students, who held up posters ridiculing certain passages from the Bible. I wonder whether they will set up a display to ridicule Islam next week? Or perhaps Hinduism or Buddhism or Native American Shamanism or . . . Actually, I don’t wonder at all. They are all on the same team. By the way, I walked over and offered myself as a speaker – free – for one of their club meetings, that is, “if they had the guts to invite someone who disagreed with them.” After all, they are “freethinkers,” I’m told. I’m hoping to get an invitation. I’ll bring pizza.

Whether it's illicit sex or pornography or substance abuse or just rebellion against authority, the underlying reason is "me" . . . me me me me me! You wouldn't get the impression that these "hobbies" are so bad from TV, movies, and magazines. The culture makes free sex, alcohol and drug abuse, and rebellion look like fun. But when someone tries to give you a false impression, what do you call it? Lying! Look at the inevitable consequences of sin. Disease isn't fun. Poverty isn't fun. Prison isn't fun. Death isn't fun. The Bible is clear about the progression from temptation to death:

*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. James 1:12-15*

In your present lost condition you don't even have the desire to resist temptation. Why should you? You're making the rules. Whatever the usual consequences of sin . . . well, that's what happens to other people. You'll get away with it. Worse, even if you have the sense to resist many of the sins the world has to offer, you don't have the strength to resist. When you are born again, with a new mind and a new spirit, you have the power of God's Holy Spirit to strengthen and encourage you, continually giving you a rational perspective.

Let's review some facts about some basic sins of the flesh that won't surprise you at all. Did you know that alcohol and drugs are major factors in suicide attempts, physical assaults, property damage, theft, school dropouts, rape, pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases? In one study, 37% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls who drank heavily tried to commit suicide.

Today in America about 11 young people will succeed in killing themselves. Girls are more likely to try. Boys are more likely to succeed. Many young people don't see any purpose for life and are trying to escape from it. Alcohol and drugs feed the depression.

Did you know that in America this week about 2 million young people (ages 12-20) will get drunk? Underage drinkers this year will buy \$25 Billion dollars of beer, wine, and liquor. That sounds like a lot of money. How much is \$25 Billion? A very, very nice house in this city will cost about \$200,000. If on average 4 people would live very richly in each \$200,000 house, how many people could you build big new houses for . . . IF you spent that money on houses instead of – literally – flushing it down the toilet? You know that's where drinking winds up – in the toilet!

\$25 Billion would build enough houses each year for about a half million people. In northern Illinois where I live, that would include all of the people in Rockford, . . . . . AND Machesney Park, AND Loves Park, Belvidere, Roscoe, Rockton, South Beloit, Freeport, De Kalb, Dixon, Sterling, Woodstock, McHenry, and Elgin.



And that's just the money spent illegally on underage drinking. Do we really have ANY economic problems in this country? Or are we just spending our money to kill ourselves? Now if you add up all the alcohol consumed in this country, by people of all ages, in just one year you could build a \$200,000 house for everyone in Chicago. Every year!

If you are under 21 and you drink and drive you're twice as likely to die compared to older people.

This year in America alcohol will play a part in 1 million assaults or injuries to students.

This year another several hundred thousand teens will develop health problems from drugs and alcohol. Are we having fun yet?

Are you part of the problem or part of the solution? If your community and this nation depended on you, and it does, are we going to make it? So who makes the decisions in your life? Life is one decision at a time. Thousands and thousands of little decisions and after a while, that's how you've lived your life. What is the basis of your decision making? Are you just winging it? Are you emulating the degenerate characters of your favorite sitcom? Are you thinking at all?

Life is like golf. I played some when I was younger. When you hit the tee shot into the fairway, it's a lot easier to hit the next shot onto the green. And that's the only obvious shot to try – just hit it onto the green. You might blow the 2<sup>nd</sup> shot, but that good first shot makes it obvious what to do with the second shot.

Now if you hit the tee shot into a sand trap, then you have multiple choices for your 2<sup>nd</sup> shot, all of which can hurt. If you try to hit the 2<sup>nd</sup> shot all the way to the green, it's easy to miff it and not even get out of the bunker. Or you might wind up in the lake. Or if you just play it safe and get out of the trap back into the fairway, you've surely lost a stroke.

So today or tomorrow you'll make a moral or immoral decision. If you hit the fairway, the next shot is easy. If you make the wrong choice, it's easy to get into even more trouble. If your 2<sup>nd</sup> choice is to get back on track, that's good, but you have lost some time, and you've damaged yourself at least a bit, because you're going to be tempted again and you might fall again. And it's easier to fall the 2<sup>nd</sup> time than the 1<sup>st</sup> time.

Pornography is like that. Taste it and it makes you hungry again. Taste again and again and you start to feel the addiction. What seemed like fun at first is now slavery. And you never get satisfied. It's the same with drugs or alcohol. And you start thinking differently. You don't look at people and life the same way after you start these addictions.

Or rebellion for that matter. If you're a young person, you smart off to your parents or teachers and you feel tough. And you think you're getting respect from your peers. Adults have their own version of this behavior. So is that how to succeed in life – getting respect from people who have no respect for

authority? If you're a rebel, namely, part of the problem, imagine what this world would be like if everybody had the same attitude. Guess what. That's where the world is. What a mess! Seven billion rebels doing their own thing.

Why not be a *real rebel* and switch teams by following Jesus Christ. You will start to make decisions that build quality into your life and the lives of others. You will have a solid Biblical foundation for making all of the significant decisions of life. Sin is stupid and destructive. Get ahold of that truth and you will find it easy to repent and follow the One who created you for abundant life, both now and for eternity.

It should be clear that we have just scratched the surface regarding the practical implications of good vs. evil. We could go on to discuss dishonesty in business, cheating on taxes, lying, bragging, foul language, greed, and many other sins. By the way, if you have the guts to hear about the Satanic history of today's popular music culture, I encourage you to acquire the "rockumentary" entitled, "They Sold Their Souls for Rock and Roll." (Google it. You'll find it.)

Let's conclude this chapter with some thoughts on the sins of unbelief and ingratitude. You may claim that you lead a "clean" life. Perhaps you're faithful to your spouse, don't cuss, don't drink, you're honest in business, and you're an upright citizen. Yet you deny that you need forgiveness from the Savior, Jesus Christ. You are therefore ungrateful to your Creator and despise His exclusive offer of salvation as a gift. The cross of Christ is irrelevant to you. Even though God created all of the atoms in your body and sustains their existence moment by moment, you still insist on being the Captain of your fate.

If all of this is true, you are likely self-righteous. Other men and women look at you and see much "good." But you live inside your own head and know better. Recall the rich young ruler we discussed in Chapter 3. I don't know what your sins are, but God does and you do, too. If you have any uncertainty about how many ways you have offended God and man, ask God to convict your conscience. Reading through the New Testament will also provide you plenty of ideas on how far you fall short of God's perfect standard.

Look, salvation is available to you today, this moment, now! I want you to become part of the family of God and the Lord wants you far more. So get smart. Make the move.

## Chapter 8

### *The cross and the resurrection: What "God is love" actually means*

*(The following dialogue was inspired by the chick.com tract entitled, "The Sissy?")*

TG (Tough Guy): "I have no respect for Jesus. He was a wimp!"

DD: "What are you talking about?"

TG: "Turning the other cheek is for cowards who won't stand up for themselves. Someone takes a shot at me and I'm takin' him out."

DD: "Wow, you just don't get it at all. Jesus showed more courage than any human being in history. Don't you know what He did?"

TG: "All I know is that He went around preachin' love and then got killed on a cross."

DD: "Let me fill you in. If God almighty could turn Himself into a man, and then some jerks planned to beat Him, and whip Him, and torture Him to death, and this God-man found out about it, how do you like their chances?"

TG: "No chance. Toast."

DD: "Well, this is going to blow your mind. The God-man is Jesus and He knew exactly what they were going to do to Him. Let me ask you a question. Suppose I saw your house on fire at 2 a.m. and I knew you and your wife and your kids were sleeping. But I didn't feel like taking the trouble to wake you up so I just left you all to burn to death. What would you think about me if you survived and found out I hadn't lifted a finger to help you?"

TG: "I'd hate you!! You'd be the most disgusting, evil guy I'd ever known!"

DD: "Well, thanks, because I'm not that kind of guy. I'm the kind of guy who will warn you. And I'm warning you. Your spiritual house is on fire. You're one heartbeat from Hell, and so is your wife, and so are your kids. The only way out of the fires of Hell is what Jesus did for you."

TG: "What did He do?"

DD: "It's like this. The only way you and your family will survive is if someone walks through that house fire, gets burned over his whole body, suffers more than any human ever suffered, and dies horribly. Just so you and yours can live. Well, that's what Jesus did for you on the cross. He suffered the wrath of God – Hell – on the cross to pay for every one of your thousands of miserable sins. Sins that He knows you committed, every one of them. More than that, He walked into Jerusalem that week knowing what they were going to do to Him. But Jesus loves your miserable soul, and your wife's, and your kids', and mine and every other rebel on this planet, so He walked into the death trap."

TG: "He did that for me?"

DD: "He could have called tens of thousands of mighty angels to slaughter those murderous Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers, but He didn't. He could have spoken just a word and vaporized His enemies – after all, He created the universe with a word – but He took the rap for their crimes and for yours. How much guts does that take?"

TG: "What does He expect me to do? Start going to church?"

DD: “This has nothing to do with going to church. It’s about you and the Creator, God, the Lord Jesus Christ. You have one way out of a condemnation that you completely deserve. You’ve got to agree with God, repent, trust Christ, and follow Him. That will set you on a path where you will have to exercise more courage than you have ever dreamed.”

You can’t speed read the Bible. So as I begin this vital chapter, I implore you to read the passages below thoughtfully, and work to embrace the message. The crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection are at the center of God’s message to man. As you read, I challenge you to summarize the points. At the end I will give you a very brief commentary myself. Please . . . play the student for a few moments. Engage your mind and heart on this central theme of Biblical Christianity. If you ultimately reject the Gospel – the ultimate Good News from God to man – you should at least understand what you reject.

One subject I will not be discussing regards the physically gruesome aspects of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As you read the Gospel accounts you will notice that the details are passed over. I do encourage you to look up and ponder the brutal facts about scourging and crucifixion in the Roman world. All of the customary pictorial representations of Christ on the cross are lies. His body was virtually unrecognizable as human by the end of the process. Isaiah 52:14 refers to this prophetically, 700 years before the event. (Read from Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 to prove to yourself that the cross of Christ was in mind. Then read Psalm 22, written prophetically 1,000 years before the cross, to glimpse the broken heart of Jesus, abandoned by His nation, yet dying in their stead at God’s execution block.) Please consider that Jesus walked into Jerusalem knowing what was going to happen. How about that for courage?

Yet the physical aspects of His sacrifice are not the greatest part of the story. The Jews and the brutal Romans were less than amateurs in comparison to what God the Father poured out on His Son. What He suffered on the cross was the very wrath of God, effectively equal to the combined experience of a justly damned human race in Hell for eternity. That is likely why the world went dark for three hours in the middle of the day. Man was not allowed to see what really happened between God as Judge and God as sacrificial Lamb. Yet without this judicial punishment, visited on an innocent Substitute, you and I and many billions of our cousins throughout history would have no hope before a holy and righteous God. Undeserving love from the perfect God for a wicked and rebellious people – including you and me and everyone we know – sent our Savior to satisfy ultimate justice. Love and justice met at the cross. Get ahold of that, apply it to your own hopeless case, and you’re not far from joining the family of God.

Now let’s do a short review of just a few relevant Scriptures. I will number the passages so you can correlate the comments which follow.

*1. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation*

*for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another . . . We love him, because he first loved us. 1 John 4:7-11 . . . 19*

*2. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. John 3:16-21*

*3. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2 . . . For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 2 Corinthians 5:21*

*4. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 1 Timothy 2:5-6*

*5. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Mark 10:42-45*

*6. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Mark 8:31*

*7. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 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 . . . Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. Romans 6:4-7 . . . 18*

*8. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit . . . 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. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh,*

*ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Romans 8:1 . . . 8-14*

*9. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you . . . For our conversation is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Philippians 3:10-15 . . . 20-21*

1. God's very essence includes love. He is the Author of love. Humankind would know nothing of love except that God made us spiritually in His own image. God explicitly showed His love toward us rebels by entering this world as a man. The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, became the *propitiation* – the payment / satisfaction / instrument upon Whom justice was levied – for our sins. He not only satisfied the *justice* of God – another essence – but also demonstrated sacrificial love for us to follow in our lives. Justice and love met on the cross. All of the phony religions of man satisfy neither justice nor love. If you can do religious deeds to earn eternal life, then where is the justice for your crimes? And if you acquire salvation by your own merits, how is God's love demonstrated? In man's religions a tolerant, non-judgmental, but non-loving god is invented so you can pick and choose any lifestyle you want.

2. God gave His son to suffer the wrath of God's justice on the cross. Whosoever / anyone / any rebel / including you can turn to Him believing and receive everlasting life. This is the *exclusive* offer from God to man. You have no other way out. You're already condemned for countless thousands of willfully heinous sins – thoughts, words, and deeds. Are you going to continue to wallow in darkness or will you run to the Light?

3. There's that word *propitiation* again. God's justifiable and judicial wrath is appeased and yet completely satisfied in only one way. Through the sacrifice of the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ. He took our sins on Himself. He became sin in our place. The wrath of God was poured out on Him so that it wouldn't be poured out on you. The offer of pardon from an everlasting capital punishment is to all. The Judge makes only this one offer. Do you want the pardon?

4. One God only, the Maker and Sustainer of the universe, this Earth, all of life, and your own individual body, soul, and spirit. The only way to find Him is through the only way He provided – the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. He paid the ransom for every man, including yours. It's up to you to humble yourself and cry out for mercy.

5. Jesus was teaching His disciples to serve, to minister to others and take no thought for themselves. For the three and one-half years of His public ministry, the incarnate Son of God demonstrated this principle continually and perfectly in the presence of the twelve, and often under the scrutiny of deadly enemies. His ultimate demonstration of service was in paying the ultimate ransom to buy back a lost humanity. Shouldn't you be grateful and lose the attitude?

6. Knowing His destiny was the cross, He also warned His disciples what was coming. They couldn't grasp it until the resurrection, which He also foretold. The psalmist 1,000 years before, in Psalm 16:10-11 also foretold the resurrection of the Christ, the Messiah, the "Holy One," in that He would suffer no "corruption."

7. The resurrection of Christ is pictured in baptism, coming up out of the water to show the world that we have been born again spiritually, to live a life following the One who saved us. Sin has no more dominion over the believer. You will never find a believer who lives perfectly, without sin, yet his direction has changed entirely and dramatically. The old life is dead and discarded. God gives His child the power to serve righteousness, and to see the putrescence of the sins he left behind.

8. There are only two kinds of people: those that live subject to the whims / distractions / temptations / addictions of the flesh and those who are led by the Spirit of God. What were hopeless addictions can now be defeated by the presence of the Spirit of Christ dwelling within.

9. Paul's cry is to know the Lord, embracing the hope of Christ's resurrection to persevere through the trials of serving the Lord in this life. Life for the Christian is tougher than before. As evangelist D. L. Moody noted, "I thought when I became a Christian I had nothing to do but just to lay my oars in the bottom of the boat and float along. But, I soon found that I would have to go against the current." Yet, like Paul, the believer looks ahead to his own resurrection, exchanging his "vile body" for one "fashioned like unto His glorious body."

Convinced yet? Perhaps you have been dying to voice one of the most common (and moronic) objections to the Gospel: "What about the guy in tribal Africa who never heard about Jesus?" As if God can't figure that one out. Besides, what difference does that make to you? If you care so much, believe the Gospel and travel over to that tribe and plead with those who have never heard. Nevertheless, I will answer your question. The Bible teaches clearly that no man has any excuse. Our own conscience will condemn us regarding sin, whether we hear about any specific God-given laws. Furthermore, it is Biblically clear that God enlightens every man, to a sufficient degree, regarding his need for forgiveness and his recognition that there is a Creator to whom he is accountable.

There are two notable examples in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 8 we see an Ethiopian noble who has previously become a Jewish proselyte, believing the Old Testament, who travels to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and learn more about his faith. Somehow, while in Jerusalem, he is not confronted by any of the new Christians in that city regarding his need for Christ. On his way home, while still in the desert, the Lord sends him a missionary under extraordinary circumstances. That preacher was enjoying

a wonderful revival in another city, yet God sent him out into the desert because of the heart cry of this African. I'll let you read the rest of the account on your own to fill in the details.

In Acts chapter 10 we see a Roman centurion, part of the occupying army despised by the Jewish people, who desperately wants to find God. To what lengths will the Lord go to send the Gospel to one who desires Him? This centurion had a "little light," but not enough to save him. Yet he responded to that light and the Lord moved. Note also the responsibility that God gives to His children to do the actual preaching of the Gospel. Angels are not qualified in this present age. . . . No, really, go ahead. Take a few minutes and actually read these accounts in Acts 8 and 10!

Now let me provide you with a modern example of the loving grace of God, who yearns far more than you or I for the salvation of souls. Back in 1985, my wife and I heard the following account from a missionary to Taiwan. (There are many, many such examples that have been recorded over the centuries. Most certainly, for every incident that has been recorded, there are countless thousands which have not.)

From notes taken by my wife, Bonnie, from Dan Freeman's sermon at Fairfax Baptist Temple, February 24, 1985:

*Several years back, he and his family first went to Taiwan and attended language school in one of the major cities. His teachers told him that he "must have lacked something in his brain" which could have enabled him to learn the language properly. In frustration, they decided that he must learn to read and write it rather than just speak it. Perhaps that would work better. It is difficult to describe the frustration Dan Freeman must have undergone, especially when he would sometimes resort to asking his boy what was being said, but he persisted. Finally, after two years of painfully slow progress in language school, he decided to pack up his family and go up into the mountains. Hopefully, by interacting with the people, their Chinese would improve. The other missionaries were doubtful, but the Freemans went anyway.*

*This missionary family traveled up into the mountains where they believed God wanted them to work. In one village where they knocked on doors and tried to pass out New Testaments, they always received the reply "I no Christian, I Buddhist but we have one Christian in village." Finally, Dan decided that it was time to find him. They found the old man working out in the field next to his house. Thinking that the Chinese grapevine had alerted him to their presence, they were quite surprised to find that the old man did not know a missionary had come to his village. He had, however, greeted them by saying, "Oh, I'm so glad you've come," just as if he had been waiting. He went into the house, came back with three stools, and placed them in the front yard. There the men sat and talked.*

*"Are you a Christian?" asked Dan Freeman.*

*With a smile and a look of rapture that needed no explanation, the old man replied that he was indeed a Christian. Twenty-one years before, another missionary on a journey had passed through the village and*



*had told the man how to be saved. "I opened my heart to Jesus Christ. He came in and has been living within for these past 21 years." The missionary had left him with a Bible and a promise that someday God would send another missionary.*

*This day was so special because now the long awaited promise had come true. There was of course no church, but what is astonishing is that the reason the old man wanted a missionary to come was because he had never learned to read. He wanted someone to read his Bible to him! Now Dan Freeman knew why it was so important that he learn to read Chinese, and not just speak it.*

*Secondly, the man was ashamed because they had never had a church to meet with. He wanted to tell his children about Jesus, but he couldn't remember how. Every Sunday they would gather in the yard. The old man would lay his Bible on one of his stools and he and all of his children would lay their hands on the precious book and sing the old children's song, taught to him by the missionary, "Jesus Loves Me." He would always tell them, "God will send a missionary. He will come." They always bowed their heads for prayer "for you, missionary."*

*Now the man's children were grown. Dan said that he would come again and speak to the family. The old man sent a note to all of his children which said, "Dear Children, Sunday afternoon you must return home. **He** is here."*

*The next day Dan Freeman came and 48 people filled the little house. In his faltering language he told the Gospel of Jesus Christ and every one of the old man's children were saved and brought into the kingdom of Christ!*

*However, the story doesn't end here. At this time Dan Freeman was 30 years old. Where was he 21 years before? He was at a Christian youth camp at the tender age of nine. During an invitation time God impressed on this boy's heart that He wanted him to serve as a missionary! At the same time that a man in China was touched by God's hand, a little boy in America was touched to be prepared to minister to that man on the other side of the world.*

*The old man had always told his children, "God will send a missionary to us. He will come." Because Dan Freeman was open to God's call, he received the blessing of a lifetime. But the story didn't end there either (in 1985). Dan Freeman was going back to Taiwan to continue pastoring that young church. There was also a young Chinese man who had been called by God to preach and pastor. Dan looked forward to training him for the ministry.*

*God is still in the miracle working business. He is still caring and loving and desires that all should come to know Him as Savior.*

*Whoever you are, reading this book, how much more "light" have you had than those villagers in the Taiwanese mountains? The real issue is how Americans can so despise righteousness and so despise the God who gave them life, when they have so much truth at hand. Virtually every household in America*

has one, if not several Bibles. Anyone interested in the big issues of life and death, Heaven and Hell, has access to enormous resources. Yet less than 2% of Americans are genuine, born again Christians.

It is not God's fault that you are not saved. It is yours! Come on, repent now. You'll enjoy reading the rest of this book even more once you have become a born again child of God.

.....

Let me now turn to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Don't you want to live forever in a body that will never die again? A body that is fairer, stronger, and has more vitality than the bodies of Olympic-class athletes? With a mind that can think clearly, learn fast, remember everything, acquire skills in areas like music / astronomy / logic / literature / rhetoric? And with taste buds that explode with pleasure when in contact with foods beyond what any man has yet seen?

I'm going to shift gears here. If you would simply recognize that the resurrection of Christ is solid, demonstrable, historical fact, you would be crazy – even in your own estimation – to reject the Gospel. I therefore will summarize for you a bit of the historical case for the reality of Christ's resurrection. If the resurrection actually occurred, it constitutes the most important event in mankind's history. Death is conquerable. Man can live again. The Gospel is true. The Bible is the word of God. If it didn't, as Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 15, death is our fate with no hope, and life is pointless.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was either the greatest event in human history or else a cruel hoax. The discussion below is from the following viewpoint: Take the presupposition that the New Testament record is the inerrant, inspired word of God. And then observe whether all of the evidence conforms to this foundation, or doesn't. Is this record internally consistent? Does the behavior of the parties involved conform to common sense and human experience? How do the Gospels, the eyewitness testimonies of the four evangelists, serve as a foundation for the early history of Christianity – namely, could the historical events pertaining to the early churches in the first two centuries have any other explanation but that the New Testament record is true? And, not least, do the sum of the parts, and the whole itself, have the "ring of truth" that would serve to transform the life of an individual in the 21st century, as we read of the lives revolutionized in the 1st?

If you've gotten this far in this book, I would like to think that you, O reader, are seeking truth – that you're not a determined scoffer. If you care about the meaning of your life and the certainty of your death and judgment to come, then begin by investing some time in reading the accounts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as found in the last few chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – 4 eyewitness accounts that transformed the world. Then read a few chapters of Luke's account of the history of the early churches in the New Testament book of Acts. Yes, I'm giving you some homework. Are you willing to invest a bit of work if the reward might be everlasting life?

By the way, the "textbook" for this mini-course is the King James Bible. Don't be satisfied with watered down, error-ridden modern translations. The KJB is the only English translation you can trust. You can

find an introduction to this subject in the article, “The 10 Most Deadly Heresies . . .”, on [truthreallymatters.com](http://truthreallymatters.com). Section #8 of that article is the relevant portion.

Let’s discuss the most common objections raised by scoffers to the historicity of the resurrection.

### **1. Did the disciples steal the body?**

This objection was dutifully recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, that the idea of a theft was “commonly reported among the Jews.” The absurdity begins with the picture of a band of terrified disciples, having lost their leader (Jesus) to the public horror and humiliation of Roman crucifixion, quickly regrouping and creating a deception to convince the world that Jesus was risen. After scattering in fright the night before the cross, they now somehow sneak past a band of soldiers to (noisily) roll aside a huge tombstone, and steal away the body.

The practical difficulties are not the main issue, although they should suffice to discredit this charge. The truly unbelievable part of this scenario is the moral character on display throughout the New Testament, in the actions and writings of the very disciples who allegedly create a new cult based on a lie. These men condemned deceit and created a church culture of utter selflessness and honesty. Honesty to the point of yielding their own lives to torture and murder in the years following. Men do not die for something they know to be a lie. Men will indeed die for a lie, such as Islamic suicide bombers. But for the disciples (not just the eleven, but the hundreds who claimed to see the resurrected Christ), to avoid martyrdom, all they had to do was admit that they had been lying. They had every motivation to recant their claims, including loss of family, friends, livelihood, home, health, and life. They had no credible motivation to persevere unto death, since they knew whether Christ was truly risen or not. These circumstances are unprecedented in history.

Ultimately, the character of the disciples was just an imperfect reflection of their Master, who walked with them for three years. Jesus affirmed to them repeatedly that He and the Father were one. The Jewish leaders understood that Jesus claimed deity. They tried to kill Him several times before He willingly yielded to the cross. Importantly, Jesus told his disciples that He would rise from the dead. This was the preeminent sign that He attached to His life on earth. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, His entire life’s testimony would be negated, and it is incredible that his followers would create a new cult from the ashes of a false teacher.

In short, without a resurrection, there would have been no Christianity, no New Testament, no Bible, and the last two thousand years of world history would have been entirely different.

### **2. Did the Jewish or Roman leaders steal the body?**

Let’s dispense with this one quickly. To destroy the credibility of Peter, James, John, and the rest of the disciples, and to squash the new movement at its start, Jewish or Roman leaders had merely to produce the body or circulate the facts of its relocation. By the way, the historical record is vacant of any

objections to the fact of the empty tomb. The problem is in the disposition of the body. That leads us to point 3.

### **3. Why was Jerusalem the focal point of this new religion?**

Why not in the friendly neighborhood of Galilee — the spiritual home base of the Lord and His disciples? If the resurrection was a scam, nothing would be harder than to make the case publicly and at the risk of liberty and life in Jerusalem, within a tee shot of the garden tomb. And what of that tomb . . .

### **4. If the resurrection was bogus, why wasn't Christianity split?**

In the three plus years that Jesus preached in Israel, there were many thousands that followed Him from venue to venue and loved his teaching. Multitudes would have been grateful for His healings and compassion. Even if you discount the healings, it is undisputed by historians of all stripes that Jesus had enormous impact on the minds and hearts of the people of Israel. So then . . . if a small cabal formed to claim that a resurrected Christ was behind their leadership, would not many — probably a majority of those thousands mentioned above — have continued to love the memory of Jesus and his teachings, while simply disbelieving the claims of Peter, etc.? The garden tomb would doubtless have enjoyed many pilgrimages to commemorate the life and unfortunate death of Jesus. Rumors of alternative burial sites would have abounded. But there is no record in history of any such splits among the early Christians.

The testimonies of the resurrected Christ were evidently so powerful that they overwhelmed any possibility of an alternative faith based on the life of Jesus. In fact, we find the miraculous events recorded in the book of Acts to represent stamps of God's approval on the testimonies of the apostles. It was only in the centuries to follow, right on up to modern times, from the gnostics of the 2nd century to the denominational modernists of the last few centuries, that we see splits over the virgin birth, deity, and resurrection of Christ. In the times of the eyewitnesses, church faith, doctrine, and polity were unified on the simplicity of the Biblical record.

### **5. Maybe Jesus didn't die on the cross.**

No serious student of history and of Roman crucifixion takes the so-called "swoon" fantasy seriously. The scourging that Jesus suffered before He was forced to carry His own cross was sufficient to have killed most men outright. The prophet Isaiah reports that "his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." The beatings, the scourging, the crown of thorns, climaxed by the bloody horror of crucifixion — it is simply not credible that Jesus survived the cross. The Romans were indeed experts in meting out death. Please re-check the Gospel accounts. The spear in the Lord's side produced water and blood. The heart's sack was already distended with water, a clear indication of death before the soldier thrust in his spear.

Admittedly, Pilate was a touch surprised that Jesus had died as soon as He did. Crucifixion was intended to be drawn out as miserably long as possible. But it was Jesus who “gave up the ghost.” He laid down His life when the sacrifice (for you, for me, for the world) was “finished.” The Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves crucified that day to accelerate asphyxiation and death. They merely used the spear to double-check in the case of Jesus. If this band of soldiers was somehow incompetent up to that point, the spear settled the issue.

But suppose that somehow he survived all that no man could survive. How did He recuperate from such deadly wounds to unwrap Himself from many yards of tightly bound cloth, head to foot, and escape from the sealed tomb? And in such a pitiable state, how did He fool His followers into thinking that He was resurrected, when He would have required help beyond any conceivable medical technology to recover his strength? And then what — did He hide out until He died, while His disciples risked their lives to spread the lie that He ascended bodily to Heaven?

## **6. Were the disciples a likely group to overturn the world?**

Note first that the eleven were unanimous in their testimony. Considering the danger (remember that their leader had just been crucified), isn't it interesting that there were no defections? (Judas Iscariot was out before the crucifixion.) And then quickly a band of 120 were in fervent prayer together. And then 3,000 converts in a day, and then thousands more, to spread, as Frank Morrison described it: “Only from an intensely heated center of burning zeal could this vast field of lava have been thrown out from a tiny country like Palestine to the limits of the Roman world.”

What a motley band, including simple fishermen, a tax collector, and women of various reputations! We know these people better than we know anyone in ancient history, including kings. These lives were utterly transformed, as were the lives of those who believed their testimony in the years ahead. Over the next three centuries the Romans instigated ten distinct decades-long periods of intense persecution, while the churches grew stronger and stronger. The first major Roman persecution, under Nero and just three decades after the resurrection, was launched not because of threatened Christian insurrection, but because of mere refusal to worship the emperor as a god. Persecutions were systematic and widespread, attesting to the pervasive spread of the Gospel. Yet ancient writings (by enemies of the Christians!) admit that the believers were loyal citizens, honest, monogamous, and kind to one another.

The New Testament doctrines center on the love of God manifested through the cross of Jesus Christ, the victorious resurrection, the preaching of this Gospel, and the love of the brethren for each other and for their neighbors. Christianity did not spread through the terror of the sword, as Islam did centuries later, and continues to do so today. The Gospel has always spread through the love of God shone through the lives of the followers of the Carpenter born in Bethlehem.

The character of the apostles is reinforced by the bald openness of the New Testament accounts. We see the lives of these men displayed warts and all: Peter's impetuosity, anger, and actions provoking rebuke from the Lord; Thomas' embarrassing doubts; the cowardly flight of the eleven upon the Lord's

arrest; and the painful details of Peter's three denials. James, the Lord's half-brother, was once one of the skeptical siblings of Jesus. But after the resurrection, we see him born again and taking the principal leadership of the church at Jerusalem. If the Bible were merely of man, the flaws of the founders would be covered up or at least "spun"! Compare the revisionist histories associated with the founders of Mormonism, the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses, and especially Islam.

Christianity did not suffer significant weakening or corruption until Constantine married it to paganism and established it as the state church. That produced far more trouble over the centuries to follow as the Roman Catholic Church came into existence in the 4th and 5th centuries, and in turn began to persecute the true Bible-believing local churches. By the way, the crusades launched by the pagan Roman Catholic Church against Islam (and vice-versa) were fully matched in intensity by the persecutions of the RCC against true Christians for the next 1500 years after Constantine. But back to our main topic . . .

### **7. Perhaps it was a small plot and the rest can be explained by emotionalism.**

Please take the time to study the book of Acts carefully, especially chapters 2 and 17. An emotional following might have been more credible with a launching point in Galilee, as already suggested. But the Jewish center of the universe, Jerusalem, demanded much reasoning and, dare we say it, proof, to create converts. Peter's sermon in chapter 2, of which we most certainly have the barest outline, is a reasoned argument based on Jewish history and Scripture. Furthermore, if there was any doubt about the tomb being empty, or any serious challenge to the credibility of the disciples, the results would have been failure at best, or imprisonment and death at worst.

Turning to Paul's open-air discourse in Acts 17:22-31, we see him making a case for God — the one and only Creator — to a mix of atheists / evolutionists and poly-theistic pagans. Throughout Paul's ministry we see him reasoning and disputing, working to turn the minds of intelligent men and women to the true God. (Acts 18:4, 17:16-17)

### **8. Just who was Paul, once Saul of Tarsus?**

Glad you asked. As you read the book of Acts and the letters of Paul in the New Testament, you'll see a highly educated Roman citizen, and yet a zealous Pharisee, of the strictest Jewish sect, a hater and persecutor of the Christians, and a murderer by his own admission. His confrontation with the resurrected Jesus Christ, as recorded in Acts 9 and amplified in chapters 22 and 26, produces a 180 degree turnaround. Paul becomes the lead missionary for the western world, suffering repeated persecutions and ultimately giving his life for the testimony of the resurrection. Paul's conversion must be explained by the skeptic. His legacy is merely the rapid growth of the Christian churches in Asia Minor and Europe during the 1st century.

Two young, well-connected British philosophers of the early 18th century determined to attack the foundations of Christianity, specifically the resurrection of Christ and the miraculous conversion of Paul.

Gilbert West committed to undermine the resurrection through extensive historical analysis and Lord Lyttleton explored the case of Paul. Meeting after some time had passed, they sheepishly (and disturbingly) admitted to each other that they had come to conclusions opposite to their presumptions. In 1747 West published the book *Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. On the flyleaf he quoted “Blame not before thou hast examined the truth.”

### **9. Isn't it “unscientific” to believe in the resurrection?**

It is true that medical science has no means of reviving a body dead for three days. And that no one outside of the records of Scripture has seen someone so revived. Science is the application of known physical laws to observations in the present. Science involves hypothesis, experimentation, modeling, and synthesis to establish theories and laws that allow us to make sense of this present world. Operational science, however, does not claim to embrace all truth for all time. There are no laboratory instruments, for example, to measure truth, beauty, morality, and all of those qualities that make human life meaningful. More importantly, man's operational science says nothing about the Creator God who made this universe. If you have a fundamental difficulty in believing the resurrection, you likely disbelieve Genesis 1:1 . . . “In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.” Given Genesis 1:1, why is it so inconceivable that God could raise the dead? And given the reality of God as presented in the Bible, why imagine that God has no purpose in his creation? In fact, God invested you as a living soul, made in His image, so that you might live with Him in fellowship and glory forever. If you choose.

By the way, arrogance is inbred in the scientific community, and I assert this after having enjoyed a long career as a Ph.D.-holding member of that club. The simplest of all physical systems is the hydrogen atom — one proton and one electron. Yet there is no scientist, no PhD, no Nobel prize winner who can tell you just what that electron is doing in that atom. Quantum theory gives us a probabilistic method to make some useful predictions, but the theory is certifiably incapable of specifying what is really going on between the two particles. At the other end of the complexity scale, consider human consciousness. After over a century of intense research, no one has a clue how interactions of neurons, synapses, and the configuration of the brain relates to the “blueness” you perceive when you look at the sky. Or worse, your awareness that you enjoy the blue sky. Could it be that mind — and by extension soul and spirit — go beyond the pitiful limits of human science?

### **10. Is the resurrection credible to intelligent, well-educated people?**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, not to mention the rest of His life, is the most vigorously investigated topic of ancient history. The greatest of scholars have examined it and many have been converted from skepticism to an active faith in the risen Lord.

Simon Greenleaf, the distinguished professor who put Harvard law school on the map in the 19th century, has been called the greatest authority on legal evidences in the history of the world. When he

tackled the case of the resurrection, he concluded without reservation that the event was historical and the Gospel accounts utterly reliable.

Frank Morrison was a British lawyer who set out to write a book repudiating the resurrection. During his research, he became a born again believer, and published the book *Who Moved the Stone?* to recount his personal transformation and the evidence that convinced him. Lew Wallace similarly intended to write a book to deny the deity of Christ and eventually published the novel *Ben Hur*, defending the Biblical accounts.

In recent times, Lee Strobel, a skeptical and cynical investigative reporter, was challenged by his newly converted wife to apply his talents to see whether the Bible stands up to reason and criticism. Strobel was first impressed by the awesome changes (for the better) that came over his wife through her conversion. That prompted him to follow the same path that Morrison, Wallace, and many others have taken through history. Strobel became a professing Christian and has published several books in defense of Biblical truth and faith.

This author, too, was once an atheist, a determined skeptic, certain that the Bible was fantasy and that life was to be lived only for self-gratification. When challenged as a young man with the transformed lives of a Christian family who befriended him, he was open to explore the foundations of Biblical belief. He became a Christian whose faith has only been strengthened as he eventually acquired five academic degrees, including a Ph.D. in engineering, and enjoyed a long and successful career in scientific research.

.....

### **Finally, is the resurrection relevant to you?**

When the Creator condescended to become man – and live in a man’s body for eternity – He proved His love for us and His worthiness for our devotion to a degree that is quite beyond man’s comprehension. If you wanted to save a colony of ants because you loved them, and had the power to become one of them, could you imagine doing such a thing? What if becoming one of them was the only way to communicate the issues and to demonstrate your desire for a relationship. I cannot get my head around it, yet when God the Son became one of us, lived among us, offered Himself as the only sufficient bloody sacrifice to pay for our wicked sins, and rose from the dead – yet as a human being – to give us the ultimate measure of hope, is it reasonable for me to spurn His offer, His message, His friendship, His love, His salvation? He will bear in His body for eternity the scars of the price He paid. What are you asked to do in return other than to humble yourself, repent, and trust?

Perhaps at this point you are willing to believe “the facts” of the resurrection, and the truth of the New Testament record itself. Is that enough? No — intellectual assent just adds to your accountability before God. You see, if you truly believe, your life will change. If you believed that your house was on fire, you would flee. Now, if you truly believe that you are a sinner, one heartbeat from Hell, you will do whatever you need to do to escape.



Consider this — in the next 24 hours, your heart will beat about 100,000 times. You don't control one of those heartbeats. When you die . . . and that's guaranteed . . . where will you be? Heaven? Hell? Or are you foolish enough to think that you (mind / soul / consciousness) have no reality apart from your present flesh? If you "believe" that, you enter into a contradiction immediately: the atoms of your brain have no capacity to reason. How is it even possible for you to decide between truth and error, logic and illogic, right and wrong? Let's at least assume that there is a YOU, and you can find out what the truth is about the greatest question facing any man, woman, or child: What lies beyond your death?

What will you do now?

## Chapter 9

### *The indwelling Holy Spirit: Eternal life starts now.*

ATS (Addicted to Sin): “Hey, I hear what you’re saying. I’d like to believe. It makes sense to me that there’s a God. I sure wouldn’t want to go to Hell. And you make Heaven sound great. I just don’t see how I could ever really become a Christian.”

DD: “I know what the problem is, but I want you to admit it. Come on, what’s holding you back?”

ATS: “I’ve lived so long doing things my way . . . yeah, that includes all those sins you’re talking about. Ok, here it is – I can’t even imagine getting over my addiction to the sins I’m so used to.”

DD: “Well, of course you can’t. There is no human way for you to get over the sins you love.”

ATS: “Wait a second. If that’s so, how did you do it?”

DD: “I didn’t do it. God did it. When I started to agree that God was right and I was wrong, and I saw sin for what it was, then – the best I could – I turned from sin and self to Jesus Christ and trusted Him to save me, forgive me, and give me a new heart. If it were possible to visualize spiritually what happened, I imagine that my steps toward Him were few and small, but He pulled me the rest of the infinite distance to Him. My willingness to repent, not even understanding how that was possible, was what God was looking for.”

ATS: “You see, whatever the sin – drinking, fornication, greed, and so on – I can see the evil of it and I don’t want to be hooked on it. I do agree with you – and God – about all that. I just don’t have the strength to put all that garbage behind me. I can literally feel the yearning, the craving, the lust. How do I get rid of that?”

DD: “As long as you’re in this flesh, temptations will be there, but God enables His children to resist, even if they have to literally flee from temptation. For some temptations, God may even give you complete victory so you don’t even feel it anymore. The thing to do is get honest with God, confess your sins and determine to put them behind you, and beg Him to help you. You take a few steps toward Him, and don’t look back, and He’ll help you the rest of the way.”

ATS: “That sounds too simple.”

DD: “Oh, it’s not complicated. You just have to turn around and ‘start walking down that new road.’ You can’t fool God. A lot of people try to turn over a new leaf, or start going to church, or join AA or some other God-dishonoring club, but this is between you and your God, who wants to be your Savior, but only on the condition that your repentance is sincere. And you don’t turn back. You take those steps and keep moving and you can’t fail to find God’s salvation, His strength, and His joy for living free from the power of sin.”

When God saves you it is not just for a Heavenly home and the ages to come. Eternal life starts right now when you are born again. Scripture teaches (John 3:16, 1 John 5:11-13) that eternal life is a present possession for the believer. His salvation is secure (John 10:27-30), he has been adopted into God’s family becoming an heir of God’s riches for eternity (Galatians 4:4-7, Ephesians 2:6-7), his spirit has been

“quicken” (made alive) (Ephesians 2:1,5), and the Holy Spirit – the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity – has taken up residence within (1 Corinthians 3:16, Galatians 4:6).

I wasn’t “born into” a Biblical worldview. I was raised in a very traditional Roman Catholic family, detoured into atheism as a teenager, was challenged by *reasonable* arguments to consider the truth of the Gospel, became a Christian, and finally settled on a solid Biblical foundation. Over the years I have come to recognize and validate that the word of God is fully trustworthy, consistent, and perfect, both theologically and scientifically. More importantly for me personally, everything important about me changed.

As I grew up in the RC Church on the south side of Chicago I was fully engaged in religious activities, but had never carefully examined the foundations of my beliefs. In short, I was an eager churchgoer and would have professed to be a loyal Catholic youth. I certainly wasn’t a born again Christian, however. I trusted that some combination of canned prayers, active service within “The Church,” and avoidance of ‘big’ sins would earn me a berth in Heaven. I didn’t realize that ALL sins are “big” (mortal) enough to earn Hell: *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”* (James 2:10)

There were two powerful forces working against my belief system. Even though all in my extended family were religious churchgoers, my dad was a skeptic. He took delight in pointing out inconsistencies in RC doctrine and in the bloody history of what has often purported to be Christianity — most notably the Inquisition. What I didn’t realize was that true Christians were always on the receiving end of persecutions.

The second force was the culture of evolutionism in which I was immersed. I spent considerable time in the museums in Chicago, which have always been completely saturated with evolution as the naturalistic explanation for life. Additionally, everything I was exposed to in literature and the media that touched the subject of origins was evolutionary. I didn’t know then that I’d been sold a “story,” but that all the scientific evidence pointed overwhelmingly to Biblical creation, as recorded in Genesis. In the 1960s there were a very few books on creation out there, but I certainly hadn’t noticed any.

As a precocious 13-year-old, and at the insistence of my mother, I brought a flock of questions to the smartest priest my family could find. He and I spent an hour together one Saturday afternoon discussing the origin and meaning of life and the universe. I had even prepared a “white paper,” four single-spaced typed pages that laid out my version of a mechanistic universe, void of free will. After all, if physics and chemistry explain everything, then wither free will? He couldn’t give me an answer for any of my concerns. That unsatisfying meeting confirmed my decision to be an atheist. Who needed God? “The Church” didn’t make sense, especially in lieu of its bloody history, and everything in the universe could be explained by atheistic evolution — it seemed.

I was a miserable atheist for the next three years. No one in my life was even aware of my agony. At the age of 16, I was a “straight-A” student and enjoyed playing varsity sports. I had it made in the shade.

Inside, the story was very different. What point is there to life if we are just animals and death means the end of it all? At the depths of my depression, God had mercy on me and sent me a friend who was a Christian. He and his family embraced me and answered my arrogant questions with kindness. They gave me some books to read that convinced me that I didn't "know it all." Importantly, I saw the love of Jesus in their lives and a purpose lacking in mine. That gave them high marks for credibility in my eyes, so that I was encouraged to grapple with the issues. Their consistent Christian behavior and testimony was not capable of converting me, of course. My mind had to change. But this family's care opened the door for me to look critically at the evidence. Which worldview made more sense of life and the universe?

It took me about four months to realize that the Bible is absolutely true – scientifically, logically, historically, prophetically, and above all . . . personally. Namely, God's word convicted me of my sinful life and my need for the Savior. In a flash I realized that if the Bible is true, I'd be crazy to defy God. It's not enough to *know* the truth. I had to repent from the specific sins of my daily life and the arrogant attitudes of my mind and heart, trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. As Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, old things passed away and I became a new creature. I was born again and haven't been the same since.

Is my life since that time a shining example of what a Christian should be? By no means. Since becoming a Christian I have stumbled, fumbled, and stupidly sinned on countless occasions. Please, don't emulate my Christian walk. Follow the Lord Jesus. He is the only perfect example. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, and under His magnificently patient and merciful care, my life on this Earth was placed on an entirely different path. I had passed from death to life (John 5:24). My perspective had changed dramatically. As a new Christian, I was truly a spiritual babe, but I began to grow a bit and mature over time.

Here's the way Billy Sunday, an evangelist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, put it (my paraphrase): "A sheep and a hog can both fall into a mud puddle. The sheep immediately knows he doesn't like it and works to get out. The hog loves it and wallows around." There were times in my young Christian life, especially before I graduated from college, that someone should have gotten in my face and challenged me as to whether I was really a Christian. I wish that some serious Christian would have. Such a challenge would doubtless have convicted my conscience and I might have matured much more rapidly.

Yet even in the first few years, here are some of the changes wrought in my heart by the Holy Spirit:

1. From a certainty that God didn't exist and that there was no way I could ever be convinced, I became certain that God is real and that He loves me personally.
2. Instead of seeing life as pointless and terminally short, I acquired purposes well beyond "self" that have eternal value.
3. My goals in life were wholly self-centered and sensual pleasure was high on the list. After conversion, my care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical condition of others grew steadily. I began to see that God's purposes for my life made sense. I was getting in sync with them.

4. Sin – the “mud puddle” – became increasingly distasteful and righteousness increasingly desirable.
5. Suddenly, I wasn’t alone anymore – anywhere and at any time. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to be the Comforter for the believer. I couldn’t have imagined that before. I couldn’t live without Him now.
6. The world began to make sense. I began to understand how to live as a man, a husband, a father, a citizen, and as a child of my Heavenly Father. The insanities of the world’s religions, man’s continual warfare, greed, oppression, and immorality; the occult, economic chaos, and the grand sweep of history fit perfectly into the Biblical worldview. Any other system results in nothing but frustrations and mysteries.

I could go on, but you get the idea. My mind (that aspect of me which thinks, reasons, and remembers), my “heart” (the seat of emotions and will), and my spirit (that which connects with God once it is made alive) were on a new road, making progress. The Lord wouldn’t let me slip or stray or stumble too far. As God’s newborn child, I had to suffer the chastisement of my Heavenly Father at times. “Spanking” from the Lord is analogous to the necessary discipline that parents must employ to keep their children from playing in a busy street, or eating something poisonous, or playing with an electrical outlet, or establishing a pattern of rebellion. God’s chastisement will start with your conscience, but if you don’t respond, may escalate to touching your wallet, health, or other circumstances. God wants His children to grow in maturity, love, grace, holiness, and service to others. I thank God for His chastisement: although never pleasant, it can save you from disaster.

Scripture teaches that the believer is to work to acquire the “mind of Christ,” to be “transformed by the renewing of our mind,” and to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” You might fear that you would lose your identity if you follow Jesus more and more closely. The opposite is true. Consider the incredible diversity of God-given talents, skills, and interests in the human race. Some love music, some love chemistry. Some write music or poetry and some exhibit impressive athletic skills. Some are bold and some are reserved. Some are eloquent and others thoughtful and sparing in words. Some are passionate in the cause of righteousness and others are analytical. Peter and Paul, for example, are wonderful contrasts, yet both were used mightily in God’s service. The poor fisherman was bold and quick to speak, sometimes for good, sometimes not. When he blundered, he was humble enough to repent immediately. The scholar was zealous and brilliant, but his single-minded stubbornness landed him in prison for several years, perhaps unnecessarily.

The entire realm of the *best*, leaving out the *worst* of human imagination, interests, skills, and ambition is just a subset of the mind of Christ. When God made man in His own image, He didn’t give each and every man the entire package of personality and talent. Your little piece of man’s diversity represents just a puzzle piece of God’s infinite complexity. The best that you can be is to be enabled, motivated, inspired, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to maximally develop and express who you are. That can only happen to a small degree in this present life and flesh, but you can have eternity to develop who you are in the ages to come.

Consider a dad who shares a common interest with his son in building cars. They can spend many hours together, building, learning, growing, bonding, and loving. Perhaps this dad has a daughter who is fascinated by gardening. They also can spend hours together making a beautiful and productive garden while their relationship deepens. Is the son missing out because he doesn't care about gardening? Is the daughter ashamed because she can't rebuild a carburetor?

This crude example is but a shadow of how the Lord has "wired" your personality and talents for productivity, for service, and also to walk with you, both now and throughout eternity, sharing common interests and creating wondrous new projects. God's personality is big enough to share intimately and enthusiastically with everyone who would come to Him. What drives you? What good things stimulate you? If it's "good" it's also of interest to God.

When you refuse the Lord, your fate is to wane smaller and smaller through life. Sin addicts, corrupts, destroys, and distracts from the "good." As we have discussed before, any sin can consume you and distract you from what you know is right. Pornography, for example, consumes more and more of the addict's time and attention. The "kick" gets smaller over time, so you have to go deeper and more vile. The interesting, productive, rewarding, "right" things you could be learning and doing get shunted aside. You become "less" of you over time, not more.

Being led by the Holy Spirit, instructed and energized by Him, pleases God, helps others, and creates a deep satisfaction. When a child knows he has done right, and is rewarded with praise from his parents, his joy is unbounded. When the child does wrong, his natural tendency is to hide, to hunker down, to avoid the very presence of his parents. Which path do you want?

Let's shift gears. As a Christian, a child of God, I have found that God answers prayers. The subject of prayer has filled enough books for a library. Once you become a Christian you will certainly study how to pray and under what conditions God answers prayer, or decides to reject your request. God wants us to walk day by day, moment by moment, in spiritual and mental communion with Him. I'll give three examples where God has answered prayers that meant a lot to me:

1. Near the beginning of my Ph.D. program I was searching for the right research topic to lead to a successful dissertation. I had a key 1 pm meeting with my faculty advisor one day to discuss options. I had been praying through the lunch hour for wisdom from God on this matter. My specialization was laser physics and I had no doubt that God knew everything there was to know about that subject. My advisor and I had a topic in mind for me to explore, but neither he nor I had any idea at the time what approach could be taken to extend the state-of-the-art. To earn a Ph.D. in the sciences or engineering requires you to tread new ground, make new discoveries, and extend man's understanding of an interesting topic. I will never forget approaching the steps leading up to the Engineering Building where my advisor's office was located. As I hit the first step a novel idea penetrated my consciousness. By the time I reached the top step I believed that I understood just what was going on in the arcane physics of that subject. I explained it to my advisor and launched into research to prove "my" new hypothesis.

The wonderfully efficient progress over the next couple of years that led to my Ph.D. confirmed to me what a wonderful gift of understanding the Lord had given to me on those steps.

I apparently startled several people with the opening paragraph of the Acknowledgments page of my dissertation:

*“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5) My gratitude goes first to my Lord Jesus Christ for calling me to this doctoral program, and for the ideas, support, and encouragement necessary for its completion . . .”*

2. About six years ago my wife and I “retired” from my paycheck at Michigan Tech University and moved to our present location in northern Illinois. We had been frustrated, despite much prayer, because our house didn’t sell for two years, and we could not afford to relocate until the house sold. Our realtor showed our house to at least 60 potential buyers. She thought we were going to abandon her services, but we assured her from the beginning that the house would sell in God’s time. Nevertheless, we suffered frustration and uncertainty about “God’s time.” One evening I was able to pray with more focus and trust than I had previously. Suddenly, God gave me the assurance that His time was approaching and that the timing would be perfect. From that moment I had complete calmness on the subject. Within a few weeks the house had sold and a month after that, we were on our way. We discovered in the years afterward that God’s timing had been absolutely perfect, because of the connections we made with other people. If we had moved any earlier or any later, even by just a few weeks, we would have missed much opportunity for service.

3. One of my principal activities in recent years has been street evangelism. I share the Gospel on university campuses and in various metropolitan areas. Good weather is conducive to engaging people in conversations on street corners. If the weather is bad enough, people won’t even be out. Every once in a while, my schedule has constrained me to a day with a wicked weather forecast. I have seen miraculous answers to prayers for good weather. On several occasions, thunderstorms have held off until virtually the moment I have finished my work for the day. Once our entire region was socked in for hours when several of us wanted to pass out tracts in a downtown area when several high school graduations were being conducted at a local indoor arena. The weather wouldn’t have hindered the graduations, but would have greatly reduced our opportunity to catch people on their way in. For those two hours that we needed good weather, the skies over the city cleared and we enjoyed beautiful blue sky. Later, reviewing the satellite weather data, we marveled to see that a very small window of clear weather opened up in the midst of 20,000 square miles of horrendous thunderstorms.

I could go on with such personal examples. What I have learned is that God cares much about the work of evangelism. Changing the weather over an entire region for the sake of a servant or two who care to share the Gospel is not a difficult thing . . . for Him.

These examples might not impress you as miraculous. Well, you don't walk in my shoes. The simple way for you to find out that God answers prayer is to become one of His children. You will have all the proof you need once you forsake the Devil's kingdom.

When God saves you, your perspective on all of life changes. It's no more just about you and yours. You may, in fact, continue to be a lawyer, a plumber, a mechanic, or whatever. But your purposes change when your spirit comes alive. Some give their lives wholly over to the propagation of the Gospel, at great personal risk, occasionally even to the loss of their lives. Whatever God's path for you once you become His, God works to connect His most faithful servants to others in times and circumstances that can only be labeled "divine appointments." One of my favorite examples is in the life of Gladys Aylward, a single woman who set out a century ago to be a missionary to China. I encourage you to obtain her biography, *Gladys Aylward: The Little Woman*, published in 1974 by the Moody Bible Institute. Her story is not only one of faithful and selfless service, but also additional evidence regarding the Lord's care in getting the Gospel to those who are interested.

This slight English lady was refused support from missions agencies because of her supposed lack of qualifications and education. So she worked as a maid and house cleaner to earn enough for transportation from England to China. Her trip across Siberia and eventually into the heart of China entailed several miracles. She served for many years, including the war years while Japan ravaged China.

During one long journey as she ministered to war refugees, she met a group of Christians who were praying for remote mountain villages that had no Gospel witness. As she joined in the prayers she felt burdened by the Lord to go herself. Gladys found a Chinese Christian doctor who agreed to travel with her. After ten days of hiking through the mountains, coming to the end of their food and with no living soul in sight, they were greatly discouraged. She prayed for food and shelter. Dr. Huang had the faith to pray, "O God, send us the one You want us to tell about Jesus. We have witnessed to no one today, but You have sent us here for some special purpose. Show us where to find the man You intend to bless."

Humbled by her companion's prayer, Gladys suggested that they start singing Gospel choruses. Very soon, Dr. Huang jumped up as he saw two men some distance up the mountain. One came down to meet them, a Tibetan priest, who invited them to come to the lamasery. Gladys was shocked because their culture forbade dealings between Buddhist priests and women. They were given private rooms, comfortable cushions and rugs, and served a wonderfully large and tasty meal. Exhausted from the traveling, Gladys was ready to turn in when two priests came to invite them to a large courtyard. In this courtyard were 500 hassocks arranged in a semicircle, each one supporting a Buddhist priest.

Gladys and Dr. Huang decided to sing some songs. Then Dr. Huang talked about the Savior and man's need for Him. They sang some more. Then Gladys talked. They sang. They taught. Sang. Taught. All the while the priests were perfectly immobile and apparently unresponsive. Finally, the two decided to call it an evening and retired to their rooms. A few minutes later two of the priests came by with questions: "Can you explain why He died? Can you explain how it is that He could love me?" Two by



two, the rest of the night, they kept coming, begging for more teaching. They had no issue with creation or the virgin birth. What they desperately wanted to understand was how God could love them and how it was that He would die for them.

Gladys learned the next morning that Dr. Huang also had visitors all through the night. They were invited to an audience with the head of the monastery. He told them how some years before one of their priests had been handed a tract in a village that consisted simply of the verse, John 3:16. He brought it back to the village, amazed to hear of a God who loved. For five years they could learn nothing more. Determined, they eventually found an outpost of the China Inland Mission. A Chinese evangelist gave them copies of the Gospel accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Allow me to quote the old priest directly from the biography:

*“Eagerly they hurried back to the lamasery and we read the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We believed all that it contained, though there was much we could not understand. But one verse seemed of special importance. Christ had said, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel,’ so obviously one day someone would come to tell us more about this wonderful God. All we had to do was to wait, and when God sent a messenger, to be ready to receive him. For another three years we have waited. Then two lamas, out on the hillside gathering sticks, heard someone singing. ‘Those are the messengers we are waiting for,’ they said. ‘Only people who know God will sing.’ While one went back to tell the rest of us to prepare for the long-expected guests, the other came down to meet you on the hillside.”*

That was a “divine appointment.” The Communists eventually destroyed that lamasery, but it is clear that up to 500 new converts were scattered into the Chinese population, eager to spread the Gospel of salvation. Most encouraging is the extraordinary working of God in circumstances and in the hearts of men and women, even a former maidservant from England, who was rewarded for her prayers and faithfulness by taking part in the salvation of so many.

You may not realize that the “center of mass” for Christianity in this world today is in China. There are perhaps 50 to 100 million Christians in China, continuing to spread the Gospel from village to village, even reaching out across borders to bring salvation to “closed” Muslim countries. Where did all these Christians come from? Gladys Aylward was just one of the faithful who brought the good news into that country before the Communists kicked out all of the missionaries. Hudson Taylor and many others in the 19<sup>th</sup> century laid the groundwork. Search out the history. Do you want to see proof of God’s work in the transformed lives of His servants? It’s not hard to find.

I’ll tell you another story about how the saving grace of God transforms an individual and changes his life’s direction. Jacob DeShazer’s autobiography, *Doolittle Raider: A Changed Life*, provides a first-hand account of the famous Doolittle bombing raid over Japan in the early months of America’s involvement in World War II.

His own words describe the climate of America just before we entered WWII. “When the Second World War broke out in Europe, and Japan (our former ally) sided with Germany, it further shook diplomatic relations . . . then came Pearl Harbor! Overnight, hatred against Japan in this country spread throughout the nation and rose to a white heat.”

Several American military defeats followed and people began to wonder if things would ever swing the other way. DeShazer was in South Carolina being trained as a bombardier. He was called in to his commanding officer and asked if he would care to volunteer for a dangerous mission. Everyone who was asked volunteered immediately. At the time he didn’t know it, but he was to participate in the Doolittle Raid – an attempt to bomb the homeland of Japan and inflict some physical damage on the empire, but more importantly, putting a dent in their morale. Japan’s people thought they were impervious to attacks on their own homeland.

He says, “I sensed a fighting spirit among these men. . . The Japanese were taking things that didn’t belong to them. They had started the war. These American men were ready to fight against such unrighteousness.”

Although the mission was an overall success, a number of problems went wrong with DeShazer’s flight, especially after his crew delivered their bomb load. Over the Chinese mainland, the crew was forced to parachute out of the plane into enemy-held territory. After walking for a long period, he finally saw some soldiers. “China or Japan?” he asked. They said China, but it wasn’t long before he realized they had lied and he had been captured by the Japanese. He was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted by Emperor Hirohito. His fate matched that of many other prisoners: torture, solitary confinement, and prison for the duration of the war.

A good a bit of time into his confinement, Jacob received a Bible. It was his to read for three weeks and then it would go to another prisoner. “The Bible is different from any other book,” he said. “The men who wrote the Bible said that God spoke to them and it has proved that God did speak to them.” He knew about prophecies and how many had been fulfilled throughout history. He came under the conviction that he was a sinner and in need of the Savior. As he got to know the Scriptures, he was impressed with the love of God and that Jesus had died so that he need not die eternally. As he read in Mark 1:15, “Repent ye and believe the gospel,” the light broke and Jacob knew that salvation was his. He yielded his plans, his hopes, his spirit.

Becoming a believer did not change his environment, though. Jacob made a decision to do his best to live as a Christian should. He remembered his anger before his conversion. Now his attitude was completely changed. God expects us to keep his commandments. Jacob was to love his fellow men and that meant his captors, too! He waited for an opportunity to show them. His bare foot was kicked by a guard wearing hobnailed boots. He felt hatred and resentment welling up, but *at the same time*, an inner voice said that he should love the guard. He had promised the Lord obedience so he submitted and waited patiently.

The very next morning he was able to prove himself. The guard came to his door and Jacob said, “Good morning” to him in Japanese. Several mornings went by and Jacob continued to show himself friendly. After a few more mornings, the guard spoke to him and smiled. The guard became friendly to him over time and even brought him some treats to eat.

Jacob said, “How easy it was to make a friend out of an enemy because I had just tried. God’s way will work if we will try it out . . . It was easy to tell that my nature had been changed. I had a different attitude toward life. It had all come through the promises in the Bible. When we see those promises and know that they are true, our nature will be changed if we submit to God’s will and accept Jesus . . . There was new power in my life. I had been weak in self-control and will power, but now I had power so that I could even love my enemies. It all came from Heaven. I knew that it was supernatural . . . It was a great joy to me to find Jesus and to learn that He gives power to overcome such a defeated life . . . Jesus gives self-control and willpower to all people who are weak on these points. By living such a victorious life we have the witness that we know Jesus.”

Jacob DeShazer was rescued after the war, came home to America, attended Bible college, and returned to Japan as a missionary to the very people that tortured and confined him. This is not the normal human reaction to such experiences! It was only through knowing the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit that he was enabled to accomplish such a work for Christ.

What will your story be? How will you be transformed? I hope to hear about it, if not in this life, then perhaps around a campfire in the New Earth while we share our adventures made possible only by the grace of God.

## Chapter 10

### *Best friends for life, eternity*

FL (Friend-Less): “I just can’t believe my wife would just leave me for someone else. I feel so betrayed, double-crossed, angry! I can’t even describe the gut-wrenching pain I’ve got. I trusted her and now this.”

DD: “I know what you’re saying. It’s easier to lose a wife to the grave than to adultery and divorce.”

FL: “I don’t know if I’ll be able to trust anyone else again.”

DD: “There is no doubt that people will let you down. There is only One you can trust completely, and that’s the Lord Jesus Christ. And He knows every flaw, every sin, everything about you, and He still offers you forgiveness, peace, comfort, and even friendship.”

FL: “It just sounds too good to be true. But what about trusting people?”

DD: “Look at it this way. If I’m lined up with Jesus Christ, trying to follow Him, loving God, hating sin, and caring far more about others than myself, how do you think I’m going to get along with someone who is trying to do exactly the same thing?”

FL: “You mean, if I repent and get born again, you and I will be headed in the same direction, with the same goals, and so on. Yeah, it would be easy to be friends with someone you’re in agreement with.”

DD: “The friendships of the world are often based on love of sports, love of beer, similar politics, maybe what they can get out of each other, whatever. They rarely have any solid foundation. When life falls apart, who really cares? I’ll tell you – the Lord does, and anyone who knows you who is a true follower of Christ will care, too, and be there for you.”

FL: “Do you have any friends like that?”

DD: “Very few, but some. I have had more in the past, but some of those friendships evaporated. You know why? Because with some it turned out they were just ‘trying out’ Christ, and when they decided it wasn’t profitable, they quit on the faith they never really had and they also lost interest in me. In other cases, with genuine Christians, some just got cooler, cooler, and then cold. That’s the mark of this age. Many professing Christians, but few true ones, and of the real ones, just a fraction keep the fire going. By the grace of God, I’ve tried to keep growing and keep the fire going. I’ve found that even among most real Christians, I’m just a bit too much of a fanatic for them.”

FL: “How can you be a real, born again Christian, like you say, saved from Hell, with eternal life and an inheritance beyond imagination, and not be a fanatic?”

DD: “Now you’re on the right track!”

We human beings are built for relationships. It is obvious that when people are in sync, aimed in the same direction, whether in marriage, in business, on a football team, or in a small church, satisfaction and success are at least possible. Since we are designed by God it follows that when individuals are lined up with Him, they also are lined up with each other.

As I share the Gospel on the street I regularly meet other Christians, not just the “professing kind,” but real believers who love the Lord. It usually takes only a few seconds of conversation to verify that we’re on the same team and have much the same heart for lost souls and for living a life in service to Jesus Christ. Their words, their attitude, their body language – it’s really quite obvious. The converse is also true. An unbeliever demonstrates his position very quickly, often by what he does not say.

In Scripture the Lord gives us hints of the eternality of the relationships that Christians begin to build while yet on this Earth. I have cited this passage previously:

*Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. Mark 10:28-30*

On this troubled Earth we need brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fathers, and friends to sustain us. Unfortunately, our “natural” relations are not often in sync with us. But a “born again” Christian has joined the family of God. Children in this family, if they are obedient at all to their Heavenly Father, will give all they have to help each other. It is extremely important to God that His children love each other in real, self-sacrificing, and practical ways. Please read thoughtfully the Scriptures below. These themes are repeated abundantly in the Bible. God doesn’t want anyone to miss this vital truth.

*If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. John 15:10-14*

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:35*

*And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 1 John 3:23*

*And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13*

*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-11*

*And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. 1 John 4:16-21*

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25*

Some years ago my wife and I moved from Michigan's Upper Peninsula to northern Illinois. It was December and it was snowing. Somewhere on a 2-lane state road in the north Wisconsin woods, miles away from any towns, the front axle of our large U-Haul truck broke. I confess that this was literally one of my worst nightmares. Now, the Lord didn't prevent this trouble, but it became clear that we were going to learn a lesson about trusting Him.

The first measure of God's grace was in the presence of a powerful satellite phone that we had carried with us on trips for years, but had never used. Never. We had simply paid the access fees faithfully every month. We opened the instruction manual and got it working. The national U-Haul desk had a very difficult time understanding that the problem was not a flat tire. It was the axle that broke!!!

A very capable wrecker arrived and towed us about 10 miles – wonderfully – to the only U-Haul facility within 100 miles. And they had a truck that we could use! My wife and I were in our fifties and it was frankly beyond our physical capabilities to unload and reload our household goods. In the Yellow Pages I found a small Baptist church and got the pastor on the line. When I explained our predicament he said that he and two of his men would come over immediately. We did not know them. They did not know us. They got us reloaded and were adamant in refusing any compensation. They simply wanted to help a brother and sister who were in need. Thank you, Lord!!!!

In the Scriptures above we observe a number of remarkable truths. Jesus set the example of love for His followers when He went to the cross for us. He commands us to love each other accordingly, even unto death. Countless believers through the centuries have suffered imprisonment, torture, and death in order to protect the identities of fellow believers from persecutors, including Communists, Muslims, and the Roman Catholic Church. Does anyone love you that much? Do you love anyone else that much?

Such marks of true disciples are unique to the Christian faith. For example, more Muslims die at the hands of other Muslims than by any other group. You might object that conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, such as in Northern Ireland, demonstrate "internal" strife. Nope. I'm talking about real, born again Christians. Believers simply do not persecute each other. Also, believers do not persecute those of any other religion. Never. The Great Commission from the Lord is not that of a "crusade," but simply to preach the Gospel. Words. Persuasion. Prayer. Kindness. Choice – always choice.

More truths: Christian love is intimately coupled to holiness, knowledge, and judgment, producing fruits of righteousness which glorify God. Love is not lust. Love is self-sacrificial, devoted to another's well-being. Love is synonymous with Biblical *charity*, as expressed so poignantly in 1 Corinthians 13 . . .

*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

You can only love like that because God loved you first – through the cross. You can only access such a capacity for love by being born again of the Spirit of God. You cannot claim to love God without loving God's children. I've heard professing Christians insist that they are believers, but they have no interest in being with other believers, and essentially live for themselves. They may "love" their own families, but your family is simply an extension of you. Of course you should love your own family. Even mass-murdering megalomaniacs like Josef Stalin showed love for their own families. If you don't you are seriously degenerate. Showing love beyond "your own" is the beginning of manifesting God's love in your life.

The passage above from Hebrews teaches that believers are to assemble themselves together for the purposes of provoking one another to love and good works, and to exhort one another in all things good. When you become a Christian you must find a church, a local group of believers, who practice Christian love. In America, this is harder than it sounds. From what I have learned, Christians under persecution in China, Vietnam, Iran, etc., despite the hardships, work hard to know, love, and encourage each other, all the while reaching out to others with the Gospel, even though their lives are at stake.

In America, the story is different, so you'll have to go outside the "normal program." In order for a church to practice love among the brethren, Christians need to know each other well enough to allow mutual encouragement, exhortation, prayer, and friendship that rises to the level of brotherhood within a family. The clear teaching of the Lord in John 13:35 and the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 must be taken seriously. Yet most churches are designed around a pulpit ministry, a show, and facilities to support them. Find support for that in the New Testament! I'm just warning you. Not many churches actually act like churches are supposed to act! When you determine to follow Jesus Christ, don't just take the word of some local preacher regarding the practice of the day-to-day Christian life.

I recall sitting in a service in a large conventional church some years ago. Before the "show" started I looked around and saw about 15 people I knew somewhat personally. Everyone was in their Sunday best, looking pleasant and contented. Smiles and handshaking abounded. But I knew something of the pain and problems that wracked the lives of these people. And that few others in the church (including the pastor) had any awareness of these particular difficulties in these particular lives. It struck me that the rest of that congregation of 1,000 could be no different. Yet the morning service, including the pulpit-thumping sermon, addressed nothing of what I knew to be real problems – that needed to be dealt with Scripturally and compassionately – and right then.

That church (like most) was *designed to prevent* intimate relationships among the people. Come to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, plus special meetings when offered, and you're a "good" Christian. Families who work hard all week and then attend the "show" are worn out. There's *no time* for people to get to know each other, not to mention deal with issues personally and Scripturally.

I note that many evangelical churches offer weekly "small group" experiences. That's good, if done well and with Scriptural substance. Some would get a passing grade in this area. Note again Hebrews 10:23-25. The whole purpose of "assembling together" is to provoke "one another" to love and good works and to exhort one another. One another . . . not just the single super-preacher to a crowd of scores, hundreds, or thousands.

You'll have to search for a church designed so that people have the time and opportunity to talk of spiritual things (see Malachi 3:16), to discuss the Bible and ask questions, to encourage one another, to work together in the ministry, to share prayer requests, to lift up prayers in the hearing of those who need to know that you care. If you have trouble in this area, please contact me and we'll work through the problems together. (My contact info is in the front of this book.)

My wife and I are part of a small "house church." On our web site, TruthReallyMatters.com, I have an article, "Designing a House Church," that goes into some detail regarding what I mean by that. One of the key elements of our weekly schedule is a pot luck fellowship every Saturday evening from 6 – 10 pm. There is rarely a planned agenda, which allows open discussion of life issues, current events, and anything else that someone wants to discuss. Occasionally we watch and discuss a DVD on topics such as creation / evolution, church history, archeology, prophecy, etc. We also discuss our own evangelistic efforts made during the week. Occasionally, someone will bring a guest to this fellowship (or to any other meeting). We do have some screening standards before inviting someone into one of our homes, however, for safety's sake.

Over the last several years our Saturday night meeting has enabled each of us to share our greatest burdens and ask counsel about difficult issues. The intent is to help each other with solid, practical advice based on Biblical principles. Here are some of the issues that I remember us discussing:

1. How to get along as husband and wife.
2. How to get along with the in-laws.
3. When and how to discipline children.
4. How to find a wife.
5. How to court a prospective wife.
6. How to get through college when it gets tough.
7. How to save and invest money.
8. How to deal with difficult bosses and co-workers.
9. Why the Middle East is in continual conflict.



10. How to answer an atheist's questions.
11. How to analyze conservative / liberal / political issues Biblically.
12. How to overcome anger / depression / bitterness / etc.

I just realized I could go on for quite a while. When big personal issues come up in a church, it is essential for help to be available immediately. If you have to wait for your pulpiteer to match his topic to your need, it may take years. When you get to know fellow believers well, in the manner the Bible describes, you can share burdens and joys, tears and laughter.

Brothers and sisters in Christ express genuine interest in each other's lives, offer help, and have enough knowledge to pray intelligently. We see much exhortation in Scripture to pray for one another. We must *know* each other well enough in order to be able to pray effectually. When you become a Christian, set out on this path. Don't be deterred by the culture of typical American churches, which tends to put distance between people.

As a lost person, what type of "fellowship" do you have now? Consider a typical worldly "party," with drinking, useless conversations, dirty jokes, flirtations, seductions . . . well, fill in the blanks from your own experience. Is that the best you have to look forward to? The fellowship of self-centered unbelievers is invariably shallow and unsatisfying. Everybody is looking out first for himself, so who really cares about you? How many friends do you have who would lay down their lives for you?

Am I saying that relationships must be deadly serious all of the time? Of course not. Especially in my youth and young adulthood, I was really into sports. I was a part of many baseball and basketball teams, and I played a lot of tennis, both singles and doubles. But by far the most enjoyable team experience I ever had was as part of a church softball team. To play, one needed to be not just a member of the church, but involved in one of the evangelistic ministries of this (unusually) motivated church. The guys I played with were also my teammates in reaching out to the local community with the Gospel. We were not just friends, but fellow laborers for the Gospel's sake. We knew each other, cared for each other, prayed for each other, and had a great time playing ball together.

Perhaps my best friend on the team, Rudy, who was also my partner in the bus ministry, came from a background strikingly different from mine. I was raised in a middle-class suburb of Chicago, with college-educated parents, and eventually earned a Ph.D. Rudy was raised in Albuquerque's "South Valley," the toughest, gang-infested area in the state, and worked as a cook before eventually owning his own restaurant. In this "world system," we had nothing in common. But since we had both been born again into the family of God, we had everything of any importance in common.

My friendship with Rudy is not just for this meager lifetime. I expect we'll play some softball in the ages to come, tell stories over campfires, and have dinner parties with many other friends . . . including our wives, who are also believers. Rudy and I shared a few campfires in the mountains of New Mexico. Perhaps we will be able to do so again in the mountains of Sirius' fourth planet. (Just speculating, mind you!)

My wife, my best friend, my lover . . . If the Lord doesn't return soon, one of us will likely die before the other, leaving the survivor in grief and loneliness. But not the hopeless grief and loneliness of this world. We will see each other again and our friendship will be eternal! I love to go for walks with Bonnie now. How much more when we can walk the streets of the New Jerusalem, and perhaps together attend a lecture (and "holodeck" experience?) on the ancient beauty of the hanging gardens of Babylon, presented by the prophet Daniel, himself. I'd love to take a tour with her and other friends through Noah's ark, and hear the ark-builder recount his efforts to reach his own generation.

Don't you yearn for true fellowship, true friendship, bonds with others that are unbreakable? Aren't you desperate for "teammates," yea, rather for a family that will endure forever?

**YOU CAN HAVE ALL THIS AND MORE!!!**

The Lord Jesus invites you to join His family. Why not volunteer for adoption this very moment?

## Chapter 11

*The alternatives are insane, illogical, and deliberate lies.*

EKG (Ecumenical Kind of Guy): “What difference does it make what religion you’re in? Aren’t all religions about the same? Even the pope and the last few U.S. presidents have said that we all worship the same god. Allah, God, what’s the difference?”

DD: “Good question. So you think that ‘Allah’ is just another name, the Arabic name for ‘God’, like ‘Dios’ in Spanish or ‘Dieu’ in French?”

EKG: “Yeah, that’s right.”

DD: “Actually, you’re exactly wrong. Allah was worshiped by Arabic tribes for centuries before Mohammed’s lifetime, as just one of many tribal gods. In fact, Mohammed’s father was named Abdullah, a contraction of *Abd ul Allah*, which means “servant of Allah.” Mohammed was their moon god, which is indicated by the symbol of the crescent moon that you see all over Islam. Also, Muslim scholars are greatly offended if someone translates the Koran into English or any other language and fails to use the name ‘Allah.’ Muslims insist that ‘Allah’ does not translate into ‘God.’ You see, serious Muslims don’t buy into this ecumenical scam at all.”

EKG: “Ok, but the religions essentially teach the same things, don’t they?”

DD: “They could hardly be more different. In the case of Allah you have a god who consists of one person, not capable of fellowship or love until other beings are created. God, however, is triune, already in perfect fellowship among His three persons before creation. God is love and wants us to have a relationship with Him, but Allah is officially unknowable. If the God of the Bible is really there . . . and He is . . . how offensive would it be to Him to be so slandered?”

EKG: “But both religions teach that the good go to Heaven and the bad go to Hell, don’t they?”

DD: “Allah supposedly rewards only the righteous and punishes the wicked, but there is no grace. Allah had no incarnate son who entered into humanity to offer himself for the sins of the world. (The tribal god Allah had three daughters, but no son.) The Bible teaches that all are sinners – wicked – by deliberate acts of rebellion. Because of God’s love He offers salvation as a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Justice is served on the cross. Love is extended by the ultimate sacrifice. Islam knows nothing of such concepts. Let me give you an example. Imagine that you have lived a long and wicked life and are now on your deathbed. You have just moments to live. In walks a Muslim cleric and you ask him what you must do to avoid being cast into Hell. What could he tell you?”

EKG: “Well, I wouldn’t have time to pray five times per day or travel to Mecca or . . . do anything. Weighed in the balances of Allah’s justice . . . I’m toast.”

DD: “Right. By the way, the answer is essentially the same for other religions. The Jehovah’s Witness teaches that to be saved you must start studying the Bible and work to obey it. The Mormons teach that you must ‘strive’ vigorously throughout your life to follow God’s laws. But you have only moments to live in this scenario. The Roman Catholic priest could offer to sprinkle you and pronounce forgiveness over you. Would that satisfy you?”

EKG: “No. I would want some assurance. I want to know that I have peace with God.”

DD: “Only through the Gospel is that even possible. By genuine repentance and trust in Christ, reliance on what He did for you on the cross, you can have complete forgiveness and a home in Heaven.”

EKG: “But that really wouldn’t be fair to all the people who lived right and went to church and were faithful to their wives, and so on.”

DD: “You’ve missed the point again. Any sinner who gets fairness . . . justice . . . is condemned for even one sin before a holy and righteous God. ‘Fair’ would mean Hell for the best among us. Look, right now you’re standing about three feet due East from me. We’re both in Chicago, but you decide to brag that you are closer to London than I am. Or we’re both beggars, but you just found a penny on the street and so you boast that you’re richer than I am. The point is we’re all pitiful sinners in need of God’s grace. We look at each other and make little comparisons, but the gap between us and a perfect God is infinite.”

EKG: “So I could be saved on that deathbed by a change of mind and attitude no matter how wickedly I’d lived?”

DD: “In fact, you could be saved right now no matter how wickedly you have lived.”

This chapter can only superficially survey the corruptions of the false alternatives to Biblical truth. Yet I hope that this survey will stimulate you to critically examine whatever baseless worldview keeps you from eternal life. If you would like to dialogue – politely – my contact info is in the front of this book. (I have no interest in debate. I’ve already experienced being LOST. You can’t HELP me. Rather, my intent is to HELP you to be SAVED.)

I have been challenged by earnest skeptics on occasion who are overwhelmed by the apparently huge multiplicity of religions / philosophies / worldviews to choose from. I assure them that they have been misled. The first thing to be settled is to recognize that our existence stems from a brilliant Creator / Designer. Either the universe created itself out of nothing – which is literally what Big Bang cosmology is all about – or an intelligent and willful Creator formed the galaxies, the stars, the planets, the periodic table, the DNA code, protein nano-machines, paramecia, petunias, and poplars. Not to mention the incredibly fine-tuned nuclear, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces to make everything work in harmony. I have dealt with this issue in Chapter 1. If you need more convincing, I encourage you to check out my book, *Creation vs. Evolution? No Contest!*, which you can find on TruthReallyMatters.com in the free e-book store.

Once you realize that God is real, it remains to figure out what He expects from you. It must seem obvious that He would reveal His will to the pinnacle of His creation – man – who has been invested with intelligence, will, and purpose. So we look to the religions of mankind, each of which professes to be the gatekeeper for God’s revelation. Is it so hard to find the one golden needle in an otherwise worthless haystack? Indeed not, as we’ll see.

Satan’s favorite scheme is the invention of false religions. He does succeed in fooling some into atheism. He thereby convinces the incredibly self-absorbed that neither God nor Satan exist. The atheist is his own god, ruling over his own life and anyone and anything else he sets his mind to. As long as his heart keeps beating, that is.

There is no mystery about the existence and malevolence of devils – fallen angels – in pagan cultures around the world and throughout history. Over the last two centuries, western missionaries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific islands have found their primary opposition to be the people’s devotion to and fear of demon gods. The equivalent pagan religions of Native Americans presented similar challenges to pioneer missionaries of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. If you spent some time in some of these tribal cultures you would quickly be faced with demonic manifestations to bring you face-to-face with the dark side of the supernatural.

Missionaries have often enjoyed success in the propagation of the Gospel in pagan lands, because the characteristics and activities of demons are so well explained in the Biblical paradigm. When told of a loving God who will forgive them if they repent and switch allegiance from Satan to Jesus Christ, many respond. The Gospel of forgiveness, love, hope, and assurance of everlasting life is a shining light that banishes the spiritual darkness. Why does Satan promote demonic and idolatrous pagan religions? He desires to control and to receive worship. In isolated cultures he works hard to keep knowledge of the true God from the people as long as possible.

In the rest of the world, especially in modern times, Satan creates religions that have much in common. So much, in fact, that it is fair to state that there are really only two religions competing for the souls of men:

1. Biblical Christianity teaches that man’s willful sins have broken fellowship between God and man. Justice must and shall be done. Yet God’s love, demonstrated through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, followed by the cross and the resurrection, opens the one and only door to man for salvation. All of the work was **done** by Jesus Christ to provide salvation as a *gift* for those who change their hearts and minds, repent and believe.
2. All of the world’s other religions teach that man must work hard for salvation. Heaven or nirvana or whatever serves as paradise . . . is to be earned. The details vary among religions, but the philosophy is the same. Whether Muslim or Roman Catholic or Mormon, etc., the individual has to **do** more good than evil and *perhaps* he will please his false god.

If this were a courtroom I would call for a summary judgment at this point in the proceedings. Position #2 is clearly unreasonable and should be rejected immediately. As we have discussed before, in a works-based religion there is no justice meted out for the crimes of those who allegedly earn eternal life. It is unreasonable to suppose that charitable giving will cancel out adultery, that a word of kindness cancels out a curse, or that a prayer (or ten or a hundred) somehow disintegrates lust.

Earning salvation is antithetical to forgiveness. What is earned is rightfully owned. When you put in a hard week for your employer, you are not expecting a “gift” from him. You are expecting your rightful wages. The five pillars of Islam consist of (1) recitation of their creed, (2) daily prayers, (3) fasting during Ramadan, (4) almsgiving, and (5) a pilgrimage to Mecca. If the Muslim is faithful in these duties and

many others he has some hope of attaining paradise. Yet the devout Muslim has no assurance because he can never be sure that he has done enough or has done well enough. Furthermore, his god can arbitrarily choose to condemn him and save someone else regardless of relative performance. The Muslim would defend this arbitrariness by invoking his god's sovereign will. Any reasonable person would call such a god capricious. Thus you see one of the critical flaws in a works-based salvation: you can never be sure that you will be saved, because salvation depends on weak, sinful, flawed *you*.

The Calvinist has the same problem regarding capriciousness. In Calvinist or "Reformed" theology, their god has "elected" just a tiny percentage of the human race for salvation. He has supposedly chosen them and them only from before the foundation of the world for eternal life. At some point in the life of the "elect," God zaps him with "irresistible grace," regenerates him, gives him repentance and faith, and he henceforth lives the life of a Christian. The non-elect are damned to Hell with no recourse. In this perverted theology, the "totally depraved" nature of the non-elect makes it impossible for them to choose to repent and trust Christ.

Why am I devoting space to beating up on Calvinism? Because many Calvinists, convinced they are of the "elect," never take upon themselves their own very real responsibility to willfully repent and believe. Also, if you, O reader, are lost and decide to become a Christian, I am compelled to warn you to avoid the many churches that have been infested with such heresies. Finally, if you are a Calvinist and I have just offended you, I implore you to read a book or two, notably Dave Hunt's *What Love is This?* and Laurence Vance's *The Other Side of Calvinism*. Read either and then get back to me.

In works-based religions, forgiveness for offenses is largely irrelevant. But for justice to be served, sins against God must be dealt with – each and every one. False religions have very strange ways of dealing with an individual's sins. The Catholic priest may assign a sinner the praying of a rosary as "penance" for an hour spent in fornication. Historically, indulgences could be purchased at stipulated prices for sins yet to be committed. The hypocrisy and corruption associated with this practice helped to motivate Martin Luther to break away from Roman Catholicism. Unfortunately, he didn't go far enough away, theologically. He retained baby baptism and other sacraments, and fostered a state-church philosophy that resulted in the persecution of non-Protestants, whether Catholic or Baptist or Jewish.

The devotees of pagan religions continually offer up bloody sacrifices to appease their demon gods. Yet appeasement never seems to take hold. Fear abounds. In Judaism, the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. ended even the theoretical possibility that the Jews could atone for their sins by relevant sacrifices. Of course, it was God Himself who ended the sacrificial system when, at the climax of the crucifixion of Christ, the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom. For the last two millennia, Jews have had no access to forgiveness: they rejected the ultimate sacrifice of the incarnate Lamb of God, their Messiah, and the loss of their temple has prevented them from going through the traditional ritual motions.

A major common theme of false religions is their suppression of competitors. When a false religion gains political power, religious freedom – along with many other beloved freedoms – disappears.

Throughout history this suppression often becomes lethal. I will relate to you a historical event that illustrates the deadly oppression of the Roman Catholic popes against non-conformists.

In January, 1655, pope Alexander VII decreed that the independent Bible-believing Christians in a district of northern Italy abandon their homes within three days under threat of death. This was in the depth of a brutal winter, and no consideration was given for the old, the infirm, the pregnant, or the infants. Of course, anyone could recant and submit to papal authority. These Christians held firm and fled into other valleys not affected by the initial decree. To the consternation of authorities, believers throughout the region took these refugees in and supported them.

In April, 1655, that wicked pope sent an army of 15,000 to chase the Christians down, each company led by a priest or monk, resulting in the slaughter of thousands. Homes and villages and their occupants were burned to ashes. Time was taken to torture countless individuals by dismemberment, fire, flaying, disemboweling, burying alive, and many other horrors that I choose not to recount to you. Children were torn from the arms of mothers and dashed to death against rocks. These were the more fortunate. A historian who survived this crusade against Christians wrote, "My hand trembles so that I scarce can hold the pen, and my tears mingle in torrents with my ink, while I write the deeds of these children of darkness – blacker even than the Prince of Darkness himself."

Was this perhaps just an isolated vile incident? No, it is representative of the persecution of Christians by false religions throughout the ages. Serious historians estimate (conservatively) that 50 million died under RC persecution from 500 to 1800 A.D. This enormous number is even more frightful when considering that the world population, and especially that of Europe where the persecution was focused, was much smaller than in the last two centuries.

In modern times, and consistent with prophecy, the RCC has changed its strategy from domination to ecumenism and corruption. The pope works to get all of the other branches of Christendom to "come home" to Rome, and has even extended olive branches to all of the other world religions. They also are in the middle of the incredible glut of corrupted Bible versions of the last century. The RCC is content to destroy faith in the authority of the Bible, while they exalt their own authority. My wife and I recently talked to a former Roman Catholic who recalled that in the 1950s, after a local evangelistic meeting, free Bibles were passed out. Her priest told her and many others to get rid of those Bibles. They were to get their doctrine from the priests. In my own life I have experienced the disdain and animosity of Catholic relatives because I left "The Church" as a youth. I am grateful to be living in America with the freedoms we enjoy. In other times and places I might have been turned over to an Inquisitor. For an interesting historical summary of such issues, I recommend David Cloud's *Rome and the Bible: The History of the Bible through the Centuries and Rome's Persecutions Against It*.

Islam is notorious for suppressing dissent. In studying its history you will observe how its spread was largely by the sword. Submit or die: a compelling argument for many. In the news this very day as I draft this chapter is the case of an Iranian convert to Christianity who pastors an illegal house church in

Iran. A Muslim court has demanded that he return to Islam or be executed. An international outcry has apparently bought him a bit of time, but at this writing, his life still hangs in the balance.

Also in this week's news, a Christian who was converted from Islam was kidnapped and decapitated in Somalia. He was forced into a car by three men who are part of a group who vow to rid Somalia of Christianity. They clearly don't plan to do this by reasoned argument or by "relationship evangelism," but rather by the sword. Nothing changes. The body lay in the open for two days, because others feared to be associated with the victim. Christians, apparently, secretly took the body at night and buried it. What is the self-proclaimed "moderate" government doing about such atrocities? The President of Somalia is working to establish a comprehensive sharia legal system that mandates the death penalty for anyone who leaves Islam. What was that about all religions teaching about the same thing?

Throughout the world today, church buildings are burned by Muslims. Christians and Jews are harassed, tortured, and killed. There are many documented cases of young women who have turned from Islam to Jesus Christ, and have been raped and / or imprisoned or bound into slavery. Indeed, it is fair to argue that half of the Muslim population are enslaved – namely, every woman. They do not enjoy the same legal rights as men, they can be divorced and abandoned without recourse, and they are not the gender promised an eternity of sexual pleasure if they die the martyr's death.

All of these issues should be well known to you if you are paying attention at all to what is going on in the world. When a false religion does not have ultimate power in a society, it does what it can. Mormons dominate Utah, but are constrained by American laws and culture. Yet Christians are persecuted in non-lethal ways. Mormons who have left their temple have been ostracized and their businesses ruined. Christians who attempt to share the Gospel openly on the streets experience much more grief than in other parts of America. Mormonism also has a dark, controlling focus. Mainstream Mormonism was polygamous for most of its history, and only in recent decades has changed its theology to conform to American norms. Yet there are still branches that enslave their women and children. Incidents surface in the news media regularly.

Also, note the difference between Mormon men and women in "Heavenly reward." The man who is faithful to the cause throughout his life hopes to be rewarded with godhood and the command of an entire planet. Their belief is centered in the aphorism, "As man is, god once was. As god is, man may become." They believe that the "god" of this world once was a man on another planet and Earth is his reward. On the other hand, the faithful wife of this new god is charged with the job of eternally pumping out new spirit babies to fill the burgeoning population of the new world. Eternally pregnant. Oh, joy.

Biblical Christianity invites discussion, questions, dialogue. Follow the apostle Paul as he traveled around the Jewish, Greek, and Roman world of his day. Paul delighted in opportunities to reason, discuss, and persuade. Yes, of course he "preached," to get his message across. There was also much discussion and persuasion. You cannot become a Christian unless you come "head first." You must



change your mind about serious issues in order for repentance and faith to be genuine. *Words* are the vehicle for the propagation of the Christian Gospel. Personally, I **love** to get serious questions from unbelievers. I love discussion. I love the opportunity to speak truth and to answer challenges to my reasoned faith. It is *impossible* for a Christian to “cram his religion down someone’s throat.” The Gospel comes without violence and only with persuasion. Each and every born again Christian enters the family as a volunteer.

False religions tend to despise open discussion. They scoff at questions and challenges. In the religion of atheism / Marxism / humanism / evolutionism, discussion is suppressed and challenges are scoffed at, or worse. When Marxism controls a nation’s power centers, suppression is lethal. In North Korea, possession of a Bible is a capital offense. To be found out as a Christian guarantees imprisonment, starvation, and most likely death. In China, churches are broken up regularly and house church pastors imprisoned. The same goes for Communist Vietnam, Cambodia, and the former Soviet Union.

In America, Marxism / humanism has not progressed as far in political power, although the trend is clear. News reports erupt regularly about a high school teacher getting reprimanded or fired because he dared to question whether evolution might have some inconsistencies. Christians are denied tenure at public universities if they are known to be Bible believers. It is very hard to get a polite discussion going with an academic who embraces evolution. You will be quickly inundated with scoffing insults.

What argument am I making to you? I am appealing to your God-given conscience that you can recognize the difference between good and evil, between right and wrong, based on the behavior of those in their respective camps. The correlation isn’t always perfect, but it is fairly strong. If evolution is true, why not examine its foundations? Why not gently straighten out those of us who “don’t get it.” When a Ph.D. scientist like myself suggests that evolution has deep flaws and the evidence against it is overwhelming, should not the response include evidence rather than insults? Scripture teaches us to examine the “fruits” of men’s behavior. How you act is a consistent indicator of what you believe and who you are. Corrupt behavior is strong evidence of corrupt beliefs.

It is interesting that Christians are always on the receiving end of persecution. Hindus in India have afflicted Christians in their midst for centuries. Hindus fight against Muslims, of course, but everyone gangs up on Christians. Buddhists despise genuine Christians and harass them wherever they are in the majority.

New Agers are simply Western Hindus, denying the Biblical God in favor of pantheistic “forces.” I won’t go into detail regarding the corruptions associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, and countless variations of such religions. That is an exercise for the student (you), if interested. Briefly, note that Hindus hope to become “ascended masters,” even gods, as do New Agers, who dream that they can learn to bend reality to their wills. It’s all about them, isn’t it? Consider the practical results of Hinduism in the centuries-long abject poverty of India, and the subjugation of women and children. The social and economic disaster of Hindu culture is tied directly to their worldview.

Turning to doctrine, we point out that Jesus Christ and His word are “the same, yesterday, today, and forever.” Revelation added precept upon precept, deeper levels of understanding, and ultimately the very person of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, as Scriptural history progressed for 4,000 years up to the life of Christ on Earth. For the last 2,000 years events have developed, as noted before, approaching the culmination of history in the last days when we see Israel in their homeland, a global ecumenical religion forming, global power networks, and global economic systems – just as the Bible predicts. Biblical doctrine, history, and prophecy don’t change.

Yet false religions change continually. When I was a child in the RCC, eating meat on a Friday was a “mortal sin” – damning the perpetrator to Hell. Now it’s not. Before the Vatican 2 conference in the 1960s established the current ecumenical love-fest among religions, non-Catholics were doomed. Now Protestants and Evangelicals are called “separated brethren,” who get to go to Heaven, too. In Mormonism, polygamy was once the rule and blacks were a doomed race. That has changed in modern times. Jehovah’s Witnesses have predicted the Second Coming of Christ for specific dates many times in the last century and have been wrong every time. Within Islam, Shi’ites and Sunnites split long ago, and not only condemn the others’ theology and practice, but regularly make war upon each other.

The founders of false religions are invariably flawed. Now, there are competing histories, so it might take a bit of research for you to wade through the propaganda. Here are just a few nuggets that are indisputable from the historical record . . . Mohammed double-crossed and killed thousands of Jews, raided caravans, and established his religion by the sword. By “revelation,” he restricted Muslim men to four wives at a time, but made an exception for himself, having at least 11, if not many more wives. Some were slaves, some captives, some stolen from other men, and one was a 9-year-old girl. Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, also took multiple wives, using “revelation” to justify swiping some of them from their husbands. Hmmm. Illicit sex seems to play a strong role in many false religions. Smith also committed many crimes in his adventurous life. Interestingly, both Mohammed and Joseph Smith served as their religions’ sole prophets for receiving the revelations that became the Q’uran and the Book of Mormon. Both men believed that an angel gave them the revelation, Gabriel and Moroni, respectively. Given the propensity of fallen angels – demons – to impersonate and lie, I believe that those founders were sincere, but fooled.

Books have been written, of course, analyzing the doctrines and history of the religions of mankind. My intent is to get you thinking about the subject, especially if the existence of alternative religions somehow discourages you from seeking **the truth**. If you do some research you will observe the same patterns that I have briefly summarized in this chapter. You do not have to do an exhaustive exploration of the thousands of sub-cults associated with the major and minor religions of the entire planet. Not to mention ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, and Incan religions that have disappeared! In particular, you will see the truth of the #1 vs. #2 model I described earlier. If you are determined to find a system where you must **do** exactly what it takes to earn eternal life, you’re in for discouragement. You have been designed by God to recognize the truth of the Gospel, along with its beauty, simplicity, and comfort.

So what are you waiting for?

## Chapter 12

*You can choose right now.*

DD: "How are you doing today? Let me give you some good news . . . it's a comic book with a story and a Gospel message . . . you know, life / death / Heaven / Hell? Do you ever think about the big issues?"

HB (Hell Bound): "Sure, all the time."

DD: "Here's the big problem . . . Guaranteed: you don't get off this planet alive. We're all going to face God someday. If this were the day you died . . . and some day will be that day . . . where would you be? Heaven or Hell? Innocent or guilty?"

HB: "Oh, I think I'd go to Heaven."

DD: "Why is that? What's going to get you into Heaven and keep you out of Hell? Jesus Christ said that the road to destruction – Hell – is broad and many are on it. And the road to life – Heaven – is narrow and few find it. So according to Jesus, most people are going to Hell, despite what Jesus Himself wants. So what's going to make the difference for you?"

HB: "I think I'm a pretty good person. I've done a lot of good stuff."

DD: "So are you 'good enough'? The Bible has a 'good person' test. You're familiar with the 10 commandments? Let's start with an easy one . . . Have you ever told a lie?"

HB: "Sure, who hasn't?"

DD: "Hey, I'm guilty, too. What does that make you?"

HB: "A story teller."

DD: "If I told a bunch of lies, what would you call me?"

HB: "Ok, a liar."

DD: "Here is some bad news. The Bible says that God loves you, personally, but that He also is holy, and just, and righteous. He cannot stand to have sin in his presence. You see, God's standard of justice is so high, that liars will be condemned to the Lake of Fire, namely Hell. Do you believe that murderers should get into Heaven? Are they good enough?"

HB: "No way."

DD: "Ever murdered anyone?"

HB: "Of course not!"

DD: "It's worse than you think. Jesus said that if you call someone a fool, or you've been angry without cause, you've committed murder in your heart. Ever have wicked thoughts about someone? In God's eyes you are guilty of murder and murderers will not inherit the kingdom of God. The 10 commandments also include 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' But Jesus said that if you look at a woman with lust, you've committed adultery already in your heart. Pornography counts, too. Innocent or guilty?"

HB: "Guilty."

DD: "Adulterers are condemned to Hell, along with murderers. Here's the problem: If you say, 'God, give me what I deserve,' God could say, 'I know everything you've ever done, said, and thought. You've broken my laws thousands of times – willfully – and you deserve Hell.' God didn't create Hell for people. He created it as a prison for Satan and the angels that rebelled against God. But when we sin,

we're no different. Whenever we sin, we're telling God we don't want Him telling us what to do. If we die in our sins, we share the Devil's fate – Hell."

HB: "If what you're saying is right, then everybody is going to Hell."

DD: "You're on the right track. The first thing is to recognize your willful rebellion and seek God to find a way to escape judgment. God did something for you because He loves you. Do you know what He did? Two thousand years ago the Creator of the universe became a man – Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life, never said a wrong word or thought a wicked thought. He lived His life loving people, especially by telling them the truth, even when they didn't like it. He made people mad by preaching that we must repent. When He went to the cross, He was innocent. He shed His blood for your sins and mine. He suffered Hell on the cross – it was more than physical torture, it was the supernatural wrath of almighty God. He took the wrath of God on Himself so you and I could go free. He paid the entire penalty for your sins. He died and was buried. Three days later He rose from the dead. Nobody else ever did that. Do you want the technology to overcome death? Only Jesus Christ has it."

HB: "What do I have to do?"

DD: "So here is salvation: Admit to God that you've sinned against Him and deserve Hell. God already knows all your sins. He wants you to agree with Him about how wicked you are, and change direction. Confess specific sins to God. Don't tell me. I don't want to know. But your conscience will convict you about which sins you're holding onto to keep you from repenting. The hard part for you is to admit that you are wicked and lost, to admit that you've been wrong all your life. Turn from your sins and your selfishness to God (that's repentance – turning around), and trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Jesus calls it a born-again experience. He said to a religious man named Nicodemus that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Are you willing to let God change you? He wants to save you for eternity, and that includes changing the rest of your life. Eternal life isn't just for after death. It's for right now! God will give you the strength to do right and leave your sins behind! If you refuse, the only reason can be that you love your stupid, addictive sins more than life. That's a really bad deal. You can enjoy sinning for a season, but death is coming . . . and judgment, and Hell."

HB: "I know a lot of so-called Christians who say they asked Jesus to save them, but they live just like I do. So are they saved?"

DD: "A lot of people would like Jesus to give them a ticket to Heaven and then get back to their party. No, it's a package deal. Jesus is both Savior and Lord. That means He gets to call the shots in your life. Here is a very blunt illustration on repentance . . . Imagine I go to my fiancée and say, 'Honey, let's get married next week, but before we do, I've got something to confess to you.' You see, the Bible teaches that marriage is a picture of salvation. Believers are called *the bride of Christ*. When my fiancée says, 'Sure, honey, I'll forgive you of anything,' then I say, 'You know that woman who hates you, your worst enemy, who has done you wrong hundreds of times? Well, I've been having sex with her and I need you to forgive me so we can get married.' After my fiancée blows up, and then, hopefully calms down, she'll certainly ask, 'Well, have you told her to get lost? Have you broken up?' Suppose I respond with, 'Well, no. I like having sex with her. I don't want to give that up. I just want you to forgive me so we can get married.' Is that going to work? When you get married, you must forsake all other women. To become a child of God, to get forgiveness of your wicked sins, you must be willing to forsake the Devil and all his works."

HB: "Does that mean I've got to be perfect from that point?"

DD: “Can you ever get perfect in this life, even as a Christian? No, but you get on a different road, with a different attitude toward sin. And you’re willing and eager to get God’s help to get the junk out of your life and put many, many good things in. Life changes. Just like in marriage, you *know* you are married, you *know* who your wife is, you treat her differently from anyone else and you keep your hands off of other women. Once you belong to Christ, your perspective changes entirely. You will have a lot to learn, but you start down that road toward maturity.”

.....

If right now, at this very moment, you are still lost, still Hell-bound, then I implore you to *choose* right now. My twelfth Biblical reason for you to get saved is that you can simply choose repentance and belief right now. Don’t be a fool and put it off. Are you going to get a better argument next year? Every day / month / year that goes by adds addiction to your favorite sins. You find more excuses to live your life in Satan’s service. It gets harder, not easier to turn to your Lord as time goes on. You should certainly admit that you are harder than you were five or ten years ago. You likely have more sins in your life and you are more determined than ever to live your own way. You’re not getting closer to finding God – you’re getting farther away.

I hope you choose wisely. If you do, please contact me. I would love to rejoice with you. And wherever you live, you should be able to find some Christians who will befriend you and help you to live a life pleasing to God and helpful to others.

## Conclusion

### *What next?*

If you're still resisting the Holy Spirit, I can only encourage you to go back to Chapter 1 and start over again. Or open up a King James Bible and read the Gospel of John, expecting to recognize truth in its record. Beyond that, I volunteer to correspond with you and will try to answer any serious questions you have. But I've already taken my best shot. I have used what I believe are the most powerful arguments found in God's word. It's between you and your Judge from this point.

For this chapter I am going to be optimistic . . . So you've truly been born again! That's great! Your mind, heart (operational headquarters of your emotions and decision-making processes), and life are changed forevermore. You have everlasting life and want to make your days count in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. I offer recommendations for you, based on Scripture and experience. To keep this chapter short I won't "prove" the basis for each recommendation. You'll find such discussion in my articles on TruthReallyMatters.com and in the list of references below.

Also, I'd love to be of help. If you have questions or just want a new friend, a brother in Christ, contact me or my wife at the emails provided on the "Contact Us" page.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Get yourself a King James version of the Bible. You can't trust the new, corrupted English versions. The best "study" Bible I've found is the *New Defender's Study Bible* with notes and commentary by Henry Morris. I like 98% of Morris' comments. If you want my cautionary thoughts on the other 2%, then contact me after you acquire it. Also, especially: *Read at least several chapters each day!* I do, and I've been a Christian for over 40 years. The vital truths of God's word are available to you, even as a novice, but I guarantee that you won't exhaust the depths of Scripture. I still learn new things every week. If you have a habit of eating food each day to satisfy your belly, then count God's word of as much importance for your spiritual growth. And start memorizing verses or passages that grab your attention.
2. Find a serious Bible-believing church that has at least some of the characteristics in the article, "Three Pillars for a New Testament Church – A Simple Model," found on TruthReallyMatters.com. Join this church, get baptized by immersion, and love the brethren you find there. In America it is almost certain that you won't find such a church, but at least find another believer of like mind and start studying and praying together.
3. Spend time every day with God in prayer and praise. Thank Him for His blessings on your life and ask Him for help regarding the burdens on your heart.

4. Immediately start sharing the Gospel message with the lost people you know, including relatives, neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances, and also start sharing the Gospel with complete strangers. Our site has articles listed in the “Evangelism” section for help. I’ve also written the book *Evangelism 1-2-1 – How to do it Biblically, Boldly, and Compassionately*, which is in the “Free e-book store” on the site. The bottom line is that if you know how you’ve been saved, then you know enough to tell someone else to do the same. So get started.

5. Get good Gospel tracts to give to the people you don’t have time to talk to; for example, people walking by you on the sidewalk, or waitresses, or clerks. See my web article “Tracts – Choosing & Using.” Schedule some time each week where there is pedestrian traffic to offer tracts to and share the Gospel with strangers. If you can’t find such a place, then knock neighborhood doors, introduce yourself, and go for it. If you live in such a remote area that not even neighborhood doors are available to you, then *move* to a location where God can make use of your life!

6. Study and read much. Your first priority is the Bible itself. You also need to get wise on several relevant subjects including the history of Christianity, creation vs. evolution, evangelism, and Biblical vs. non-Biblical worldviews. Accordingly, acquire and read the following books . . . to just get started:

*How Should a Man Live? Christian Manhood in America Today*, by Dr. David H. Stone (that’s me)

*Creation vs. Evolution? No Contest!*, by Dr. David H. Stone

*History of the Churches*, by David Cloud

*The New Answers Book (1,2, and 3)*, by Ken Ham

*The Way of the Master*, by Ray Comfort

*Grave Influence – 21 Radicals and Their Worldviews that Rule America from the Grave*, by Brannon Howse

*Prayer – Asking & Receiving*, by John Rice

*Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn

*Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, by Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor

*The Bible Version Issue*, by David Cloud

*America in Crimson Red*, by James Beller

*A Woman Rides the Beast*, by Dave Hunt

You might say, “But I don’t like to read much.” Then *repent* from being ignorant and ask God to give you a desire for good books and to acquire knowledge and wisdom. Build a good library. When you find a book you love, buy an extra copy to give away. It’s a great blessing to do so. You might help to change someone else’s life.

7. Get acquainted with the websites below and their archived articles. If they offer an email newsletter, sign up so you can get a good inflow of Scriptural thinking each week.

- <http://www.AnswersInGenesis.org>

- <http://www.thebereancall.org>
- <http://wayoflife.org>
- <http://biblefortoday.org>
- <http://wayofthemaster.com>
- <http://www.chick.com>
- <http://icr.org>
- <http://creation.com>

I pray that you will find some help from the recommendations above. If I don't hear from you in this life, then we can swap stories around a camp fire after the Lord's return.

Now I want to take my shot at provoking you to get heavily involved in the greatest work that God has for Christians while they are still alive. It doesn't matter what you do to make a living or how much money you make. The issue is whether your life will count. Too many Christians are willing to do **anything** other than the **one thing** that will make a difference for all of eternity. So let's get started. Listen up!

Who is it that we claim to follow? We should look again and again at the personal evangelistic ministry of our Lord when He walked this Earth. In John 4 we read of His famous encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. We see the fruits of her conversion in her immediate actions. We also see revealed the zeal of Jesus for souls.

*The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.*

*In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

*Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.*

*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. John 4:28-42*



Like so many others, this new convert speaks up and points others to the Savior. She had the advantage over us in that she could bring her neighbors to meet the Lord physically and let Him do the preaching. We have the immense advantage over her in that we have the indwelling Holy Spirit so that we literally walk with the Lord when we preach. We also have the counsel of the entire New Testament so that we can answer all legitimate questions.

We then see the heart of our Lord. He and His disciples have worked up a big appetite in traveling. It is ironic that Jesus sent the twelve into town to buy food, where they doubtless crossed the paths of many people. He waited outside the town and shared Gospel truth with the one person He encountered. The disciples returned and, still focused on food, didn't understand why Jesus wasn't eating. Why wasn't He still hungry? He was completely consumed with a passion for winning souls – first the woman, and shortly the rest of the town.

Then we read that glorious metaphor: *Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.* Why the metaphor? We can imagine the townsfolk coming out to the well. As they approach in everyday garments which are essentially white, they appear as if they are a large field of grain, ready for harvesting. You can sense our Lord's excitement! The twelve are clueless, but are about to be taught a marvelous lesson, meant also for us. That harvest of souls was available for the twelve, but they missed it in lieu of a bag of cheeseburgers.

The Lord goes on to give us great encouragement by teaching that conversion often occurs through different agents and times of sowing and reaping. Who had sown so that the Lord and His disciples might reap? Certainly John the Baptist, the prophets that preceded him, and any true believer that proclaimed God's message. Our evangelistic efforts today are built upon the shoulders of preachers and other Christians who have sown before us. Most American households contain one or more Bibles, even if the owners are functional atheists. We can thank God for John Wycliffe, Erasmus, William Tyndale, and many others who have helped to produce and publish the Bible over the last several centuries.

We can also take comfort that the Holy Spirit continues to *"reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."* The one who rejects our tract today may be led to cross the path of another believer downstream. I recently shared the Gospel on the street with a thirty-something atheist, and was able to give him some new things to think about. He was polite and talkative, although at present a determined skeptic. Interestingly, he told me that his dad was a Christian and praying hard for his conversion. I rejoice that the Lord used me to help out a bit in the more serious drama between father and son. I have had similar encounters many times before.

In this crazy age where natural disasters are on the rise, ecumenical movements are apparently drawing together the world-wide religion of the antichrist, nations are rising against nation, and persecution of Christians is on the increase, I am motivated to preach more than ever before. I feel utter helplessness to do anything about the massive corruption in the U.S. government. I served this nation for twenty years as an officer in the United States Air Force during the Cold War. My efforts were focused to defend this nation against Marxism emanating from the Soviet Union and China, in particular. Imagine

the disgusted irony I feel in seeing Americans vote for our present virulently Marxist government. Ultimately, such major political movements are part of Satan's efforts to set up his kingdom under his ruler, the antichrist. The one thing I can do in response that might mean something – both for now and for eternity – is to hit the street with the Gospel. The Gospel lifeboat offers salvation to any individual who sees his need.

Since we may be in the final days or months (or still years?) before the rapture of the believers and the onset of the seven-year tribulation, it occurs to me that I may have the privilege to be part of the greatest harvest in all of history. You might say, "What are you talking about? You only see a real convert once in a blue moon! You sow thousands of Gospel tracts and witness to multitudes and see virtually no response!" I admit it. Yet I see in the book of Revelation that multitudes will be converted (and most of them martyred) during the Tribulation. If the rapture is not far off, many of those who hear the Gospel now and reject it, may well be saved during the Tribulation. God's wrath poured out on the Earth during those seven years is primarily for retribution on a world that has rejected His Messiah and His word through all the ages. Clearly, though, a secondary purpose is to get the attention of many who have been complacent in these last days. The Bible makes clear that man will know from Whom the judgments come. Many will continue to scoff and rebel and "believe a lie," but many will repent and be converted.

Let me point out that there is false teaching being propagated on this point. Some teach that those who have heard the Gospel before the rapture will necessarily "believe a lie" from the antichrist and so cannot be saved. Let me quote the relevant passage:

*Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?*

*And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

*And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-*

*12*

The last two verses, set apart in the last paragraph above, are cited as proof texts for this damnable doctrine. I'll point out that if I believed that those who heard the Gospel from my lips or read a tract that I gave them would certainly be damned if the rapture were imminent, then I would quit my evangelistic efforts immediately and buy a set of golf clubs. Since well over 99% of those I reach out to reject the message, then the harder I work, the more I help to damn to Hell. Logically and Biblically, that is insane. Since the Gospel accounts and the epistles were written, believers have been instructed to eagerly anticipate the Lord's return and to work ever harder to preach His word. Yet those in the "actual" final days before the tribulation should be motivated (apparently) to stand down, so that more might hear the Gospel from the two witnesses or the 144,000 evangelists prophesied in the book of Revelation . . . because *multitudes will be saved* under their preaching.

Those that misinterpret this passage would have it say something equivalent to: "If you have heard the Gospel message in any form before the rapture, then after the rapture, without any exceptions, you will have zero opportunity to be saved because you will believe the lie of the antichrist and will be damned. You will not even be able to repent, regardless of what you have heard before the rapture, regardless of the challenge to your worldview by this fulfilled prophecy, and despite any future Gospel witness."

Of course this passage says no such thing. The resolution of the matter is simply to review the passage above in context. The last two verses are written in the context of the revealing of the Wicked one – the antichrist. When he comes he will propagate many lies, including his claim to be from God and worthy of worship. There will be lies associated with the rapture. Those who determine *in that time frame* to take "pleasure in unrighteousness" shall willfully believe such lies and be damned. Others will choose to repent, because they finally recognize the difference between Good and Evil. Many will "wake up" because of the rapture and will search out the truth. There is nothing in the passage above that indicates that anyone who has heard any semblance of a Gospel message will disqualify himself when the ultimate choice between Truth and Lie confronts him. To those who hold that depressing doctrine, how much "Gospel truth" does it take? What about an unscriptural Gospel presentation? Does not Scripture teach that no one has any excuse in any time or place? Everybody is accountable, whether having been exposed to much or little light. If you are a missionary to a 3<sup>rd</sup> world country where few have heard the Gospel, then this doctrine should provoke you to stand down! Give those poor people a chance to be saved under the preaching of the 144,000!

Why do I devote such significant space to this issue? Because I anticipate that you, as a new believer, will be discouraged by more "experienced" Christians that you meet, who are as cold as ice, and don't have the love of God or the guts to consistently preach the Gospel in the midst of our wicked and apostate generation. Especially in the West, you are not likely to see many converts in this age, but if we are close to the rapture, your own work may very well produce much fruit, despite the pessimism of such naysayers.

Also, I have previously discussed the rapture and the Satanic schemes likely to be used to explain it away. If you, O reader, are stubborn in your unbelief as you read this chapter, my hope is that you live to see the rapture and recognize it for what it is. You will have been left behind, but can still repent and

trust Christ. If you do, you will most likely be persecuted, imprisoned, and even martyred, but that is a small consequence in light of eternity. Additionally, please don't imagine that it is safe to wait to see if the rapture actually occurs. You are not guaranteed tomorrow. Even if you live to see the rapture as a lost person, your present rebellion may well persist and you might well believe the lies of the antichrist. If you won't get saved amidst today's freedom, professing Christ when it means torture and death will not be easier. Don't wait! The Tribulation is a time when God brings His wrath on this planet. You don't want to be here!

Those that believe the lies of the antichrist will take his mark and thereby forfeit their opportunity for salvation. The "mark of the beast" is the ultimate and only Scriptural disqualifier. Believing lies in the presence of available truth is a willful act. The problem with the lost sinners I encounter is never a lack of knowledge on their part. It is always a will to hold tightly onto their sins. Some, though, compare truth with lies and respond wisely. Many will do so in the Tribulation.

Since we are apparently so close to the final judgments on this earth, I am consoled for the lack of visible fruit by the hope of the harvest to come. I do believe that there are many people coming to Christ in China, Vietnam, Pakistan, Sudan, Russia, and other places where Christians are under persecution and false professions are therefore not as prevalent as in America. But in our country there is a particularly cold and dedicated apostasy that epitomizes Paul's assessment of Satan's work:

*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4*

I can't imagine getting discouraged and giving up, however. Jesus "wondered" whether He would find faith on the Earth upon His return. Yes, there will be a remnant. I want to be counted among the faithful, though few. Do you?

Is there not a cause? Are not the stakes high enough? The Lake of Fire awaits the lost. The glories of Heaven on Earth, with New Jerusalem as an everlasting capital city, await the saved. Shall we not at least explain to everyone we can the difference between outer darkness on the one hand and an eternal life of joy, fellowship, learning, and adventure on the other? We have mentioned before that the Lake of Fire may be a dark star in the most distant corner of the universe. Such a prison would include the characteristics of outer darkness, everlasting fire, and inescapability. On the other hand, imagine the Lord opening up the rest of the universe of galaxies and untold wonders for the exploration and enjoyment of His children. We will have indestructible bodies, with energized taste buds, strength beyond that of the greatest athletes, and brains that learn quickly and don't forget. We will enjoy the company of the Creator Himself, along with fellowship with multitudes of like-minded best friends.

If someone will reject salvation and continue headlong to everlasting destruction, should it not be over our best possible efforts, pleading, prayers, and reasoned arguments?

In the meantime, even in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, some can be saved and enjoy the rapture along with us. Some years ago I was out walking, looking for opportunities to share the Gospel. Two hundred yards away, along a residential street, I saw a young man whose 4-wheeled ATV was stalled right in front of his house. He was working hard to kick-start it, all to no avail. I started praying that the Lord would keep his engine off until I got there. He must have tried to start it a dozen times before I reached him. As I began to share the Gospel with him, I could see that he was under conviction. He responded with heartfelt concern for his lost condition and agreed that he needed the Savior. His sins were specific and he knew he needed to repent from them. He recognized that coming to Christ would change everything in his life. We spent about 15 minutes together and he gave me every hope that he would henceforth turn from his sins, trust Christ, and follow Him. I gave him several tracts and encouraged him to call.

The moment I left him, he kicked the starter again and the engine roared to life. Thank you, Lord! The next day I dropped off a letter at his house for his parents with some additional Gospel literature, explaining in my note about the conversation I had with their son. I hoped they might call and allow us to meet. I never heard another word from that family or that young man in the following years.

About a year after that, I was walking by one of the Lutheran churches and saw just one car in the parking lot. Guessing correctly that it belonged to the pastor, whom I had never met, I entered the building and found him in his office. I engaged him in conversation about his ministry and explained my heart for personal evangelism. I probed to see whether he was a born again believer. He was dismayed at my literal interpretation of Scripture, since he had been raised and trained in a liberal mainline denomination. His dismay answered my question about his spiritual condition. During the hour I spent with him, he realized at one point that we must have a mutual acquaintance, because my "style" fit a description he had heard. He told me how a year before one of his church families made an appointment with him, two parents and their teenage son.

The parents were extremely upset that their son was claiming that he had just been born again and that he understood the point of the Bible for the first time. Worse, he was trying to convert his mom and dad to his newfound beliefs. The parents wanted this pastor to assure them and their son that they had been "OK" all along, Christians "born" into the church, baptized as babies, and by no means needing to be "born again." This pastor explained to me that he did his best to reassure the family that "of course" they had always been Christians. After all, they believed in God and were faithful church members their whole lives, were honest people, blah, blah.

Little did that fellow know how he made my heart rejoice. This was clear evidence that the seed sown the previous year had taken root and borne fruit. Although he had sent the parents away with false assurance for themselves, he admitted to having no impact on their son's position. A few years later, I heard from someone else that the young man had enlisted in military service and deployed overseas. Although I don't expect to run into him again in this life, I'm sure we'll swap stories around a camp fire in the New Earth someday, rejoicing in the grace of God on both of our lives.

In the late 1970s I attended graduate school at Michigan State University. One of my fellow grad students – we'll call him "William" – was a committed atheist / evolutionist. But he was quite polite and willing to discuss the big issues of life. Over the course of our friendship I worked hard to try to reach him for Christ. After about two years he confessed that I had convinced him that evolution was unsupported and unscientific. But he wasn't willing to become a Christian. His worldview had shifted by only a bit: on the subject of origins he figured that someone would come up with a better naturalistic idea than evolution. He professed that the only thing that would likely provoke him to become a Christian would be some traumatic experience. In short, *he didn't want to give up his favorite sins and he didn't want any God telling him what to do.* We lost contact upon graduation. I simply don't know how his life has turned out.

"Warren" was another grad student who worked on the same research team as I did. We weren't close, although we had a good professional relationship. Warren was also an atheist, but didn't want to engage in discussion. I know that I shared the Gospel with him in those days – I was in the habit of sharing the Good News with everyone I knew – but I can't remember doing so. After graduation we lost touch for 20 years. That's when Warren called me. He was a researcher in a West Coast lab and I was teaching at Michigan Tech U in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Warren told me that he had become a Christian five years before. He said that he could never get out of his mind the truths that I had told him. Over the course of 15 years, God had brought circumstances into his life that got his attention. He repented and trusted Christ and was serving the Lord in a local church. Warren was also raising his daughter so that she would know the Lord. He wanted to call me to thank and encourage me.

That encouragement was timely. I had been praying for encouragement at the time that he called, because I had seen so little response to my efforts in personal evangelism for several years. The Lord used that experience to show me that He is always working. God cares more than I do about the salvation of souls. He expects me to be faithful, whether I see any results or not. I'll spend time with my "brother-in-Christ" Warren in the New Heaven and the New Earth. We'll rejoice together over the love and grace of God, Who sent someone to me with the Gospel when I was a young man – someone who cared enough about me to warn me about sin, judgment, and Hell. When I got saved I got "soul-conscious." I want to invite more people into God's family and out of the Devil's. That's what motivated me to "preach" to Warren, even though he didn't like it at the time. But now he's glad that I did.

Ezekiel was one of many prophets who lived in wicked and apostate times. It was such times that provoked God to raise up such men as this faithful preacher. Consider the commission given by God to him:

*And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith*

*the Lord GOD. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.*

*And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. Ezekiel 2:1-7*

Put yourself in the young prophet's place. Does this sound like an appealing job description? (Also review Isaiah's commission in Isaiah chapter 6 to see if he had it any better.) The impudent and stiffhearted are not unique to Ezekiel's generation. The rebellious never want to hear the call to repentance. The religious lost of Jesus' time tried to kill Him ten times before He willingly went to the cross. Note the bottom line of the commission: Whether they hear or not, make sure they know that a prophet has been in town! Like Ezekiel, we need have no fear. God will protect us perfectly as long as He has need for our service. Let us be about that service and we can be moved only by graduation to a Heavenly realm.

Lest Ezekiel be discouraged and retire to the golf course, the Lord laid heavy responsibility on his shoulders:

*Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Ezekiel 3:17-19*

You may make the difference between an eternity in Heaven or in Hell for someone. Yes, every sinner is individually accountable and has no excuse whatsoever. Nevertheless, some get more opportunities to hear, to understand, and to repent, especially if they have a Gospel preacher on their trail. If you neglect your commission, you have bloody hands.

Immerse yourself in the short passage below, considering the parallel between the apostate Israel of that day and America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 22:29-31*

What was the danger facing that nation? The danger was judgment from God for the willful evil and perversions that consumed the people. The Lord's lament is that He sought for a man to stand in the gap to stay the hand of God in judgment upon the land. Amazing, isn't, it? The Lord must bring judgment, yet He desperately wants a volunteer to stand up for the people, calling them to repentance, enticing God to delay His wrath, that some may respond. Do you care about your people? How about your mom, your dad, your daughter, your wife or husband? You might be the instrument that spares their lives and even the existence of the nation for a time, if you would be used of the Lord to preach repentance. Even more importantly, you may be the instrument of their salvation. Given the pitiful lack of faithful Gospel witnesses in America today, you are likely the **only** witness your relatives will have in this life. Who else is going to get in their face, plead for their attention, and tell them the truth compassionately?

Our daughter-in-law, Kristine, was recently in a public park with another Christian woman and their small children. A school bus, filled with kids, arrived and flooded the park with activity. Kristine noticed that our 5-year-old grandson, Eli, was talking to a group of kids. She called him over to ask him what the conversation was about. Eli said that he was trying to prove to them that Santa was not real. Mom instructed her son that it was not his place to tell them that, but then gave him a stack of Gospel tracts to hand out to the kids. He and his friend did just that until all of the tracts were gone. Kristine's friend ran out to her car to get a stack of booklets with the Gospel of John. So the kids passed out the booklets until every child had a Gospel message. When they left the park, Kristine asked Eli what he told the kids as he handed out the tracts. Eli reported that he recited the song by Buddy Davis – a Scripture song – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Are you as bold as a 5-year-old? Ask God for such zeal and you, too, can be a watchman for your generation.

This is not a time for laziness or discouragement, but for renewed zeal. We have an assured hope, an inheritance from the Lord with saints of like mind. Many who have gone on before are witnesses of our present labors. Let us carry the sword of the word of God for our generation. The stars that shine across the night sky and throughout the trillion galaxies of creation dim in comparison with the glory that God attaches to His servants, those who proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Until that day . . .

*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Daniel 12:2-3*



### **Author's Biographical Sketch**

Dr. Dave is a former atheist / evolutionist who became a Christian as a teenager, and has been involved in many levels of ministry throughout his Christian life. Presently, he is active in street evangelism. He holds five academic degrees, including a Ph.D. in laser physics and an MBA. He enjoyed a 20-year Air Force career in research and development, and has won the Air Force R&D Award for Advanced Technology. After retiring from the Air Force he enjoyed a second career as an R&D manager at a large defense contractor and then as a professor at a major state university.

In ministry, by the grace of God, he has served as a Sunday school teacher, a junior church director, a bus captain and bus ministry director, taught evening classes at a rescue mission, created a training program for street evangelism . . . and should have done far more and wasted far less of his discretionary time through the years. Presently, he is blessed to be leading a small house church and doing street evangelism in Rockford, Chicago, and other northern Illinois locations.