



**Are You**  
***Certain***  
**You Know the**  
***True Gospel***  
**?**





*“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” (Gal. 1:8).*

## **The True vs. a False Gospel**

These are very solemn words written by the apostle Paul, who warned his readers to beware of trusting in a false gospel. He knew that Satan would try to deceive unsuspecting souls by persuading them to believe in either a partial or distorted version of the gospel – in essence, a false gospel. He also knew the devastating effects of such a false gospel – to turn people away from the one true way of salvation and cause the loss of many souls. Grieved by such a predicament, Paul emphasized the need for spiritual discernment and being able to distinguish between the true and a false gospel. Stressing the seriousness of the matter, he even pronounced anathemas or curses upon anyone who would dare to oppose GOD’s truth and teach a false gospel.

Almost two thousand years have passed, and very little has changed. The enemy is still working hard to cover up the true gospel and deceive people concerning their souls, lulling them into a false security. And with all the different versions of the gospel that currently exist, we have just as much, if not a greater, need for spiritual discernment today. But how can we have this kind of discernment and know for certain what the true gospel is? And if we profess to be believers, how do we know that the gospel we trusted in and base our salvation on was the true gospel and not a false one? These are important questions to consider seriously, because if someone is mistaken or deceived about the gospel, he could think that he is saved when he is really not. And even worse, he might not discover the truth until it’s too late. That’s a frightening thought! Dear Reader, could you be that person? Let me ask you, “Are you *certain* you know the *true* gospel?”

## **The Source of the Gospel**

The only way to know if something is the true gospel or not is to go to the source of the gospel - the Bible. GOD’s Word must be our standard, by which we measure the truth. If we compare something to Scripture and it doesn’t match, then we know it’s not the true gospel. To be able to accurately compare things to Scripture and detect inconsistencies, however, requires a good knowledge of the Bible. Without this, we will be uninformed of GOD’s Word and thus unequipped to discern truth from error. And nothing makes us more vulnerable to the enemy’s assaults (i.e., deceptive tactics) than spiritual ignorance and gullibility. Therefore, it’s essential that we have a solid foundation in the Bible so that we can know the difference between a true and a false gospel.

## **A Summary of the Gospel**

So, what is the *true* gospel, according to the Bible? Put simply, the gospel is the message of hope that brings “good news” to those who hear it and believe it. The gospel is good news, because it tells you how you can be “saved” and go to Heaven. What does it mean to be “saved”? Briefly, it means that GOD, by His grace (undeserved kindness, mercy) and not your works (good deeds), forgives your sin (breaking GOD’s law) and *saves* (delivers) you from bondage (slavery) to sin and Satan and the eternal punishment for sin (hell) when you believe in Him and repent of (turn away from) your sins. GOD saves you by radically transforming your heart so that you are “born again” or be-

come a new person spiritually - someone who desires to love, obey, and glorify GOD! Unlike what many believe, salvation not only involves a change in *destination* (Heaven or hell), but also a radical change in *heart*! In other words, when GOD saves you, He does not leave you in your sin but sets you free from the tyranny and enslaving power of sin, so that you may begin to serve Him in true righteousness and holiness.

How is this salvation made possible? The gospel tells us the amazing story of GOD's plan of salvation made before the world began. GOD demonstrated His great love and mercy toward undeserving sinners (you and me) by providing a way (the *only* way) of salvation through His only Son JESUS CHRIST. JESUS, who is GOD, came to the earth to be born a man and die in our place on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins (i.e., death) so that we could be set free from the power of sin and eternal judgment. And more than that - so we could spend an eternity with GOD, as His adopted children, enjoying all the wonderful blessings of Heaven. This is just a summary of the gospel. But if you are interested in finding out more about the gospel and how you can be saved, please read on...

## **An In-Depth Look at the Gospel**

What is the Gospel in more detail?

I. First the gospel begins with *understanding* these basic truths:

- A. Who is GOD? - What are His attributes, and who is He in relation to man?
- B. Who is man? - What is his origin, who is he in relation to GOD, and what is his purpose?
- C. What is sin? - How is it defined, what is its source, and what are its consequences?
- D. Who is JESUS? - Where is He from, how is He unique, and why did He come to the earth?
- E. What is GOD's plan of salvation? - How can sinners be forgiven and saved from sin and judgment?

II. Then the gospel concludes with *responding* to these truths:

- A. Believe in JESUS - Trust GOD's promise that you are saved by grace through faith in JESUS alone.
- B. Repent of your sin - Turn away from sin toward righteousness.
- C. Surrender your life to JESUS - Commit to follow and obey Him as your LORD and Savior.
- D. Examine your heart - Look for spiritual fruit or evidence that you're truly saved.

### **I. Understanding the Truth**

#### **A. Who is GOD?**

Before we can understand who we are, why we're here, and most importantly, how we can be saved, we must first know who GOD is. Since GOD is infinite and we are finite, it is impossible to know Him fully, and it would be the height of presumption to even think we could. Though we are limited in our knowledge of GOD, GOD has graciously recorded in His inspired Word, the Bible, the essential things we need to know about Him. For example, Scripture (the Bible) tells us that GOD is our Creator - the One who made everything in the universe, including the heavens, earth, and everything in them. Since it is impossible for anything to create itself, someone had to be the *first cause* to make everything. That someone was GOD. He was the first Cause who created all things and set

everything into motion. He created everything by the word of His mouth, out of nothing, and all in six literal days. Not only this, He is also the One who continually sustains and directs everything by His infinite wisdom and power. As our Creator and Sustainer, who not only made us, but also provides for all our needs, we should show our appreciation by worshipping, loving, and obeying Him.

For GOD to create everything, by necessity, He had to exist prior to anything else. In fact, the Bible says that He has always existed and always will. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2). Unlike man, GOD is self-existent and eternal. This means that He was never born or created, and that He will never die or cease to exist. In other words, GOD has no beginning or end. This is difficult for us to understand, because we are finite creatures bound by both time and space. But GOD, who is eternal and infinite, is not bound by anything and exists outside of time and space. How this knowledge of GOD should inspire awe in us!

Another thing that distinguishes GOD from man is that He is sovereign over all things. By right of creation, GOD not only owns, but also rules over everything He has created. "For the LORD most high is terrible [awesome]; He is a great King over all the earth....God reigneth over the heathen [nations]; God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness" (Ps. 47:2, 8). As the "King of kings and LORD of lords," He reigns supreme and can do whatever He wants (which is always good and wise). "But our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). And nothing can stop or thwart Him. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay [restrain] His hand or say unto Him, 'What doest thou?'" (Dan. 4:35). GOD's sovereignty is unlimited, which means nothing lies outside of His dominion or control. He directs absolutely everything in the universe, from the revolution of the planets to the number of hairs on our head (Gen. 1:14-18; Matt. 10:30). As the highest governing authority, GOD determines the rulers for each nation from the highest to lowest levels. "He removeth kings and setteth up kings" (Dan. 2:21). He also decides all the boundaries of nations, who will win and lose wars, and all national and international events. He "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Attesting to GOD's complete sovereignty, He even controls time itself (Gen. 1:14). "And He changeth the times and the seasons" (Dan. 2:21).

Even before we're born, GOD predetermines our condition or circumstances in life – whether we will be rich or poor, weak or strong, where we will live, whom we will know, and what we will do. Our whole life is in His hands to dispose of as He wishes (Ps. 31:15). As such, He also decides when we will be born and when we will die. Nothing is outside of GOD's sovereign control. "The LORD killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor and maketh rich; He bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and He hath set the world upon them" (1 Sam. 2:6-8). Since GOD is sovereign over absolutely everything, including the minutest detail, nothing in the universe occurs by chance or accident, though we speak in these terms. If anything could occur outside of GOD's control by chance, He would not be completely sovereign over all things, and thus, He would not be GOD (GOD

forbid!). Therefore, the whole notion of chance (which is really a non-existent entity) is incompatible with a sovereign GOD, who rules over all things. All things are directed by GOD. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). Even man's decisions and plans ultimately fall under the power and authority of GOD. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever [wherever] He will [wishes]" (Prov. 21:1). "A man's heart deviseth [plans] his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9). Everything is predetermined by GOD, according to His perfect, sovereign plan, which was made before the world began. Knowing that GOD is completely sovereign over every circumstance of our lives should put our fears to rest and give us confidence, because instead of being victims of mere chance or the caprice/whim of man, we are secure in the hands of a wise and loving GOD, who not only wants what's best for us, but also knows the best way to accomplish it.

Not only is GOD sovereign over everything, but He is also infinite – that is, unlimited and unbound in size, wisdom, power, etc. Because GOD is infinite in size, it is impossible for anything to contain or constrain Him. "But will GOD indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee..." (1 Kings 8:27). With no limit to His size, GOD's presence is everywhere and extends beyond the known universe. GOD is also infinite in wisdom. Because He is all-knowing and all-wise, He knows everything past, present, and future. "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps 147:5). Nothing can be hidden from Him, not even our secret sins. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest [visible, clearly revealed] in His sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do [must give an account]" (Heb. 4:13). In addition to GOD's wisdom, His power is also infinite. Nothing in all of creation even comes close to matching GOD's strength. Men and angels derive their power from GOD and are thus limited in power. But GOD, who is the source of all power and is Himself all-powerful, can do absolutely anything (in accordance with His holy nature). If GOD created the entire universe with just a word, nothing is impossible for Him to do! "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17). Since GOD is infinite in wisdom, power, etc., we have no need to fear if He is on our side. We can trust Him to take good care of us.

What are some more of GOD's attributes? GOD is Spirit (John 4:24) and omnipresent (i.e., everywhere at the same time) (Ps. 139:7-10). GOD is also perfectly just and impartial in all His decisions, rewarding the good and punishing evil (Deut. 32:4). And as the definer and upholder of all truth, GOD always tells the truth and is incapable of lying (Titus 1:2). Accordingly, He is trustworthy and faithful and thus never wavers in keeping His promises. "GOD is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent [change his mind]: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). Closely related to GOD's faithfulness is His immutability or unchangeable character. "For I am the LORD, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). If GOD says He will do something, He will, because He never changes. Stable as a rock, GOD will always remain the same. "JESUS CHRIST the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). He is not like man, who is fickle and continually changing. The fact that GOD never changes brings comfort and security to believers, because they know they can depend on Him.

Of all of GOD's attributes, the one that stands out most and excels the rest is His holiness. Essentially, this means GOD is unique and is far above all of creation. No one compares to GOD. "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11). Perfect in all His attributes, He stands in a class all by Himself. He alone is perfectly holy, sinless, and faultless. No one else can make that claim. Consistent with His holy nature, GOD can never do anything wrong. All that He does is perfect, good, and right. "As for GOD, his way is perfect" (Ps. 18:30). Neither can He commit any evil nor tempt anyone else to do evil. "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" (Jms. 1:13). For "GOD is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Being perfectly holy, He hates anything that opposes or acts contrary to what is good and holy, namely, sin and evil. "For thou art not a GOD that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee" (Ps. 5:4). He hates sin so much that He cannot even tolerate the slightest evil in His presence. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity [sin, evil]" (Hab. 1:13). GOD is indeed holy. And as His children, He commands us to be holy. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [conduct]; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

In addition to being perfectly holy, GOD is also very good (kind, generous). "O taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8). We see GOD's goodness in creating us so that we could experience joy as recipients of His abundant gifts (e.g., sharing creation with us) and witnesses of His magnificent glory (i.e., His beauty, splendor, and perfections) both in His creation (Ps. 19:1) and providence (i.e., His works or directing/orchestrating all things in creation). GOD's goodness is also seen in that He purposely designed the world with the special intent to meet our needs as well as to maximize our pleasure and enjoyment of it. "Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16). "He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb [vegetation] for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth" (Ps. 104:13-14). "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness [fullness] of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Ps. 36:8). Additionally, GOD's goodness is magnified by His providing for even His enemies. He shows common grace to both the good and evil. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).

Closely related to GOD's goodness is His mercy. "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:8-9). Though GOD is perfectly holy and just and therefore must punish sin, He is quick to forgive and very reluctant to punish the wicked. He does not look forward to their destruction. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez. 33:11). GOD pleads with sinners to turn away from their sin, which will destroy them, and to turn toward righteousness and live. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die...?" (Ez. 33:11). He is very longsuffering and patiently waits for sinners to come to Him in humble submission. His desire is that all men be saved. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise [of returning in judgment], 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 Pet. 3:9). He gladly offers forgiveness to anyone who sincerely confesses his sin and repents. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the un-

righteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our GOD, for he will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:7).

Inseparable from GOD's mercy is His infinite love. As the source and definer of love, GOD is the embodiment of love, as well as the originator of all creaturely love. In the fullest sense, "GOD is love" (1 John 4:8). One way GOD demonstrates His love is by taking the initiative to love us when we are most unlovable – that is, before we're saved, when we don't love Him at all and are, in fact, His enemies. "Herein is love, *not that we loved GOD*, but that he loved us..." (1 John 4:10; emphasis added). "Christ died for the *ungodly*." "GOD commendeth [demonstrates] his love toward us, in that while we were yet *sinner*s, CHRIST died for us." "When we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to GOD by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10; emphasis added). A perfect example of this amazing love of GOD can be seen in the conversion of the apostle Paul, who was an ardent enemy and persecutor of the Church. Attempting to stamp out Christianity, Paul wreaked havoc in the Church by imprisoning and killing Christians, even to the extent of travelling to distant countries to search for and arrest them. It was on one such occasion, as he journeyed to Damascus, that JESUS miraculously appeared to him and saved him. Notice, JESUS did not save Paul when he was going about doing good or seeking after Him, but when Paul was at his worst, committing the greatest evil by opposing CHRIST and persecuting His people. This is the matchless love of CHRIST!

It is no different with us. When GOD looks down from Heaven at all of humanity, He does not see any good or worthy people who genuinely love Him, desire Him, or seek for Him. Speaking of everyone, including believers before they're saved, the Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one...There is none that seeketh after GOD...There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10-12). Instead, when GOD looks down at us, He sees only a mass of sinful, undeserving people, who are self-seeking, spiritually blind, and opposed to Him (though not all are conscious of this). There is nothing intrinsically good or appealing about us that draws or attracts GOD to us. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Due to our sin, there is everything loathsome and unappealing about us that actually repels GOD! Thus, it is purely something within GOD (e.g., His perfect love and compassion), and nothing within us, that causes Him to mercifully save unworthy sinners such as us.

Like Paul, it's when we're still sinful and ungodly that GOD takes the initiative to renew our hearts so that we can be saved and love Him (Rom. 5:6-8). If GOD were to wait for us to love and seek Him first (in our own strength) before saving us, it would never happen, because our hearts are too black and saturated with sin to ever desire what is good (e.g., salvation). And being born spiritually dead, we are utterly powerless and thus incapable of changing our hearts from evil to good. GOD, in His mercy, must first give us new hearts that desire what is good before we can love and seek Him earnestly. In other words, if GOD did not love us first by changing our hearts so that we could love Him, we *could* and *would* never love Him on our own. The only reason we ever come to love GOD is because He graciously loves us *first* (not based on any merit of our own or anything He foresees in us) and grants us the ability and desire to love Him. "We love him, because he *first* loved us" (1 John 4:19, emphasis added). This is one thing that distinguishes divine love from human love and sets GOD apart from man. Normal human love is conditional and based on the good behavior of the recipient. That is, human love generally attaches itself to "worthy" objects or those who, either through their relationship or conduct, merit or reciprocate love in some way. In contrast, GOD's love is not

dependent on man's good behavior but attaches itself to "unworthy" objects or those who, through their persistent evil and animosity, more than deserve GOD's wrath and eternal punishment. This is the unfathomable love and grace of GOD!

The greatest demonstration of GOD's love and mercy can be seen in the sacrifice of His only Son JESUS CHRIST on the cross for our sins, so that we could receive eternal life and escape eternal punishment. "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" (1 John 4:9). "GOD commendeth [demonstrates] his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Though we are totally undeserving of His mercy and more than merit His eternal judgment, JESUS, who is GOD Almighty, showed us tremendous grace by humbling Himself to become a man in order to act as our substitute and pay the penalty for our sins through His death. "Hereby perceive we the love of GOD, because he laid down his life for us..." (1 John 3:16). JESUS showed us the greatest love possible by willingly giving up His life for us (His enemies and undeserving sinners), though He was perfectly innocent and sinless (John 10:18, 2 Cor. 5:21). "For CHRIST also hath once suffered for sins, the just [righteous] for the unjust, that he might bring us to GOD, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18).

That GOD, who is the Supreme Ruler of the universe and glorious in all His perfections, should condescend to save lowly sinners such as us and then adopt us (beggars) into His royal family is utterly astounding and transcends all human comprehension. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of GOD" (1 John 3:1). It would be understandable if GOD had chosen to adopt angels, who far exceed man in glory and are faithful, obedient servants to GOD. But instead, GOD chose to set His special love upon man. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest [pay attention to or care for] him?" (Ps. 8:4). As the psalmist declared in amazement, what is man that GOD should even take notice of him? And what makes man so different from other creatures? That leads us to the next subject: Who is man? Specifically, what is his origin, who is he in relation to GOD, and what is his purpose?

## ***B. Who is Man?***

### ***1. Man's Origin***

The answer to man's origin is, of course, GOD. After GOD created everything else in the universe, He created man on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26-27, 31). "And the LORD GOD formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). As the pinnacle or height of His creation, GOD made man in His own image with a perfect nature. "So GOD created man in his own image, in the image of GOD created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). Superior to all other creatures on earth, man was endowed with an intellect and reason far beyond that of animals, a moral capacity and freedom to choose between good and evil, a soul to commune with and worship GOD, and the authority to govern and manage the world as GOD's appointed stewards. Man was GOD's image-bearer and appointed vice-regent on earth. "And GOD said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). To accommodate man's needs and to provide for

his pleasure, GOD made the world and everything in it. Even the sun, moon, and stars were created to assist man in determining the times and seasons (Gen. 1:14). Thus, the heavens and earth were made not only to glorify GOD (i.e., by revealing His existence and some of His attributes), but also for the purpose of man. Unlike what evolution teaches, man was not a product of chance or a faceless blob lost in the cosmos of existence. Nor was man a mere afterthought. With purposeful intent, GOD, the Supreme Author of the universe, made man one of the central characters in His story (JESUS being the main character and hero) and the earth his setting or stage of operation. Nothing was left to chance. GOD directed everything in creation according to His sovereign purpose and plan.

## 2. Man's Purpose

What was GOD's purpose and plan for man? That is, why did GOD create man? GOD made man with a noble purpose - to glorify Him (Is. 43:7). As GOD's representative on earth, man was intended to glorify GOD by carrying out His divine will as he exercised dominion and authority over the rest of creation. Moreover, as GOD's image-bearer, man was meant to glorify GOD by duplicating and spreading His image throughout the earth as he multiplied and increased in number. Furthermore, as the recipient of GOD's goodness (kindness, generosity), man was supposed to glorify GOD by not only offering up sincere thanks for all His provision, but by also expressing gratitude through his willing worship, obedience, and service. Given a superior intellect capable of recognizing and appreciating GOD's perfections (e.g., His infinite wisdom and power seen in creation and providence), man was also created to glorify GOD by naturally responding to His works with praise, adoration, and awe. Even the events and circumstances surrounding man, including his own decisions and actions, were designed by GOD as part of His sovereign plan to display His glory (e.g., His love, mercy, holiness, justice, faithfulness, etc.) for both the pleasure and admiration of man<sup>1</sup>. Most of all, though, man was created for the purpose of glorifying GOD by enjoying close communion with Him in an intimate, loving relationship that would last into eternity.

## **C. What is Sin?**

### 1. Sin's Origin

How did man do at fulfilling his GOD-given purpose? Sadly, man failed in his purpose to glorify GOD due to sin. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD" (Rom. 3:23). Despite a perfect environment, sinless nature, and close fellowship with GOD, our first parents (Adam and Eve) rejected GOD's authority and rebelled against Him in the Garden of Eden. Though GOD generously provided for all their needs and gave them freedom to eat from any tree of the garden, except one, they failed the test by choosing of their own free will to eat the forbidden fruit, contrary to GOD's clear command. Moreover, they chose to exchange the truth of GOD for the lies of Satan. Deceived, they not only thought they could escape the consequences of their sin (i.e., death), but that they would also benefit from their sin (i.e., become as gods) (Gen. 3:1-6). Sadly, things have not changed very much. Man is no different today.

Before someone might be tempted to think Adam and Eve's sin was only minor (i.e., eating forbidden fruit), let's consider their unique circumstances. Unlike all their descen-

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<sup>1</sup> Some of GOD's attributes could not be demonstrated until the fall of man (i.e., sin's entrance into the world) occasioned the need for justice (punishment), mercy (forgiveness), etc.

dants after them, Adam and Eve had a perfect, sinless nature. They did not begin life with a corrupt nature that naturally inclined them toward evil, making it difficult to resist sin. Nor were they enslaved to sin, so that it completely controlled their heart, mind, and will (i.e. the faculty that chooses or makes decisions). Without a sinful nature, they truly had a free will, in every sense of the word, and could freely choose between good and evil without any internal hindrance caused by a bias toward sin. In addition to this, they had direct access to GOD and close communion with Him (i.e., they walked and talked with GOD in the garden) (Gen. 3:8-10). Their personal knowledge of GOD (i.e., of His perfect character and will) should have kept them from doubting GOD's Word and trusting the devil instead. Add to that all the gifts and privileges they enjoyed (e.g., a perfect paradise, dominion over the world, immortality, etc.), and it is clear that their sin was not small, but rather great.

Their sin was grievous in that it was committed against so much light (i.e., a clear knowledge of GOD's will and person); in presumption (i.e., knowingly opposing a direct command; not in ignorance); and despite so many advantages (i.e., made in GOD's image, a sinless nature, freedom of will, communion with GOD, possession of the earth, etc.). With no justification for their disobedience, their sin represented the height of pride, rebellion, and ingratitude. What made their sin worse was that it was committed against a loving, kind, and generous GOD, who not only gave them life, but also lavished His abundant gifts upon them. All that they had was free and unmerited. The very least they could have done was to show their gratitude by trusting and obeying GOD. Instead, they allied themselves with GOD's worst enemy, the devil, and opposed GOD, bringing in lasting destruction upon themselves and all their posterity (descendants) (Rom. 5:12, 19). Because of the devastating effects of their sin, how very fitting it was to call this first or "original sin" the "fall of man".

## 2. Sin Defined

Thus, we see that sin first originated with Adam and Eve in the garden, ushering in the fall of mankind. Before proceeding to the effects of this fall, let us first define what sin is more precisely. According to Scripture, sin is the transgression or breaking of GOD's law. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Put simply, anything we do that is displeasing or contrary to GOD's will (desire, wish), as revealed in His law, is sin – whether it be a sin of presumption (conscious, willful sinning) or a sin of ignorance (sinning without knowledge). More specifically, sin is either performing what GOD forbids us to do or failing to perform what GOD commands us to do. Additionally, sin is not limited to acts of commission (actively breaking GOD's clear/direct commandments), but it even involves sins of omission (passively omitting or withholding good or a failure to do what is right). "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James. 4:17). At its most basic level, sin is rebellion against GOD and a stubborn refusal to submit to His divine authority. And all known sin ultimately stems from pride (i.e., man's attempt to exalt himself above GOD and exert his own self-will) and unbelief (i.e., not trusting GOD's promises to either reward obedience or punish disobedience). This is only a broad or general definition of sin. In order to have a better and more thorough understanding of sin, we must begin with a right knowledge of GOD's law, since sin is defined by GOD's law. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

### 3. What is GOD's Law?

#### a. *The Greatest Commandments*

The whole of GOD's law, found in the Bible, comprises many commandments - so numerous, in fact, that if discussed here would extend beyond the scope of this tract. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, we will cover only a small portion of GOD's law, focusing on the major commandments<sup>2</sup>. To begin, all of GOD's law, including both the Old and New Testaments, can be summarized by the first and second most important commandments (Matt. 22:36-40):

1) "Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy strength and with all thy soul." (Mark 12:30)

2) "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Mark 12:31)

JESUS said that all the law hangs on or falls under these two commandments. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets [a term denoting the entire Old Testament]" (Matt. 22:40). In other words, if we could truly keep both of these commandments from our heart, we would fulfill all the law (though, not perfectly) (Matt. 7:12; Rom. 13:8-10). How is this possible? If someone truly attempts to love GOD, he will not want to displease or dishonor GOD by breaking any of His law (e.g., worshipping idols, taking His name in vain, profaning the Sabbath, etc.). Instead, he will show his love to GOD by obeying His law. JESUS affirmed this when He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Moreover, if someone truly attempts to love others as himself, he will desire to do good, and not evil, to them. And the best way to accomplish that is to not break GOD's law or sin against them by lying, stealing, hating, or doing any other harmful thing (Rom. 13:9). "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Thus, the way we demonstrate our love both to GOD and to others is by keeping GOD's law and abstaining from sin.

In addition to the two greatest commandments, another set of very important laws of GOD are the "Ten Commandments."

#### b. *The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17)*

1) Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. We are commanded to worship GOD alone and nothing else, for there is only *one* true God. "For I am GOD, and there is none else; I am GOD, and there is none like me" (Is. 46:9). "The LORD is the *true* GOD, he is the living GOD..." (Jer. 10:10; emphasis added). There is only one GOD who made Heaven and earth and rules over all things (Jer. 10:11-12). All other so-called "gods" or idols are fictitious and not real. A "molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity and the work of errors" (Jer. 10:14, 15). Since idols are false, it is futile or useless to worship or depend on them (Ps. 115:4-8). Can something that does not really exist help us when we're in need or in trouble? "One shall cry unto him [an idol], yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble" (Is. 46:7).

What is the origin of idols? They are mere figments of man's imagination and fabrications of the devil intended to deceive man by turning him away from worshipping the one true GOD. Even worse, the Bible calls false gods or idols demons (fallen angels). Thus, if we worship idols, we are really worshipping demons, who try to deceive us by impersonating idols (1 Cor. 10:20; Deut. 32:17; Rev. 9:20).

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of GOD's law, see the tract "What is Sin?"

What is the definition of an idol? An idol is anything that takes the place of God in our heart or that we prefer over Him. Specifically, an idol can be anything we worship, love, trust, depend on, fear, honor, or value more than God. Whatever has a higher priority or importance than GOD in our heart is an idol. Moreover, an idol is not limited to simply statues or physical objects. An idol can be either something tangible or intangible. Even a false concept of GOD or false religious beliefs can be idols. Do you worship the one true God, or do you worship idols?

2) *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them, for I the LORD thy GOD am a jealous GOD, visiting the iniquity [sin] of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.* Closely related to the first commandment, this commandment strictly warns us not to make idols or to honor them in any way. GOD detests idols very much and severely punishes those who engage in any form of idolatry (Deut. 7:25-26; 8:19-20; 11:16-17). We should not even own or use an idol for *any* purpose (e.g., worship, instruction, décor, etc.). How do you know if something is an idol? First, an idol can be any physical or mental representation (e.g., copy, statue, picture, image, thought, etc.) of God (i.e., any person within the Trinity) or anything else that might be worshipped or revered (i.e., bowed down to, prayed to, or trusted in), such as people (e.g., Buddha, Mary, saints, etc.), animals (e.g., sacred Hindu cows), or heavenly bodies (e.g., astrological charts/horoscopes) (Deut. 4:12, 15-19).

Though this may surprise some, even seemingly innocent images of JESUS are also idols (e.g., in the manger, on a crucifix, in children's Bibles or storybooks, and in Sunday school curriculum). For centuries, the Church forbade images of JESUS in respect of the second commandment<sup>3</sup>. However, over time, as rules relaxed, images were gradually introduced into worship, instruction, and other areas within the Church, so that today it is quite commonplace to see images of JESUS. But is it right? Just because something may meet with the approval of man and represent the majority opinion, it does not necessarily make it acceptable to GOD. GOD strictly forbids *any* use of images to represent Him. Israel, GOD's chosen nation, was severely punished for this breach of command in the Sinai wilderness, where they made a golden calf to represent Him (Ex. 32:1-10, 27-28, 35). Since JESUS is GOD, the second Person of the Trinity, this prohibition also applies to images made of Him.

Though there may be good intent (e.g., to aid in worship or teaching) in attempting to portray JESUS through the use of images, this is nonetheless displeasing and dishonoring to Him. Instead of magnifying JESUS, man-made images actually have the opposite effect. They make JESUS appear inferior to what He is in reality. After all, how can something *imperfect* (a man-made image) depict someone *perfect* (JESUS)? It's not possible. Even the greatest masterpiece or work of art could not fully portray JESUS in all His perfections (i.e., His human and divine attributes), and thus, it represents a false JESUS. And a false JESUS is an idol. Furthermore, because images of JESUS can only depict His human nature (and even that, not sufficiently), but not His divine nature, they attempt to separate His humanity from His divinity – a serious heresy! In essence, they give the false impression that JESUS is only man and not also GOD (GOD forbid!).

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<sup>3</sup> Images of CHRIST were condemned by a church council convened in A.D. 753 by Constantine V. For further insight into this subject, see the tract *Pictures of CHRIST* by Marcellus Kik and Prof. John Murray.

Lastly, since no one really knows what JESUS looked like while He lived on the earth, any images of Him are simply guesses at best and therefore are not accurate or true representations of Him. Any use of such images, then, is perpetrating a lie, and no ordinary lie – a lie about GOD! That, again, is a very serious sin. So, though it's very important to glorify JESUS by worshipping Him and teaching others about Him, we should do it in a way (i.e., without images) that honors Him and neither detracts from His glory nor violates His commandments. As always, the end does not justify the means.

Not limited to physical idols, idolatry also consists of false religions or belief systems. These include any cults that call themselves Christian but add to, diminish, or distort GOD's Word. Though there are some superficial differences among false religions, at their foundation, they are basically the same in that they all share a common principle. They all rely on some type of human effort or merit-based system (i.e., achieving success through good works<sup>4</sup>, acquiring different levels of knowledge, self-reform, self-denial, asceticism, etc.) to earn acceptance with GOD or admission into Heaven.

In contrast, *true* Christianity is the only belief system that depends solely on GOD's grace (i.e., undeserved and unmerited favor), and not on man's achievements, to freely *receive* (not *earn*) eternal life. Whereas in all other religions, man is perceived as having the potential to determine his destiny by striving in his own ability to climb toward Heaven, Christianity is unique in that it sees man as spiritually dead (not just weak or sick), helplessly bound in sin, and thus incapable of reaching Heaven in his own ability. Instead of man being able to reach upward toward GOD, the Bible teaches that GOD, in His mercy, must bend downward toward man and rescue him from his lost and pitiful condition before he can be saved. On his own, man cannot take even one step toward Heaven. Thus, salvation is fully attributable to GOD and not one bit to man. This is very humbling to man's pride to have to admit that he can do nothing at all to earn his way to Heaven - that he is, in fact, totally powerless on his own and must beg GOD's mercy to save him.

In addition to false religions, there are other idols that can captivate and entrap us - most notably, the "idols of our heart". These idols are insidious in that they're not always obvious or easily detectable and therefore, can cause more harm. One way to determine if something is an idol for you is to evaluate the amount of time, money, or energy expended on it. How does that compare to how much time, money, or energy you spend on other things, such as your necessities, duties or responsibilities, ministries, tithing/giving, devotions, or other things related to GOD? This will often reveal whether your priorities are right (i.e., putting GOD first, then family, etc.) or if they're unbalanced. For example, you know your priorities are wrong if your checkbook reveals that you spend more money on entertainment or luxuries than on GOD. You also know things are unbalanced if your schedule is so tied up with either essential or non-essential things that you have little or no time left for GOD.

Another way to know if you have idols hidden in your heart is to honestly ask yourself if you prefer anything to GOD. More pointedly, would you rather spend your spare time communing with GOD (i.e., in prayer, studying His Word, and worship) or doing some-

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<sup>4</sup> This does not negate the importance of good works either before or after we're saved. However, the Bible clearly states in no uncertain terms that even our best works are tainted by sin and viewed as filthy rags in GOD's eyes. Thus, they can never meet the perfect standard of GOD's holy law to gain admission into Heaven. We can only be saved one way – by GOD's grace alone through faith in JESUS CHRIST as our LORD and Savior.

thing else (e.g., watching TV, playing games, reading novels or magazines, etc.)? This is not to say that you should never spend any free time on things other than GOD. But if you find that much, if not most, of your free time is spent on things other than GOD, you have to seriously wonder if these things might be idols. Again, if *anything* takes the place of GOD in your heart or affections, whether it's a person, thing, or activity, it is an idol – clear and simple.

Some of the most common idols of the heart are the love of money or possessions (e.g., your home, car, boat, clothes, electronic gadgets, toys, jewelry, home furnishings and accessories, other amenities, etc.); pursuit of power and position (e.g., achieving notoriety, fame, popularity, or a high political or social status); pleasure-seeking (e.g., over-emphasis on entertainment and recreation; consuming interest in pursuing excitement/thrills even if at high risk); over-indulgence (e.g. lack of self-control in areas such as gluttony, drunkenness, etc.), glorification of the body (e.g., too much focus on physical beauty or strength), and people (e.g., famous people such as athletes, movie/rock stars, politicians, spiritual leaders, etc.). Even seemingly innocent or neutral things, such as work, education, family/friends, civic or social involvement, sports, hobbies, pets, secular ambitions, etc. can become idols if they become all-consuming or take precedence over GOD. It matters little what it is, if it takes your attention away from GOD as your primary source of delight and object of affection.

Closely related to idols of the heart are idols of addiction. These can include the more obvious addictions, such as to drugs (legal or illegal), smoking, alcohol, pornography, etc. But it can also involve *anything* that enslaves or controls you so that some area of your life becomes unbalanced or extreme. Examples are overeating, overworking, watching television, playing video games, etc. Note, not everyone shares the same addictions/idols. What may be an idol for one person may not necessarily be an idol for another person. For example, sugar and caffeine may pose problems for some, but not for others. One way to determine if something is an addiction is to see if you can live (and be content) without it. If abstaining from it causes cravings or withdrawals, you know it's an idol of addiction. Apart from necessities, anything that has such a strong hold on you that you feel you can't live without it or worse, you are willing to sin because of it (e.g, lie, steal, get angry, be selfish, neglect family/friends or responsibilities, etc.), is unquestionably an idol.

Though there are many idols that vie for our heart, probably the most common idol today is "self". Self-idolatry manifests itself in many different forms, ranging from overt self-deification (i.e., the belief that we can become gods) to less obvious forms, such as the whole self-esteem cult (i.e., the push for self-love, pride, self-promotion, etc.), vanity, self-gratification, etc. Self-idolatry has existed as long as man has existed (since the fall). However, in the past, it was not practiced so openly and blatantly, but more subtly and indirectly. For example, self-idolatry was evidenced in the worship of Greek and Roman gods, who reflected many "human" characteristics (including man's sinful side) and thus were mere extensions of man's self. Similarly, idols of the heart (e.g., lust for wealth, power, fame, etc.) can also be traced back to self-worship, since their ultimate purpose is to exalt man. Likewise, false religions, which are based on human invention and achievement, also promote man or self in the end. Thus, self-idolatry has always existed in some form or another.

The main difference today, though, is that the worship of self has gained such wide acceptance that it is practiced openly and unashamedly, unlike in the past. In fact, in some

places, self-idolatry or self-love is actually encouraged and promoted. How things have changed! Not long ago, such a self-centered focus would have been perceived as the height of egotism, pride, and conceit. But today the love of self is so accepted and widespread that it has become culturally ingrained. And anyone who does not condone self-love is viewed as strange or antiquated. Amazingly, what was once denounced as a vice (i.e., self-worship) is now touted as a virtue. Just about everywhere you go, you see evidence of this growing narcissism in our society. Propaganda promoting self-love is boldly emblazoned on billboards, bumper stickers (e.g., proud boasting), magazines (e.g., the magazine entitled "Self"), newspapers, etc. Its influence can also be seen in advertisements (e.g., "You deserve it"; "Have it *your* way"; "You're number one"), books, TV/radio programs, the internet, and much more. To encourage its further promotion and wider acceptance, self-love is advocated by our educational system, government, medical establishment (i.e., psychology, psychiatry), media, and even many of our churches. As the Bible prophesied concerning the last days, men have truly become "lovers of self". "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud..." (2 Tim. 3:1-2). Are you a lover of GOD, or are you a lover of yourself?

3) *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy GOD in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.* GOD warns us not to profane His name by abusing or mistreating it in any way. His name is *holy* and should therefore be treated with the highest respect and honor. GOD's name is greatly dishonored when it is used derisively or mockingly, or when it is used in false oaths/swearing (e.g, court of law) or broken vows/pledges (e.g., marriage, military service, legal transactions, etc.). It would be better to not involve GOD's name at all in a vow/oath, and to simply affirm that you will tell the truth or keep your word, than to risk profaning GOD's holy, awesome name. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear [swear falsely] thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is GOD's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matt. 5:33-37). "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (James. 5:12).

In addition to vows/oaths, GOD's name is dishonored in other ways. For example, in the area of cursing, no other name is profaned as much as GOD's name. Where, for instance, do you hear people yell, "Buddha!" or some other idol's name as a curse word when they're frustrated or angry? You don't. Amazingly, though, you hear the holy and exalted name of JESUS CHRIST continually trampled upon in the dirt and blasphemed as if it were some common swear word. Instead of marring JESUS' name in such a crude and debasing way, His name should be highly honored and exalted to bring praise and glory to Him!

How else is GOD's name profaned? Speaking evil (either in the form of derision or lies) of GOD or anything related to Him (e.g., the Bible, Christians, etc.) highly offends and dishonors GOD. Distorting the meaning or words of Scripture (i.e., by adding, diminishing, or changing things) in either exposition (i.e., explaining or interpreting GOD's Word through preaching, teaching, etc.) or translation is also profaning GOD's name. Further-

more, treating Scripture lightly or casually by using it in jokes (as some common thing) and speaking of it irreverently (without a serious and holy regard) also brings reproach to GOD's name. Lastly, God's name is dishonored when people either claim to be Christians, but don't live like it, or when they use GOD's grace as an excuse or license to sin. This not only gives the wrong impression of what true Christianity is, but it also stains God's holy name and reputation. Who would believe that GOD is perfectly holy or powerful enough to transform lives if His children are not holy and live in continual sin? Instead of bringing reproach and shame to GOD's name, let us fear GOD and reverence His holy name. Do you honor GOD's holy name through your speech and conduct?

4) Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor [work] and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy GOD. In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore [therefore] the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it [made it holy, set it apart as special]. After God created everything, He set aside the seventh day of the week as a holy day of rest<sup>5</sup>. "And GOD blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which GOD created and made" (Gen. 2:3). From the beginning<sup>6</sup>, GOD established the Sabbath as a weekly memorial to remind us to honor and worship Him as our Creator and Sustainer. It is a special day reserved to thank GOD for creating us, as well as for providing for us (Ps. 92:1). GOD also intended the observance of the Sabbath to act as a distinguishing mark or sign of the covenant between Him and His people (Ex. 31:12-17). As an added benefit, the Sabbath carries an even greater significance for Christians in that it reminds us of how GOD not only created us *physically*, when we were born into this world, but how He also recreated us *spiritually*, when we were "born again" into GOD's kingdom. Finally, the Sabbath acts as a continual reminder to believers that some day we will all spend an "eternal" Sabbath (i.e., rest) with GOD forever in Heaven (Heb. 4:1-11). In anticipation of that future day and in gratitude for what GOD has done for us, it is very fitting that He designated the Sabbath as a weekly feast day (i.e., holy day) so that we could have a time of celebration and joy, in which to reflect upon His goodness and kindness toward us (Lev. 23:1-3).

In addition to acting as a memorial, the Sabbath was also made to benefit man (Mark 2:27). One benefit is that GOD promises to bless those (Jew or Non-Jew) who obey Him and observe the Sabbath (Is. 56:1-7; 58:13-14)<sup>7</sup>. "Blessed is the man that doeth this,

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<sup>5</sup> See Endnote A

<sup>6</sup> GOD established the Sabbath law from the beginning (that is, following creation), and not for the first time at Mt. Sinai, when the law was delivered to Moses under the Old Covenant. This is supported by the fact that GOD tells us in the fourth commandment to "*Remember* the Sabbath," intimating that the Sabbath law had already existed prior to the giving of the law. For those who would argue that the Sabbath only applies to Israel under the Old Covenant, the Sabbath's prior establishment to the Mosaic Law and the nation of Israel demonstrates that this law has universal application for all mankind and is not just for Jews.

<sup>7</sup> While there are promises of rewards for faithfully observing the Sabbath, Scripture is also replete with warnings for presumptuously (knowingly) breaking the Sabbath (Num. 15:29-36; Neh. 13: 17-18). "Who-soever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 31:15). This commandment applies to both Jews and Non-Jews (Num. 15:29-36; Ex. 12:49). "One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger [Non-Jew] that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for

and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil" (Is. 56:2). "Also the sons of the *stranger* [non-Jew], that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, *every one* that *keepeth the Sabbath* from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for *all people*" (Is. 56:6-7; emphasis added). Another benefit is that the Sabbath gives us a break from our daily routine (e.g., regular work, chores, and activities) and rest from physical and mental labor, so that we can enjoy a time of refreshment. More importantly, the Sabbath helps us to slow down from our busy schedule so that we can focus on more important things in life, such as GOD, Heaven, and our souls. In other words, the Sabbath gives us time to reflect on GOD and eternal things instead of simply on the world and temporal things. Most of all, the Sabbath helps prepare us for Heaven, where every day will be a Sabbath.

How can we keep the Sabbath in a way that pleases GOD? First, we must believe that this commandment (i.e., fourth commandment) applies to us - that it is still binding upon us and we should keep it. Though the observance of the Sabbath was seldom questioned in the past, sadly, today many believe that we are exempt from keeping the fourth commandment. Though in theory, they affirm that we should obey the "*Ten Commandments*," in reality and in actual practice, they recognize only "*Nine Commandments*"<sup>8</sup>. Their erroneous and unscriptural argument is that the New Covenant nullifies or cancels out this commandment, even though JESUS clearly taught just the opposite. "Think not that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19). In support of this, the apostle Paul taught that instead of abrogating or abolishing the law, GOD's grace (i.e., salvation through faith) actually strengthens or further increases our obligation to obey GOD's law, which would include the fourth commandment. "Do we make void the law through faith? GOD forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). "What then? Shall we sin [break GOD's law], because we are not under the law, but under grace? GOD forbid" (Rom. 6:15).

Further evidence that we should keep the Sabbath can be seen in the example of JESUS. If even JESUS Himself, whose image we are to bear and whose example we are to follow, kept the Sabbath, shouldn't we do the same, if we claim to be His followers (Luke 4:16)? Though we cannot be perfectly holy like JESUS, He still commands us to imitate Him and strive for holiness by obeying GOD's law. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). If being holy means keeping GOD's commandments, then we must also keep the fourth commandment (i.e., the Sabbath), if we wish to follow JESUS' example and be holy.

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ever in your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger [Non-Jew] be before the LORD. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger [Non-Jew] that sojourneth with you" (Num. 15:15-16).

<sup>8</sup> See Endnote B

Though some incorrectly teach that JESUS nullified the fourth commandment under the New Covenant and even broke the Sabbath (GOD forbid!), this is the furthest thing from the truth. Granted, JESUS' enemies often accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. But He never once broke the Sabbath, according to *GOD's Word*, but only according to *their interpretation* of the Sabbath law, based on *human* wisdom and tradition. If JESUS broke even *one* commandment, including the fourth commandment (i.e., the Sabbath), that would mean He was not sinless and thus not GOD (GOD forbid!), since one of the divine attributes is sinless perfection. Thankfully, we know that this is not the case, and as Scripture clearly affirms, JESUS was perfectly sinless and kept *all* the law, including the Sabbath (1 John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; John 7:18, 8:46). Furthermore, as the divine Law-maker<sup>9</sup>, who established the Sabbath, and as the "Lord of the Sabbath," JESUS would never break His own law by not keeping the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). That would be contradictory and hypocritical. Nor would He tell others not to keep the Sabbath, because that would not only be inconsistent, since He Himself kept the Sabbath, but it would also be a sin to tell others not to obey GOD's commandments (Matt. 5:19). Though JESUS often rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for *how* they kept the Sabbath (i.e., legalistically), He never once condemned them for *keeping* the Sabbath. That was never the issue. It was assumed that they would keep the Sabbath. And, of course, JESUS would want them to obey His law, just as He wants us to obey His law (John 14:15).

Not only did JESUS keep the Sabbath, but His disciples and other followers within the early Church also kept the Sabbath (Luke 23:54-56; Acts 13:14, 42, 44, 15:21, 17:1-2, 18:1,4). Moreover, a study of church history reveals that up until about the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, much, if not most, of the Church acknowledged and observed a Christian Sabbath<sup>10</sup>. Well known historical documents and doctrinal statements, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith and the London Baptist Confession (1689), clearly attest to a long-standing belief in a Sabbath observance. Highly respected names of the past (e.g., Charles Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, Eric Liddel, J.C. Ryle, John Paton, George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, John Knox, John Bunyan, the Puritans, the reformers, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, etc.) also recognized and kept the Sabbath. There are clues in many places, if you truly seek to know the truth, that the Sabbath was once widely accepted and practiced almost universally within the Church. Browse through some old, unrevised hymnals (e.g., Trinity Hymnal) and you'll see references to the Sabbath. Look at older (unabridged) commentaries (e.g., Matthew Henry) and devotionals (e.g., Charles Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening Devotions*) and you'll see references to the Sabbath and its importance. Even what is now called "Sunday" school used to be called "Sabbath" school. When did the name change? If you're older, perhaps you'll even remember that many stores and other businesses used to close on Sundays in honor of the Sabbath. In some states, there were even special laws (i.e., blue laws) passed to restrict commerce/trade and other types of activities in order to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath. How things have changed! Only in modern times, has there been a wide scale departure from GOD's law and thus a corresponding rejection of the fourth commandment, based on faulty and/or liberal arguments<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> See Endnote C

<sup>10</sup> Though there was always debate over which day was the true Sabbath (i.e., the 7<sup>th</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> day) and how to keep the Sabbath, at least the Church, for the most part, recognized the binding authority of the fourth commandment and practiced it.

<sup>11</sup> See Endnote D

All this is not surprising, considering how far we have migrated away from GOD in both the secular and spiritual realm (i.e., the Church). Perhaps more than any other time in history, the modern Church has suffered from extreme corruption and compromise, to the point where it is almost indistinguishable from the world. And part of this downward trend can be seen in the Church's widescale rejection of GOD's law, as in the case of the fourth commandment. As someone wise once said, Sabbath observance is a barometer or measure of the Church's spiritual health. In times past, whenever the Church was spiritually strong and thriving (e.g., the Reformation, Puritan era, Great Awakening, other revivals, etc.), there was a high regard for GOD's law and a corresponding respect for the Sabbath. However, when the Church was spiritually weak and corrupt, there was little esteem for GOD's law, and thus, the Sabbath was virtually forgotten and neglected. If this is so, what must this say about the spiritual condition of much of our modern Church today, which not only wants to throw out the fourth commandment, but, in some cases, even the entire Ten Commandments? To stem this tide of corruption within the Church, we must return to the basic principles and foundation upon which the Church was built – faith in GOD and His Word. If we truly trust GOD and His Word, we will strive to please Him by obeying His commandments. And part of that obedience would, of course, include honoring the fourth commandment by recognizing the Sabbath as universally binding and applicable to us.

In addition to recognizing that the Sabbath applies to us, another way we can honor the Sabbath as a special, holy day is by offering up our spiritual sacrifices to GOD (Num. 28:1-3, 9-10; Rom. 12:1). These include praising and worshipping GOD, prayer, meditating in His Word (through personal study and hearing the Word taught/preached), applying His Word by walking in obedience to Him, thanksgiving, serving Him in ministry, tithing, fellowshiping with other Christians, participating in the Lord's Supper, and more. It's important to remember, though, that even if we do all these things, but we do it with a wrong motive or attitude (i.e., reluctantly, legalistically, out of guilt or fear, or to receive praise from men), GOD will not accept our spiritual sacrifices. For our spiritual sacrifices to be unblemished (as much as possible) and a sweet aroma to GOD, we must offer them with the right heart (i.e., willingly, humbly, out of love and gratitude, and for GOD's glory, not our own).

In addition to spiritual sacrifices, we are to honor the Sabbath day by resting and not working (Ex. 23:12; 31:14-15). Not only should we not work, but we should also not cause *others* to work on the Sabbath. This includes family, friends, neighbors, strangers, employees, businesses or workers who provide services, etc. (Deut. 5:12-15). Refraining from work, however, does not mean we are to waste our time by sitting back and doing nothing or sleeping all day. If we are truly offering up spiritual sacrifices to GOD as we should, there will be little time for idleness. A Sabbath rest means pausing from our normal, daily routine and all its associated work and activities, so that we can dedicate our time and energy to worshipping and serving GOD. In other words, we are to lay aside the "common" work of the week so that we may focus on performing the "uncommon" (i.e., special, holy) work of the Sabbath.

So, what constitutes "common" work? With a few exceptions, this includes regular, secular work for pay/profit (in or out of the home), *unnecessary* chores or activities (e.g., mowing the lawn, extensive cleaning of the home, non-emergency related home or car repairs, etc.), cooking (should be done the prior day), unnecessary travel, buying/selling, and physically taxing work, such as lifting or moving very heavy objects

(Deut. 5:12-15; Ex. 16:4-5, 22-30; Neh. 10:31; Neh. 13:15-22).<sup>12</sup> Basically, we should not perform any *unessential* tasks on the Sabbath that would prevent rest and consume so much of our time and energy that we have little left for GOD. The most important thing to remember is to make GOD the highest priority. Anything that prevents us from putting Him first should not be done on the Sabbath.

Of course, this does not imply that we cannot do *any* normal or regular work on the Sabbath. JESUS made this clear when He contended with the Pharisees and scribes over what is permissible on the Sabbath. He condemned them for making the Sabbath burdensome to the people by adding further restrictions to GOD's law regarding the Sabbath (e.g., forbidding acts of mercy, such as healing, and acts of necessity, such as carrying a mat or plucking grain from the fields to eat) (Matt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18). Certainly, in addition to work related to worship and ministry, GOD permits works of necessity (e.g., work needed to sustain life or health), and works of mercy (e.g., showing compassion by helping others in need, including animals) (Deut. 5:12-15; Is. 66:22-23; Matt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; John 7:23).

Reserving the Sabbath as a holy day of rest enables us to dedicate more time to worshipping GOD without all the normal distractions that tend to take our eyes off of GOD. If instead, we spend our Sabbaths shopping, attending sports events, playing video games, watching TV, maintaining the home, or doing other unessential things, we will not be giving GOD the best of our time and attention. GOD wants us to lay aside all lesser, unimportant things on the Sabbath in order to spend time with Him. Is that so much to ask? If someone you truly loved asked you to take time out of your busy schedule to spend just one day a week with him/her, wouldn't you say yes? How much more should we do the same for GOD, who is our Creator, Sustainer, Lord, Savior, and the One who loves us most? Does He not deserve the right to ask this of us? GOD gives us six days a week to work and perform other tasks. Is it so unreasonable to devote at least one day a week to GOD to show Him that we truly love Him and want to honor Him?

Put another way, how would you feel if someone who claimed to love you was always too busy or distracted to spend time with you or made you the last priority, even on special occasions? Would you feel very loved or special? And what if he or she only spent time with you reluctantly, out of obligation or compulsion? If you would not like this, how do you think GOD feels when we complain about giving Him just *one* day a week (not to imply that our time with GOD should be limited to this)? Like us, GOD wants us to spend time with Him because we *want* to, not just because we *have* to. Our heart and motives, and not just our actions, are very important to GOD. He is pleased when we consider the Sabbath a delight and a joy (Is. 58:13-14), instead of a burden. But He is displeased when we keep the Sabbath only out of fear, guilt, or duty. How we perceive the Sabbath reveals a lot about our true feelings toward GOD. If we resent spending time with GOD on the Sabbath, which is only *one day* a week, how will we possibly enjoy Heaven, which is an *eternal* Sabbath? In a way, keeping the Sabbath helps prepare us for Heaven by acquainting us with life in Heaven. And it also acts as a spiritual barometer of our love and dedication toward GOD. How are you doing spiritually? What is your attitude toward the Sabbath?

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<sup>12</sup> For more specific things forbidden on the Sabbath, see Ex. 16:23, 29; 31:14-15; 35:1-3; Num. 15:29-36; Neh. 10:31; 13:15-22; Is. 58:13-14; Jer. 17:19-27

5) Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy GOD giveth thee. This commandment is so important that GOD attaches a blessing to it, promising long life to those who honor their parents. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. 'Honour thy father and mother'; which is the first commandment with promise, 'that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth'" (Eph. 6:1-3). GOD also says that it pleases Him very much when we honor our parents (Col. 3:20). To further emphasize how important this commandment is, GOD also warns that He is very displeased with and severely punishes those who would purposely dishonor or harm their parents through their speech or conduct (Ex. 21:15,17; Deut. 27:16; Prov. 20:20; Matt. 15:4-6). It's made even clearer that this commandment to honor our parents is very serious in that GOD attaches the death penalty to cursing or hitting them and a curse to showing contempt for them (Ex. 21:15,17; Deut. 27:16).

Realizing how important and serious this commandment is, how do we honor our parents? Primarily, we honor them when we love, respect, and obey them. God gave us parents for our benefit - to bring us into this world and to raise us by nurturing, guiding (by word as well as by example), training, protecting, and providing for us. In this respect, we owe them our lives. The least we can do in return for their love is to show our appreciation by honoring them, even after we're grown. (And even if some were not the best parents, we should still honor them as GOD commands, first out of obedience to GOD, and second, out of respect for their position of authority.) Honoring our parents includes our speech, conduct, and even our attitude/thoughts. How we speak *to* our parents (i.e., guarding our tone, volume, and words; speaking without sarcasm or condescension) is just as important as how we speak *about* our parents (i.e., avoiding gossip, slander, and disrespect), even when they're not present or no longer alive. If they request or need something (e.g., running errands, transportation, financial help, etc.), we should try our best to accommodate them, remembering how much they did for us. (The exception would be if something they requested conflicted with GOD's Word.) We should also avoid arguing with them, even if there is provocation or justification, out of respect to them. We should never speak to them with disrespect or anger, even if something they do seems to merit such a response. And when our parents are older or incapacitated, we should try our best to take care of them, if possible. Do you honor your parents?

6) Thou shalt not kill. Though man is sinful and far from perfect, he still has some intrinsic value from being made in the image of GOD (Gen. 1:26-27)<sup>13</sup>. Even in his fallen state, man is still worth far more than any other creature on earth. We see the high value GOD places on human life by the penalty for murder. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of GOD made he man" (Gen. 9:6). Though animals are also GOD's creatures and important, they do not have the same value as man. We see this distinction made in the penalties for killing an animal vs. killing a man. Whereas murdering a man requires the death penalty, the same is not required for killing an animal.<sup>14</sup> Knowing how much man is worth (because he bears

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<sup>13</sup> This image was severely marred by the fall, so that because of sin, there is little resemblance between GOD and the unregenerate (unsaved) person. However, when someone is regenerated, that image begins to be restored and increases in likeness to GOD the more he is sanctified or grows spiritually.

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that Scripture, in any way, condones unnecessary killing of or cruelty toward animals. In fact, Scripture clearly condemns animal abuse and promotes the kind treatment of animals.

GOD's image), compared to other creatures, we should also esteem human life and not undervalue it by equating man to animals or lessening the punishment for murder.

More importantly, we should value human life by avoiding anything that would harm people, either physically or mentally. Specifically, we should not murder people, which includes killing with malicious intent, suicide, abortion, or euthanasia. It also means that we should not commit any unkind act that might injure others (e.g., physical or mental abuse, revenge, slander, damaging property, etc.). However, this commandment is not referring to accidental manslaughter, self-defense (such as in wartime), or capital punishment, which GOD clearly mandates in the case of murder and other serious crimes (Gen. 9:6).

The sixth commandment not only condemns physical acts of murder and abuse, but also murder in the heart, such as hatred or (unrighteous, unjustified) anger. JESUS expounded the fuller meaning of this commandment on the Sermon on the Mount, when He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [Stupid!], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:21-22). Hatred or murder in the heart may manifest itself overtly (e.g., bitter sarcasm, angry tone, shouting, abusive language) or subtly (e.g., a silent, secret resentment or unforgiving spirit). As with other commandments, we see GOD's standard is very high in that He not only expects outward compliance to His law, but also inward compliance. He considers the whole person and wants our thoughts, speech, and conduct to be conformed to His will. Would you pass His evaluation? Have you ever been guilty of murdering someone in your heart?

Instead of murdering or hating others, GOD wants us to do just the opposite and *love* them. He even tells us to love our enemies and not just those who are good to us. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). God demonstrates this kind of love by showing mercy to both the good and evil. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). JESUS exemplified this kind of love by dying on the cross for His enemies (us) and by even asking the Father to forgive the very people who killed Him (Rom. 5:6-10; Luke 23:34). Thus, instead of murdering and hating people, GOD wants us to imitate Him and love others the way He does. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:12). When we demonstrate love, especially toward our enemies, we are imitating God, but when we show hatred, we are acting like the devil. Whom do you try to imitate?

7) *Thou shalt not commit adultery.* After creation, one of the first things GOD established was the institution of marriage (Gen. 1:24). GOD intended marriage to be a sacred union between one man and one woman, for the purpose of mutual companionship and assistance, procreation (i.e., producing godly offspring), and glorifying GOD. Another important reason for marriage was to symbolize the mysterious union between CHRIST (the Bridegroom) and His Church (the bride) (Eph. 5:22-33; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2). Just as the husband is joined to his wife in marriage, CHRIST is joined together spiritually with His Church in an everlasting union. Using the same illustration (i.e., mar-

riage), any unfaithfulness or breach of covenant (e.g., idolatry, apostasy) on the part of the Church is described as spiritual adultery or harlotry.

With such an important purpose (i.e., illustrating the sacred relationship between CHRIST and His Church), GOD intended marriage from the beginning to be a permanent union (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9). Therefore, anything that might sever that union, such as marital infidelity or adultery, was forbidden. Not limited to adultery, the seventh commandment broadly covers any form of sexual immorality, such as premarital sex, homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestitism, pedophilia, incest, bestiality, prostitution, pornography (including viewing sex scenes in movies and immodesty in commercials, magazines, calendars, the internet, etc.) (Lev. 18:6-20, 21-23; 19:29, 20:10-21; Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rom. 1:26-27). Closely related, this commandment also forbids any type of immodest behavior in dress, speech, or conduct that might tempt others to commit sexual sin (1 Tim. 2:9-10, Gen. 9:20-25, Lev. 18:6-17). And as with other commandments (e.g., murder), GOD is concerned with the heart and not just external behavior, so that even lustful thoughts are considered adultery (Matt. 5:27-30).

Are you sexually pure both in mind and body? If not, what can you do to curb sexual sin? The best remedy is to first cry out to GOD in repentance to save you and deliver you from sexual bondage. On your own, you cannot overcome this sin (or *any* sin for that matter). Next, pray daily for GOD's protection from temptation and His strength to resist sin. Read the Word continually, filling up your mind with what is good and meditating on holy things, so that you will have less desire to do what is evil. Memorize specific verses that can help you combat sexual sin, and recall them when you're faced with temptation. This is a spiritual war, and thus, it requires spiritual weapons, such as the sword of the Spirit (i.e., the Word of GOD).

Don't stop there. In addition to arming yourself with prayer and the Word of GOD, *actively* avoid as many potential temptations as possible. Don't give yourself any opportunity to sin. Simply being *passive* and doing nothing will not help you win the battle against sin. It will just aid the enemy in defeating you. It takes diligence, determination, and deliberate planning ahead to succeed. It may also require some sacrifice, if you want to remove this plague of sexual sin. Though it may sound extreme, if necessary, get rid of the TV, DVD player, and/or internet access. Stay away from beaches, swimming parties, malls, or other places where immodesty is prevalent. And avoid looking at suggestive material in magazines at the checkout stands, billboards, women's lingerie ads in the mail, etc.

Another key to winning the battle against sexual sin is to "be clothed with humility" (1 Pet. 5:5). That is, don't be overconfident about your ability to resist temptation and place yourself in compromising situations. Be wise and take precautions. Don't underestimate the power of the enemy to entrap you. Remember, the devil has had thousands of years to perfect his craft (e.g., deception, temptation, etc.) and study mankind, so that he is expert in identifying your vulnerabilities and knowing how best to attack you. Therefore, put away all pride and be honest with yourself, acknowledging your spiritual weakness and inability. And cry out to GOD for His help, since He alone can give you the victory. At the same time, do all that you can (in GOD's power) to protect yourself from the onslaughts of the enemy.

Don't be afraid to take a radical approach, because this sin is very destructive. It is not only the cause of many divorces and the break up of many families, but even worse, it can send you to your eternal damnation. Is it really worth it? Heed JESUS' warning

about the seriousness of this sin. He said it would be better to permanently remove your eye or hand, if this would stop you from sinning sexually, than to go to hell. "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 [causes you to sin], pluck it out, and cast it from thee...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 [eye or hand] should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:28-30). JESUS was not saying that you should literally mutilate yourself to avoid sexual sin. However, He was stressing the utter importance of treating this sin seriously and taking drastic measures, if necessary, to prevent further sin. If, for instance, you pass a sexually explicit billboard on your way to work every day that poses a continual temptation, you may want to take another route to work, even if it's inconvenient or adds to your commute time. If there is a tempting situation at work or next door (e.g., a seductive woman or man), you may want to seriously consider switching jobs or moving somewhere else, if you cannot avoid temptation some other way. This may sound extreme, but is anything worth keeping (e.g., your job, home, comforts, or conveniences) if it means giving up your eternal soul?

Furthermore, if you claim to be saved, sexual sin is particularly evil in GOD's sight, because you are defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit (i.e., your body) (1 Cor. 6:15-20). And GOD does not take that lightly. Note His sober warning: "If any man defile the temple of GOD, *him shall GOD destroy*; for the temple of GOD is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:17; emphasis added). Again, I ask – Is a little sinful pleasure in this life really worth an *eternity* in hell? Do you want to forever regret your decision to indulge the flesh as you suffer the penalty for your sins in eternal judgment? If not, then at all costs, avoid sexual sin! "Flee fornication [sexual sin]. Every sin that a man doeth is without [outside] the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

8) *Thou shalt not steal.* GOD commands us not to steal or take anything that does not belong to us without the owner's prior and explicit permission. This includes both significant and insignificant things. The value or price of an item matters little. It's the principle that counts, not the amount. Whether you steal a penny or a thousand dollars, it's still considered theft in God's eyes. And though it's commonly done, even taking small things, such as paper clips, pens, or paper from work for personal use (without the owner's permission), is stealing, since they were not intended for that purpose.

It also doesn't matter whom you steal from. Whether you steal from friends, family, or strangers, it's still theft. And though some may try to justify their theft by stealing from - 1) those whom they perceive as owing them or deserving retribution for unjust treatment (e.g., enemies, unfair employers, the government, etc.); 2) wealthy people or businesses that have such a surplus that they won't miss anything; 3) people or companies that are far removed and with whom there is no direct contact (e.g., vending machines; internet fraud; violating copyright laws by duplicating DVD's, CD's, etc.), it's still theft, no matter what the circumstances are.

Stealing can take many forms. It ranges from direct or overt theft (e.g., robbing a bank; credit card fraud; shoplifting; taking someone's money or possessions, etc.) to less obvious forms of theft: keeping change that was given to you by mistake; defrauding the government by lying on your taxes (e.g., exaggerating your deductions or charitable giving; not declaring all taxable income) or receiving financial aid when there is no true

need or some hidden source of money (e.g., receiving educational grants/scholarships intended for poor students when you have sufficient funds; accepting welfare when you are able-bodied and can work, etc.); cheating others by charging too much for something or inflating the price of something beyond its actual worth, such as a house or car; taking advantage of others by paying much less than what something is worth; not returning borrowed items; finding something (e.g., wallet) and not returning it to the owner when you know who lost it; not paying for or replacing someone's things that you lost or destroyed, either accidentally or purposely; defaulting on or not paying off debts, such as credit card bills, taxes, utilities, loans, rent, overdue library books, etc.; declaring bankruptcy when the loss of funds was due to personal negligence, irresponsibility, or an extravagant lifestyle; not paying for park entrance fees, bridge tolls, and parking meters; receiving payment for work you didn't do (i.e., getting paid for 8 hours, though you only worked 6 hours because of wasting time or taking long breaks; getting paid for a full job, though you only did a partial job), etc.

By far, the worst kind of theft is stealing from GOD, our Creator and Sustainer, who lavishes His love upon us daily through His generous gifts and provisions. How do we rob GOD? By not regularly tithing or giving back to him a portion of what He graciously gives us (e.g., our pay/wages, gifts, investments, profits, etc.). "Will a man rob GOD? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me..." (Mal. 3:8-9).

What are some deterrents to stealing? If you're ever tempted to steal, first remember the "golden rule" - treat others the way you would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). Would you want someone to steal from *you*? If not, then you should not steal from *others*, not in the slightest way. What also helps is to remember that GOD is omniscient and knows everything. Even if you manage to keep your theft a secret so that no one else knows about it, GOD knows and records every instance of it, to be reviewed before you on the Day of Judgment. Nothing can be hidden from GOD's all-seeing, penetrating eyes. And though you may try to justify your sin in your own eyes to salve your conscience or in the eyes of others to save face, GOD sees your heart and knows the truth. And He says stealing is wrong, no matter what.

So, what do you do if you have stolen things, even very small or slight things? First, stop stealing. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). Instead of thinking only of yourself and *stealing*, GOD says you are to do just the opposite - think of others and *give*! Second, if you've stolen something and you still have it in your possession, you should return it. Or if you no longer have it, you should replace the stolen possession or pay for its equivalent value.<sup>15</sup> Then humbly confess your sin and ask for forgiveness both from the person you stole from and from GOD, even if it was done a long time ago. This is the right and just thing to do.

9) *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.* GOD commands us to tell the truth and not lie. GOD, who is Truth, never lies and hates every form of deception (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Prov. 19:9; Ex. 23:1; Lev. 19:35-36). When we lie, we are acting like the devil, who is called the father of lies (John 8:44). Examples of lying are: 1)

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<sup>15</sup> According to GOD's just and holy law (Ex. 21:33 - 22:15), the actual penalty for stealing is not only to replace the value of the stolen item, but to also add an additional amount to compensate for the loss to the owner and make restitution.

overt or outright lies (e.g., calling in sick when you're not); 2) telling partial truths; 3) deceiving others or trying to convince them of something that's not true; 4) exaggerating with the intent to mislead (e.g., claiming you have a higher level of competency than you really have in a resume or interview; exaggerating the pain or injustice you suffered in order to solicit sympathy or malign someone); 5) purposely leaving out information in order to give the wrong impression (e.g., not reporting all your taxable income when filing taxes; when selling something, highlighting its good points but hiding its problems/defects); 6) saying untrue things about others (e.g., slander, gossip, false testimony), etc. Lying also includes any attempt to cover up or justify sin, so-called "white lies" (e.g., saying you're too busy or have some other commitment, when it's not true, to avoid doing something or accepting an unwanted invitation; saying untrue things to avoid offense); cheating on tests; and not keeping your word or breaking promises, when there is no valid excuse, etc.

The main reason we should not lie is simply because GOD commands us not to lie, which makes it wrong and a sin. Also, if we claim to be saved, we should want to please GOD by obeying Him and glorifying Him by telling the truth. A Christian that lies brings great dishonor to GOD's name. Another important reason we should not lie is because it's not demonstrating love toward others or treating them the way we want to be treated. If we don't want others to lie to us, why should we lie to them? Isn't that unfair and hypocritical? Additionally, depending on the situation, lies can sometimes cause great injury to others (i.e., false testimony marring others' reputations or leading to unjust punishment, including even imprisonment or death). Aside from these things, one very practical reason we should not lie is that people will not trust or believe us. Liars are seen as undependable and untrustworthy, which can cost them their reputation, job, relationships, and much more. Lastly, GOD warns us that unrepentant liars will spend an eternity suffering in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). Isn't that incentive enough to stop lying? Do you lie?

10) *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.* A simple definition for coveting is greed or desiring things that we really don't need. This includes envying or wishing for things that others have (e.g., their possessions, status/position, reputation/esteem, physical appearance, wife, husband, etc.). Also, coveting is not limited to only large or expensive items. We can even covet small or seemingly insignificant things, such as food (i.e., gluttony or eating too much food), clothes, tools, or just about anything. The list is endless, because we are by nature covetous.

At the heart of covetousness is discontentment and ingratitude. If GOD has supplied all our needs (not wants) so that we have enough, why should we covet or lust for more? He wants us to be satisfied with what we have and not compare ourselves to others. "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:6-8). What does it matter if all our friends and neighbors have larger homes, newer vehicles, or the latest in home entertainment, computers, appliances, cell phones, and other non-essentials? For many, the American dream has degenerated into mere materialism or a contest to see who can accumulate the most toys in their life. But is that what life is really all about – simply amassing as much stuff as possible, only to lose it all when we die? JESUS warned, "Take heed, and beware of cov-

etousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

But how many people have succumbed to this lie - that happiness is measured by how much stuff we own? And how many parents have chosen to sacrifice their children (i.e., sending them off to daycare or babysitters) so they can both work outside the home, in order to achieve an unnecessary high standard of living and afford luxuries? I'm not referring to single or low-income parents who have no choice and must survive by working outside the home. But parents who do have a choice and opt to invest more time and effort in things that don't matter (e.g., luxuries), do it at the expense of their own children. What's more important - our children or a having a bunch of stuff? And is it worth it in the end? Is getting the impressive car, bigger house, or deluxe vacation worth neglecting our own children?

All the material things that people work so hard to get, sometimes at great cost to themselves and others, will some day all disappear. Isn't it futile and meaningless, then, to invest our whole lives in things that are temporary and will only last a short while? "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19). "For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (1 Cor. 4:18). Why not invest in things that really matter, like our family, or more importantly, eternal things, which are of far more value and will last forever? "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:20). Truly, the modern American lifestyle, characterized by covetousness (i.e., an obsession with material things, pleasure-seeking, and a demand for immediate gratification), is detrimental to our spiritual health and well-being.

Aside from these practical implications, an even more important reason to avoid coveting is that it is no small sin in GOD's eyes. In fact, the Bible equates covetousness to idolatry. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor *covetous man, who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of CHRIST and of GOD" (Eph. 5:5; emphasis added). How is covetousness idolatry? Essentially, coveting is the *love* or *worship* of things, which is idolatry. Put another way, covetousness is idolatry in that it places the *creation* (i.e, things) above the *Creator*, GOD (Rom. 1:23, 25). How can you know if you're guilty of coveting or idolizing something? Ask yourself - What is truly more important to you or has a higher priority - GOD or that thing (or person)? If it's anything other than GOD, it is an idol. Another way to know if you covet something is by your willingness to sin or compromise because of it (e.g., lie, steal, cheat, act selfishly, sacrifice or neglect others, obsess, feel discontented, prefer it to GOD, etc.). That's a sure sign that something is an idol.

What can you do to help yourself not covet or idolize things? First of all, the best defense is to have GOD on your side, because you cannot fight this battle on your own. Only GOD has the power to help you overcome covetousness. Try as you may, you can never truly reform yourself in your own strength. You may seem to make progress for a while. But apart from GOD, you will only fail in the end. Thus, you must be saved by GOD's grace and be given His Spirit and a new heart that is able to resist sin in His power, not your own. If you're saved, then you will not only have the ability, but also a sincere desire or willingness to fight sin.

Once saved, only then can you adequately arm yourself in the battle against sin. The way to protect yourself is to first recognize the seriousness of sin and its destructive na-

ture. A casual or indifferent attitude toward sin will only leave you open to the enemy's attacks. Contrary to what the devil would have you believe, sin is not your friend; nor is it some harmless or neutral thing. Sin is very biased *against* you, and it is very deadly. To say it plainly, sin is your mortal enemy bent on your destruction. This can be seen in that sin results in death – both physically and eternally. This is one reason Satan tries to get us to sin so much. He knows that sin will ultimately lead to our destruction. Thus, to put yourself in temptation's way is both unwise and dangerous. Would you stand near the edge of a steep cliff or a blazing fire? If not, why would you even go near something that might tempt you (e.g., to covet), which is far more dangerous, because it affects your eternal soul? You can't expect to have victory over sin if you play around with it or treat it as something small or insignificant. The only way to defeat sin is to take it seriously and to actively and persistently mortify (kill) it, before it destroys you.

The best way to mortify sin (i.e., weaken its power over you) is to use your spiritual weapons (e.g., the helmet of salvation, shield of faith, breastplate of righteousness, belt of truth, gospel of peace, sword of the Spirit, prayer, etc.) GOD has given you, if you're saved (Eph. 6:10-18). One of the most effective weapons is prayer. Pray regularly and earnestly that GOD would give you the strength to resist temptation and overcome sin. And pray believing that GOD's power and mercy can help you. A faithless prayer is an ineffective prayer (James 1:6-7). Another very important weapon is the "sword of the Spirit" or GOD's Word. It's not enough to simply read or study Scripture regularly, but you must also memorize it if you want help in battling sin. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). Just as JESUS wielded the sword (i.e., the Word of GOD) very accurately and precisely against Satan's temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), it helps to recall specific verses and recite them in your mind (or out loud) when you are being tempted. This means memorizing verses that pertain to your particular areas of weakness and not just general verses on coveting, though this, too, is helpful. For example, if your weakness is coveting possessions, try memorizing verses that warn about the futility and danger of pursuing wealth, loving this world, and the associated consequences (1 John 2:15-17; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:9-10). Or if your coveting is related to (sexual) lust, memorize passages directly related to this (1 Cor. 6:9, 18-20, Matt. 5:27-30). Be very precise in your application.

In addition to your spiritual weapons, the best defense against sin is to actively avoid any potential temptations. Before you can do this, though, you must first be honest with yourself and identify your areas of weakness. What specific things are you prone to covet? Once you've identified these things, you should try your utmost to remove yourself from these temptations. For example, if your weakness is sweets or desserts, then you would be wise to avoid passing by the local donut shop or bakery each day you go to work. Pick another route, if possible. Or if your weakness lies in some other area (e.g., electronic gadgets, home accessories, cars, video games, etc.), don't subscribe to magazines or watch shows that focus on or advertise these things. You're just asking for trouble and playing with fire. Exposing yourself to these things will just cause you to covet what you don't need or shouldn't have and to be dissatisfied with what you do have. Also, *seeing* the actual images/pictures of these things often elicits more covetous thoughts than simply *reading* or *hearing* about them. Don't underestimate the power of visual stimuli. Satan knows it very well and uses it to his advantage to tempt us. It's no accident that we live in such a media-saturated society (e.g., TV, the internet, electronic billboards/signs, digital images on cell phones and cameras, etc.) that daily bombards us with tantalizing and tempting images (e.g., billboards picturing a big, juicy burger with

fries; a sleek, shiny, new car; a seductively dressed woman, etc.). Another thing - don't fall into the trap of being overly confident and assuming you're strong enough to resist these temptations. (That's what Satan would like you to think.) Instead, be humble and admit your weakness in succumbing to sin, and avoid all possible sources of temptation.

Going on, beware of your surroundings, including all potential (spiritual) dangers, and plan ahead. For example, if you must go to the store, but you know you're tempted by certain things there, pray before you go and try avoiding that particular section of the store. Better yet, shop less, if possible, or send someone else in your place to avoid further temptation. Also, if you know you're tempted by certain mail advertisements (e.g., store catalogs, ads for women's lingerie, etc.), ask someone else to get the mail, if possible, or do what you can to have your name removed from those mailing lists. If another source of temptation is the TV or videos/DVD's, the simple solution is to not watch these things! Better yet, don't even own a TV and/or DVD player. If you have no choice, though, and other family members use them, just go to another room when they're in use. The same thing goes for the internet. If it's a problem, take what measures are necessary to help you resist temptation. Place the computer in a public area (e.g., kitchen, living room), use reliable filtering software, or simply don't subscribe to the internet. Knowing you have an enemy that is actively seeking to destroy you, it makes sense to take as many precautions as possible to avoid covetousness. It's far better to be overly cautious than to not be cautious enough. And though this may sound strange to some, and they may disapprove of such extreme measures, what matters more - what they think or what GOD thinks? Furthermore, you cannot afford to be passive or indifferent when it relates to your spiritual well-being. If you care anything about your future eternal state, do whatever is necessary, within reason, to preserve your soul.

Another thing that will help in the fight against covetousness is to realize that the things of this world cannot truly satisfy or bring lasting contentment. (Only GOD can do this.) Instead, the things of this world generally have the opposite effect - they simply make us covet more things. Ironically, the more we have, the more we want. And even when we have plenty, we still long for more. You would think that having plenty would satisfy us. But it never does, because we are by nature covetous. Nothing, not even the whole world, can make us content, as long as our hearts are covetous. We'll never think we have enough. And if we're in a continual state of discontentment, always coveting more things, how can we ever truly be happy? Evaluate your own heart in this matter. Were you satisfied with all the gifts you received last year for your birthday, holidays, or other special occasions? What about with all the things you yourself purchased? Or how about your last raise and promotion you received? Did all these things satisfy you, or do you still wish you had more?

Truly, the more things we have, the more we cling to and worship them. Riches and the love of this world are like weeds that grow invisible roots in our hearts. The longer we covet the things of this world, the more firmly rooted they become in our hearts, until they are impossible to remove, apart from GOD's grace. This is evidenced by the fact that no matter how much we have (e.g., riches, possessions, high status/position, the world's praise, trophies/awards, etc.), we still crave for more. Truly, our hearts are like bottomless pits that cannot be filled. A perfect illustration of this was a millionaire's reply to the question of what would make him happy. His answer? "More money!" More money? Why would he want more when he already had so much? The problem wasn't the amount of money he had, but his heart. Like the rest of us, he had a covetous heart

that produced an insatiable desire that could never be satisfied, no matter how much money he had.

History teaches us about the futility of trying to seek satisfaction in the things of this world (e.g., wealth, power, fame, etc.). One good example was the Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great. Even after conquering the whole known world at a very young age, he was not content, but sorrowed over the fact that he had nothing more to conquer! Like the millionaire and his riches, Alexander's insatiable desire for more power could not be satisfied, no matter how vast his empire was. An even better example was King Solomon of the Bible. We're told in the book of Ecclesiastes that he had everything in abundance – wisdom, fame, power, wealth, and even 1,000 wives – and yet, with all this, he was still not satisfied! Even after much experimentation with every conceivable pleasure and pursuit of this world (e.g, entertainment, the arts, wine, women, human achievement, etc.), he could not find lasting contentment in any of these things (Eccl. 1-2). In the end, he concluded that the only way to find true happiness is to pursue GOD and not the things of this world (Eccl. 12:13). If, as we've seen, the things of this world cannot truly satisfy, why should we invest all our time and energy in acquiring them? As Solomon discovered, this is just vanity or utter futility – in other words, a waste of our lives.

Having the right perspective on earthly treasures (i.e., their futility) can help you battle covetous desires. But even more important to gaining the victory over covetousness is to have a humble heart. Being humble means viewing yourself realistically with all your sins and weaknesses (instead of minimizing or downplaying them), which is the opposite of pride. It also means not thinking highly of yourself, but less of yourself, in relation to others. Moreover, if you're truly humble, you will see yourself in a servant's role, ready and willing to obey GOD in whatever He tells you. As GOD's steward (servant), you will realize that all that you have really belongs to GOD, since He owns all things, and that your responsibility is to manage His resources (e.g., money, possessions, etc.) for His kingdom and glory. With such a humble recognition, you will be less inclined to waste GOD's resources on luxurious or extravagant living, which stems from a covetous heart.

Additionally, true humility will cause you to see yourself as unworthy of receiving more things from GOD. Thus, you will not feel that you have the right to ask for more things beyond what you need. Instead, you will be content and thankful for what you have, realizing that you deserve nothing at all. You'll acknowledge that all you have was given to you purely by GOD's grace and through no merit of your own. In contrast, a proud person is conceited and exalted in his own eyes. Unlike the humble person, he is self-deceived and blind to his deficiencies and faults. Moreover, he does not attribute what he has to GOD's grace, but to his own ingenuity and effort. Having such a high opinion of himself and his worth, he imagines he deserves more than what he already has and thus feels justified in coveting more things. In the end, a covetous or dissatisfied heart is really a proud and ungrateful heart. Are you content with what GOD has graciously given you?

#### 4. *The Law's True Intent*

##### *a. Antinomianism vs. Legalism (Avoiding Extremes)*

Thus far, we've looked at a portion of GOD's law that comprises the main summary (i.e., the greatest commandments and the Ten Commandments), but not the full extent, of GOD's law. As already mentioned, GOD's law is not limited to this, but includes many

more commandments. Before proceeding further, it is essential to understand the true intent of GOD's law, to avoid any misconceptions. This is especially important, since Satan has continually attempted throughout history to obscure the true meaning of GOD's law in order to mislead people regarding the true nature of salvation and ultimately to draw them away from GOD. Common to Satan's tactics is to focus on one of two extremes – either *legalism* (i.e., the belief, stemming from pride and self-righteousness, that salvation can be attained through human effort or keeping the law; an overemphasis on the externals of the law, to the neglect of the internal aspects relating to the heart; adding to, altering, or misinterpreting the law, based on human tradition) or *antinomianism* (i.e., literally, "against the law"; an attitude that opposes GOD's law and seeks to remove it; the false belief that believers can remain habitually carnal/sinful and that grace grants a license to sin; a twisting of GOD's truth by labeling any attempts at sanctification or growth in holiness as legalism). Either extreme (i.e., the spirit of legalism or antinomianism) contradicts GOD's Word and is not the mark of genuine salvation.

We see the dangers of these extremes both in our own day and in the past. Today, the pendulum swings mainly in the direction of antinomianism, both within the secular realm and the Church. There is little respect for law and authority in general within our society, as seen in our educational system, government, workplaces, and families. Sadly, we see this same trend within the Church, most notably in the acceptance of liberal doctrines, such as carnal Christianity, "cheap grace", and other false teachings that use grace as an excuse or license to sin and undermine the authority of GOD's law. This distorted doctrine that attempts to sanction or justify sin in the name of grace is in direct opposition to GOD's Word. "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? GOD forbid" (Rom. 6:15). "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? GOD forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

In contrast to today, in JESUS' time, the pendulum seemed to swing mainly in the direction of legalism. With the prevailing of Pharisaical doctrine, human tradition and teaching had for many generations superseded much of GOD's law, by reinterpreting its meaning and adding to or diminishing its requirements. In direct opposition to this, JESUS worked to restore GOD's law by clarifying its original meaning and intent (cf. the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7). Basically, JESUS taught that it is not enough to simply maintain an external compliance to GOD's law (which is one component of legalism), but that we must also maintain an inward compliance from the heart (Matt. 23:25-28). GOD, who is omniscient (all-knowing) and sees our hearts, expects our thoughts, as well as our actions, to be conformed to His will. For example, He taught that the sixth commandment (i.e., Thou shalt not murder) also includes unrighteous or unjustified anger, which is murder in the heart (Matt. 5:21-22). He also warned that adultery not only forbids the actual physical act, but even lustful thoughts (Matt. 5:27-30). Not limited to our thoughts, GOD is also concerned about our motives behind every action. His desire is that we obey Him, not merely out of duty or fear, but more importantly, out of love and gratitude. "For this is the love of GOD, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous [burdensome]" (1 John 5:3). One of the marks of a true Christian is that he not only strives to obey GOD's law (however imperfectly), but that he does it out of love for GOD. The two – love for GOD and obedience to GOD – are inseparable and inextricably tied together. Wherever there is true love for GOD, there will also be a sincere desire to please Him by obeying His law. Conversely, wherever there is a sincere desire (and effort) to obey GOD's law, this is evidence that there is true love

for GOD. JESUS' own words affirm this: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

### b. *JESUS Did Not Abolish the Law*

Clearly, if JESUS Himself told us to keep His commandments, He must certainly not have come to *abolish* His own law, as some suppose, but to *restore* it to its rightful place of authority. "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 5:17-18; emphasis added). Nor did JESUS intend on lowering GOD's standard by minimizing the requirements of the law, but He, in fact, *raised the standard* from mere external performance, which was characteristic of the scribes and Pharisees, to an inward conformity of the heart. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall *exceed the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19; emphasis added). To "exceed the righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees does not mean to abandon GOD's law, but to go beyond a mere external or superficial compliance to the law (i.e., empty moralism) and to obey GOD's law from the heart.

JESUS did not condemn the scribes and Pharisees for their careful attention to GOD's law, but for their sinful motives (e.g., vanity, pride, self-righteousness, etc.), their imbalanced approach (i.e., overemphasizing certain laws to the exclusion of weightier laws)<sup>16</sup>, their misinterpretation of both the purpose and application of the law (i.e., viewing the law legalistically), and their additions and changes to the law (i.e., superseding GOD's law with their own traditions). "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have *omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment [justice], mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*" (Matt. 23:23; emphasis added). As this verse clearly indicates, JESUS did not rebuke the scribes and Pharisees for being careful or meticulous about keeping GOD's law, even seemingly smaller laws (i.e., being so exacting and thorough in their tithing to include even spices), but for neglecting the greater or weightier matters, such as justice, mercy, and faith. In other words, JESUS did not tell them to ignore lesser<sup>17</sup> laws in order to attend to weightier issues. Rather, He expected them to do *both* and not do one to the exclusion of the other.

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<sup>16</sup> One of the things JESUS rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for was their being selective about which laws they kept. Always mindful of men's praise, they tended to prefer those external laws that were more visible to observers and thus would promote them in the eyes of others, while neglecting the more challenging laws that dealt with the heart and involved self-sacrifice and/or humble contrition. In contrast, JESUS taught that we should keep *all* of His law (Matt. 5:17-19) and not just the ones we personally prefer or find most advantageous or convenient. We're not given the freedom or option to choose which laws we want to obey and ignore the rest.

<sup>17</sup> I hesitate to use the words "lesser" or "smaller" to describe any of GOD's commandments, since they are all important and should be taken seriously. However, since JESUS Himself even distinguished between certain laws, placing more weight on some than on others (Matt. 5:19, Mark 12:29-31), I felt it was permissible. Certainly, most would agree, for example, that murder is worse than lying or stealing, taking all things into consideration. Also, the very fact that punishments differ, depending on the sin, indicates that some commandments are weightier than others.

Thus, far from abrogating or cancelling out the law, Scripture teaches that we are to still keep GOD's law, but not with the same motives or methods of the scribes and Pharisees (e.g., self-glorification, legalism, adding to the law, etc.). Furthermore, under the New Covenant, the authority of GOD's law (i.e., our duty to obey it) is not *weakened* by GOD's granting salvation by grace through faith. If anything, it's quite the opposite! The authority of the law is actually *strengthened* under the New Covenant, in that we now have less of an excuse to disobey GOD's law, since He not only gives us new hearts with His law written on them, but He also gives us His Spirit to assist us in keeping His law. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). "And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ez. 36:27). Additionally, we have an even greater obligation to obey GOD's law out of love and gratitude for His immense grace shown to us through the sacrifice of His only Son. If there were any uncertainty about this, Paul made it very clear when he said, "Do we then make void the law through faith? GOD forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31).

### c. *The Law Cannot Save Us*

Thus, we see GOD's expectations concerning the law have not been *lowered* under the New Covenant, as some would have us believe, but actually *raised*. In fact, GOD's standard is so high that it is perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Hypothetically, one could go to Heaven if he could obey all of GOD's law perfectly. But, of course, this is impossible, since everyone is born with a sin nature and therefore sins. Except for JESUS CHRIST, who had no sin nature and was perfectly sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 3:5), everyone who has ever lived has sinned. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD" (Rom. 3:23). "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20). Anyone who denies this is self-deceived. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Even worse, he is calling GOD a liar (GOD forbid!). "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). Therefore, since everyone has sinned, no one can be saved or justified by keeping the law. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight..." (Rom. 3:20). Unlike what many believe, GOD does not compare our good deeds to our bad deeds to determine whether we can enter Heaven or not. Even if He did this, still *none* of us would make it to Heaven, since *all* our deeds (even the best of them) are "filthy rags" in GOD's eyes and fail the test (Is. 64:6). It is impossible for an unregenerate (unsaved) heart to please GOD. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please GOD" (Rom. 8:8). Clearly then, trying to be good on our own or keeping the law cannot save us.

### d. *The True Purpose of the Law*

If the law cannot save us, what is its purpose then? The law serves many important purposes. First, it reveals what GOD, the Author of the law, is like. We can't help but see GOD's glorious attributes (e.g., perfect holiness, justice, mercy, truthfulness, etc.) reflected in His law. Just as GOD is holy, just, and good, so are His laws. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). Additionally, the law informs us of what GOD expects of us, so that we may know how to please Him. Another purpose of the law is to benefit us. GOD promises many blessings to those who obey Him: wisdom, protection, spiritual and physical provision, rewards, joy, answered

prayers, etc. (Ps. 119:98, 99, 104; Deut. 6:24, 12:28; Ps. 19:8, 11; 1 John 3:22)<sup>18</sup>. An added benefit is that the law acts as a deterrent to sin by warning us about the dangers and consequences of disobedience (Ps. 19:11). Also, by putting some restraint on sin, the law helps to promote societal peace and order (i.e., political and moral stability), without which we would suffer under an oppressive crime rate (even worse than what we currently have), unchecked corruption, moral chaos, and the eventual breakdown of society as a whole (i.e., total anarchy).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the law is one of GOD's means to sanctify (i.e., make holy, spiritually mature) believers so that they may become increasingly conformed to the perfect image of CHRIST.

Most importantly, though, the law's purpose is to act as a tutor to bring us to CHRIST so that we can be saved. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto CHRIST, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). The law does this by first showing us our sin, "For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Only when we look into the mirror of GOD's perfect law, do we begin to see the many black stains caused by our sin. In recognition of this, Paul confessed, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7). Not only does the law reveal our sin, but with the aid of the Holy Spirit, it also begins to awaken our conscience to just how evil and repulsive our sin is in the sight of GOD.<sup>20</sup> In turn, this magnifies GOD's abundant grace in that He is willing to forgive our great evil, even the most heinous of sins (granted that there is genuine repentance). "Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

So, increasing our awareness of our sin works to magnify GOD's grace. How? The more we see our sin and the depravity of our hearts (with the help of the law), the more we recognize our need for forgiveness and consequently, the more we see and appreciate GOD's grace. In contrast, the less we see of our sin (due to ignorance of the law), the less we see our need for salvation and thus, the less we value GOD's grace. In other words, without a clear definition of the law (utilizing specific examples and applications) to confront us with our sin, we will view our sin as only minor or insignificant. And in such a self-deceived state, we will not see our great need for a Savior or truly value what JESUS did on the cross for us. Therefore, to have a fuller appreciation for what GOD offers us through CHRIST (i.e., His grace, forgiveness, etc.), we must have a

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<sup>18</sup> It's important to understand that these are *general* blessings for obedience and do not imply believers will never encounter hardship or problems if they follow GOD's law. In fact, true believers are told to expect trials/testing in their lives (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12). The advantage for those who obey GOD is that He promises to help them through their trials and benefit them in the end (Rom. 8:28-29). Thus, the mere absence of external or outward blessings (e.g., health, wealth, reputation/esteem, etc.) is not necessarily an indication of GOD's disapproval or judgment for disobedience. Job, who was very devoted to GOD and initially very prosperous, experienced a season of great suffering and loss, not directly attributable to any sin of his own, but for GOD's sovereign purposes (Job 1-2). Nor is the presence of outward blessings necessarily an indication of GOD's approval or acceptance. As the psalmist Asaph observed, many of the wicked are physically prospered in this life, though afterwards they suffer miserably in eternal judgment (Ps. 73).

<sup>19</sup> As we migrate further away from GOD's law, which puts a check on evil, we see increasing evidence of moral decline and societal disorder (e.g., escalating crime, approval and promotion of evil, despising and rejecting authority, general apathy toward sin, etc.)

<sup>20</sup> This does not imply that, while in this life, we can ever see the *full* extent or breadth of our sin, since we are finite and thus limited in our knowledge, even of ourselves. Only GOD, who is infinite in knowledge and thus, knows our hearts better than we do, can comprehend the complete depth of our sin, even our potential, and not just our actual, sins.

greater awareness of our sin, which can only come through a better understanding of the law.

Without the law, we will remain under the deadly illusion that we are pretty good or decent overall and thus spiritually secure. But when we measure ourselves to GOD's holy law, we begin to realize just how far we fall short of His perfect standard and how impossible it is for us to earn eternal life or enter Heaven on our own merit. Thus, the law is used by GOD as a tool to *humble* us by revealing our sin and showing us that we are totally *incapable* of keeping GOD's law perfectly. Additionally, it is used as a sword to pierce our hearts with conviction, so that we can sense the great burden of sin we carry and realize our guilt before GOD, to whom we owe an infinite and unpayable debt. When, by the convicting power of GOD's Spirit and Word, we are finally brought to our lowest point and 1) come to the end of ourselves (i.e., ceasing to trust in our own goodness; shattering our self-confidence and pride); 2) acknowledge our utter unworthiness before GOD and His justice in punishing us; and 3) realize our desperate condition as sinners (i.e., enslaved to sin/Satan; bound for eternal destruction; powerless to save ourselves), then and only then will we recognize our true need for a Savior and cry out to JESUS in all earnest to save us.

It is precisely for this reason that the law is absolutely essential for any gospel presentation to be truly effective.<sup>21</sup> Though the law itself does not save, it serves the very important role of awakening a sinner's conscience to his sin and convicting him so that he can see his need for GOD's grace. Just as a dying man with terminal cancer will not seek a remedy until he is first informed of his disease, so a lost soul headed toward eternal destruction will not seek a remedy through CHRIST until he is first made aware of his deadly, spiritual disease called sin. And the only way he can be convinced of this is if he is given a *clear* definition of sin, through *specific* examples and applications of the law. If sin is just defined *generally* or worse, glossed over, he will not recognize the extent or seriousness of his sin and remain deceived about the true condition of his heart. The law (together with GOD's Spirit) must be used to convict and humble him, before he can see his need for a Savior and appreciate the grace of GOD offered to him through the cross.

Thus, those who wish to toss out the law, calling any mention of it legalism (ostensibly to defend grace), are, in fact, weakening the gospel and making it ineffective. The piercing of the heart with GOD's sword (i.e., the law), together with heartfelt conviction brought about by the Spirit, must *precede* the healing of the heart that comes through GOD's grace. In summary, though the law cannot save us, it serves many useful purposes, the most important of which is to show us our sin and convict us in order to drive us to CHRIST, who alone can save us.

## 5. The Consequences of Breaking GOD's Law

### a. *The Physical Consequences*

Having discussed the purpose and intent of the law, what are the consequences for breaking the law? To understand this better, we must return to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve first sinned. Adam and Eve's sin had many serious and long-term

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<sup>21</sup> In the past, when biblical literacy was more prevalent, there was less need for defining GOD's law. But today in our post-Christian society, where the Bible is virtually unknown, especially among younger generations, we can no longer assume that people really know what "sin" is (as the Bible defines it). In the absence of this (once common) knowledge, a return to the basics (i.e., defining what sin is based on a clear, precise explanation of the law) is greatly needed.

consequences that affected not only them, but also all of creation on the earth, including every future generation (Gen. 3:8-24; Rom. 5:12, 19). First, the earth came under a terrible curse. Once a perfect paradise, protected from the ravages of disease and decay, the earth became subject to plagues, pathogens (e.g., harmful bacteria, mold, etc.), natural disasters, extreme weather conditions, etc. Everything in creation, both living and non-living, was impacted by sin's curse (Rom. 8:20-21). Though much good still remained (e.g., continuation of life, the imprint of GOD's handiwork in creation, nature's beauty and wealth of resources to meet man's needs, etc.), reflecting GOD's goodness and mercy, life on earth became very difficult, compared to life before the fall. Many animals, which were once tame and docile, became wild and aggressive, posing serious threats to man. The introduction of poisonous and parasitic plants and animals brought additional hazards. Natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, etc.), along with destructive weather patterns, added further challenges. And even the ground itself, once easily cultivated, became plagued by weeds, parasites, and pestilence (i.e., disease), making it more difficult to grow things. All this was the result of sin's curse.

Moreover, on account of our first parents' sin, death entered the world, affecting all of life and passing down to every succeeding generation. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Up until the fall, death had not existed on the earth, since death only came as a result of sin. Had Adam and Eve never sinned, they and all their descendants would have lived forever. But with the fall came the curse of death upon all living creatures, and mortality replaced immortality. This is ultimately why we all die – because of sin. Though secondary causes are used by GOD as the immediate agents in death (e.g., illness, old age, accidents, etc.), the primary cause for death is SIN – not only Adam and Eve's sin, but also our own actual sin. Thus, we see that sin brought about a terrible curse that affected all of creation. Even worse than the physical effects of sin, though, were the spiritual effects.

### b. *The Spiritual Consequences*

When Adam and Eve first sinned, they fell from a state of perfect innocence to that of sin and corruption. Their once sinless nature was replaced with a sinful nature. And the once holy image they bore of GOD was marred by sin.<sup>22</sup> There were other consequences to their sin too. Whereas before the fall, they possessed a free will in the *fullest* sense (i.e., the *complete* freedom and ability to choose between good and evil), after the fall, they lost this ability. Before their first sin, their hearts and wills were not corrupted and influenced by a sin nature, so that they could freely choose between good and evil. However, once they sinned and assumed a sin nature, their hearts and wills came under bondage to sin and its corrupting influence. Thus, they became biased toward sin and could no longer act as free, impartial agents in choosing between good and evil. An even worse consequence of their sin was that their sin nature was (and still is) passed down to all of mankind, so that everyone that came after them was born in sin (Rom. 5:12, 19).

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<sup>22</sup> Before the fall, man was given the noble purpose of bearing GOD's holy image as His representative on earth. But after the fall, this image was distorted and made ugly by sin. Though there were still traces of GOD's image remaining in man, pointing to his once glorious state, it was not possible for man in his fallen condition to recover that image on his own. Only regeneration (i.e., the new spiritual birth) and sanctification (i.e., growth in holiness and conformity to CHRIST's image), promised under the New Covenant, could later begin to restore that lost image to man.

## 1) The Sin Nature

What does it mean to be born in sin or to inherit a sin nature? It means that we enter this world with a natural inclination or predisposition to sin. David acknowledged this truth when he wrote, "Behold, I was shapen [brought forth] in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). According to the Bible, we are not born innocent with a clean slate, as some suppose. Rather, we're born with a natural bent or bias *toward* sin and evil. "The wicked are estranged *from the womb*: they go astray as soon as *they be born*, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3; emphasis added). Evidence of this sinful tendency can be seen from a very young age. Even before a child begins to walk, he begins to manifest signs of an inherent sinful nature. On his own, without anyone showing him, he knows how to be selfish and not share, take toys from other children, hit others, disobey, and cry in willful anger when he doesn't get his way. All these sinful behaviors come *naturally* from his heart. He does not need to be taught to do these things. In fact, he needs to be taught *not* to do these things. And though environment certainly plays an important part in the development of a child and contributes to his overall character, it is not the *sole* or *ultimate* factor that determines negative or sinful behavior. The root cause or source of sin is a sinful heart or an inherited sin nature. Thus, the *main* reason we sin is not due to our upbringing or environment, as influential as these are, but rather our inborn sin nature that inclines us toward evil.<sup>23</sup> Put another way, our sin is the *effect*, and not the *cause*, of our sin nature; that is, our sin nature *precedes* our sinful acts and not the other way around. Thus, we do not have a sin nature, because we sin. Rather, we sin, because we have a sin nature.

## 2) Spiritual Death

One of the results of having a sin nature is that we are all born "spiritually dead". Scripture describes this lost condition as being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Specifically, to be spiritually dead means that we are born - a) separated from GOD; b) under His wrath and condemnation; c) spiritually blind; d) spiritually enslaved to sin and Satan; and e) completely powerless to save ourselves.

### a) *Separated from GOD*

First, being born spiritually dead means that we are alienated or estranged from GOD (Ps. 58:3). From the time we're born, it's as if an invisible wall separates us from GOD, preventing us from truly knowing Him or enjoying a close relationship with Him. And unless GOD mercifully removes the barrier, we will remain in that same spiritual condition until we die. Though we are GOD's physical offspring by creation, spiritually we are strangers to Him and, in fact, enemies. "The carnal [sinful] mind is enmity [hostility] against GOD: for it is not subject to the law of GOD, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). The main thing that separates us from GOD is our sin. GOD, who is perfectly holy, detests all sin and cannot tolerate even the slightest sin in His presence. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). Therefore, as long as we refuse to let go of our sin and submit to GOD in reverent obedience, He will view us as rebels in His kingdom and remain separate from us.

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<sup>23</sup> Even the best of parents and a perfect environment cannot guarantee godly offspring. The Bible provides several examples of righteous men (e.g., Noah, Judah, Aaron, Gideon, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, etc.) who, despite their godly example, had evil sons, attesting to the fact that our sin nature, and not our environment, is the true and ultimate cause of our sin.

What further separates us from GOD is our own rejection and avoidance of Him. Instead of running *to* GOD and embracing Him as the One who loves us most and who alone can save us, we foolishly run *away* from Him, heading in the opposite direction. Why? One reason is that our perception of GOD is so grossly distorted before we're saved that we actually view Him as our enemy, though He is really our best Friend. And ironically, we see sin and the world, which is under Satan's dominion, as our friends, though they are really our worst enemies. Another reason we avoid GOD is that, consciously or unconsciously, we all have a natural aversion to GOD, because He is holy and we are not. Before we're saved, our lives are characterized by spiritual darkness and sin (Eph. 4:18, 5:8). Thus, we are naturally opposed to GOD, who, in contrast, is all light and perfect holiness. "GOD is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). As unbelievers, we love spiritual darkness but hate the light, because the light seeks to counter and expose our sin. "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 everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19-20). Thus, as sinful rebels with spiritually darkened hearts, we distance ourselves from GOD, because ultimately we do not want to come under His holy and righteous rule and give up our sin. Stubbornly, we would rather remain in spiritual darkness, suffer under sin's tyranny, and miss out on so many of GOD's blessings than to submit to GOD's authority. Is this not utter foolishness and insanity to let the love of sin drive us to our own destruction? And yet that's precisely what we all do, unless GOD, in His mercy, takes the first step to reconcile us to Him by making us spiritually alive and giving us new hearts that desire to love and obey Him. Apart from this, we will remain forever separated from GOD (Ez. 36:25-27).

#### b) *Under GOD's Wrath*

One result of being spiritually dead and separated from GOD is that we fall under GOD's just condemnation. Born sinful, we are all headed toward eternal judgment from the time we enter this world (Ps. 51:5, 58:3; John 3:18). Even from a very young age, we are by nature enemies of GOD and demonstrate it through our sinful rebellion. "For the imagination [intent or thought] of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). As such, we consistently and steadfastly oppose GOD in our conduct, including our thoughts, words, and actions. "Dead in trespasses and sins", we are "children of disobedience" that follow the course (i.e., mindset, standards, values) of this world, guided and actuated by Satan's principles (Eph. 2:1-2). How appropriate it is that Scripture calls us "children of wrath," since our natural tendency to sin and rebel causes us to come under GOD's wrath. "We all had our conversation [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were *by nature* the *children of wrath*, even as others (Eph. 2:3; emphasis added). GOD, who is perfectly holy, hates all evil and is justly angered by our persistent sin and rebellion. "For the wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Is it any wonder that we, who are spiritually dead and evil by nature, should deserve GOD's righteous anger?

#### c) *Spiritually Blinded*

Though we are all under GOD's wrath, headed toward eternal judgment before we're saved, we seem almost oblivious and indifferent to our desperate plight. Unaware of the peril facing us, we just continue down the path that leads to our ultimate destruction.

And even if others warn us, amazingly, we still don't wake up out of our spiritual stupor and get serious about our soul. Though our conscience may bother us for a little while and even stir us up to some course of action (e.g., self-reform), our amendments are superficial and temporary at best. And it's just a matter of time before we're lulled back into a spiritual sleep again by the calming reassurances of the enemy, promising us that all is well and that we needn't worry. What's wrong with us? The Bible tells us that all unbelievers are spiritually blind or ignorant and live in "the vanity [futility] of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of GOD through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17-18).

This means that before we're saved, we cannot see or understand spiritual things clearly, since our minds are spiritually darkened by sin. It's as if we're looking through very dark, spiritual sunglasses that distort our sense of reality and spiritual perception. Specifically, we are unable to truly grasp how sinful we are, what judgment we face now and in eternity if we do not repent, and how utterly helpless we are to save ourselves. Spiritually dead and blind, we walk around like zombies in a hypnotic state, completely unaware of the spiritual dangers threatening us. Though we may be fully cognizant of the physical world and even keenly aware of potential physical threats, we are completely vulnerable when it comes to the spiritual realm. Like a man who cannot see that he is surrounded by deadly, poisonous snakes, we do not realize that we are continually surrounded by spiritual enemies, whose aim is to destroy us. While Satan is shooting his arrows at us left and right and setting traps all around us, we are totally oblivious to what's happening and act as if nothing is wrong.

What causes this spiritual blindness? First, spiritual blindness is something we're born with, as a result of being spiritually dead. However, there are also other factors that contribute to our spiritual blindness. One major factor is a lack of spiritual knowledge or not being properly instructed in the Word of GOD. We live in an age when fewer and fewer people are being taught the Bible and are, in fact, being actively discouraged from learning about GOD. Add to this the vast ignorance of Scripture and biblical doctrine (and practice) in many of our churches and the failure of most parents to pass down the knowledge of GOD to their children, and it is no surprise that so many people are spiritually blind. Ironically, spiritual ignorance is very prevalent today, though we have more spiritual resources (e.g. Bibles, sermons, tracts, biblical study aids, etc.) available to us now than we ever had before.

Though lack of biblical instruction contributes to spiritual ignorance, an even more important reason for spiritual blindness is simply our love of sin. Clinging to our cherished sins, we stubbornly refuse to believe or accept anything (e.g., GOD's truth) that would try to persuade us that sin is harmful and that we should give it up. It's like an addicted smoker with lung cancer, who has been clearly warned about the dangers of smoking, but persists in his destructive habit, refusing to believe that it will eventually lead to his death. Or it's like someone who denies that his unhealthy diet (i.e., overindulgence in the wrong foods) is a main factor that contributes to his chronic health problems (i.e., obesity, high blood pressure, heart problems, etc.), though, like the smoker, he has been repeatedly warned. In both cases, the cause for blindness or unbelief is not so much a lack of knowledge as it is an unwillingness to give up harmful addictions (i.e., smoking, unhealthy diet, etc.). Acknowledging the truth would make them feel compelled to give up their cherished idols, which they are reluctant to do. By choosing to remain blind and reject the truth, they try to justify or excuse their unhealthy lifestyle,

to their own destruction. Similarly, before salvation, we all stubbornly refuse to acknowledge GOD's truth, because we would rather remain in our spiritual blindness than give up our beloved sins. Our own love of sin then is another factor that contributes to our spiritual blindness (1 John 2:11).

Still another reason for spiritual blindness is Satan's deceptions. Since the fall of man, Satan has worked long and hard to deceive man in order to destroy him and also bring reproach upon GOD. "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and *Satan, which deceiveth the whole world...*" (Rev. 12:9; emphasis added). Just as the devil tempted Eve in the garden to distrust GOD by questioning His Word, he uses the same tactics today (Gen. 3:1-5). By maligning GOD's character, people (i.e., believers), and Word, Satan manages to place doubt in our minds regarding GOD's trustworthiness (Rev. 12:10). Using both subtle and overt means, Satan continually contradicts GOD's Word, encouraging a spirit of skepticism and unbelief. Naively, we succumb to Satan's lies and fall into his deadly trap. Instead of trusting GOD's Word at face value and simply obeying it, we question it, criticize it, and try to overrule it with our own wisdom, which really comes from Satan. Or worse, we twist GOD's Word by reinterpreting it to fit our own agenda and/or personal bias. Rejecting GOD's wisdom for our own, we set up our own standards and rules by which to govern ourselves. Like Israel in the days of the Judges, we do what's right in our own eyes, which amounts to foolishness (Judges 21:25). Ironically, we think we're on the right path, but in reality, we're headed for destruction. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25). Blinded by Satan's deceptions, we head down the broad and easy path marked "Heaven," but it really leads to hell.

Thus we see that being born spiritually dead, a lack of biblical instruction, our love of sin, and the devil's deceptions all contribute to our spiritual blindness. But now, what are some of the effects of spiritual blindness? As already mentioned, one of the main effects of spiritual blindness is a distorted perception of reality. Trapped in spiritual darkness and ignorance, we are incapable of seeing things as they really are. Deceived by Satan's lies and our own love of sin, our minds are clouded to the truth and prejudiced by evil, so that we have difficulty distinguishing between right and wrong. As a result, we reject the truth and embrace error. This is especially true in spiritual matters. Before GOD opens our eyes, we don't believe or accept His Word, because our minds are held captive by a spiritual stronghold. Again, it's as if we see through dark, tainted glasses that obscure and distort the truth. It's not until GOD's Spirit enlightens us, that we can more fully grasp GOD's truth beyond a superficial level. Left in our spiritually darkened condition, though, we cannot and will not accept or receive GOD's truth. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of GOD: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

This distorted perception and inability to discern truth can also be seen in our reversal of priorities and values from what is reasonable and rational. Amazingly, we esteem what is of little worth (i.e., the temporary things of this world) but have virtually no appreciation for what is of infinite worth (i.e., the eternal things of GOD). With such distorted values, it naturally follows that our priorities are also upside-down. Ranking GOD at the bottom of our priority list, we, in essence, pass up what is far superior – GOD – and settle for what is vastly inferior – this world. Like an undiscerning child, who prefers a toy ring worth only cents to an authentic diamond ring worth thousands of dollars, we choose this world with its passing pleasures over GOD and His eternal riches. Why? In

our natural (unsaved, spiritually lost) state, aided by the devil's deception, we are incapable of recognizing or appreciating GOD's magnificent glory, either in His divine attributes or in His gracious offer of salvation through JESUS CHRIST. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world [the devil] 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 Cor. 4:3-4). Though GOD's glory (e.g., holiness, love, mercy, wisdom, justice, power, etc.) is clearly visible to the unbiased eye and shines brighter than the sun, we are blind to His infinite beauty and splendor.

Not only are we spiritually blinded to GOD's glory, but we are also blinded to the true condition of our own hearts. Biased by our own pride and self-love, we fail to see the true nature or extent of our sin. Though, like many people, we can admit we're sinners, this is more often a mere acknowledgment of general human imperfection than it is a true confession of our sin and failure to meet GOD's holy, perfect standard. Sadly, we do not see the depth or extremity of our sin, that is, just how wicked our hearts are. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9) Nor do we see our desperate plight as sinners bound for eternal judgment. Like a man unaware of his terminal cancer, we are oblivious to the spiritual cancer (sin) within our hearts that is leading us toward our destruction. Blinded by self-conceit, we think we're pretty good, when compared to others around us. Instead of using others as our benchmark, though, we should compare ourselves to GOD, who is perfectly holy, and use His perfect law as our standard of measurement. Then, we would begin to get a clearer picture of how sinful our hearts are. But even that is still not enough to show us the true condition of our hearts. GOD must first perform a miraculous work of grace in our hearts before we can even begin to see our sin the way GOD sees it – ugly, loathsome, and detestable. Without GOD's graciously granting us spiritual sight and shining the light of His truth in our spiritually darkened hearts, we cannot see ourselves as we really are (2 Cor. 4:6). And until we're humbled and see our utter unworthiness before GOD, we cannot begin to truly recognize or appreciate the infinite beauty and worth of GOD.

In summary, our spiritual blindness prevents us from seeing the truth about GOD, eternal things, this world, and our own helpless condition as lost sinners. As a result, we spurn GOD's love and reject our only hope of salvation – JESUS CHRIST. The only way out of this spiritual darkness is to be delivered by GOD's grace. Only His power can overcome our spiritual ignorance and open our eyes so that we can understand, believe, and receive the truth. "The shining of GOD's light in our hearts partially and gradually dissipates the awful ignorance, blindness, error, prejudice, and unbelief of our souls, thereby preparing the mind to (in measure) apprehend the Truth and the affections to embrace it. By this supernatural illumination, the soul is enabled to see things as they really are (1 Cor. 2:10-12), perceiving his own depravity, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the spirituality of the Law, the excellency of truth, the beauty of holiness, the loveliness of CHRIST."<sup>24</sup> Has GOD opened your spiritual eyes?

#### d) *Spiritually Enslaved*

##### i) Slaves to Satan

In addition to spiritual blindness, another characteristic of spiritual death is spiritual bondage. What are we in bondage to? First, we are spiritual slaves of Satan. Born in

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<sup>24</sup> Pink, Arthur. *Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. XXVI, Feb. 1947, No. 2, p. 26

sin, we begin life as Satan's subjects, imprisoned in his spiritual kingdom of darkness. Like the rest of the world (i.e., unbelievers), we are under Satan's power and dominion (Acts 26:18; Eph. 2:2, 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 John 3:10, 5:19). Though GOD reigns supremely in the universe and is sovereign over all creation, for His mysterious and unknown purposes, He has allowed Satan to temporarily rule the world. However, once GOD has accomplished His plan, according to His perfect timing, JESUS will return to conquer the earth, destroy Satan's kingdom, and establish His own kingdom in its place. Until that time, Satan has been permitted by GOD to act as the "ruler of this world" and "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31, 14:30).

Thus, from the time we're born, we remain trapped in the kingdom of darkness, unless GOD mercifully rescues us and brings us into His kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Note, there is no neutral territory or realm between Satan's and GOD's kingdoms, where we are autonomous, free agents, existing independently. We are either in Satan's kingdom or GOD's kingdom. There is no place in-between. Though we think we govern our own lives before we're saved, *Satan* is really at the helm directing things (under the limitations and restraints set by GOD). Unknown to us, Satan leads us around like dogs on a leash or puppets on a string. As his spiritual slaves, Satan has a powerful influence over our thoughts and decisions and can easily persuade us to do his will. He merely suggests some idea, and we accept it as our own. Or he tempts us to sin, and we eagerly perform it. He commands, and we obey – quite willingly. In our spiritually darkened condition, our blind and sinful hearts yield readily to Satan and offer very little resistance, if any, though it is to our own destruction. Little do we know that what keeps us spiritually bound to Satan is our own love of sin. If we were to simply let go of our sin by putting our trust in JESUS and repenting of our sins, Satan would no longer have power over us, and we could be set free. But are we able to let go of our sin?

## ii) Slaves to Sin

The answer is, of course, "No" – that is, not in our own power. Just as we are spiritually enslaved to Satan before salvation, we are also enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:6-7; 12-14; 16-20). "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant [slave] of sin" (John 8:34). "Know ye not that, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). As slaves of sin, we follow the natural bent of our evil hearts, giving in regularly and habitually to our sinful desires. We are "foolish, disobedient, deceived, *serv*ing various lusts and pleasures..." (Titus 3:3; emphasis added). Ironically, we think we are free before we're saved, but in reality, we are in bondage to our own sinful lusts and desires. "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption [sin]: for of whom a man is overcome [namely, sin], of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Pet. 2:19).

As with Satan, sin is our master, and we willingly yield to its power, offering little resistance. Why? Ultimately, it's because we *love* our sin and are so attached to it that we don't want to give it up. Sin is like a close friend or relative that we are reluctant to part with or like an arm or leg that, without painful surgery to remove it, remains permanently intact and an integral part of us. Before GOD radically changes our hearts and removes the veil from our eyes, we are friends, and not enemies, to sin. Instead of battling and opposing sin as our mortal enemy, we invite it into our homes and families. Spiritually blinded, we do not recognize the dangers of sin, thus laying ourselves open to the enemy's attacks.

### iii) Sin's Powerful Appeal

One reason we do not see the danger of sin before we're saved is that we have been deceived and held captive by sin's luster and promise of pleasure and satisfaction. Let's be honest - to the unregenerate heart and mind, sin can be quite enjoyable and enticing. Anything that feeds or indulges the flesh (i.e., carnal appetite, lust, covetousness, pride, selfishness, etc.) is seen as something desirable and feasted on. If sin were not desirable and pleasurable, it would not be so appealing and have so much power over us. Though sin promises pleasure to its unsuspecting victims, its pleasure is both deceptive and harmful, much like poisoned candy or bait on a hook. In other words, sin has a price - death! However, despite its dangers, sin has such a powerful attraction that we find it very hard to resist. Like a huge magnet, sin draws us toward it. And instead of fighting it, we head straight for it! Amazingly, we don't need to be compelled or even persuaded to come. Intoxicated by sin's pleasure, we come quite willingly, like dumb sheep led to the slaughter.

Sadly, even after we're saved, we can still be tempted by sin, though thankfully, not to the same extent or in the same way as before we're saved. What accounts for this difference? First, if we're believers, we have the ability, by GOD's grace, to resist sin, unlike unbelievers, because we are no longer spiritually dead, but alive (Rom. 6; Eph. 2:1-5). This means we are neither spiritually blind nor enslaved to sin. As such, we do not downplay sin's seriousness or view it as something harmless. Instead, we see sin for what it really is - a deadly enemy that must be defeated. Additionally, sin does not dominate our hearts as it does unbelievers' hearts. While *sin* reigns in unbelievers' hearts, *GOD* reigns in believers' hearts. This enables believers to fight against sin and not be continually victimized. Secondly, with GOD's Spirit residing in them and a new nature, believers love righteousness and hate sin. They hate sin, because it acts contrary to their renewed minds and hearts that seek to please and obey GOD. Thus, there is a continual battle between their remaining corruption and their new nature (Rom. 7:15-25; Gal. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:11). And though they may sometimes fail and succumb to temptation, committing even grievous sins at times, it is not with the same frequency, degree, or intensity as with unbelievers. In other words, they do not actively pursue sin, delight in sin with a passion, or continue in an unbroken pattern or habit of sin. Through the Spirit's convicting power and chastening, believers eventually sorrow over their sin and repent - not just for sin's consequences (i.e., punishment), but also for its great offense toward GOD and its hindrance to close fellowship with Him. Third, having been radically transformed from within, true believers strive to grow spiritually, being increasingly conformed to CHRIST's image, which is perfect holiness (Eph. 1:4, 4:24; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, they view any obstacle to that goal, namely sin, negatively and as something that must be eradicated (2 Cor. 7:1; Gal 5:24; Rom. 6:12). Additionally, the more believers become like CHRIST, the more they love what CHRIST loves (holiness) and hate what CHRIST hates (sin). Thus, far from delighting in and pursuing sin as unbelievers do, true believers view sin as both a deadly enemy and a barrier to their spiritual growth and communion with GOD. In their heart of hearts, they hate sin and want to be rid of it, though they often struggle with temptation. Like the apostle Paul, they long for the day when they will no longer have to battle sin and have the final victory over it in glory (Rom. 7:24-25).

#### iv) Addiction to Sin

In contrast, unbelievers do not engage in spiritual warfare against sin or try to resist it, because they love their sin and are addicted to it. They are so addicted to sin that it's impossible for them to stop sinning or break free from sin's power in their own strength. And this does not just include hardened criminals, drug addicts, or alcoholics. *Everyone* is addicted or enslaved to sin (before they're saved), with no exceptions. Even believers, who are no longer "addicted" or enslaved to sin, still struggle with their remaining corruption and must confess their sins regularly. Thus, if it's a challenge for believers to resist sin, how much harder must it be for unbelievers, who are still in spiritual bondage and held captive by sin?

This should show you just how *powerful* sin is. In fact, sin is so powerful that *no* one, not even the most mature Christian, can go *one single day* without any kind of sin (whether in thoughts, words, or actions). Does this sound incredible? To demonstrate this, just look at your own life – whether you're saved or not. Are you able to go one whole day without sinning at all (taking into account all your thoughts, motives, words, and actions)? That is, can you manage to spend an entire day without any complaining at all; negative or unkind words or thoughts; impatience or irritation; the slightest dishonesty; engaging in gossip or slander; discontentment; anger; resentment; selfishness; pride; boasting; critical or judgmental thoughts of others; self-pity; worries or fretting; procrastination or laziness; sinful or inappropriate jesting/joking; self-indulgence or lack of self-control (e.g., in eating, drinking, spending, etc.); lusting or coveting the things of this world? If you managed, by some miracle, to pass that test, don't stop there. Sin doesn't just include doing what GOD *forbids*, but also failing to do what GOD *commands*. True obedience includes not only avoiding the negative (sin, evil), but also pursuing the positive (righteousness, holiness). Knowing that, can you also, for one day, love GOD with *all* your heart, soul, mind, and strength; make Him the highest priority; commune with Him in frequent prayer and meditation in His Word; strive to know Him better and become more like Him in holiness; fervently serve and obey Him out of love and gratitude; totally submit yourself to His will; love others the way you love yourself; humbly confess your sins and forgive every offense committed against you; and use every opportunity to glorify GOD and seek the benefit of others with an attitude of perfect love, joy, peace, and humility? If you're honest, you'll admit that it is impossible to go even *one day* without sinning.<sup>25</sup>

No matter how hard we try, we can never keep GOD's law perfectly or cease from sinning. Even if we manage, by GOD's grace, to avoid gross or scandalous sins (e.g., sexual immorality, drunkenness, theft, murder, etc.), one area we all fail in *daily* is to love GOD with our whole being and to truly love our neighbors as ourselves. And since very few, if any, can possibly understand *all* of GOD's law perfectly (i.e., both in its meaning and application) and we are often unconscious of our own motives, we also regularly commit sins of ignorance. Add to this our normal sins of commission and omission (i.e., when we know to do something good but don't do it), and we have a myriad of sins to confess and repent of every day.

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<sup>25</sup> Knowing that we're incapable of perfection does not mean that we should just continue sinning with impunity, because clearly, this is wrong, and we are still obligated to keep GOD's law, though it cannot save us. We are accountable for all our decisions and actions before GOD.

Knowing that it's impossible to stop sinning, even for one day, clearly demonstrates that we are all addicted or enslaved to sin before we're saved. And as sin-addicts, we can never be truly good or effectively reform ourselves on our own (Jer. 13:23). Though our dull conscience may at times convict us of sin and make us feel guilty, so that we can curb certain sins for a while, the feeling soon passes, and we just go right back to where we were before. Like a pig that returns to wallowing in the mud or a dog that returns to its own vomit, we eventually return to the filth of our own sin. No matter how hard we try, we can never break free from our addiction to sin in our own strength. As long as our hearts are dominated by sin, we will just continue in an unbroken pattern or cycle of sin, becoming increasingly worse over time, until sin finally destroys us. Sin's power over us is too strong and its enticements too alluring for us to overcome on our own. Only GOD, who is all-powerful, can rescue us from sin's grip. He must perform radical surgery on our hearts to remove the love of sin before we can desire to be set free from sin. And He must open our eyes before we can see sin as our enemy and actively oppose it. Without GOD, we will just continue in our addiction to sin, giving further evidence of our spiritual bondage.

#### v) Total Bondage to Sin

Even more proof of our spiritual bondage can be seen in just how much sin governs our hearts. To be born spiritually dead or in sin means that every faculty of our being (e.g., heart, soul, mind, and will) is in some way dominated and controlled by sin. In other words, there is no part of us left untainted or untouched by sin.<sup>26</sup> What does this mean in practical terms? Though, technically, we have a "free will" to choose between right and wrong, before GOD transforms our hearts, we do not *choose* what is truly good (including seeking after GOD, believing in Him, and repenting of our sins), because we do not really *want* to (John 3:19-20). In other words, it's not just our *inability*, but also our *unwillingness or lack of desire*, to choose good that causes us to prefer sin and evil.

The key factor is our *heart* (i.e., the seat of our emotions and desires), and not just our *will* (i.e., the part of us that chooses or makes decisions). Under spiritual bondage, our heart is so corrupted by sin that it does not naturally *desire* what is good. And since our corrupt heart influences our will, we choose to do evil and not good. In other words, if our hearts were good, our wills would choose to do what is good, but since our hearts are evil, our wills choose to sin. In essence, then, we do not have a free will in the truest or fullest sense, because our wills are influenced by our hearts, which are, in turn, controlled by sin. If you can imagine, it's sort of like we're prisoners who, if we could access the key that would unlock our prison doors, we would choose to remain imprisoned, because our hearts are so attached to the things (i.e., the things of this world, sinful pleasures) within that prison cell that we are unwilling to leave. What good is the "key" or "free will" if our hearts prevent us from using it because of our attachment to sin? As long as our hearts are in spiritual bondage to sin, we will not choose what is truly good (as GOD defines it). Unlike us, Adam and Eve, before the fall, had a perfectly free will to choose between good and evil, because their hearts were not influenced or corrupted by sin. We, on the other hand, have sinful hearts that control our wills, and thus we do not have total and unbiased freedom to choose between good and evil, as Adam and Eve once had. How does this affect us in the end?

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<sup>26</sup> This complete influence of sin over a person, known as "total" depravity, does not mean that we are as wicked as possible and is distinguishable from "utter" depravity, a condition marked by the performance of almost every conceivable sin

### e) Spiritually Powerless

Since sin affects every aspect of our being, including our heart, mind, and will, we are left totally helpless spiritually. Thus, we are completely powerless to save ourselves. To better grasp this, we must have a clearer understanding of what it means to be born spiritually dead. Though many who profess to be Christians acknowledge that we are born spiritually dead (i.e., with a sin nature), there seems to be a lot of confusion as to what this really means. The common belief today, based on Arminianism<sup>27</sup>, views man more as spiritually *sick* and *weak* than as *dead* and *helpless*, when it comes to salvation. However, this contradicts the whole biblical teaching on human depravity and the sin nature. The Bible clearly teaches that we are born spiritually dead (“And you being *dead* in your sins...” (Col. 2:13; emphasis added)), destitute of all spiritual life and power, and that we are born in total depravity or sin with *nothing* good in us *whatsoever* (Rom. 3:10-18; Eph. 2:1-3; Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; Gen. 6:5; Job 15:14-16; Prov. 20:9; Is. 64:6). “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl. 7:20). “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are *full of evil*; madness is in their hearts while they live” (Eccl. 9:3; emphasis added). Describing the natural human condition, JESUS said, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23). Scripture also teaches that we are completely *incapable of understanding or accepting spiritual things* in our natural state, so that it is impossible for us to choose salvation without GOD’s first regenerating us (John 3:3-8, 6:63, 14:17). “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of GOD: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Thus, we are unable and unwilling to choose what is good or righteous, such as believing in CHRIST or repenting of sins, apart from GOD’s grace. If we were born with even the slightest amount of goodness or spiritual capability with which to believe in CHRIST and repent of our sins, then we could credit ourselves with contributing to our salvation. And if we could contribute even the smallest bit to our salvation, then salvation would be by works and not by grace (Rom. 11:6). (GOD forbid!)

Because this subject relates directly to salvation, it is critical to understand what it means to be born spiritually dead – that our hearts are so spiritually darkened by sin that we are *totally powerless* to save ourselves, even in the slightest way. Though this is very humbling, we need to be brought down very low in our estimation of ourselves and have all our self-confidence shattered, so that we can recognize the extreme depth of our sin and total absence of all goodness within our hearts. Until then, we cannot truly appreciate or see the need for the grace of GOD offered to us through CHRIST’s redemption. To illustrate, if we see our sin as only a slight cut or bruise, we will not be overly concerned about our condition or sense an urgent need for a strong remedy. We will think that all we need is a bandage to patch up our minor wound. Thus, the grace offered to us through JESUS’ atonement on the cross will not be truly appreciated or seen as necessary. However, if we perceive our sin more accurately and clearly as a very serious injury that will prove fatal if not attended, we will sense our desperate need for help and appreciate the remedy (JESUS) much more. Thus, you can see the utter importance of recognizing our true spiritual condition (i.e., our spiritual deadness, total depravity, and complete helplessness) before we can see our need for a Savior.

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<sup>27</sup> See Endnote E

Contrary to popular opinion, we are not born with a clean slate or even a partially sinful heart. Our hearts are not *partially* controlled and influenced by sin, allowing us a little bit of spiritual light and ability to seek after GOD and righteousness. Rather, our hearts are *fully* controlled and influenced by sin. Having a sin nature means that we enter this world "totally" depraved or wicked, with not one ounce of goodness or righteousness that we can count as our own. "There is none righteous, no, not one...there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10, 12). "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Righteousness is completely foreign and external to us and is only made possible *after* GOD regenerates us.

Thus, void of any real virtue, we are *unable* and *unwilling* to do anything good, such as coming to GOD for salvation.<sup>28</sup> Our spiritually blackened hearts, which are completely controlled and saturated by sin, cannot desire what is good or righteous. It goes against our sinful nature that loves sin and tends toward evil. To expect an unregenerate person, whose natural inclination is to do evil, to desire what is good (e.g., salvation) is as impossible as expecting a lion to prefer vegetables over meat. Without a radical heart change (i.e., the new birth), we will *never* seek after GOD on our own, put our trust in Him, or repent (i.e., turn away from sin and pursue righteousness). GOD must first replace our old hearts that love sin with new hearts that love Him, before we will truly desire what is good. Left to ourselves, our hearts are so dead spiritually and dominated by sin that even given an infinite number of opportunities, we would still cling to our sin and perish rather than choose salvation.

Are you beginning to see just how utterly powerless and helpless we are to save ourselves? In every sense of the word, we are spiritually dead – dead (i.e., insensible, unaware, indifferent) to GOD and all spiritual good and dead in sins with no means at all of recovering ourselves spiritually. Just as Lazarus did not have the power to raise himself from the dead or respond to JESUS' call until JESUS first gave him life, so we cannot resurrect ourselves spiritually and respond to GOD's invitation to be saved without GOD first giving us spiritual life (John 11:38-44). Like Lazarus in the grave, we are not spiritually *sick* or *weak*, but spiritually *dead*, and thus totally incapable of doing anything in the way of salvation (Eph. 2:5). "And you hath he quickened [made alive], who were *dead in trespasses and sins*" (Eph. 2:1; emphasis added). GOD, who alone has the power to quicken us (i.e., give us spiritual life), must take the first step by regenerating us and giving us the gifts of faith and repentance, before we can respond positively to the gospel call and be saved (Acts 11:18, 13:48; 2 Tim. 2:25).

Without GOD's taking the initiative in renewing our hearts, none of us would truly seek after Him in order to be saved. Scripture clearly states, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after GOD" (Rom. 3:11). There are no exceptions. That's how spiritually dead we are. Naturally, we are not truly interested in knowing GOD or pursuing after spiritual things. Our hearts are cold and unresponsive to GOD. In fact, more than indifference, we are opposed to GOD and have a natural aversion to true righteousness. "The carnal mind is *enmity* against GOD: for it is not subject to the law of GOD, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). GOD must first overcome our natural resis-

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<sup>28</sup> Though many claim they want to be saved, quite often it's simply a superficial desire for the benefits of salvation, e.g., eternal life and riches in Heaven, escape from eternal judgment, etc., rather than a sincere desire to be radically transformed by GOD, live in total surrender to Him, and know Him in an intimate relationship.

tance to Him before we can come to Him willingly. Thus, those who do take an interest in GOD only evidence GOD's prior grace working in their hearts to make them receptive to Him. GOD's grace must always *precede* any spiritual interest or awakening, because spiritually dead hearts, which are controlled by sin, are *incapable* of doing anything good, such as seeking after GOD or responding positively to His invitation.

Put another way, GOD must mercifully choose to open our spiritual eyes and heart *before* we can truly believe in Him. An example of this is the case of Lydia in the book of Acts. Before she gave serious attention to the gospel and accepted it, GOD had to *first* open her heart to make her willing to receive the gospel. Notice the order. "A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped GOD, heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things* which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14; emphasis added). Like Lydia, none of us has the inborn ability or desire to believe the gospel and repent until GOD first softens our naturally hardened hearts. Faith and repentance are not *inherent*, but *external* abilities given to us by GOD at the time of regeneration.

GOD's Word clearly teaches that both faith and repentance are *alien* to us and must come from *without*. They are, in fact, *gifts* of GOD given to those whom He *sovereignly chose* to save before the foundation of the world (Acts 18:27; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim 2:25-26).<sup>29</sup> "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were *ordained to eternal life believed*" (Acts 13:48; emphasis added). As this verse indicates, only those who were previously ordained or chosen to be saved by GOD's grace believed the gospel. In Eph. 2:8-9 ("For by grace are ye saved through *faith*; and *that not of yourselves*: it is the *gift* of GOD: not of works, lest any man should boast" (emphasis added)), few realize that not only *salvation* is a gift of GOD, but also *faith* itself. If that were not so, someone might have reason to boast, claiming that it was *his* faith that saved him, instead of GOD's grace alone. Though faith is certainly the *means* or *instrument* by which GOD saves us, it is not the *ultimate cause* or *source* of our salvation. GOD's grace alone is the true cause. Just as a painting cannot be attributed to the artist's tool (e.g., paintbrush), but rather to the painter himself, so salvation cannot truly be traced to our faith, the mere tool of GOD, but rather to the author of faith Himself - GOD. This, in no way, negates the need to exercise faith in salvation, since this is clearly scriptural and GOD's chosen means to save us (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:28; 5:1). However, in salvation the emphasis should be placed on GOD and not on us. We must not believe that our salvation is due to *any* effort of our own, not even our faith or decision to follow CHRIST. It's essential that we realize that *all* (i.e., 100%) of our salvation is of GOD and not of ourselves. We don't even contribute one percent through our faith, since that also originates from GOD. GOD grants faith at the time of regeneration or the new birth through the instrumentality of His Spirit and Word (Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:23; Titus 3:5). Thus, faith is the *result* and not the *cause* of the new spiritual birth promised under the New Covenant (Ez. 36:26-27).

Like faith, repentance is external to the unregenerate man and is given by GOD to those whom He chooses. "When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified GOD, saying, Then hath GOD also to the Gentiles *granted repentance* unto life" (Acts

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<sup>29</sup> For further references on GOD's sovereign election, see Eph. 1:4-5, 11; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 8:29, 9:11-13, 15-22; 11:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; John 1:12, 6:37, 44, 65; 1 Cor. 1:26-29

11:18; emphasis added). "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if GOD peradventure [perhaps] will *give them repentance* to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25; emphasis added). In both verses, it is clear that the ability to repent of sins is not natural to man, but must be granted by GOD's grace. Like faith, we must exercise repentance before we can be saved. However, we must not think, even subconsciously, that our repentance (or faith) is the true or ultimate deciding factor in our salvation. Obviously, the final decision lies with GOD as to whether we will be saved or not, since He must first choose to regenerate us and give us a new heart that is able to believe and repent before we can be saved. We cannot come to Him and believe on our own unless He first gives us spiritual life and draws us to Him. "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:65).

If we are saved, it was not ultimately due to *our* decision or will, but *GOD's* will. His Word clearly states that we "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, *nor of the will of man, but of GOD*" (John 1:13; emphasis added). "So then it is *not of him that willeth*, nor of him that runneth, *but of GOD* that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16; emphasis added). We are not born again by our will (i.e., our decision to believe and repent), but by GOD's sovereign will, based on His *grace alone* and not on any of our foreseen works or decisions (Rom. 9:11-13). GOD said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). GOD decides who will be saved based on His grace alone and not on anything we do, according to His sovereign plan made before the world began. "He hath *chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having *predestinated us* unto the adoption of children by JESUS CHRIST to himself, according to the *good pleasure of his will*, to the *praise of the glory of his grace*...(Eph. 1:4-6; emphasis added). Notice, we are chosen according to the "good pleasure of *his will*", not our own will, and "to the praise of the glory of *his grace*", not to the praise of our effort or works, including our decisions. Clearly, GOD, who is sovereign over absolutely *everything*, is the one who truly controls salvation in the end, not man. If the final decision in salvation were left to man, man would be sovereign and not GOD (GOD forbid!). Not only that, no one would ever be saved, because without GOD's quickening/regenerating power, spiritually dead people could never resurrect themselves spiritually and respond to GOD's call by believing and repenting.

Thankfully, GOD did not decide to let all of mankind perish, though we certainly deserve this and it would've been perfectly just had He simply left us all in our sin and allowed us to go our own way. But instead, He chose to mercifully save some of us, His elect<sup>30</sup>, though He was not obligated to save anyone, in order to show us His matchless love and grace. If you are one of those privileged few, whom GOD elected before the foundation of the world to be a part of His special, chosen people, be amazed at His infinite love and grace shown toward you. And be forever grateful that when GOD looked down at all of humanity and saw you drowning in the same mire of sin as everybody else, that He had pity on you and dragged you up out of it, though you did not ask or seek for it and though you were no better or more deserving than anyone else. Not only that, He chose you, even though He knew ahead of time just how evil you would be (and what your full potential for evil would be, if He did not restrain you) and that you would spurn His love

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<sup>30</sup> See Endnote F

and reject Him on your own. No one apart from GOD can love like that. That is truly divine grace.

What conclusion can we draw from all of this? If even our very faith and repentance are gifts of GOD, given to us by His grace alone, we cannot credit ourselves with the *slightest* contribution to our salvation.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, GOD deserves *all* the praise, because from beginning to end, salvation is *totally* a work of GOD, initiated and completed by Him. "No flesh should glory in his presence," but "he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:29, 31). To acknowledge that GOD authors *all* of salvation and that we contribute absolutely *nothing*, though, is very humbling to the pride of man that naturally seeks some sort of praise or credit in the work of salvation. Even if we secretly think, "It was *my* free-will or *my* faith or *my* repentance or *my* decision that saved me," we are robbing GOD of his glory. We must recognize GOD's total sovereignty in salvation and renounce all trust in human self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, self-reliance, self-determination, etc. In other words, GOD wants us to give up our pride, self-confidence, and dependence on ourselves. Like Job, we need to fall on our faces before GOD and humbly confess that we are vile creatures with nothing at all to offer GOD in the way of personal merit or worth. We should see ourselves realistically as beggars who are spiritually bankrupt (i.e., devoid of any goodness) and totally powerless to save ourselves. In every sense, we are *completely* dependent upon GOD's grace *alone* to save us.

Let me ask you - Have you been humbled to the point yet where you can see your utter sinfulness and unworthiness before GOD and like the apostle Paul, exclaim, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24)? Or like Job, have you come to the bottom of yourself and see yourself as nothing before GOD? Can you honestly cry out in self-disgust, "I abhor [despise, hate] myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6)? Moreover, do you truly see yourself as totally helpless spiritually and incapable of contributing anything to your salvation? In other words, have you ceased to trust yourself in *anything*? If so, this is evidence that GOD is working in your heart and that you are not far from the kingdom of GOD.

### 3) Eternal Judgment

If, on the other hand, you are still trusting in yourself to get you into the kingdom of GOD, this is a sign that you do not belong to GOD and are still spiritually dead, living in sin, and separated from GOD. If left in this spiritually darkened condition until you die, where will you end up? Unless GOD mercifully saves you, you will suffer forever in a terrifying place of eternal judgment called "*hell*". Don't be mistaken or let anyone deceive you. Hell is a very real place – not a myth. And yes, hell lasts forever! Not a million years or even a billion years – but forever (Rev. 20:10, 2 Thess. 1:9)! Once you die and go to hell, it's permanent. Your eternal destiny is fixed and unalterable. Though GOD mercifully grants you many opportunities to be saved and avoid eternal judgment while you're still alive, after you die, it is too late. There are no second chances!

What makes hell even more horrible and terrifying is that it is a place of eternal *punishment*, where GOD, in His justice, pours out His wrath upon all unrepentant sinners. Unlike what some teach, contrary to Scripture, hell is not a mere waiting or interim

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<sup>31</sup> GOD's sovereignty in salvation does not negate our responsibility to act on the gifts of faith and repentance given to us at the time of regeneration. Once GOD has given us spiritual life and overcomes our natural resistance and aversion to Him, we must respond in faith by believing in CHRIST as our Lord and Savior and repenting of our sins in order to be justified or saved.

place, where souls can work off their sins. Nor is it a state of non-existence, where souls simply cease to exist after death. Hell is an inescapable prison and place of eternal torment reserved for GOD's enemies – not only the devil and his angels, but all that die without CHRIST, who while they lived: 1) repeatedly rebelled against GOD's authority and would not submit to Him; 2) readily received His gifts (e.g., life, food, clothing, home, security, health, love of family/friends, earthly pleasures, etc.), yet showed no gratitude; 3) despised His patience and kindness; 4) denied His truth and refused to obey His law; and 5) worst of all, trampled upon His grace by rejecting His Son JESUS CHRIST. Deserving of GOD's just condemnation, these rebels receive His full vengeance and wrath for their sins.

And what is GOD's wrath like? Scripture describes it as a consuming fire that cannot be quenched (Matt. 3:12; Heb. 12:29). Repeatedly, the Bible depicts hell as a place of unquenchable or unceasing fire. We're told that anyone not found in the book of life on the Day of Judgment will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). Those who go to hell will suffer there by being "tormented with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 14:10). And in the book of Revelations, we're told that all of GOD's enemies will "have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8). JESUS provided an even clearer picture of GOD's wrath through his repeated warnings concerning hell. He said it would be far better to be disabled or lose a part of your body (e.g., arm, foot, eye) than to be "cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:45-46). He described hell as a "furnace of fire," where there is "wailing and gnashing of teeth" and where sinners are "punished with everlasting destruction" (Matt. 13:42; 2 Thess. 1:9). Interestingly, JESUS spoke more of hell than He did of Heaven. Could He have done this to emphasize the extreme horrors of hell so that His listeners (including us) would be warned and avoid it at all costs?

It's difficult to imagine just how terrible and frightening hell is. But if even demons, who are powerful, supernatural beings, tremble at the thought of suffering forever in hell, how much more should mere mortals fear? The Bible describes hell as a place of extreme torture, anguish, terror, darkness, isolation, and endless pain. The misery and agony suffered in hell is extreme – so extreme that it is absolutely unbearable and beyond description. Hell is like your worst nightmare come true, but with this main difference - you can never wake up out of it. Even if you were locked up in the darkest dungeon on earth in total seclusion, suffering under the worst kind of torture, or you were experiencing excruciating pain while dying from some terminal illness, this would still not compare to hell<sup>32</sup>. And even if you could multiply that experience by a billion times, it would still not come close to what you would suffer in hell. This is a very sobering thought!

What makes hell even worse is that there are absolutely no breaks, but there is just continual, non-stop suffering. Souls in hell are tormented "day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). And "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have *no rest day nor night...*" (Rev. 14:11; emphasis added). At least on earth, there are seasons of rest and some degree of comfort and relief given to those who suffer, even under the most dire circumstances and intolerable pain. But in hell, there is *never* any rest or peace. Since those in hell are forever separated from GOD, they no longer receive the benefits of His common grace that they once enjoyed on earth and took for granted. While they still lived, they experienced GOD's goodness and mercy

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<sup>32</sup> See Endnote G

shown to all His creatures (e.g., life, food, water, shelter, health, protection, sunlight, love of family and friends, earthly comforts and pleasures, etc.). But in hell there is a total absence of GOD's kindness and love. Thus, they do not experience any amount of mercy, comfort, or relief there. Truly, hell is a place of utter hopelessness. What makes hell even more hopeless is that there is no way of escape. Once you are condemned to hell, there is no way out! Let this terrifying reality sink in. Hell lasts forever!

Knowing this, it is a great mercy of GOD that He repeatedly warns us to turn away from our sin and turn toward Him, so that we may escape eternal punishment in hell. He sends messengers and messages (like this tract) to warn us of the wrath and judgment to come, if only we will listen and heed His warning. GOD is so merciful and unwilling to see us suffer that He even pleads with us to repent of our sins, as a loving father would plead with his son to stop heading down the path of destruction. "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die...?" (Ez. 18:30-31). Thus, those who repeatedly reject GOD's merciful appeals by refusing to bow the knee to CHRIST and accept His offer of grace only evidence their just condemnation when they suffer the eternal consequences of their own sinful choices. They cannot blame GOD and accuse Him of injustice or lack of mercy, since He gives them plenty of opportunities to repent of their sins and avoid eternal judgment.

Far from desiring the punishment of the wicked, GOD is very merciful and does not wish to see anyone suffer or perish. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez. 33:11). GOD does not willingly punish sinners. "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (Lam. 3:33). In understanding this, it's helpful to remember that GOD, who is perfectly balanced in all His attributes, is both just and merciful. Though GOD is holy and just and therefore must punish sin, He is also a loving and merciful Savior that rejoices over every sinner that repents (Matt. 18:13-14; Luke 15:7, 10). In fact, GOD desires that all would be saved (though paradoxically, He knows this will not happen) (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Scripture tells us that GOD "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Because GOD is so merciful and would rather save than condemn us, He does not leave us hopeless, but offers us a way of escape from the eternal punishment we deserve. What is that *one* way of escape?

## ***D. Who is JESUS CHRIST?***

### ***1. JESUS the GOD-Man***

JESUS CHRIST is the *one and only* way we can escape eternal judgment (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). According to GOD's sovereign plan made before the world began, GOD sent His only Son (JESUS CHRIST) from Heaven to earth to act on our behalf as our Savior (John 3:13, 17; 5:36-38; 16:27-28; 1 Pet. 1:19-20). JESUS, who is Himself GOD (the second Person in the Trinity) and possessor of all divine attributes, existed from all eternity with GOD the Father and GOD the Holy Spirit (John 17:24; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:7, 20, 8:23; Micah 5:2)<sup>33</sup>. "In the beginning was the Word [JESUS], and the Word was with GOD, and the Word was GOD. The same was in the beginning with GOD" (John 1:1-2). Attesting to His deity and pre-existence in Heaven, JESUS said, "And now,

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<sup>33</sup> For further Scriptures referencing JESUS' deity, see the tract "JESUS is GOD".

O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee *before the world was*" (John 17:5; emphasis added). As "King of kings" and Divine Ruler over the universe, JESUS enjoyed all the royal benefits, honors, and privileges of Heaven (1 Tim. 6:14-16; Rev. 19:16). Yet He willingly humbled Himself and became poor for our sake, giving up His magnificent glory and riches in Heaven (for a season), in order to become a man (Phil. 2:5-8). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Though JESUS became a man, He still retained all of His divine attributes and was no less divine than before He became a man (1 Tim. 3:16, Col. 3:15-17). "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:8-9). JESUS was, and still is, fully GOD and fully man. He is the unique GOD-Man. Miraculously conceived in a virgin (Mary) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:31-35), JESUS was not only born a man (with a human body and soul), but He was also born perfect without a sin nature (Luke 1:35).

## 2. JESUS' Purpose for Coming to the Earth

What was JESUS' purpose for coming to the earth? JESUS came for many important reasons. One primary reason was to perform GOD's will by manifesting GOD's glory (i.e., His divine attributes) through His life, teaching, and ministry (John 7:18, 8:29; 14:7-11). Referring to this mission, JESUS prayed to the Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). One of the ways JESUS glorified GOD the Father was by revealing GOD's holiness through His perfect, sinless life. Despite the many temptations He faced, JESUS never once sinned or broke one of GOD's commandments in all His life (2 Cor. 5:21; John 7:18, 8:46; Heb. 7:26). "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and *in him is no sin*" (1 John 3:5; emphasis added). By living a perfect life, JESUS modeled GOD's holiness for us to imitate. "CHRIST also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: *Who did no sin*, neither was guile [deceit] found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:21-22; emphasis added).

In addition to manifesting GOD's holiness, JESUS also revealed GOD's truth through His preaching and teaching (John 8:32, 47, 18:37). JESUS boldly defended GOD's truth by restoring GOD's law (i.e., clarifying its true meaning and intent) and countering religious leaders, who tried to replace or conceal GOD's law with human tradition and teaching (Matt. 5-7; 15:3-9). In a clear denunciation of such corrupt practices, JESUS rebuked His opponents, saying, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of GOD by your tradition?" "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:3, 9). Another way JESUS revealed GOD's truth was by preaching the gospel, insisting on the need for true belief and repentance. "JESUS came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of GOD, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of GOD is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15). Related to this, JESUS also defined true discipleship – following Him as Lord and Savior, living in total surrender to His will, prizing Him above all, and walking in obedience (Matt. 7:21-23, 10:37-39, 13:44-46; John 14:15). Additionally, JESUS taught His disciples how they should live in order to glorify GOD: in love, truth, humility, justice, faith, holiness, mercy, forgiveness, self-control, self-sacrifice, continual and persistent prayer, etc. He cautioned them 1) to avoid religious hypocrisy and pretense, characterized by a superficial, external morality; 2) to prefer true righteousness that originates from a heart that sincerely loves GOD and worships Him in spirit and truth; 3) to not be conformed to the

world and its ideologies; 4) to value eternal things over temporal things by storing up treasures in Heaven instead of on earth; 5) to not exalt oneself or seek for men's praise and approval; 6) to discern between truth and error; 7) to persevere under persecution, looking forward to the reward; 8) to always be watching and waiting for His return, etc. (Matt. 5:10-12; 6:1-2, 5; 19-20; 7:15-20; 10:22; 23:27-28; 24:42-44; Luke 12:29-31; John 4:23-24). Finally, JESUS warned of future judgment upon all those who reject GOD (Matt. 13:41-42, 16:27). "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:49-50).

JESUS not only revealed GOD's truth through His teaching, but He also glorified GOD by manifesting other divine attributes. For example, He demonstrated GOD's great power through His many miracles. He healed every kind of disease, cast out demons, transformed water into wine, fed thousands of people with only a few loaves of bread and fish, calmed a raging storm at sea with just a word, walked on water, and even raised people from the dead (Matt. 8:16; 23-27; 9:35; 11:2-5; 14:15-21, 25; 15:30; John 2:1-11; 11:39-44). At the same time, JESUS revealed GOD's abundant love and mercy through His self-sacrifice; forgiveness of others, including His worst enemies; His tireless compassion upon the poor and sick; His humble reception of sinners and outcasts of society; His love and acceptance of children; His fatherly patience with His disciples; and many other ways.

In addition to manifesting GOD's divine attributes, JESUS served other purposes in coming to the earth. By living a perfectly righteous life, JESUS set a godly example for believers to follow (e.g., holiness, sacrificial love, humility, self-denial, patient suffering, and endurance) (1 Pet. 2:21-22). JESUS also came to the earth to defeat Satan and destroy his works. "For this purpose the Son of GOD was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Specifically, JESUS exposed Satan's lies, countering them with GOD's truth (John 8:32, 44-47). He liberated those who were held physically and spiritually captive by Satan through healing and saving them (Luke 13:10-16; Heb. 2:14-15). And most importantly, He triumphed over Satan through His humble submission to GOD, seen in His willingness to obey GOD, even to the point of death (i.e., JESUS' suffering and dying on the cross) (John 6:38; Phil. 2:8). Also critical to JESUS' purposes was to choose and train up disciples, who would later spread the gospel and establish the New Covenant Church (Matt. 28:18-20; John 15:16; Acts 1:8). These were some of the reasons JESUS came to the earth. However, the most important reason for His coming was to glorify GOD by carrying out His plan of salvation for His people. This was His main purpose. What was this plan of salvation, and how did JESUS accomplish it?

## ***E. GOD's Plan of Salvation***

### ***1. The Problem of Sin***

GOD's plan of salvation, determined before the world began, was His solution to the problem of sin. What is the problem caused by sin? As already mentioned, sin, which is a breach of GOD's law and a grievous offense to His perfect and holy nature, deserves eternal punishment.<sup>34</sup> As a holy and just Judge, GOD must punish sin. He cannot simply

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<sup>34</sup> What determines the type and degree of punishment depends not only on the actual sin itself, but also on the nature of the One offended, namely GOD. Because of who GOD is in all His divine perfections (e.g., *eternal* and *infinite* in holiness, power, mercy, wisdom, etc.), our offense or evil committed against Him

ignore it or sweep it under the rug. That would be neither holy nor just. GOD's perfect justice requires that sin be punished. However, GOD, who is also loving and merciful, desires to forgive us and spare us from His eternal wrath. This is where the problem lies.<sup>35</sup> How could GOD be *merciful and loving* by forgiving our sins and yet also be *holy and just* by punishing our sins according to what they deserve? In other words, how could GOD show us mercy and love without compromising His just and holy standard that requires eternal punishment for sin?

## 2. GOD's Solution to Sin

What was GOD's (predetermined) solution to the problem of sin? GOD, who is omniscient (i.e., perfectly wise and knows all things, including future events) and sovereign (i.e., controls and therefore decrees everything that happens), planned the best way to solve this problem even before the world began or the first sin was committed (Rev. 13:8). GOD decided to demonstrate His perfect *justice* and *mercy* by sending His one and only beloved Son, JESUS CHRIST, to act as our substitute both in His life and in His death (Rom. 3:24-26, 5:8; Eph. 2:4-8; Is. 53:5). First, by living a holy, sinless life, JESUS satisfied GOD's positive requirement for the law, which is perfect obedience. He kept every single commandment of GOD. Whereas we all failed miserably to keep GOD's law, JESUS, our representative, fulfilled it perfectly on our behalf. He never once sinned, despite all the many temptations and trials He faced.

## 3. A Temporary Substitute for Sin

Not only did JESUS represent us in His life, but also in His death. To better understand this, we must first have some knowledge of the sacrificial system that GOD instituted under the Old Testament with Israel, His chosen people. Under the Old Testament or Covenant<sup>36</sup>, GOD allowed His people to temporarily atone (i.e., pay the penalty) for their sins through animal sacrifices (Heb. 9:22). Because sin is so evil in GOD's eyes, it requires the death of the sinner as payment for sin. But since GOD is so merciful, He permitted an animal to die in the place of the person who sinned (Lev. 4). The innocent animal acted as a substitute, receiving the punishment, which the sinner deserved. Through a ceremony of laying hands on the animal before it was killed, the sinner symbolically transferred his sins to the animal, so that it, and not the sinner, bore the punishment for sin (Lev. 4:28-29). If there were no payment for sin through a blood sacrifice, there could be no forgiveness. "Without shedding of blood is no remission [forgiveness]" (Heb. 9:22). For the animal to qualify as a sacrifice, though, it had to meet certain requirements. For example, it had to be a biblically "clean" animal (e.g., a lamb), as opposed to an "unclean" animal (e.g., a pig), and it could not have any blemishes at all, such as bruises, cuts, deformities, diseases, or broken bones (Lev. 4:28, 22:19-25).

## 4. JESUS Our Permanent Substitute

Though GOD allowed animal sacrifices for sin, they were only intended as *symbolic* and *temporary* coverings or payments for sin. In and of themselves, they could not truly or effectively remove a person's guilt or permanently atone for sin. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). By the very fact

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correspondingly takes on *eternal* and *infinite* proportions. Appropriately then, the just punishment for sin should be of an eternal duration and infinite magnitude.

<sup>35</sup> At least it appears to be a problem or dilemma from our perspective, though not from GOD's, since He is perfectly wise and is never perplexed or challenged by anything.

<sup>36</sup> See Endnote H

that they had to be continually offered demonstrates their ineffectiveness in atoning for sin. "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (Heb. 10:1). Thus, their real purpose was to foreshadow (i.e., symbolize, point forward to) JESUS' future atonement for His people's sin (i.e., His death on the cross), which alone would be truly permanent, sufficient, and effective. Unlike the animal sacrifices, which had to be repeated year after year, JESUS only had to offer Himself *once* for our sins, which was more than enough to pay for the sins of all His people throughout all time. "So CHRIST was *once* offered to bear the sins of many..." (Heb. 9:28; emphasis added).

Like the sacrificial lamb, JESUS acted as a substitute for His people and died in their place on the cross to pay the penalty for their sins. As their substitute, He fulfilled the requirements for a sacrifice in that He was spiritually clean and had no spiritual blemishes or imperfections (sin).<sup>37</sup> "How much more shall the blood of CHRIST, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself *without spot* to GOD purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living GOD?" (Heb. 9:14; emphasis added). GOD's elect are redeemed "with the precious blood of CHRIST, as of a *lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Pet. 1:19; emphasis added).

### 5. The Just for the Unjust

By taking *our* place and dying for *our* sins, JESUS suffered the punishment that *we* deserve. "But he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement [punishment] of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes [namely, His suffering and death] we are healed" (Is. 53:5; emphasis added). GOD poured out His full wrath for *our* sin upon JESUS, though He was perfectly innocent (sinless), so that *we*, who are guilty (sinful), could be forgiven. "For CHRIST also hath once suffered for sins, *the just for the unjust*, that he might bring us to GOD, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18; emphasis added). This is the amazing love of JESUS – that He, the Just and Holy One, graciously volunteered to trade places with us, His undeserving enemies, to set us free from spiritual bondage and eternal punishment. And not only that, He sacrificed Himself so that *we*, who are helpless and worthless beggars, could be the recipients of His infinite love and eternal riches in Heaven. Why? Because *we* were good or somehow deserved it? Not at all! It was not due to anything *we* did, but purely because of His goodness and mercy. Let's ponder this for a moment. How many of us are so self-sacrificing that *we* would be willing to suffer and die for someone else, even our enemies? Truly, it would be quite a noble and praiseworthy deed to die for good or innocent people, but to die for those who are wicked, guilty, undeserving, and even worse, our enemies is utterly astounding and unprecedented (Rom. 5:7-8). And yet that's precisely what JESUS did. "In due time CHRIST died for the *ungodly*". "When *we* were *enemies*, *we* were reconciled to GOD by the death of his Son..." (Rom. 5:6, 10; emphasis added). By atoning for our sin, JESUS

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<sup>37</sup> Only JESUS, who is both GOD and man, could act as our substitute and satisfy GOD's just requirement for sin. No mere man, even the holiest of men, could atone for his own sins, let alone all the sins of GOD's people throughout all history. To act as our representative or mediator, our Savior had to be human like us. At the same time, He had to be GOD, since only GOD, who is perfect (sinless), could satisfy the sacrificial requirement of a "lamb without blemish." And only GOD, who is eternal and infinite in all His attributes, could pay the eternal and infinite debt of our sin. Thus, only JESUS, who fulfilled both these requirements (i.e., being GOD and man), could act as our Savior.

appeased GOD's wrath, satisfied His perfect justice, and upheld His holy standard. In taking our sin upon Him, JESUS made it possible for us to be reconciled to (have peace with) GOD and be shown mercy, so that we could be forgiven and delivered from eternal judgment (Rom. 3:25, 5:1,10; Col. 1:20-22).

## 6. *The Benefits of JESUS' Redemption*

Thus, through JESUS' life and death, the problem of sin was resolved, magnifying GOD's perfect justice and mercy. But now how do we apply what JESUS accomplished through His life and death to our own lives? In other words, how do we receive the benefits of CHRIST's righteousness (i.e., His perfect life and atoning work on the cross)? The answer is by *faith*. That is, when we believe in JESUS CHRIST as our LORD and Savior and are united to Him spiritually in faith, we are given the privilege of counting JESUS' righteousness as our own, even though we did nothing to deserve or merit it (Rom. 3:24-26). Because we are joined by faith to CHRIST, and He represents us as our Mediator and Advocate, it's as if GOD the Judge sees JESUS, the righteous, when He looks at us, the guilty (Rom. 5:1-2). Another way of stating this is that GOD "justifies" us or declares us righteous or innocent (as in a court of law), based on CHRIST's righteousness, not our own. As our substitute, JESUS traded places with us spiritually, both in His life and death. This means we receive the benefits of His righteousness, while He received the punishment for our sin. "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 Cor. 5:21; emphasis added). That is, His perfect righteousness (i.e., His sinless life and sacrificial death) was *imputed* to us (i.e., applied to our spiritual account) as if it were our own, and our sin was imputed to Him (Rom. 4:23-25, 5:19; Phil. 3:9). Thus, we receive the blessings of JESUS' righteousness when GOD saves or justifies us, not for anything we did, but purely by GOD's grace.

## **II. Responding to the Truth**

### **A. Believe the Gospel**

I mentioned that in order to receive the benefits of CHRIST's righteousness<sup>38</sup>, we must trust in Him as our LORD and Savior. But what does this mean exactly?

#### **1. Believe in JESUS' Person**

First, it means we must believe *who* JESUS is – namely, the eternal Son of GOD, GOD in the flesh, our Redeemer (Savior), Sovereign Lord, Creator, Judge of all the Earth, Prophet, Priest, and King, etc.

#### **2. Believe in JESUS' Work**

Second, it means we must believe *what* JESUS did – that He, GOD Almighty and Creator of the universe, condescended and humbled Himself to become a man through means of a miraculous conception in order to redeem His people; lived a perfect life; suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sin; was buried and resurrected on the third day; as-

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<sup>38</sup> The benefits of CHRIST's work on our behalf not only include deliverance from bondage to sin and Satan, but also acceptance with GOD through JESUS' reconciliation; adoption into GOD's spiritual family as a legal heir with all special rights and privileges, including an eternal inheritance; a renewed heart and mind; the Holy Spirit's indwelling, guidance, protection, and teaching; sanctification or spiritual growth; and some day in Heaven – eternal life with GOD, angels, and other believers in close fellowship; a perfect, glorified body that will never grow old or perish; eternal riches; the absence of all sin, pain, and sorrow; perfect love, joy, and peace; and infinitely more blessings beyond what we could ever imagine!

cended into Heaven, where He currently reigns and from where He will some day return in all His glory to judge the earth and establish His kingdom.

### **3. Believe in JESUS' Promises**

Third, it means we must believe *what JESUS promised* – that if we put our trust in Him *alone* to save us from our sin, and not in anything else, we will receive the blessings of eternal life.

### **4. Faith in JESUS Alone**

What does it mean to put our trust in JESUS alone to save us? We must acknowledge that no amount of effort on our part can ever gain our acceptance with GOD or admission into Heaven apart from CHRIST. None of us can depend on our efforts to save us, because even the best of our deeds are “filthy rags” in GOD’s eyes and fall far short of His perfect standard (Is. 64:6; Matt. 5:48). Thus, we mustn’t think for one moment that our performance or good deeds (e.g., baptism, church attendance or membership, tithing, serving in ministry, biblical knowledge, etc.) can, in any way, earn our way to Heaven. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). As subtle as it is, even if we acknowledge that faith in JESUS’ atonement is necessary for salvation, but we then add other requirements (e.g., baptism, church membership, good works, etc.), this is still wrong and unscriptural. We should not think that we’re saved by JESUS’ atonement *plus* my good deeds or JESUS *plus* my baptism or JESUS *plus* my church membership. We cannot add *anything* to the perfect atoning work of JESUS CHRIST as the means of our salvation. JESUS’ death *alone* was *sufficient* to pay for *all* of our sins (Heb. 10:14, 18). To try to add anything to this not only demonstrates our lack of faith in JESUS as our only Savior, but it also insults His throne of grace by implying that His atonement, and thus His worth, was not sufficient to pay the penalty for our sins and that it requires our help to complete the work of salvation. Does GOD Almighty need our help in anything? (Job 38-41; Rom. 11: 34-35). GOD forbid!

Not only should we not trust in ourselves, but we should also not trust in anyone or anything else other than JESUS CHRIST to save us. Having Christian parents, for example, cannot guarantee our salvation. We cannot inherit salvation from our parents. Nor are we “born” Christians by the mere fact that we were born and raised in a Christian home. Not even growing up in a pastor’s or missionary’s home can save us. Though Christian parents may certainly be a godly influence on us and show us how to be saved, they themselves cannot save us. Aside from CHRIST, no other person or organization (e.g., parent, pastor, priest, saint, Mary, angel, church, denomination, etc.) has the authority or power to grant us eternal life or to act as our mediator.<sup>39</sup> JESUS CHRIST alone is our Savior and Mediator between GOD and man. “For there is one GOD, and *one mediator* between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS; who gave himself a ransom for all...” (1 Tim. 2:5-6; emphasis added). Contrary to popular belief, GOD does not give us a choice of saviors or means of salvation. There is only *one* way to Heaven, and that is through

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<sup>39</sup> As such, we should not even pray or bow down in holy reverence to anyone other than GOD, since He alone is GOD and deserves our worship. To pray or bow down in holy reverence to anyone other than GOD is clearly idolatry and a great offense to GOD, who alone can save us and answer our prayers. As the second commandment states, “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy GOD am a jealous GOD, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:5-6)

JESUS CHRIST. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). JESUS Himself affirmed this when he said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:6; emphasis added).

Since JESUS is the only way to Heaven, the path that leads to Heaven is not broad, but, in fact, very narrow. (Matt. 7:13-14). Such a concept is very unpopular today and runs counter to our culture, which promotes broad thinking and open-mindedness (even to the extreme of accepting nearly everything, including evil and falsehood) as modern virtues. Though a narrow road to Heaven is highly objectionable to man and receives his disapproval, GOD's Word, which reflects His sovereign purpose and non-conformity to man's way of thinking, stands true and unchanged. As determined from eternity past, according to GOD's plan of salvation, there is only one way to Heaven, and that is through JESUS CHRIST. Thus, despite many claims to the opposite, all roads do not lead to Heaven. And though it is commonly believed today that all religions are basically the same and share the same god, this is false and flatly contradicts the Bible's clear assertion that there is only one GOD and one way to Heaven.

One reason the "narrow road" is so despised today is that Satan, whose constant aim is to malign GOD, has convinced people that restricting or limiting the way to Heaven is somehow unjust or unreasonable. GOD unjust or unreasonable?! Impossible! Rather, Satan and those who propagate his lies are unjust and unreasonable for falsely accusing GOD and perverting His grace to make it appear as something negative or evil (i.e., injustice).<sup>40</sup> Instead of complaining that GOD allows us only *one* way to Heaven, we should fall on our knees before Him in utter amazement that He provides us *any* way at all. As sinful rebels, who deserve nothing but GOD's wrath, He is under no obligation to save us. The fact that He even offers us one way to Heaven is astounding and clear evidence of His immense goodness and mercy. Who are we then to question GOD's justice or argue with His methods? It would be like a beggar angrily complaining that you were unfair and unkind, because you did not give him more money or a wider choice of gifts, after you mercifully gave him a very generous gift out of sheer pity. Who, in his right mind, would think you did something wrong in that situation? Rather, the beggar should be reproached for his unjust accusations and utter ingratitude. Like that beggar, we are unworthy recipients of GOD's mercy and should be grateful for any amount of grace He shows us. We have no right to complain about how GOD decides to show us grace. If GOD has said there is only one way to Heaven and that is through His Son, let us accept it and be thankful.

## **5. True Faith vs. False Faith**

In addition to believing that JESUS is the only way of salvation, we must also have the *right* kind of faith or *true* faith. What is true faith? First, true saving faith is only possible for someone who has been regenerated or given a new heart. If we're not "born again" spiritually, it is impossible for us to exercise true faith. True saving faith is not inherent

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<sup>40</sup> Satan used a similar tactic on Eve in the garden to deceive her concerning GOD so that she would disobey Him. Instead of praising GOD's kindness in furnishing all the needs of Adam and Eve and generously granting them liberty to eat from all the trees but one, Satan focused on the one tree that they could not eat from, breeding discontent. Satan suggested that GOD was unjust in depriving them of such a pleasure and had ill motives for restricting their access, wishing to deny them their full potential and happiness, all of which were lies. Satan deceives people the same way today. He takes GOD's good intent (i.e., to show us His love and mercy) and twists it to make it seem otherwise.

to the natural (unsaved) man. It's not something we're born with and can muster up on our own. According to GOD's sovereign will, He must grant us the gift of faith at the time of regeneration. That is, He needs to first give us new hearts before we can truly believe in JESUS as our LORD and Savior.

Until that time, it's possible to have a counterfeit faith that is shallow and based merely on feelings, religious experiences, past decisions, or a mental assent of facts. But this is not true saving faith. How can you discern between true and false belief and know whether you have the right kind of faith? Ask yourself these questions:

1. First, are you trusting in your feelings alone to tell you whether you are saved or not? Just because you "feel" certain that you are saved does not necessarily mean that you are. Feelings can be very deceptive and are not always dependable. People can actually have seared consciences and live very immoral lives and yet still "feel" good about themselves, though they are clearly deceived. Others, misguided by false systems of belief, "feel" quite certain that they are secure and on their way to Heaven, though they are headed in the opposite direction. Thus, feelings alone are not good indicators of the truth. Nor should they be relied upon to determine your spiritual condition (i.e., whether you're saved or not). Something more is needed than just feelings to evidence true saving faith.

2. Second, is your confidence resting in some miraculous religious experience as proof of your salvation (e.g., a vision, bright light, angelic appearance, miracles, or other supernatural phenomena)? Though GOD may certainly use miracles in saving people, miracles alone cannot save. Israel witnessed many great miracles in the ten plagues, in the parting of the Red Sea, and during their wilderness trek, and yet thousands of them perished without knowing GOD. Similarly, many witnessed JESUS' great miracles, even the raising of the dead; yet this did not save them (John 11:43-48). Though they had a type of superficial faith, it was not genuine saving faith that leads to repentance (John 2:23-25). Another prime example was Judas Iscariot, one of JESUS' own disciples, who personally witnessed many, if not most, of JESUS' miracles firsthand. Despite all the miracles Judas saw, his heart was never changed, and he even betrayed JESUS to His enemies, perishing in his sins (Luke 22:3-5; Acts 1:16-18). Still another proof that miracles do not save is Simon Magus, the sorcerer who witnessed many of Philip's miracles in Samaria. Though Simon "believed" (superficially) and was even baptized, he later demonstrated that he was never truly saved (Acts 8:9-24). Further proof that miracles alone do not save can be seen in JESUS' own words concerning those who can actually perform miracles in His name and yet still not belong to Him. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works [miracles]? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23). Thus, like feelings, experiencing or even performing miracles are no guarantee of genuine salvation.

3. Third, are you depending merely on some past "decision" made years ago at a crusade, revival meeting, or church service as proof of your conversion? In other words, do you believe that you're saved simply because you raised your hand, walked the aisle, or said the sinner's prayer in response to a gospel invitation, even though there was no genuine and observable change in your life? Though GOD is certainly not limited in His means and may sometimes save people through "decisions" made at evangelistic meet-

ings, this again is no guarantee or certain proof of genuine salvation, unless it is also accompanied by an inward change of heart, evidenced by a radically transformed life.

4. Fourth, are you depending on mere head knowledge or intellectual faith to save you? The right kind of faith is that which comes from the heart and not just the head. Though certainly the mind must be actively engaged in comprehending and believing the gospel before GOD's Word can pierce the heart in true conviction, a mere mental assent to biblical truths without an internal heart change is not true saving faith. The heart must also be actively involved in receiving the gospel before you can be saved. By the power of the Holy Spirit, GOD's Word must penetrate the deepest part of your heart, working to convict you of sin and bring about humble contrition and repentance. Intellectual faith in the bare facts of the gospel is not enough to save you. Even the devils know the Scriptures and the gospel, and yet they are definitely not saved (James. 2:19). What is lacking is a transformed heart – a heart that willingly obeys and submits to CHRIST out of love and gratitude and not merely out of duty or fear of punishment. Believe it or not, it is quite possible to be an expert in the Bible or have the whole Bible memorized and yet still not be saved. Even graduating from seminary with several degrees in theology is no proof that you're truly saved. Thus, having a lot of head knowledge or merely affirming the facts of the gospel intellectually, without an internal heart change, does not constitute true saving faith.

True saving faith stems from a renewed heart that evidences itself in a radically transformed life marked by spiritual fruit. It is not a shallow type of faith based merely on feelings, miracles, "decisions" for CHRIST, or even a head full of Bible knowledge, devoid of any true love for CHRIST or sincere obedience to His Word. Even if you "feel" absolutely certain that you are saved, witness the most extraordinary miracle, are emotionally stirred to tears at an evangelistic meeting, or are the president of a seminary, all this makes no difference if your life has not truly changed and you are still enslaved to sin. Don't be fooled. This is not genuine salvation. Satan has deceived so many people into thinking that they are saved simply because of feelings, supernatural experiences, past "decisions", or mere head knowledge, even though their hearts and lives are not changed and are still steeped in sin and spiritual darkness. Don't be naive and believe Satan's lies. Evaluate your heart and life to see if you are truly saved.

The only way to know if you're truly saved is if you manifest spiritual fruit in your life (i.e., righteousness, holiness, etc.). "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). If you claim to be saved, has your life really improved or changed for the better so that it is noticeable not only to yourself but also to all those around you? Though not perfect, is your overall life characterized by holiness (i.e., striving to be more like CHRIST than the world), consistent and earnest prayer, a growing delight in spiritual things, a hunger for GOD's Word, honesty/integrity, love for GOD and others, self-sacrifice, mercy/forgiveness, self-control (e.g., over anger, lust, gluttony, covetousness, etc.), GOD-honoring speech, and humility? Or are you still the same person? If you claim to be saved but continue to live in habitual sin with no observable change in your lifestyle, this is not true saving faith. "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin [as a habit] is of the devil" (1 John 3:7-8). True saving faith always leads to a radical change in heart *and* life (2 Cor. 5:17). True saving faith does not leave you in your sin, but delivers you from bondage to sin. It is not a dead faith that has no effect on your life, but an active, living faith that transforms you from within so that it is visible from

without. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works [righteousness, holiness] is dead also" (James. 2:26). Thus, one of the surest signs that you have true saving faith is a transformed life marked by the fruit of repentance. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet [fitting, suitable] for repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

## **B. Repent of Your Sin**

True saving faith will always result in genuine repentance. In fact, true saving faith is inseparable from repentance (Mark 1:15). What is repentance? First, as with faith, repentance originates from GOD and is a gift of His grace (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25; Eph. 2:8-9). Together with faith, GOD grants repentance at the time of regeneration or the new birth to those whom He chose to save before the foundation of the world (Acts 13:48). Apart from GOD's grace, you *cannot* and *will not* repent, because in your natural state you are spiritually dead and thus *unable* and *unwilling* to come to GOD and repent of your sins (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 8:7). GOD, in His mercy, must first give you a new heart and overcome your natural resistance to Him before you will repent (Ez. 36:26-27). In essence, He must first mercifully prepare your will (i.e., the part of you that makes choices) so that you can of your own volition decide to turn toward Him in true repentance.

Is this a contradiction? No, rather it is the incomprehensible mystery and irreconcilable paradox of GOD's sovereignty vs. man's responsibility, which the infinitely wise GOD alone understands and no finite, human mind can resolve. In fact, it would be the height of presumption and pride to ever think that you could solve this mystery. As with other difficult doctrines (e.g., the Trinity, JESUS' incarnation, etc.), the best response is to just trust GOD and accept this paradox by faith, since it is clearly scriptural, and not reject it simply because it's difficult to comprehend.<sup>41</sup> Accept the fact that while "it is GOD which worketh in you both to will [decide, choose] and to do of his good pleasure," clearly demonstrating His sovereignty in salvation, you are still responsible to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" by first believing and repenting to be justified and then afterwards, actively pursuing holiness during sanctification (i.e., spiritual growth) (Phil. 2:12-13). Though GOD is ultimately sovereign over your will (power of decision), you are still expected to exercise your will in the process of salvation. In other words, GOD's enabling you to repent does not remove your responsibility to act on His grace and turn away from sin. Despite your responding to GOD's grace, however, you still cannot attribute any part of salvation to yourself or take any credit for it, since salvation is fully the work of GOD. Therefore, GOD alone should receive all the glory (1 Cor. 1:29-31).

Having established that the source of repentance is GOD, what exactly is repentance? That is, how is it defined? True repentance is a sincere change of mind (and heart) that results in turning away from sin toward GOD and righteousness. "Repent, and *turn yourselves from all your transgressions*: so iniquity shall not be your ruin. *Cast away from you all your transgressions*, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit..." (Ez. 18:30-31; emphasis added). Repentance begins with acknowl-

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<sup>41</sup> That's how many cults begin. Because they cannot comprehend some difficult doctrine, such as the Trinity or JESUS' deity and humanity, they reject GOD's truth for their own humanly conceived notions and develop a system of false doctrine. Instead, they should humbly acknowledge that certain doctrines are beyond human comprehension and must simply be accepted by faith. They should not expect that man's finite mind can possibly understand everything that originates from the infinite mind of GOD. If that were possible, then man would also be infinite in understanding and thus divine (GOD forbid!).

edging your desperate condition as a lost sinner – that you are spiritually dead, in bondage to sin and Satan, headed toward destruction, and incapable of saving yourself. Part of this recognition includes a humble admission that your sin is a great offense toward GOD and worthy of eternal punishment. In other words, if you are truly repentant, you will agree with GOD that your sin justly deserves eternal death. “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Ps. 51:3-4).

In addition to recognizing your sinful state and acknowledging the justice of GOD’s punishment, true repentance should lead you to a deep conviction of your sin. Humbled by the awareness of your depravity, you should feel sincere remorse and guilt over your sin – not just for its consequences (i.e., punishment), but for how it grieves and offends GOD, the One who created you, sustains you, and loves you more than anyone else. If you’re truly convicted about your sin, you will mourn over it, realizing how adversely sin has affected both you and those closest to you. In other words, having been awakened to the destructive nature of sin, you will sorrow over all the pain your sin has caused yourself and others. Aside from the pain caused by your sin, you will regret all the wasted time, energy, and resources spent on a sinful or worldly life. You will realize that it was futile to live for the temporary pleasures of this world and for yourself instead of living to glorify GOD, benefit others, and invest in eternal treasures. Thus, if you’re truly sorry for your sin, you will experience sincere conviction that pierces your heart and causes you to mourn over your sin and its detrimental effects. It’s this kind of humble heart that GOD desires. “The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O GOD, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17). Such humility is usually not possible, however, without first experiencing much suffering and pain. Trials are GOD’s common means for humbling people. Depending on how stubborn someone is, he may have to hit rock bottom before he finally gives up his pride and seeks GOD in humble contrition. Have *you* been brought low and humbled by GOD so that you have seen the ugliness of your sin and wept over it?

If you have experienced sincere remorse and conviction over your sin, that’s a good start. But true repentance doesn’t stop there. It goes beyond a mere feeling of conviction to acting on that conviction. In other words, it’s not enough to simply feel sorry for your sin and remain in your sin. Feelings of conviction alone cannot save you or change you. Plenty of hardened criminals feel sorry for their crimes without ever changing and turning away from their sin. You must go beyond mere *feelings* of conviction to taking *action* regarding your sin (all the while realizing that it is in GOD’s power alone that you can do this). What good is it if you just *feel* bad about your sin but never *do* anything about it?

There are many who experience a superficial kind of conviction that effects no real change in their lives. Though they may feel some regret and even sorrow over their sin, they do not turn away from sin and thus remain in spiritual bondage, continuing to reap the natural consequences of sin (e.g., destructive behavior, broken relationships, trials, loss, pain, sorrow, etc.). And the conscious or unconscious guilt caused by sin also wreaks havoc in their lives, though very often its source is unidentified. Like a disease that goes for years undetected until it finally evidences itself through external symptoms, guilt that is ignored or left unresolved can fester for years, hidden in the dark re-

cesses of the heart, until it finally surfaces, manifesting itself in physical sickness, chronic depression, irritability, etc.<sup>42</sup>

Instead of addressing the source of the problem (sin) and applying the needed remedy (i.e., repenting and receiving GOD's forgiveness), many attempt to suppress their guilt and seek comfort through vain, ineffective means: 1) escaping or forgetting their problems through drugs, alcohol, books that encourage a fantasy world, etc.; 2) indulging the flesh or giving into sinful pleasures (e.g., illicit sex, overeating, excessive entertainment and shopping, etc.); 3) distractions (e.g., pursuing worldly ambitions); 4) ignoring the guilt and pretending it doesn't exist; 5) or believing the lies of secular wisdom and psychology that rationalize or justify sin on the basis of moral relativism<sup>43</sup> and teach that guilt is a negatively conditioned response that is both unhealthy and damaging to one's self-esteem.

Far from helping people with their guilt and its associated suffering, these so-called solutions only succeed in aggravating their sin even more and increasing their guilt, resulting in greater sorrow and judgment in the end. Like attempting to heal a fatal wound by putting a bandaid on it or masking the symptoms of a serious disease by taking aspirin, these useless remedies only work to cover up the symptoms, without ever getting to the root of the problem (sin) and finding a cure (GOD). Even worse, if guilt is left unaddressed, it can eventually sear the conscience so much that it becomes totally desensitized or inoperable. This is very serious, because much like nerves that warn us of physical danger (e.g., extreme heat, sharp objects) through the use of pain, the conscience warns us of spiritual danger (e.g., sin and its consequences) through the use of conviction and guilt. Unlike what psychology teaches, conviction and guilt over sin are not products of poor training and an unhealthy upbringing that need to be unlearned. Rather, they are the healthy responses of a conscience implanted by GOD to restrain our sinful tendencies and prevent us from rushing headlong to our own destruction. Instead of ignoring our conscience and trying to suppress the guilt, we should listen to GOD's merciful warnings and respond by turning to Him in true conviction and sorrow over our sin.

So, whereas superficial, worldly sorrow and conviction never address the issue of sin and only end in destruction, true, godly sorrow and conviction lead to genuine repentance and life. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of [regretted]: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). If you wonder whether you have a godly sorrow that leads to repentance, you must examine your heart and life. Do you truly sorrow over your sin? Do you have such an intense hatred for your sin that you want to flee from it in disgust? If so, you will not wish to secretly harbor any known sin or hold anything back, because you no longer cherish it as you once did. By GOD's grace, you see how destructive sin is and desire to escape its enslaving power. Like a deadly disease, you want to be rid of your sin before it destroys you. And though you know you can never fully eradicate sin in this life because of your

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<sup>42</sup> This does not imply that *all* sickness, depression, etc. are *direct* results of one's *actual* sin and suppression of guilt, though they are certainly attributable to living in a fallen world. Other factors can also be involved (e.g., trials used for the purpose of testing or bringing glory to GOD, as in the case of Job and the man born blind whom JESUS healed).

<sup>43</sup> Moral relativism is the belief that there are no moral absolutes (i.e., fixed standards for right or wrong) and that morals change, relative to the culture, time period, circumstances, etc.

remaining corruption, you long for the day in Heaven when you will finally be set free from all sin.

Additionally, if you're truly repentant, you will not be satisfied with simply turning away from your sin. In the place of sin, you will want to fill the empty gap in your heart with what is good. Just as a bare spot in the lawn will eventually fill up with weeds unless you replace it with good seed (e.g., grass), so sin's weeds will try to take over your heart again, if you don't replace it with good spiritual seed. Thus, if you're truly repentant, you will not only try your best to avoid evil, but you will actively pursue what is good, namely, GOD and His righteousness. "Cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Is. 1:16-17). "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14). Having fled from the deadly grip of sin, you will run toward the loving and merciful arms of GOD, your only source of hope and deliverance. He alone can set you free from the enslaving power of sin. And He alone can cause you to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

If in true repentance, you earnestly desire to be freed from sin and pursue holiness, you will seek GOD in humble contrition and sincerely confess your sins to Him. True confession must come from the heart and not just the mouth. It must also be done with the recognition that GOD, who sees and knows all things, is aware of all your sins, including every secret thought and hidden motive of the heart. Thus, trying to conceal anything from Him is futile. Though He knows every sin you've ever committed, He wants you to be totally honest with Him and admit your sins (specifically, and not just generally). "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6). Moreover, He wants you to let go of your pride and humbly acknowledge your utter unworthiness and spiritual poverty (i.e., helplessness) before Him before He will forgive you. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin..." (2 Chr. 7:14).

Finally, if you're truly repentant, you will see yourself as a desperate beggar in need of GOD's forgiveness. Like David, you will humbly beg GOD to forgive you, appealing only to His mercy and not anything in yourself. "Have mercy upon me, O GOD, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1). And you will readily bow the knee before GOD in humble submission, pleading with Him not only to forgive you but to also cleanse you spiritually and change you so that you may truly serve Him out of love and obedience. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:2). "Create in me a clean heart, O GOD; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). Finally, you will resolve in your heart to put away sin and continually draw upon GOD's power to keep you from being overcome and defeated by sin. If you truly seek Him in this way and repent of your sin, GOD promises to forgive you. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our GOD, for he will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:7).

## ***C. Surrender Your Life to JESUS***

### ***1. JESUS is LORD***

Where true faith and repentance exist, there will also be a willing and humble submission to GOD's will. That is, if you have truly trusted in JESUS as your Savior and repented of your sins, you will be willing to surrender your life completely to Him. It's not enough to simply claim JESUS as your Savior, but you must also acknowledge Him as

your LORD (i.e., Master or King) to be saved (Rom. 10:9). In fact, you cannot rightfully call JESUS your Savior if you refuse to follow Him as your LORD. Is it unreasonable or unjust for JESUS to expect this? Not at all! If JESUS graciously purchased your freedom with His own death, delivering you from spiritual bondage and eternal judgment, and secured your eternal inheritance in Heaven, is He not worthy of your total love and devotion, as demonstrated through your obedience? At minimum, do you not owe Him your life? "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify GOD in your body, and in your spirit, which are GOD's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

## **2. Humble Yourself Before GOD**

Though you have the great honor and privilege of being adopted into GOD's royal family and receiving an eternal inheritance when you're converted, you should also see yourself as a humble servant of GOD, ready and willing to yield to Him in everything. "But now being made free from sin, and become *servants to GOD*, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6:22; emphasis added). As His servant, you should be willing to follow and obey JESUS in whatever He tells you, even if it means denying yourself and giving up the things you cherish most in this life (Luke 14:26-27). "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). This is easier to do if you remember that JESUS, who is perfectly wise and loves you, knows and desires what's best for you. So, whatever He decides for your life will always be for your good in the end, even if you may not fully understand it at the time. And if JESUS loves you so much that He died for you, though you did not deserve it, shouldn't you be willing to surrender your life to Him out of love and gratitude?

## **3. Count the Cost**

Before you decide to surrender your life to JESUS, though, it's important to first consider the costs involved (Luke 14:26-33). In other words, what should you realistically expect to face as a true follower of CHRIST? My intent is not to scare you off, but to honestly inform you of the realities of the Christian life, so that you won't be surprised or disillusioned. Contrary to what many believe today, being a true Christian or disciple of CHRIST is not easy. In fact, it's very hard. "We must through *much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of GOD" (Acts 14:22; emphasis added). First, following CHRIST is difficult, because you have to be willing to give up your sin (i.e., repent), which is as painful as having surgery (i.e., parting with an arm or a leg). Second, becoming a true disciple of CHRIST is difficult, because it requires serious dedication and a lifelong commitment - one which must be placed above all other commitments. CHRIST must come first, even above family and friends (Luke 14:26). "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Third, what makes a Christian's life difficult is that, like a soldier's life, it can be filled with challenges and even risks. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of JESUS CHRIST" (2 Tim. 2:3). Scripture depicts the Christian life as a spiritual war, in which the Christian must always be spiritually alert and armed for battle. He must be ready to fight the enemy (i.e., Satan, sin, and the world) (Eph. 6:10-18). "Put on the whole armor of GOD, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles [tricks, schemes] of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The true Christian life is a life of striving, toil, and battles - not one of leisure and comfort. In fact, the path that leads to Heaven is described as "narrow" and "difficult" - so difficult that very few make it (Luke 13:23). "Enter ye in at the strait [narrow] 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" (Matt. 7:13-14).

In contrast to this, many churches give the wrong impression of Christianity, portraying it as a life of relative ease and prosperity with little or no hardship involved. Using the world's methods (e.g., marketing strategies, entertainment, etc.), they attempt to sell Christianity like some consumer product, softening the hard and challenging aspects of true discipleship to make it more appealing to so-called seekers. In essence, they claim that you can have the rewards of Christianity without the sacrifice. Additionally, they water down the gospel (in effect, creating a counterfeit gospel) by glossing over or removing essential parts (e.g., sin, repentance, eternal judgment, cost of discipleship, etc.), in order to make it more palatable to carnal (worldly) tastes. Beware of this modern gospel that distorts GOD's truth and purposely leaves out the core elements of the gospel to avoid offense to man, though it highly offends GOD. This popular gospel also misleads people by implying that it's very easy to get saved (i.e., just say the sinner's prayer, raise your hand, or sign this tract, etc.). And it paints an unrealistic picture of Christianity, promising plenty of worldly pleasure, entertainment, and fun, while failing to mention the high costs that are associated with true discipleship. Such a false gospel cannot save you.

Unlike this counterfeit gospel, the real gospel teaches that *true* Christianity is no Disneyland! It is not fun and games. It's serious business that involves a lot of hard work, sacrifice, and even suffering. Anyone who tries to paint an unrealistic or rosy picture of Christianity in order to persuade people to join the church is not telling the whole truth. Though it is true, great blessings and rewards accompany salvation (e.g., eternal life and riches, GOD's infinite love, reveling in GOD's perfections in Heaven, close fellowship with other believers, spiritual gifts and abilities, spiritual wisdom and guidance, protection from the enemy, etc.), you must also expect to experience trials and loss for the sake of CHRIST. "All that will live godly in CHRIST JESUS *shall suffer persecution*" (2 Tim. 3:12; emphasis added). Notice this verse says "shall" suffer persecution and not "perhaps" or "possibly," indicating the certainty of persecution for believers. And the reason it's certain, is because GOD, in His perfect wisdom and sovereignty, has predetermined both the nature and extent of suffering for every believer (Rev. 6:11)<sup>44</sup>. "For unto you *it is given* in the behalf of CHRIST, not only to believe on him, but also to *suffer for his sake*" (Phil. 1:29; emphasis added). "No man should be moved [shaken] by these afflictions: for yourselves know that *we are appointed* thereunto" (1 Thess. 3:3; emphasis added). The apostle Peter made it clear that true believers should not be surprised by suffering, but to actually expect it, and even more than that, to rejoice in it, knowing that they are honored to suffer for CHRIST's sake. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of CHRIST's sufferings..." (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Though not all believers will experience the same amount of persecution or extreme persecution, such as imprisonment or martyrdom, they should expect at least some form of persecution (e.g., rejection; ostracism; slander; loss of relationships, freedoms, possessions, jobs, etc.), if they're true followers of CHRIST. Anyone who claims to be saved but

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<sup>44</sup> GOD, who is perfectly holy and loving, sends trials both for our good (e.g., refinement, chastening, instruction, tests of faith, etc.) and for His glory, and not for any vain or cruel purpose.

has only received the world's approval, and not its disapproval, is highly questionable. This is an indication that he's not doing something right – that he's compromising in some area and not living the way a true Christian should live. For if he were to truly live as GOD calls him to live (i.e., according to biblical, and not the world's, standards; in true righteousness and holiness; and unashamedly defending GOD's truth in love and humility), he would stand out as very strange and be rejected by the world. More than that, he would be perceived as an enemy.

JESUS warned that just as the world hated Him, the world would also hate His followers. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:18-20). Thus, if you're a true believer, who is following CHRIST and living according to the Scriptures, your words (i.e., speaking GOD's truth in love; avoiding gossip, lies, and other vain or unedifying speech) and your life (i.e., pursuing holiness, integrity, humility, self-control, etc.) will be offensive to most unbelievers, who, when they compare their lives to yours, will be confronted with their own sin and feel guilt and shame. Even if you never say anything directly about their sin and are the kindest and most loving person, you will still be hated and rejected by those who hate and reject GOD. Therefore, it is incongruent to suggest that a true Christian, living according to GOD's will, could escape persecution and receive the love and acceptance of the world, which is by nature spiritual darkness and diametrically opposed to believers, who are spiritual light.

Attesting to the high cost of discipleship, JESUS warned His listeners that following Him would be very difficult. He never once tried to gloss over or minimize the hard or challenging aspects of true discipleship. He pointedly said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). "For whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). As JESUS' listeners knew, taking up the cross symbolized suffering and death and not merely encountering some minor frustrations or problems. Unlike many preachers and evangelists today, JESUS did not try to attract followers by either catering to the world or lowering the standards for discipleship. Quite clearly, JESUS taught that to follow Him meant self-denial, sacrifice, suffering, humility, and complete submission to His will (Luke 9:23-24, 57-62, 14:26-33; 2 Tim. 3:12; Matt. 18:1-4; Mark 10:43-45).

If you profess to be saved, are you marked by these characteristics? If you're considering salvation, are you willing to dedicate your whole life to CHRIST in obedient service to Him? That is, are you willing to humbly submit to Him in whatever He tells you? And are you willing to suffer for His sake, even if it means giving up the things you love most in this life, including your comforts, pleasures, plans, ambitions, reputation, possessions, freedoms, friends/family, and possibly even your own life? This is the life of a *true* Christian.

Knowing what kind of commitment and sacrifice true discipleship requires, the decision to follow CHRIST is very serious and should not be taken lightly or casually. Christianity is not like some club or hobby that you can try out for a while to see if you like it and then give up, if it doesn't meet with your approval. In fact, GOD gives very sober warnings to those who would dare to abuse His grace this way and apostatize (i.e., turn away

from GOD either openly or secretly) after professing to be His<sup>45</sup> (Heb. 6:4-8; 3:12; 2:2-3; 1 John 1:19; Jude 1:4; Matt. 7:21-23). Thus, it's very important to first weigh the costs of true discipleship *before* making a final decision to follow CHRIST. Also, by considering the costs, you will be better informed of what to expect as a follower of CHRIST and not be surprised when you face persecution and trials for His sake.

#### **4. The Rewards for Following CHRIST**

Though there are many difficulties and challenges that attend a true believer's life, there are also many encouragements and rewards to offset or balance this. In fact, the blessings for following CHRIST far outweigh any suffering we may endure for His sake. As the apostle Paul assures us, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). In other words, no matter how bad things get here on earth, they cannot compare to the infinite joy and happiness we will experience in Heaven forever. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). And to add further encouragement and incentive to persevere through trials, GOD's Word tells us that He will richly reward those who are persecuted for His sake. "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" (Matt. 5:11,12). Thus, GOD promises to more than make up for all our temporary losses here on earth with innumerable and eternal treasures in Heaven.

We cannot even conceive of all the wonderful things GOD has stored up for us in Heaven. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which GOD hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Speaking of what awaits us in Heaven, JESUS said, "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...that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 2,3). Not only is Heaven a place of mansions reserved for believers, but it is also a place of great beauty and splendor. The apostle John described it as a perfect paradise, where a river of crystal clear water flows out from the throne of GOD; where the tree of life, on either side of this river, produces twelve different kinds of fruit; where the streets are paved with gold and the gates and walls of the city are adorned with precious jewels; and where there is only light all day (proceeding from GOD) and never any darkness at all. Nothing on earth can compare to the magnificence and beauty of Heaven. More importantly, though, Heaven is where GOD lives and where He will dwell with us forever (Rev. 21:3, 10-27; 22:1-5). It's also where all the glorified saints (believers) enjoy close fellowship together in perfect love and unity. If that were not enough, Heaven is a place where we will never experience any pain, sorrow, or death, because no sin or evil exists there – only perfect holiness. "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" (Rev. 21:3-4). Additionally, Heaven is a place where we will receive an "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 1:4) – that is, treasures that last forever and will not disappear, unlike those on earth. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:20). So, though we may have to give up things we

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<sup>45</sup> See Endnote I

cherish here on earth, it's well worth the sacrifice, because what we gain in eternity far surpasses anything we may lose in this life.

Despite the fact that the *true* Christian life is a hard road to travel and in fact, impossible without GOD's help, what can give you hope is to remember that there is the best prize of all waiting for you at the end of the road – not just Heaven, eternal life, riches, and glory, as wonderful as these things are, but more importantly, JESUS Himself! To be able to bask in the infinite beauty and glory of GOD Himself, while experiencing intimate communion with the Supreme Ruler and Creator of the Universe, stretches the imagination beyond what is humanly conceivable. Here on earth, you look forward to those occasions when you can spend time with those you love and enjoy most. But envision spending eternity with the One who not only made you and graciously saved you, but who also loves you with an infinite love that surpasses any human love. This same GOD has reserved a special place for you in Heaven, where He not only plans to lavish His generous gifts upon you for eternity, but where He also plans to increase your capacity for joy and heighten your experience of pleasure beyond what you've ever known before.

As wonderful as Heaven is, the benefits of true discipleship are not limited to just Heaven. Even while you're still on earth, GOD greatly blesses you. In addition to giving you a new heart and His Spirit to live inside of you, GOD grants you spiritual gifts or abilities to help you serve and glorify Him (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31). GOD also guides you on the right path, providing you with spiritual discernment to help you make wise decisions (1 Cor. 2:12-16). Moreover, He supplies you with spiritual armor, strength, and other resources to help you grow spiritually, overcome sin, and protect you from the enemy (Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 4:13; Col. 1:11). All that you need for your journey to Heaven is provided by GOD. "But my GOD shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by CHRIST JESUS" (Phil. 4:19).

Not only this, GOD promises to always be with you and never leave you. "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). With GOD on your side, you will not have to endure trials on your own or fight spiritual battles alone. He will take you through your trials and help you fight the battles (Deut. 31:3-8). "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy GOD is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9). Moreover, as your Heavenly Father, He cares for you and lovingly oversees everything that happens to you (Ps. 34:15). Nothing can happen to you apart from His sovereign will or permission (Ps. 31:15, 37:23). There are no surprises for GOD. Even when adversity strikes and everything seems to be going wrong, GOD is in perfect control, directing everything according to His sovereign purpose. In His infinite wisdom and power, He can take even the worst circumstances in your life (e.g., trials, losses, your sins and failures, etc.) and transform them into something good for your ultimate benefit (Rom. 8:28). Thus, with GOD in charge, you needn't worry, but can rest peacefully in His hands, trusting Him to take care of you.

You can be assured that if you're GOD's child, He wants what's best for you. He will provide you with all the help and support you need to make it to your journey's end (i.e., Heaven). Thus, when you fall (which you will), He will lift you up and encourage you to keep going and not give up. "The LORD upholdeth the righteous." "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand" (Ps. 37:17, 24). When you grieve Him with your sin and then repent, He will mercifully forgive you and restore you (Ps. 32:5). When you're confused and don't know what to do, He will

show you the answer (Ps. 119:105). When you wander off the path heading toward danger, He will warn you. And if that doesn't work, He will lovingly chasten you, so that you will get back on track (Ps. 119:67). When you're weak and exhausted from continual trials, He will comfort and strengthen you and give you rest. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And when you are on the brink of despair and desperately cry out to Him for help, He will rescue you and bring you to a place of safety. "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles" (Ps. 34:17). "For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy" (Ps. 61:3). Though you cannot see Him, GOD is always there. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). You don't need to fear if GOD is with you. And you can trust that He, who never changes and always keeps His promises, will be faithful to carry you all the way to your final destination. He loves you more than anyone else loves you. And His heart's desire is that you spend eternity with Him, enjoying the riches of Heaven and everlasting peace and contentment. Is this what you want?

### ***5. Beware of the Enemy's Tactics***

If your answer is yes, seriously consider the costs of discipleship before you make a final decision to follow CHRIST. But don't take too long or delay. The longer you wait, the more you risk losing your soul. Remember, you have an enemy (Satan), who is actively engaged in opposing you and would like nothing more than to see you destroy yourself, even if by your own indecision. A common strategy of the enemy is to convince you to put off your decision until a later time. "You've got plenty of time to decide. Why rush? There's no hurry. Enjoy your freedom and pleasure while you can. And then when you're older or about to die, you can get serious about GOD." He will try everything in his power to prevent you from giving your life to CHRIST. Beware. He is a persistent foe that does not give up easily. And on his side are both subtlety (i.e., deceptive tactics) and seemingly inexhaustible means.

Distractions are another one of the enemy's main weapons. Don't think it's strange, for example, if when you begin to seriously consider your soul, that the enemy tries his best to distract you from that purpose. Even while you're reading this tract, don't be surprised if you are repeatedly interrupted. The phone or doorbell may suddenly ring. A loud noise may drown out your thoughts. Your little child may require immediate attention. Or someone may want to speak to you right at that very moment. These are not coincidences, especially if they keep occurring every time you begin to ponder spiritual things. Satan is the master of distractions. His goal is to keep you busy and preoccupied with the things of this world so that you won't think seriously about spiritual matters. And he can distract you with just about anything – good or bad (e.g., successes, failures, illness, family crises, financial woes, responsibilities at work or home, worldly pleasure, amusements, friends, enemies, etc.). It doesn't really matter what it is, as long as it keeps you from thinking about your eternal state and salvation.

If distractions don't work, the devil has plenty of other schemes he can use. For example, he might try to persuade you not to follow CHRIST by using peer pressure. "What will people think of you if you become a true Christian? Everyone, including your family and friends, will think you're too extreme or crazy. And then they'll reject you, because you seem so strange and don't fit in anymore. Just do as everybody does and follow the world's beliefs and standards. Then you'll be accepted. Why be different?" Or Satan might appeal to your self-indulgence (i.e., natural inclination to pamper the flesh) or

laziness. "It's too difficult to be a true Christian. It requires so much hard work and commitment to serve CHRIST. And you have to give up so much. Say goodbye to all your fun and pleasure. Why be so hard on yourself? Just stick with the broad, easy path."

## **6. Choose CHRIST Before it is Too Late**

If you've been tempted with these or similar thoughts, don't listen to them. Satan, who is the father of lies and who was a murderer from the beginning, wants to deceive and destroy you (John 8:44). Don't let anything hinder you from getting right with GOD and securing your future home in Heaven. Give your life to JESUS as soon as possible. Don't put it off. Seek Him while the door is still open and there is opportunity to be saved. You never know when your time will be up and your life will come to an end. It may be today. Thus, before it's too late and the door shuts, trust in JESUS as your Lord and Savior, placing your full confidence in Him and His righteousness (i.e., His atoning death on the cross for your sins) to save you. Repent by renouncing your sin and your love of this world. Don't cling to the temporary things of this life. Nothing on earth is worth losing your soul over. Then surrender your life to JESUS. Let go of the reins and let CHRIST rule. If you truly put your faith in JESUS as your LORD and Savior and demonstrate it by repenting of your sins and surrendering your life to Him, GOD promises that you will receive the gift of eternal life (Acts 2:38-39; Rom. 10:9-10). The burden of sin's guilt and the dread of eternal punishment will be removed from you, and you will be delivered from spiritual bondage. For the first time in your life, you will be free! As if this were not enough, you also will be adopted into GOD's family, made one of His children, and receive an eternal inheritance that is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (Eph. 1:5; 1 John 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:4).

## **D. Examine Your Heart**

### **1. The Importance of Examining Your Heart**

How can you know if you're a true child of GOD with an eternal inheritance? GOD's Word says you must examine yourself to see if you are truly saved. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove [test] your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5). Don't just assume that you're saved simply because of what other people say. Though they may be sincere and mean well, they may be sincerely wrong, since they are not GOD and thus, cannot truly know your heart. And even if they quote Scriptures regarding GOD's faithfulness in keeping His promises and the certainty of eternal security (which are true), still don't let that keep you from examining your heart. Though it is true, you can never lose your salvation, that only applies to those who are genuinely saved. And how else will you know if you're genuinely saved unless you look for proof? Furthermore, don't let anyone convince you that by examining your heart, you're somehow sinning or demonstrating a lack of faith. I can tell you right off - that does not come from GOD. The enemy would like nothing more than for you to be self-deceived about your spiritual condition and think you're saved when you're really not. Sadly, thousands of professing, nominal Christians have fallen into that trap of believing that they're eternally secure, when they're really on the brink of hell. Don't let the enemy convince *you* that you shouldn't examine your heart. GOD warns you in His Word to examine yourself. And this makes sense. Why would you gamble with your eternal future? This is the one area you don't want to risk being wrong in. Just what if you're mistaken and you're not really saved after all? It certainly doesn't hurt to look into the matter just to be on the safe

side. But it will cost you your eternal soul, if you don't do anything and you were wrong. Why take a chance? Make sure that you're secure in CHRIST by closely inspecting your heart and life for evidence of salvation.

## **2. How to Examine Your Heart**

So, how do you check to see if you're truly saved? First of all, if you're a true child of GOD, you will be "born again" spiritually, which means that you will have a new heart with GOD's law written upon it, as well as the Holy Spirit living inside of you to help you love and obey GOD (Jer. 31:33; Ez. 36:26-27; John 3:3). Radically transformed from within, you will be a new person spiritually. "Therefore if any man be in CHRIST, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). And if there is truly an internal change of heart, there will also be outward, visible signs of this change manifested through your speech, conduct, dress, choices, preferences, etc. In other words, the proof that you're truly saved is a radically changed life that produces spiritual fruit or holy living. "Ye shall know them by their fruits...every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:16, 17).

## **3. Look for Signs of Spiritual Fruit**

How do you know if you're producing spiritual fruit? Together with the internal witness of the Spirit, you must look for signs or evidence of spiritual fruit in your life (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:10, 24). One mark of true saving faith is love for GOD. Be honest and ask yourself - Do you truly love JESUS? If so, you will strive to please Him by obeying His commandments. Amazingly, some within the Church today try to subtly deny this obvious truth by either skirting around the issue or avoiding it altogether, while others openly deny it through the use of sophisticated arguments and twisting GOD's Word (e.g., implying that obeying GOD's law is legalism and is opposed to grace). But even JESUS Himself said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). What could be plainer than that? In the clearest and simplest terms, JESUS linked love for Him to obedience to His Word. And as if to emphasize and clarify this point, JESUS repeated it several times. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21). "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (John 14:24). "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (John 15:10). If even JESUS Himself said this, who could argue with this or deny it? It seems so clear then that love for GOD is inextricably tied to obeying Him.

But now what kind of obedience is GOD referring to? Is it one merely performed out of a sense of duty, the fear of punishment, or a promise of reward? Though these are valid reasons for complying with GOD's will, our motives for obeying GOD should not be limited to these. Certainly, GOD, who is our Creator and LORD, has every right to command us. Without a doubt, we should feel a sense of moral obligation to obey Him. Our conscience dictates this. Moreover, a healthy fear of GOD's chastening should act as a deterrent to disobedience, while encouraging obedience. Finally, the hope of reward should provide further incentive to obey GOD. However, if we were to simply stop there and obey GOD for no other reasons than these, we would be no better than a Pharisee, motivated by pride and self-righteousness, or a devil, motivated by a slavish fear of punishment. Is this the kind of obedience GOD wants from us? The answer is, of course, "no". Even from a human standpoint, we can understand this. For example, would a

man want his wife or children to submit to him simply because they felt obligated to, feared his punishment, or looked forward to some reward? What would that imply about their relationship or their feelings toward him? Certainly, if he's like most people, he would prefer his family to obey him because they *want* to and not just because they *have* to. Similarly, GOD wants us to obey Him for the same reason. Again, GOD is not only concerned with our actions, but also with the motives behind our actions. In order for our obedience to be acceptable to Him, we must have the right motive.

Thus, one thing that distinguishes a true Christian from a non-Christian is his *sincere desire* to obey GOD from the heart. Out of love and gratitude for what GOD has done, he desires (though not perfectly) to please Him through his obedience. Put another way, the test of true love for GOD is his *willingness* to obey Him. Have you examined your heart on this issue? Ask yourself - Do you find it a joy or a burden to obey GOD? For example, do you attend worship, serve GOD, share the gospel, pray, and read the Scriptures because you really desire to or merely out of a sense of duty and moral obligation? GOD's Word says that if we really love Him, we will not see it as a burden to obey Him and do what pleases Him. "For this is the love of GOD, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not *grievous [burdensome]*" (1 John 5:3; emphasis added). In other words, if you claim to love JESUS, you should not only try to keep all of His commandments, but you should also do it willingly from the heart and not reluctantly. Do you do this? And what about when you fail to obey Him, which we all do? Do you repent with remorse over your sin, asking GOD to forgive you and to help you improve by His grace? Your answers to these questions will tell you a lot about your heart's spiritual condition and about your true feelings toward GOD.

In addition to obedience from the heart, another test of true love for GOD is whether you prefer Him above everything else or not. If you claim to love GOD, how much do you love Him? Do you prize Him above all and value Him as your priceless Treasure? Is He your "Pearl of great price"? If so, you will strive to put Him first and make Him your highest priority. And you will be willing to deny yourself, even if it means sacrificing or giving up what you cherish most in this life for His sake. "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" (Matt. 13:45-46). Are you willing to sell all to have JESUS? Is there anything in your life (e.g., an idol, some sin, etc.) that interferes with your putting GOD first or hinders you from loving Him the way you should? If so, are you willing to let go of it?

Another way to know if you truly love GOD and put Him first is to ask yourself - Do you still love the world or cling to the things of this life (as a general habit and way of life)? If so, then you cannot really love CHRIST. Scripture says, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with GOD? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of GOD" (James. 4:4). "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15; emphasis added). You cannot love both GOD and the world. First, GOD and the world are directly opposed to each other. GOD is perfect light and the world, which is under Satan's dominion, is total darkness. Therefore, the two are incompatible. Second, true Christianity is not syncretistic, where you can blend different faiths together or share more than one loyalty (i.e., GOD and the world). In other words, it's not like you can straddle the fence with one foot in Satan's kingdom (i.e., the world) and the other foot in GOD's kingdom, hoping to get the best of both worlds. GOD demands your complete

and undivided loyalty. He will not share this with anything or anyone else. You are to worship GOD alone. Thus, if your heart is divided between GOD and the world, then you are not truly worshipping GOD. And if you are not worshipping GOD, you cannot rightfully call Him your Lord and Master. The world (or rather, Satan) is your master. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve GOD and mammon [riches]" (Matt. 6:24).

#### **4. The Marks of True Conversion**

In addition to these questions, there are other tests that can help you evaluate your spiritual condition and determine whether you are truly saved or not. The following is a list of some of the general characteristics of true believers. Though not limited to this list, every true Christian should share these marks to one degree or another, depending on his spiritual maturity. Do you bear these marks?

1) A radical transformation of heart and mind that results from the new birth and dramatically changes one's worldview, goals, priorities, preferences, and perspectives regarding GOD, man, the world, etc. (e.g., switching from a man- and self-centered focus to a GOD- and others-centered focus)

2) Love for GOD and man that evidences itself in holy obedience to GOD, a desire to commune with GOD in close fellowship, and a selfless, sacrificial love toward man, including strangers and even enemies

3) Mercy or compassion toward others, even undeserving recipients; a willingness to forgive others, based on GOD's forgiveness of one's own sins

4) Joy that is deep-rooted and founded on GOD's eternal promises and biblical principles, rather than a superficial happiness based on temporal prosperity and changing circumstances

5) Peace that results from reconciliation with GOD through faith in JESUS; an attitude that promotes harmony/unity (based on truth and not on compromise), while avoiding unnecessary conflict or division

6) Longsuffering or patience with others and endurance through trials

7) Kindness or a considerate disposition that seeks to help and benefit others

8) Goodness or a generous spirit that gives cheerfully and willingly

9) Faith or a sincere, active belief in GOD's Word, person, and works that reveals itself through good works or spiritual fruit; trusting in JESUS CHRIST as the only means of salvation

10) Humility that increases with an awareness of one's sin, shortcomings, and unworthiness before GOD; a meek, gentle, and quiet spirit that is not easily angered and readily forgives; not thinking highly of oneself or seeking after praise or glory; esteeming others better than oneself and putting their interests first; the opposite of self-love (e.g., self-seeking, self-exaltation, self-confidence, self-will, etc.)

11) Self-control over carnal desires, appetites, passions, and excesses (e.g., anger, lust, gluttony, drunkenness, inordinate fear or anxieties, covetousness, etc.)

- 12) Truthfulness or adherence to the truth, marked by honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, etc.; a dedication to GOD's truth that seeks to spread it and put it into practice, while countering anything (falsehood, deception) that would oppose GOD's Word
- 13) Gratitude for GOD's love and mercy that naturally overflows into praise and adoration of Him and seeks to demonstrate appreciation through heart-felt obedience
- 14) Conviction of sin that extends beyond just feelings of remorse and leads to genuine and on-going repentance
- 15) Holiness that is not perfectionism or mere external morality, but a sincere desire and effort to please GOD from the heart by obeying His commandments; a new, inward principle that motivates the believer to pursue righteousness and overcome/mortify the remaining corruptions within the heart, having been delivered from spiritual bondage
- 16) Separation from the world that protects a believer from the world (i.e., its corrupting influence) without removing him from the world; remaining *in* the world as a witness for CHRIST, while not being *of* the world, condoning its false ideologies/beliefs and joining in with its sinful practices
- 17) Reverence for GOD or honor given to GOD out of due respect and regard for His divine attributes (e.g., holiness, power, wisdom, etc.); a holy awe and reverential fear of GOD derived not only from a knowledge of Scripture, but also from practical or personal experience (e.g., witnessing GOD's power through answered prayers; divine discipline or chastening, etc.)
- 18) Hunger for GOD's Word that is evidenced by the daily study, memorization, and application of Scripture
- 19) Prayer according to GOD's will that is regular, continual, and from the heart, based on GOD's truth
- 20) Serving GOD wherever there is an opportunity - at church, in outreach ministries, in the home, on the job, at school, etc.
- 21) Witnessing for CHRIST by testifying of GOD's truth (e.g., sharing the gospel, declaring GOD's attributes and works, etc.) and setting an example through godly behavior
- 22) Devotion to GOD's glory that increases with the knowledge of GOD and a corresponding humbling and forgetting of oneself; striving to make GOD's glory the focus and goal in every area of life, including thoughts, attitudes, speech, and conduct
- 23) Spiritual growth that manifests itself through an increasing conformity to CHRIST's image; growing in the knowledge of GOD and in personal holiness through the consistent application of GOD's Word
- 24) Perseverance or enduring to the end (of one's life or until JESUS returns) without abandoning or apostatizing (falling away) from GOD; continuing steadfastly in the faith and remaining loyal to GOD, sustained by His power and grace

## **5. Did You Pass the Test?**

Do you see spiritual fruit or signs of true conversion in your life? I'm not implying perfection, of course, since even after you are saved, you still struggle with remaining sin and corruption in your heart until you reach final glory (Rom. 7:15-25). "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). But overall,

is your life characterized by these marks? For example, do you see visible signs of spiritual growth or progress? Are you increasing in your knowledge of GOD, growing closer to Him, and becoming more like Him? Is your love for GOD deepening over time, the more you know and experience Him? Do you have a childlike faith that causes you - 1) to trust in and obey GOD's Word, though all those around you question or oppose it; 2) to depend on Him for your every need, even the seemingly most insignificant needs; and 3) to run to Him first and seek refuge in Him when faced with problems? Is GOD the main focus of your life, as seen in the use of your time, energy, money, and other resources? Is your overall goal to live for GOD's glory, submitting to His will, or to live for yourself, following your own desires? Do spiritual things have a higher priority in your life than temporal things? Are you experiencing more victories than losses in your battle against sin? That is, are you gaining more control over certain sins and weaknesses that you struggle with (e.g., anger, lust, pride, unedifying speech, selfishness, covetousness, etc.) and seeing improvement? And are you growing in love, humility, and holiness, without which no one will see the LORD (Heb. 12:14)? If you're truly saved, the general direction of your life should be heading in an upward trend, indicating spiritual growth and increasing conformity to CHRIST's image, though, granted, there will also be some valleys (failures) in between. Your life should not look like a flat line, representing a stagnant or spiritually dead life with no spiritual progress at all. Or worse, it should not look like a line heading downward in increasing degeneracy/depravity toward final destruction.

If you passed the test, by GOD's grace, and see definite signs or confirmation that GOD is working in your life (i.e., in salvation and sanctification), rejoice! And remember to praise GOD, giving Him all the glory. At the same time, note the areas that you need to grow in, and ask GOD for His continued help. In other words, don't rest satisfied with simply being saved, if indeed you are, but proceed further in your Christian walk, pursuing godliness and sanctification with all your heart and might, giving honor and thanks to GOD all the while.

However, if you did not pass the test, you may want to seriously evaluate your heart and life to see if perhaps you may be temporarily backslidden and need to get right with GOD by repenting of your sin and returning to Him. Another possibility and even more important, is to consider whether you are saved at all. This may be a frightening thought, especially if you've gone to church for most of your life and just assumed you were saved. You may even be a Sunday school teacher or a leader in the church, and even the thought that you might not be saved is quite embarrassing and humbling. But what is a little shame compared to your immortal soul? It's far better to face the truth now about yourself, when you can do something about it (i.e., seek GOD in *true* salvation), than to discover the truth when it's too late (after you've died). Sadly, many who profess to be Christians are in this very predicament. They are deceived into thinking they're saved, when they're really not, either because they were fed a false gospel or someone simply assured them that they were saved. Though I've mentioned it before, it's worth repeating. Don't be misled. Whether well-intentioned or not, no one, apart from GOD, can tell you for certain that you are saved. Though someone can and should show you verses that promise the *true* believer eternal security, no one can read your heart like GOD can and know if you're really saved. Only GOD has that power. And the way GOD has chosen to reveal to you whether you're saved or not is through His Holy Spirit and by examining your heart for spiritual fruit. Have you examined your heart?

## **6. One Final Plea**

If you've examined your heart and suspect you're not saved, don't despair. There is still hope for you. The fact that you're reading this tract shows that it's not too late. Thus, seriously consider what you will do. GOD places two paths before you. You can either choose to follow the path that leads to life or the path that leads to death. There are no other choices. One path leads to eternal joy, glory, and peace. The other path leads to eternal misery, shame, and fear. Once you have chosen the path you will take and you die, there is no turning back. Your eternal destiny has been fixed. Thus, it is critical that you make the right choice while you still can, since your *eternal soul* is at stake. What could have a higher priority or be more important than that? Don't make the mistake of delaying until it's too late and then regret it for the rest of eternity while you're suffering in hell. Abandon any thought that you'll get serious about your soul at some later point or when it's more convenient. Get right with GOD now. You may never get another opportunity. Therefore, cast aside all indifference, pride, unbelief, prejudice, or whatever else may be hindering you from coming to CHRIST. Stop the excuses. Be honest with yourself and admit that the real reason you've delayed is that you love this present world and your sin too much to give them up. Beg GOD to deliver you from this spiritual bondage and open your eyes. Pour out your heart before Him in humble contrition and repentance. Don't continue down the path that will lead to your ultimate death and destruction. Why must you perish? Please, for your own sake, don't ignore this final plea to get right with GOD. I urge you, dear reader, choose your path wisely. Choose LIFE!

*“I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the LORD thy GOD, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days...”*  
(Deut. 30:19-20).

***Which path will you choose?***

## Endnotes

**Endnote A** (page 17): Though I am a conservative, Bible-believing Baptist, it is my personal conviction that a literal seventh day Sabbath (i.e., Saturday) is what is intended by the fourth commandment. (Apparently, there are some other Sabbatarian Baptists out there, though I'm not familiar with their denomination.) Like most Christians, I at first accepted the traditional interpretation of a Sunday Sabbath. However, after studying Church history (especially the first few centuries of the early Church, which was closest to the time of the apostles), I came under the growing conviction that the Sabbath had not changed to Sunday (the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week) following JESUS' resurrection, as I had been taught. Moreover, I discovered that the Sabbath and the Lord's Day were not only clearly distinguished as separate days in the early Church, but to my surprise, some of the earliest documents revealed that *both* days were observed, demonstrating that the Lord's Day did not replace the Sabbath. ((See Matt. 28:1, Mark 15:47-16:2, and Luke 23:50-24:1, which, as part of the gospels, were all written years after the New Covenant Church was already established and show that in the early Church, the Sabbath and the Lord's Day (first day of the week) were viewed as separate, distinct days. Also see 1) Schaff, Philip. vol. VI, (Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Third Century), Anatolius, chapter XIV (Paschal or Easter Table); vol. I (Ante-Nicene I), Ignatius, "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians", chapter IX and "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians", chapter IX, Early Church Fathers. 1885, public domain – [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org), ; 2) Apostolical Constitutions (Coptic version), translated by Henry Tattam, London, 1848; pp. 138, 140: #75; p. 200: #66; etc.)) I wonder, could this be one of the factors that contributed to the establishment of a two-day weekend, consisting of both the Sabbath (7<sup>th</sup> day) and the LORD's Day (1<sup>st</sup> day)?

As helpful as the history of the early Church was to my search for the truth, what convinced me most regarding the observance of a literal seventh day Sabbath was Scripture itself. How could I ignore so many references to a seventh day Sabbath throughout the Bible? (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 16:4-5, 22-30; 20:8-11; 23:10-12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:1-3; Lev. 23:1-3; Deut. 5:12-15, etc.) And though there certainly were references to the church assembling on the Lord's Day, I could not find *one* single verse that gave clear proof that the Lord's Day (Sunday) had *replaced* the original Sabbath (Saturday). So, I resolved in my mind, that despite what I grew up with and church tradition (Yes, even the Protestant Church still relies on many of man's traditions, much of which were simply passed down from the Catholic Church and retained), I would simply trust in the plain and literal Word of GOD and not try to reinterpret it or read anything more into it. As Martin Luther felt compelled to follow his conscience based on Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura), so I felt convicted that "we ought to obey GOD rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and that "it is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man" (Ps. 118:8).

As a result, I decided to follow the example of the early Church and most importantly, Scripture, by observing a Saturday Sabbath in honor of GOD's *physical* creation, followed by a celebration of the LORD's Day in honor of His *spiritual* re-creation (i.e., the believer's new birth; JESUS' resurrection). I'd like to stress that though this is my own personal conviction, based on what I believe is the correct interpretation of Scripture, I also think that GOD, who is merciful and knows our hearts as well as our limitations, still honors those that *sincerely* observe either day as a Sabbath, according to their conscience. For me, at least recognizing the validity of the fourth commandment and observing a Sunday Sabbath is better than completely ignoring the fourth commandment

altogether and not keeping a Sabbath at all. And though I believe it's important to inform others about the "forgotten" commandment (i.e., the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment) and that a Sabbath observance is certainly a matter of obedience relating to sanctification, I do not think that it is, in any way, a *salvation* issue, upon which someone's salvation hinges, or that it should form the main basis or focus of a church's doctrine, as some groups assert. The only reason I spend some length in covering this topic in this tract is not because I believe Sabbath observance is the most important doctrine, but because it has long been neglected, misunderstood, or almost entirely abandoned in today's Church. May GOD restore the knowledge of His Sabbath to His people, along with many other forgotten doctrines, for His honor and glory.

**Endnote B** (page 18): This abridgement of the Ten Commandments should come as no surprise. Throughout Church history, Satan has systematically covered up GOD's truth, most notably His law. From the very beginning (i.e., Adam and Eve), Satan has actively worked to question GOD's Word in the mind of man and diminish His law in both doctrine and practice. Most of Israel's history, as recorded in the Bible, can attest to this downward spiral (i.e., rejecting GOD's law) toward apostasy (i.e., falling away from GOD). It is no different in the Church. With every succeeding generation, Satan has very subtly and gradually removed more and more of GOD's law from the Church, so that now even the Ten Commandments are being called into question (cf. "New Covenant Theology"). Who would have ever thought that it would go this far?

One of the ways Satan tries to convince people not to obey certain laws, such as the fourth commandment, is to suggest that GOD's law is no longer relevant or applicable under the New Covenant. Though it is true that we cannot be saved through the law, does this mean that we should no longer obey it? Does GOD's grace give us liberty to toss out His law and become rebels in His kingdom? GOD forbid! "Do we make void the law through faith? GOD forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). "What then? Shall we sin [break GOD's law], because we are not under the law, but under grace? GOD forbid" (Rom. 6:15). Scripture says that we are saved *from* sin, not so that we can remain *in* sin. JESUS did not sacrifice His life for us so that we would just continue in bondage to sin and dishonor His name, but so that we could live holy, righteous lives and bring glory to His name. What a perversion of grace to think that grace gives us a license to sin. We are saved by grace for the purpose of being sanctified (i.e., made holy), so that we can glorify GOD by serving Him acceptably, according to His will. And the only way we can do that is by following and obeying His written will for us, namely, His law. But if we reject GOD's law, how can we accomplish this and please Him?

Closely related to this is another one of Satan's common strategies - to directly or indirectly imply that the only commandments binding upon New Covenant believers are those specifically mentioned in the New Testament. The problem with this type of reasoning, though, is that, first of all, neither JESUS nor His disciples ever said this was the case. Nowhere in Scripture is the law for believers limited to just what is in the New Testament. Secondly, if believers were to simply obey the commandments in the New Testament, this would exclude a lot of very important commandments found only in the Old Testament, leaving the door wide open to all sorts of indescribable evil. Some of the Old Testament laws not repeated or directly addressed in the New Testament relate to: incest; bestiality; cross-dressing; rape; prostitution; the sanctity of human life, including unborn children; capital punishment; specific forms of idolatry (e.g., astrology) and related practices, such as child sacrifice, communicating with the dead, channeling, tattoo-

ing, piercing, self-mutilation, and other rites; cannibalism; rights protecting the poor and weak from abuse/injustice; humane treatment of animals; property rights; specific types of fraud; libel/slander; civil laws regarding justice, fair/impartial trials, and equitable punishment, etc. Not only this, but many of the laws found in the New Testament are so general or broad in their description (e.g., fornication, idolatry) that the only way to gain an adequate definition, with specific examples and applications, is to go to the Old Testament for clarification.

Though some believe that the New Covenant cancels out all Old Testament law, including the fourth commandment, both JESUS and His apostles (including Paul) not only kept the law, but repeatedly quoted laws from the Old Testament in defense of their arguments. Rather than nullifying Old Testament law or replacing it with a new set of laws, JESUS expounded and clarified the already existing law, giving it fuller meaning and shedding light on the true purpose and intent of the law. Even when JESUS said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34), this commandment was not new in the sense that it had never existed before, since clearly the Old Testament also taught that we should love one another (Lev. 19:18). But it was new in the sense of its example and application - that is, we are to love others the way JESUS loves us (i.e., sacrificially). Thus, the New Covenant does not abolish the law, but rather establishes and upholds it, while providing the means (i.e., GOD's Spirit, a new heart with His law written on it) for believers to keep it, by GOD's grace (Matt. 5:17-19; Ez. 36:26-27; Jer. 31:31-33). "I will put my *law* in their inward parts, and *write it in their hearts*" (Jer. 31:33; emphasis added). "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you...And I will put my spirit within you, and *cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them*" (Ez. 36:26-27; emphasis added).

What is another one of Satan's tactics to persuade us not to obey GOD's law? He tries to weaken our simple trust or faith in GOD's Word through deception and by assaulting GOD's name and character (e.g., His trustworthiness, infinite wisdom, good intent, immutability, etc.). Satan used this same strategy with our first parents when he questioned GOD's Word (and thus, authority). Even though GOD's commandment was clear and direct (i.e., if they ate the forbidden fruit, they would die), the master deceiver placed doubt in Eve's mind concerning GOD's trustworthiness (i.e., saying they would not die if they ate the forbidden fruit, contrary to GOD's warning) and good intent (i.e., lying about GOD's motives for restricting the fruit). As with Eve, Satan does the same thing with us. He tries to persuade us not to trust GOD's Word. Though we read in GOD's Word very clear and direct commandments, such as "Remember the Sabbath," Satan manages to deceive us by questioning GOD's Word and integrity: "Did GOD really mean that?"

That leads to another way Satan tries to prevent us from obeying GOD's law. He suggests that certain laws are just meant to be symbolic or allegorical and not to be taken literally. Believing Satan's lie, we reinterpret GOD's Word beyond its simple and plain sense to mean something that was never intended. And then we use this to rationalize or justify our disobedience to GOD's clear commandments. This does not imply, of course, that there are never times when GOD uses symbolism or figurative speech in Scripture. Quite clearly He does, as in the case when JESUS said, "I am the Door" or "I am the Bread of Life" (John 10:9, John 6:35). Obviously, JESUS did not mean that He was literally a door or bread, and these metaphors were intended for illustrative pur-

poses. However, unless the context of a passage clearly reveals that it is symbolic, we should simply accept its plain meaning and interpret it literally, instead of reading something into it. We run into serious problems when we over-allegorize Scripture. If misused, this practice can: 1) foster unbelief (e.g., questioning the literal accounts of Adam and Eve; Noah and the flood; Jonah being swallowed by a great sea creature; JESUS' incarnation; a future tribulation period, antichrist, Millennial kingdom and temple, etc.); 2) lead to doctrinal errors (e.g., seeing the gift of tongues as something other than a known language and using it without an interpreter); and 3) be used as an excuse to disobey GOD's law (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount, the Sabbath, modest dress, ordaining only men to be elders, a woman's head covering, etc.).

**Endnote C** (page 19): It's often wrongly assumed that GOD the Father alone is the Divine Lawmaker, who established and delivered the Old Testament law, including the fourth commandment, on Mt. Sinai. But it's important to realize that JESUS, who is also GOD, authored the *same* law (in its entirety) together with GOD the Father. That is, GOD the Father's law and JESUS' law are one and the same law. Perfectly united in divine essence and being, JESUS and GOD the Father agree in all their decisions and decrees, including the law. Far from being incompatible, they share the same purpose and design in all that they do. Though Satan tries his best to confuse the issue, we must understand that the GOD of the Old Testament is the same GOD of the New Testament. They are not two separate GODs – one of the Old Testament (i.e., the holy, just GOD) and one of the New Testament (i.e., the loving, merciful GOD). GOD, who is immutable, does not change. He has always been and always will be the GOD of both justice and mercy and of law and grace (in perfect balance). The subtle belief to the contrary, which has crept its way into the Church over the centuries and has significantly diminished esteem for the Old Testament and the law, is partially attributable to the false doctrine of Marcion, who was a 2<sup>nd</sup> century heretic condemned by the early Church for teaching that the GOD of the Old Testament was distinct and separate from the GOD of the New Testament and that the Old Testament (including the law) was not applicable to New Testament believers.

Though the Father and JESUS are separate Persons within the Trinity, they are still the same GOD, and thus both rightly bear the title of Divine Lawmaker. Where do we see proof of this (i.e., that JESUS, and not just the Father, established the law)? One proof is that JESUS Himself (in a pre-incarnate state) delivered the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. As the "Angel of the Lord" (i.e., a common designation for JESUS in the Old Testament), JESUS first appeared to Moses in the burning bush on Mt. Sinai and identified Himself as GOD or the great "I am" (Ex. 3:2, 4, 6, 14; John 8:58; Acts 7:30, 35). This same "Angel of the Lord" (JESUS) later delivered the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, as Stephen tells us in Acts 7:38. Hence, it is clear that JESUS, along with the Father, co-authored *all* the law, in both the Old and New Testaments, including the fourth commandment. Therefore, when JESUS says, "If ye love me, keep *my commandments*," He means *all* His commandments, including the fourth commandment (John 14:15; emphasis added).

**Endnote D** (page 19): Similar to the Pharisees' attempt to override GOD's law with their own laws and traditions, much of the Church's original, biblical doctrine has been replaced with human tradition, wisdom, or invention (e.g., certain papal decrees and church council decisions passed down for generations; the addition of pagan/idolatrous customs and holidays; practices based on contemporary cultural beliefs, popular opinion, or modern methodologies, such as pragmatism and entrepreneurialism, etc.). Thus, it's

very important to study Church history to understand our Christian roots and discover what important biblical doctrines once formed the basis and foundation of the Church. This, however, is not to imply that everything we learn in Church history is doctrinally correct or worthy of approval. As with any subject, we need to exercise spiritual discernment when studying Church history and compare everything to Scripture. Our guiding principle should be "Sola Scriptura" or Scripture only. In other words, does a certain church dogma or tradition line up with the Bible? No matter how long a particular doctrine or practice has been accepted by the Church, if it contradicts Scripture, it should be discarded. Therefore, the study of Church history, if done properly, can aid us not only in uncovering "lost" or "forgotten" biblical doctrine, which could prove helpful to the Church's stability and growth, but also in discovering when and how unbiblical, and even heretical, doctrine developed, so as to avoid it.

Sadly, due to the enemy's relentless deception and attacks on the Church, many biblical truths, including the observance of the Sabbath, have been grossly neglected, if not entirely forgotten. In addition to reading Church history (e.g., primary sources or actual writings of the early Church fathers; narratives of Church history by Eusebius, Philip Schaff, etc.), it is also helpful to read other Christian literature (e.g., biographies, autobiographies, journals, sermons, tracts, and other writings of pastors, evangelists, missionaries, reformers, martyrs, etc.) from past centuries to be better informed of how many different doctrines were once held in high esteem but are now virtually non-existent in the modern Church (cf. [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org) for more information).

Some of the biblical doctrines/practices that have been neglected or, in some churches, completely abandoned are: 1) the preaching of the full gospel in its unabridged and undiluted form (including a clear definition of sin, the need for sincere repentance and surrender to CHRIST's Lordship, the costs of discipleship, warnings about eternal judgment, CHRIST's atonement, the true meaning and purpose of grace, etc.); 2) a balanced and undistorted teaching on the relationship between law and grace; 3) an in-depth study, and not simply a brief overview or summary, of GOD's attributes, which is essential for spiritual growth and countering false teaching concerning GOD's nature (e.g., questioning GOD's total sovereignty, omniscience, sinless perfection, immutability, etc.); 4) the importance of using the "means of grace" to aid believers in sanctification (e.g., consistent and continual prayer; daily study and application of GOD's Word; regular fellowship/worship; partaking of the LORD's Supper; holy/obedient living; serving in ministry; sharing the gospel, etc.); 5) limiting the ordinances (baptism, Communion) to believers only and thereby guarding the purity of the Church; 6) thorough pre-screening of individuals being considered for baptism, church membership, ministry, and leadership that requires not only instruction/training and an interview and/or examination, but also a probation period, during which potential candidates are evaluated for their character and evidence of saving faith; 7) emphasizing the need for increasing sanctification/holiness for believers, including separation from the world (i.e., its sinful ideologies and practices); 8) administering church discipline according to Scripture; 9) adhering to biblical qualifications for appointing church leaders; 10) the appropriate roles for men and women, founded on Scripture and not on the world's standards; 11) the responsibility of parents (especially, the father as head of the family) to spiritually guide and train their children by modeling godly behavior; leading daily family devotions ((including prayer, worship, studying and memorizing Scripture, and doctrinal instruction (e.g., using church doctrinal statements; church confessions, such as the London Baptist or Westminster Confessions; or catechisms based on these confessions), etc.)); overseeing their

schooling/education (including curriculum) to ensure that it conforms to GOD's Word; practicing consistent, loving discipline based on biblical principles (e.g., justice and mercy); guarding against worldly or corrupting influences (e.g., friends, movies, music, games, books), etc.; 12) holy, reverent worship, based on Scripture, that aims to please GOD and does not try to please man by using the world's methods (e.g., marketing/advertising techniques, entertainment, videos, rock music, theater productions, emphasis on casual dress and contemporary worship, dividing the worship service between different age groups instead of joint family worship, etc.) to appeal and cater to non-believers; 13) careful, verse by verse expository preaching that includes both the Old and New Testaments; 14) public reading of the Scriptures during the service that covers the whole Bible within a certain time frame (e.g., a yearly cycle); 15) modest dress, especially in church, out of reverence for GOD and to prevent temptations and distractions; 16) corporate prayer and fasting, etc. The sad result of neglecting these biblical truths and practices has been widespread doctrinal ignorance and increasing conformity to the world within the Church. Instead of the Church having a godly influence and purifying effect upon the world for GOD's glory, the world has infiltrated and corrupted the Church, bringing reproach and dishonor to GOD's name. In many places, the Church's compromise has been so great that there is little, if any, recognizable difference between the Church and the world.

Satan's ultimate goal in concealing biblical doctrine and "dumbing down" the Church is to corrupt and weaken it in order to destroy it. By covering up GOD's truth, he has succeeded in spreading false doctrine, promoting counterfeit conversions, and stunting the spiritual growth and effectiveness of believers. Satan knows that without a true and accurate knowledge of GOD's truth, the Church's influence in the world will be greatly weakened and diminished. More specifically, without a thorough understanding of GOD's law, which helps to define sin and identify areas of weakness, where improvement or growth are needed, believers are left in a spiritually immature state. Without the law to aid them in exposing their sin, they fail to recognize and mortify (i.e., destroy, put to death) much of their remaining sin and thus make very little progress in the way of sanctification or advancing in holiness. And spiritually weak and immature Christians are less effective in their witness for GOD and sadly, often bring Him more shame than honor. And that's precisely what Satan wants – a weak and ineffective Church that poses no threat to him.

To counter this aim of Satan requires some knowledge of his strategies. One common tactic of the enemy is to distort the meaning and application of GOD's Word through imbalanced teaching (i.e., overemphasizing certain doctrines to the neglect or exclusion of others). For example, focusing almost entirely on GOD's grace in salvation (i.e., justification by faith) without balancing it with teaching on sanctification (i.e., the need to grow in holiness following conversion) encourages carnal living by giving the false impression that Christians can live unsanctified, unholy lives. In recent years, another subtle tactic to undermine GOD's truth has been to question the binding nature and relevance of His law (i.e., specifically, the Ten Commandments) under the New Covenant. This false doctrine (i.e., "New Covenant Theology") has done much harm to the Church in further confusing the issue involving law and grace.

Truly, as the Bible prophesied, we are quickly heading down that slippery path of anti-nomianism (lit. against the law) toward a final state of anarchy and total rejection of GOD's authority, in which GOD's law is completely despised and abandoned, in favor of

self-rule (which is really Satan's rule), where everyone does what's right in his own eyes. Don't be deceived by Satan's subtle assaults on the truth and fall into his trap. Just because we're saved by grace does not mean that we no longer have to walk in obedience to GOD's law or that grace somehow gives us a license or freedom to sin. In fact, grace further increases our obligation to follow GOD's law in that we now owe Him a far greater debt for saving us. Instead of using GOD's grace as an excuse to obey His law *less*, His grace should motivate us to obey His law even *more* out of love and gratitude for what He has done for us. Thus, to discard GOD's law by labeling it as irrelevant for New Covenant believers or worse, implying that it's legalistic to obey it, is not only trampling upon and abusing GOD's grace, but it also represents the height of ingratitude. Not only that, when we reject GOD's law, which is "holy, just, and good," we are, in fact, throwing away our own blessings (Rom. 7:12). That is, the further we migrate away from GOD's holy law, which was intended for our benefit and protection, the closer we head toward our own destruction. What madness! May GOD drive out our foolishness.

**Endnote E** (page 47): Arminianism is a man-centered theology based on the teachings of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), who opposed the biblical or reformed position on GOD's total sovereignty and predestination/election. Arminianism presupposes that man is born with an innate ability to choose what is good and right (e.g., to believe in CHRIST and turn away from sin). By inference, it suggests that man is not born spiritually *dead*, and thus powerless to save himself, but spiritually *sick* with some natural ability to help himself in the way of salvation. Furthermore, it also assumes that man is born with some amount of *goodness* and *spiritual discernment* within himself, enabling him to choose what is good and righteous (e.g., salvation). In contrast, the reformed position teaches that GOD, and not man, ultimately determines who will be saved, based on His sovereign choice (though this does not cancel out man's responsibility). Born spiritually dead, totally depraved, and thus, utterly helpless, man is incapable of contributing to his salvation in any way, but is entirely dependent on GOD's grace alone to save him. Adherents to this reformed position include some of the early Church fathers (e.g., Augustine), ancient Jews (cf. Dead Sea Scrolls, Book of Enoch, etc.), Protestant Reformers (e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin, etc.), Puritans, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, J.C. Ryle, and many different denominations, e.g., Lutherans, early Baptists (cf. London Baptist Confession of 1689), Primitive Baptists, Missionary Baptists, Southern Baptists, Presbyterians (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith), Reformed churches, Sovereign Grace churches, etc.

**Endnote F** (page 50): Though GOD does not explicitly state His reasons for electing some and not others, He provides some insight into those whom He most often chooses. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that *not many wise* men after the flesh, *not many mighty, not many noble*, are called: but GOD hath chosen the *foolish* things of the world to confound [shame] the wise; and GOD hath chosen the *weak* things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and *base* [insignificant] things of the world, and *things which are despised*, hath GOD chosen, yea, and *things which are not*, to bring to nought [nothing] things that are: *that no flesh should glory in his presence*" (1 Cor. 1:26-29; emphasis added). Though there are exceptions, it seems that GOD more often chooses those whom the world does not esteem or value (e.g., the poor, ignorant, weak, lowly, young and inexperienced, outcasts, criminals, etc.) and in fact, would reject as unlikely candidates for Heaven due to their lack of personal merit or worth. This preference for the lowly and base is confirmed by the ministries of both

JESUS and John the Baptist, who chose to minister more to the common people, including societal outcasts (e.g., tax collectors, prostitutes, etc.), than to the rich, powerful, highly educated, or religious elite (Matt. 15:30, 21:31-32), who were, for the most part, proud and resistant to their teaching. Even JESUS' choice of His disciples reflected this preference for the "lowly" in that they were generally taken from the lower classes and were of humble occupations (i.e., fishermen, a tax collector, etc.). Referring to His disciples, who were seen as "babes" in their education, knowledge, and experience, JESUS prayed, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the *wise and prudent*, and hast revealed them unto *babes* [the disciples]. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25-26; emphasis added).

Not just on an individual basis, but even on a national level, we see GOD choosing the lowly or those held in low esteem. In the case of Israel, GOD clearly states that His choice of them as His special, priestly nation that would inherit the promised land (Canaan) was not based on their strength, numbers, or righteousness, all of which was lacking. "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the *fewest* of all people." "Understand therefore, that the LORD thy GOD giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy *righteousness*; for thou art a stiff-necked [stubborn] people" (Deut. 7:7, 9:6; emphasis added). GOD said that He chose Israel to fulfill His covenant promise made to their forefathers (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), to punish the Canaanites by dispossessing them of their land, and simply because He decided to set His love upon Israel, though they were undeserving (Deut. 7:6-8, 9:4-6).

Whether on a national or individual level, why would GOD purposely choose to set His love upon those at the bottom segment of society, who hold little value or significance in the eyes of the world (e.g., a nation of slaves who were stubborn and rebellious, common people, minorities, the poor, disabled, young/inexperienced, ignorant, weak, social outcasts, the despised, etc.)? Why would He not generally prefer those at the top of the social ladder, who are highly esteemed by the world (e.g., those of noble birth, the rich, wise, powerful, very gifted/talented, and famous)? Though GOD does not inform us of all His reasons, He gives us at least one reason – "*that no flesh should glory in his presence*" (1 Cor. 1:29). Perhaps if GOD were to prefer those at the "top", some, if not many, would be tempted to boast of their own merit or achievements as the basis for their election by GOD, thus robbing GOD of His glory. By mainly choosing the "lowly", who have little or nothing to boast of, GOD not only shames and humbles the proud who trust in themselves, but also makes it manifestly clear that He bases His sovereign choice, not on the merit, worth, or even foreseen decisions of individuals, but purely on His *grace*, thus magnifying His glory. For the very reason that GOD, and not man, receives all the glory, the doctrine of sovereign election is one of the most humbling doctrines, and thus, one of the most despised doctrines.

**Endnote G** (page 52): The greatest misery on earth does not compare to the least torment in hell. This is precisely why suicide, euthanasia, or "pulling the plug" on someone's life support should not be seen as an act of mercy, even under the most trying circumstances, since the *worst* suffering he could experience here on earth would still be far *better* than the *infinite* torture and pain he would experience *forever* in hell, if he were not saved. Instead of providing relief from pain and misery, a premature death would only usher him into a far worse state of suffering, beyond what he ever experi-

enced on earth. Thus, every additional minute that he lives, no matter how painful it is, should be prized as one more minute in which he can get saved and escape the endless horrors of hell. (And even if he never got saved, at least every extra minute he survived would mean one less minute of suffering in hell.) Would you take this last hope away from him by pulling the plug? Even if he were unconscious or comatose, how do you know for certain that he could never regain his consciousness? And if he were conscious but could not respond outwardly (e.g., through speech or body gestures), how do you know that deep within the silence of his mind he can't still think and desperately cry out to GOD to save him in those last few moments? Don't be the one who is indirectly responsible for ending his life and sending him to a CHRISTless eternity. You can be certain that, while he is suffering in extreme anguish in hell, he will not be thanking you for what you did, however well-intentioned you were. Thus, assisting someone to end his life early is not a mercy, but rather, the greatest cruelty, if you consider what will happen to him after he dies, if he's not saved. And even if you think he is saved, are you so absolutely certain that you are willing to risk his eternal soul? Just what if you're wrong? I definitely would not want that burden of responsibility or guilt plaguing me the rest of my life, wondering if I made the right decision.

Still another reason to sustain someone's life as long as possible is that we are clearly told in GOD's Word to love others by helping them to *live*, not to *die*. If Scripture condemns us for not showing mercy by providing others with food, clothing, or other essentials, how much more would we be condemned if we had it within our means to prolong someone's life by simply supplying oxygen, a feeding tube, or some medication, but we withheld these things? In the past, it was unthinkable to even consider not doing whatever was necessary to keep someone alive. Anyone who would've turned down life support for his loved one would have been thought of as barbarous and inhumane, or at minimum, cold and uncaring. But today, after years of clever indoctrination and deception by the enemy, many actually believe that it is somehow undignified and thus wrong for someone to live with the aid of a machine and that it is somehow unmerciful to keep someone alive if he's suffering. (Of course, in all of this, they are not thinking of the spiritual or eternal side of things, but only of the physical and temporal aspects.) Furthermore, they rationalize that if he were not hooked up artificially, he would naturally die anyway, as people did in the past, before such modern technology existed. However, unlike people of the past, we *do* have the capability to prolong life in some cases (as enabled and permitted by GOD), and thus, we will be held accountable by GOD, if we do not use all our available resources to help someone live.

Therefore, in this whole debate, it is critical to think not just of the physical side of the issue, but more importantly, of the spiritual side, which is of far greater import and significance. Failing to do our utmost to help someone live would, at minimum, be a sin of omission and a lack of love, if not worse. And pulling the plug before someone is ready to meet GOD is not showing mercy or kindness, but the greatest cruelty, when we consider what will happen to him in eternity. Thus, before you think of ending someone's life prematurely, when you have it within your means to prolong it, consider seriously what you will do, since your decision will have eternal ramifications, both for yourself and for the person affected. Let GOD and your conscience be your guide and not this world's wavering and untrustworthy opinion.

**Endnote H** (page 56): A covenant is a very serious and binding agreement or promise made between two or more parties. In ancient biblical times, a covenant was sealed or

confirmed by the blood of a sacrifice (Heb. 9:18-20). GOD has always related to His people on the basis of covenants (e.g., Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New covenants). After delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage, GOD established the Mosaic or Old Covenant with Israel (and any Non-Jews joined to them) at Mt. Sinai, while they were en route to Canaan, the inheritance promised to them under the Abrahamic Covenant (Ex. 19:1-8; 24:1-8; Gen. 13:14-17). Under the Mosaic covenant, GOD promised blessings for obedience to His law and curses for disobedience (Lev. 26:3-39). Knowing that Israel would fail to keep His covenant and incur judgment, GOD mercifully established the New Covenant with Israel (and any Non-Jews grafted to the "olive tree" or Israel), based solely on grace (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13). Under this covenant of grace, GOD promised to forgive His people's sins, give them new hearts with His law written on them, and put His Spirit within them to help them love and obey Him (Jer. 31:31-33; Ez. 36:25-27).

**Endnote I** (page 70): All *true* Christians will persevere to the end and never lose their salvation, because they are kept by the power of GOD and not by their own power or decision (John 6:39, 10:28; 1 Pet. 1:5; Phil. 1:6). If it were left to them to maintain their own salvation, none of them would remain faithful, but all would fall away. That is, if persevering in the faith were dependent on man's strength, ability, or righteousness, no one could stand the test, because man, who is by nature sinful, imperfect, and weak (even in his regenerate state), is incapable of maintaining his own salvation. Thankfully, though, GOD, by His power and grace, enables believers to persevere to the end, so that they can never lose their salvation. Further affirmation of the believer's eternal security can be found in GOD's sovereign election of those who will be saved. GOD, who determines all things according to His sovereign plan, made before time began, will not alter His eternal decrees. Nor can He, in any way, be kept from performing His sovereign will. He is the King of the universe and sovereign over everything. Whatever He has decided in eternity past will most certainly come to pass. Thus, to imply that salvation could somehow be lost, because it is dependent on man's decision or power to maintain it, robs GOD of His sovereignty and puts the final say and control into man's hand. Who is sovereign – GOD or man? Additionally, because GOD is immutable (unchanging), faithful, truthful, and perfectly wise, He will not change His mind or break His promises concerning the choice of His elect. To do so would imply lack of foresight, caprice, or error on GOD's part, which would then mean GOD was mutable, unfaithful, and imperfect in knowledge, and therefore, not GOD (GOD forbid!). In the end, to suggest that salvation can be lost has very serious implications - tantamount to stripping GOD of His deity, which is unthinkable. Instead of this, it is better to realize that those who permanently fall away from GOD don't demonstrate that salvation can be lost, but rather they simply show that they were never *truly* saved in the first place. Many can make an outward profession of faith and even appear to be true Christians (i.e., by attending church, serving in ministry, participating in baptism and the LORD's Supper, being externally moral, being well-versed in the Bible, and even leading and/or teaching in the church, etc.) without ever being really saved. But only those who persevere till the end and never lose their faith demonstrate that they are true believers.

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Thank you for reading this tract. We hope that you were blessed and encouraged by it. If you have any questions, or would like a free New Testament please contact: [freegiftofgrace@gmail.com](mailto:freegiftofgrace@gmail.com)

Recommended resources: (We do not necessarily endorse all of the doctrinal views of the following)

[The Gospel According to Jesus](#), John MacArthur  
[Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic](#), Walter Chantry  
[Religious Affections](#), Jonathan Edwards  
[Letters to My Students](#), Charles Spurgeon  
[The Existence and Attributes of God](#), Stephen Charnock  
[The Attributes of God](#), Arthur Pink

[www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com): Solid Reformed Christian Literature  
[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com): Online bibles  
[www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/bcof.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/bcof.htm): London Baptist Confession  
[www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org): Classic Christian writings

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May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ  
receive all the praise and glory, for He is worthy!

*For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things,  
to whom be glory forever. Amen.*  
(Rom. 11:36)

*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible,  
to God who alone is wise,  
be honor and glory  
forever and ever. Amen.*  
(1 Tim. 1:17)