

A REASON FOR ADVERSITY

TIME CAN BLUNT THE STING OF EMOTIONAL
PAIN. BUT UNDERSTANDING WHERE IT FITS IN
GOD'S WILL CAN PUT IT TO REST

By, Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

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For God so loved the world
that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in Him
should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

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“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”
Proverbs 23:23

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Preface

The author, an attorney and graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, addresses the problem of pain with the conviction that scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is wholly without error. Accordingly, this book is an uncompromising demand for scriptural consistency and truth – whether it bodes good or ill for how one may prefer to view God. The reason for this approach is not simply to grasp the truth, but to honor the Creator, who, for His own reasons, has made us in the way that He chose and is in no need of apology.



This book is an examination of scripture for the purpose of understanding why God, being both just and good, permits pain and tragedy to occur to those He loves.

The problem of pain is a canker in the faith of many and a stumbling block for many more. But there are excellent reasons why the Creator has created a world that contains both pleasure and pain. The failure to confront the more difficult scriptures directly and see the whole fabric of His creation as a whole obscures the reality of God's true character and leads the Christian to a place where God is re-defined and made into something that He is not.

Ultimately, if God is God, He is responsible for all things including adversity and pain. Ironically, when one confronts this difficult truth with blunt honesty and simply accepts the plain words of scripture, the circumventions that we often use to color our conception of God begin to fade and an unexpected consistency and faith emerges.

As I wrote this book it became evident that the avoidance of adversity is of equal, if not more, importance than the reason for it. I therefore addressed that issue in the last half of the book.

Charles R. Chesnutt

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† indicates a comment on the text of a scripture

◇ Indicates a comment on the accuracy of scripture

↻ indicates the end of a chapter.

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If this life is not a crucible where the Creator
places His creation and forges value with the
fire of adversity, then what is it?

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Chapter 1

The Theological Problem of Pain

WHY DOES GOD PERMIT ADVERSITY?

For many Christians, the problem of pain and adversity lies at the very center of all Christian doubt.

Indeed, there is no more challenging argument to the Christian than the argument “If God is a loving God and if He is all powerful, then how could He allow pain and adversity?” This argument is a formidable challenge to our faith, but it is only a facade that covers the deeper challenge: “Is there a God at all?”

If the answer is “Yes, there is a God” then the inevitable response is, “If there is a God, then He is either not loving or He is not all powerful because He permits pain and adversity to exist when He could stop it.”

The argument continues, “The first baby born without arms is an irrefutable argument that a loving, caring God does not exist.” And “Who is this God who can create arms on an infant but chooses not to do so? Who is this God who could prevent the untimely death of a mother or a father or prevent disasters, disease and hunger? Why does He stand by when crimes are committed?” Or, “Why am I dying?”

Ironically, it is only after we have the courage to challenge Him with these questions that His presence and power become evident—and the true strength of scripture becomes real. Challenges like these prove Him. We challenge Him only to discover that He invites the challenge and He emerges as Truth out of the cobwebs of avoided issues and circumvented doctrines. When we challenge Him head-on for who He is we see more clearly than ever before that He is indeed righteous, loving, just and more magnificent than we will ever know.

So let us take a leap of faith and directly face the Problem of Pain and see where scripture takes us.



Chapter 2

God is God Despite the Opinions of Man

THE SEARCH FOR A MORE SUITABLE GOD

The God of Scripture is Sovereign

Hell

God Made in the Image of Man

God has created us the way we are for a *very* good reason and He has given us no choice in the matter. He has done what He has done and He leaves us free to accept Him, reject Him or challenge Him. Therefore, let us take Him at His word and Challenge Him. Why, if You are all powerful, do You permit pain and adversity to exist?

Only one thing is forbidden in our inquiry. We must not pretend that He is something that He is not. God is not the product of man's needs and imagination. He exists and He makes Himself known through the Bible and directly to people who seek Him.¹

He offers no apology for who He is and we must not circumvent scripture to accommodate our own desire for Him to be different because He is who He is despite any opinion of man.

Whether we accept Him, agree with Him, love Him, reject Him, hate Him, follow Him or try to make Him into our own image, He is who He is. And all of our pretense, fabrications and rejections will not change Him.

If we do not wish Him to be who He is or if we do not wish Him to do what He does, it is of no matter because He simply is. Indeed, His name is "I AM THAT I AM"² which means "The Self-existent One." We cannot change Him, nor can He change Himself. He is immutable (unchangeable).³ If we examine Him and find Him not to be to our liking,

1. John 14:21 "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him."

2. Exodus 3:2 "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM ... thus shall thou say unto the children of Israel ..."

3. Malachi 3:6 "For I am the LORD. I change not..."

it is of no moment, because He is still God. There is only one God, and He is a jealous God.⁴ Searching for a more suitable God is meaningless. He will not receive the worship of those who worship another god.

The God of Scripture is Sovereign

So who is the God of the Bible? He describes Himself by saying that He is love.⁵ But how can that be if He creates us and places us in a world where sin, adversity and pain exist?

He is eternal.⁶ He existed before man and He created man,⁷ and He will exist for the rest of eternity.⁸ Therefore, He exists apart from man and is not dependent upon man for any aspect of His existence.

The God of scripture is sovereign over all things.⁹ He is all-powerful¹⁰ and all-knowing;¹¹ and as such, He foreknew each of us.¹² He knows the number of the hairs on our head¹³ and He is aware of every sparrow that falls.¹⁴ He creates man and all things¹⁵ and He executes

4. Exodus 20:5 “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ... thou shalt not bow down thyself to 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* ...” (the First Commandment); Exodus. 34:14; De 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; Jos 24:19; Na 1:2; 1 Corinthians 10:22.

5. First John 4:8 “...God is love.”

6. Deuteronomy 33:27 “The eternal God is thy refuge ...”

7. Genesis 1:26 “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”

8. Psalms 104:31 “The glory of the Lord shall endure forever...”

9. Psalms 103:19 “The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all.”

10. Revelation 19:6 “... the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Job 42:2; Genesis 18:14; Matthew 19:26. God, however, cannot or will not deny Himself. For instance, He cannot sin.

11. 1 John 3:19 “... For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” Job 37:16; Psalms 147:5 “...His understanding is infinite.”

12. Romans 9:29 “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of His Son ...”; 1 Peter 1:2 “...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father ...”; see also Acts 2:23 and Romans 11:2.

13. Matthew 10:30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

14. Matthew 10:29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”

15. Genesis 1. (Entire chapter)

His will notwithstanding the opinions of man.¹⁶ He heals,¹⁷ guides,¹⁸ directs,¹⁹ answers prayer,²⁰ manifests himself (makes Himself known) to those who love and obey Him;²¹ He lives in each person who obeys Him and who loves Him;²² He gives wisdom to everyone who asks for it;²³ He brings righteousness to each one who wants it;²⁴ He protects,²⁵ provides,²⁶ gives true freedom,²⁷ removes sin²⁸ and instills within each person who is willing an immense and profound internal peace, which, once discovered, is more marvelous than anything that this earth has to offer.²⁹

God who is constantly with us and is all powerful is fully capable of delivering each of us from all pain and tragedy and insulating us from harm and sin, either our own sin or the sin of others.

16. Isaiah 14:24 “The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand...”

17. Deuteronomy 32:39 “I am He and there is no god with me...I heal.”

18. Psalms 32:8 “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye.”

19. Psalms 23:3 “...He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name’s sake.”

20. John 14:13 “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Hebrews 4:16 “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

21. John 14:21 “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

22. John 14:23 “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

23. James 1:5 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith...”

24. Romans 5:17 “...they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness ...”; Romans 4:11 “... that righteousness may be imputed unto them...”

25. Psalms 50:15 “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee...”

26. Matthew 6:33 “But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”

27. John 8:36 “If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed”; John 8:32 “If you continue in my word, *then* are you my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

28. Psalms 107:3 “As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”

29. Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

God is God Despite the Opinions of Man

He could have placed us in a world where no baby is born without arms, where no one dies, where no disease afflicts, no crime injures, no accident maims, no war kills, no greed steals and no tear is ever shed. But He did not.³⁰ † God who created each of us and who knows the hairs on our heads³¹ is more than capable of healing any disease that we may ever encounter and instantly delivering us from persecution, hatred, crime, injury, debt, divorce, lawsuit, disease, pain or death. And He, more than any force in the universe, is able to protect us and our loved ones from anything. But He does not always do so. Why?

Let us not delude ourselves by embracing a theology that teaches that God is not responsible for adversity. God certainly is responsible for adversity. He is responsible for all things, including every tragedy and every pain and loss that has ever occurred because He is all knowing³² and all powerful.³³ Of course He is responsible for it all; He is God.

God does not directly cause all tragedies, but He certainly permits them.³⁴ He who created Mother Theresa also created Adolph Hitler and hammered His own son, Jesus Christ, to a cross and left Him to die an excruciating death. He alone determines when men shall live and when they shall die and He determines all of the agonies and ecstasies that happen in between.

Although God is the Creator of those who commit sin, He is not the author of sin.³⁵ Sin is a free choice made by man to engage in acts that result sordid pleasure or profit—and result in spiritual death.³⁶ God neither sins, nor causes sin nor does He tempt anyone to sin.³⁷ God creates the sinner but it is the sinner who sins. But God is ultimately responsible for both because He created both the sinner and the sin.

30. † However, He do these things in the future. Revelation 21:4 " 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."

31. Luke 12:7 "But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

32. Hebrews 4:13 "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do."

33. Revelation 19:6 "...for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

34. Job 1:12 "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he [Job] hath *is* in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.."

35. Deuteronomy 32:4 "All His ways are right." Job 34:12 "Surely God will not act wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice."

36. Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

37. James 1:13 "...God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man;

We cannot argue that this omnipotent God is not responsible for adversity because it is somehow part of His “permissive” will rather than His “sovereign” will. Any distinction between these two “wills” is meaningless because God is omnipotent³⁸ and omniscient,³⁹ all powerful and all knowing⁴⁰ and He alone, therefore, determines what will occur.

Exculpating God by saying that a tragedy occurred because of different parts of His will—or because His back was turned—is saying that God is not omnipotent and not in control of all things. This argument is unscriptural and it is unnecessary. God is ultimately responsible for everything and He has no need to be exculpated from anything.

Many simply do not accept that God is the author of tragedy because they do not wish the God whom they worship to have any part in adversity. But God Himself announces that He directly creates evil:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace,
and create evil;⁴¹ I the Lord do all these things.⁴²

Therefore, when scripture says that we should fear God,⁴³ it means exactly that. God did not promise us a life on a bed of rose petals; He promised a life in a garden full of dirt and weeds, labor and rest and roses and thorns. Fear God? Fear Him indeed.

but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust...

38. Revelation 19:6 “... the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Job 42:2; Genesis 18:14; Matthew 19:26.

39. 1 John 3:19 “... For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” Job 37:16; Psalms 147:5 “...His understanding is infinite.”

40. 1 John 3:20 “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” Matthew 10:29 “

41. The Hebrew word that is translated “evil” in this passage can mean 1) evil as in a malicious, immoral act, or 2) evil as in a disaster (as translated in the NIV) or “harm” (as translated in Jeremiah 39:12 (KJV)) or 3) it can mean a consequence which is the result of an evil act of men, as in, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion...ye that put far away the evil day...and drink wine in bowls...but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” (Amos 6:1,3,6). When Isaiah 45:7 is read with Deuteronomy 32:4, Job 34:12 and James 1:13, it is clear that its meaning cannot be 1, but is instead either 2 or 3. See Harris, L., Archer, G., Waltke, B. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press. 1980. Print. s.v. 2191 at page 854 vol. 2. See also Keil, C.F., Delitzsch, F. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. 1975. Print. Vol. VII, p. 221 (Isaiah 45:7).

42. Isaiah 45:7; the Hebrew translated “evil” is better rendered “tragedy”, as it is in the New American Standard Version.

43. Deuteronomy 6:13 “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him...”

And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.⁴⁴

God alone determines when each of our bodies will die. And, indeed, He *destines* some to be disobedient and to stumble:

Behold, I lay in Zion a Chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe *He is* precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed...⁴⁵

And God chooses:

Therefore hath he mercy on whom He will *have mercy*, and whom He will He hardeneth. You will say then unto me, Why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed *it*, Why have you made me thus?⁴⁶

So God chooses some and does not choose others and ultimately casts some into hell.

Hell

At this point we must address what happens to people in hell because the eternal fate of the billions who reject Christ speaks directly to the character of God. And we must understand the character of God to understand problem of pain and why He permits adversity in this life.

44. Luke 12:4-5 (emphasis supplied).

45. 1 Peter 2:6-8

46. Romans 9:18-20

We must ask, if "God is love" as John 4:8 says that He is, why does He torment unbelievers in the flames of hell for the rest of eternity? What does He gain by eternal torment?

The belief that God effectively burns everybody alive for the rest of eternity except for us Christians for the rest of eternity is theological error. The Bible does not teach it. The Bible teaches that the ultimate fate of the unredeemed is death, not eternal torment. There are 50 scriptures that teach death as the final state of the unredeemed. Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death," is best known. Ezekiel 18:4 is perhaps the most straightforward, "The soul that sins shall die." And Revelation 21:8, "the second death," is the most conclusive.

Every single scripture that directly addresses the eternal state of the unredeemed says that their eternal state is death, eternal death. There are 50 of these scriptures.⁴⁷

Those who propagate the doctrine of eternal torment cannot explain why no scripture refers to eternal torment except for one, and that scripture refers to the eternal fate of Satan (Revelation 20:10). There are several scriptures that are broad enough to include either eternal torment or eternal death but there is no conclusive scripture that teaches eternal torment, whereas there are 50 conclusive scriptures that teach eternal death.

Those who propagate eternal torment attempt to circumvent the scriptures that teach eternal death. They do so by redefining death out of existence. According to current evangelical theology, there is no real death. After the body dies, the unbeliever lives forever in hell and Revelation 21:8 (the "second death") is not real death at all and the wages of sin is eternal torment. These beliefs are not scriptural.

The souls of the unredeemed have not been forgiven and they must face the consequence of their own unforgiven sin in hell. They will reside in hell pending the final judgment and their stay in hell is determined by the extent of their sin.⁴⁸ But after the final judgment they die eternally in the second death. Eternal death is their eternal punishment, not eternal torment.

47. See the Author's *Fate of Unbelievers* at BIBLEBOOKS.CO.

48. Scripture says little about how different souls are treated in hell. It is broad enough to accommodate the ideas of C.S. Lewis in his book *The Great Divorce* where sincere but deceived people live out their beliefs in a massive spiritual city. Or, Lucy of Fatima whose vision of hell was continual torture.

How does this effect the theology of adversity? It shows that God is just and there are no surprises. He warns us repeatedly that sin causes death but that He has provided an escape and that escape is Jesus Christ. Christ died in our place. He paid our death-penalty for us and those who turn to Him can escape eternal death. But those who reject Christ will have to pay their own penalty, which is death.

Note that Jesus Christ died for us. He paid the death-penalty for us. He was not eternally tormented for us because death is the penalty for sin, not eternal torment.

So, God determines when we are born and when we die. What we do between those two is largely up to us. But in the end God judges sin and that punishment for sin is spiritual and physical death.

Every single scripture that speaks directly to the eternal fate of the unredeemed death. This includes passages that allude to eternal punishment.⁴⁹ The unredeemed will be punished eternally, to be sure, but that eternal punishment is not eternal torment; it is eternal death.

It is for this reason that scripture tells of two deaths, not just one. In the first death the body dies;⁵⁰ and in the second death the soul dies.⁵¹

Unless the soul is saved through Christ, in the end it will die because of sin because "The soul that sins shall die"⁵² and "The wages of sin is death."⁵³ All have been thoroughly warned and given the opportunity to be saved through Christ.⁵⁴

The only escape of eternal death is to appropriate the work of Jesus Christ who paid the wage of sin for us by *dying* for us *in our place* on the cross.⁵⁵

49. Matthew 25:46; Second Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 1:7.

50. Hebrews 9:27 "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment..."

51. Revelation 21:8 "... their part [their soul and resurrected body] will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

52. Ezekiel 18:4

53. Romans 6:23

54. Revelation 22:17 "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

55. See *Believe in God* which may be downloaded from biblebooks.co

God does not predestine the unredeemed to burn in hell forever. But God is eternal justice and as such He must punish sin and that inevitable punishment is death—either the death of Christ or our own death. And God alone determines when that death will occur.⁵⁶

God Made in the Image of Man

Some Christian denominations re-define God to become less fearsome, less responsible and not really in control. Some come to this conclusion because they cannot accept a God of burns people alive forever—and they are right. He certainly does not.

But rather than consult scripture, they create a god who neither creates, judges or does anything unpleasant. In this oblique way, they teach their congregations that salvation in Christ is superfluous and lead their followers away from scripture, away from salvation by faith in Christ and away from the Creator into lives that will eventually end in eternal death.

One does not have to look far in scripture to see that God is far from the neutered god described by apostate churches. In addition to being love, He is also the eternal judge and He must judge sin. He alone determines when we live and when we die and determines which adversities that we will face while we are alive for His purposes and our benefit.

But, although He is fearsome, He is also the source of love and life itself, all hope and every act of kindness, self-sacrifice, every faithful friend and loving spouse, every caring parent, all Truth and all beauty that is on or ever has been on this earth.

So, let us simply admit that He is who He is whether we like it or not. But in our admitting let us admit *all* that He is. Let us presume that these scriptures are true, as all of scripture, and let us have the courage to see where it leads us. Let us look at this God, who is at once the author of tragedy and ecstasy, the giver of comfort and pain, the author of eternal life and eternal death, and let us ask the most difficult of questions:

Why?



56. Matthew 10:28 " Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Chapter 3

A Reason for Adversity

MANKIND WITHOUT ADVERSITY IS MANKIND
WITHOUT RELEVANCE

God has knowingly created us to be fallible and placed us in a world of crumbling virtues and sin, ecstasy and pain. The reason that He has created us in this way is because He is creating us as independent agents of good. He has created us to create eternal value and that value is righteousness.

We are His chosen ones, chosen to express and to eternal fruit:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control¹

Within these fruits we also find honor, fidelity, honesty, forgiveness, acceptance and integrity. The reason why we are here is to do and to be good, to be righteous.

But the gripping irony of this magnificent goal is that the virtues that express righteousness and love cannot exist in a vacuum. They must have their counterparts. Honesty cannot exist without dishonesty; fidelity is vapid without the existence of betrayal; and in order for kindness to exist, cruelty must be possible.

Adversity is the background for righteousness, spiritual strength, patience and love. Like a white ferret on a snowy hill, righteousness is invisible without its opposites. It is adversity that *engenders* righteousness. Adversity is the fire that forges eternal value.

Righteousness is not possible without choice and choice is irrelevant without adversity. Mankind without adversity would not be man. Man must be free to sin if his choice not to sin is to have relevance. If man is free to give, he must also be free to take. He must be both free and imperfect to be real.

Of all of the miracles that Christ performed, not one of them altered the free will of anyone. Nowhere does scripture make this more evident than in the case of John the Baptist. When the Baptist was imprisoned, Christ was beginning His ministry and performing miracle

1. Galatians 5:22,23

after miracle. Christ changed water into wine.² He healed the sick³ and gave sight to the blind⁴ and paid the temple tax from coins taken from the mouths of fishes,⁵ but He left John the Baptist to die in prison.

The Baptist fell victim to a tyrant acting on the whim of a depraved young girl and her mother. The soldiers of Herod came to the Baptist's cell and cut off his head and presented it to the girl on a platter.⁶ Christ did nothing to stop it. Why? Because He would not interfere with either the free will of Herod or the Baptist. Herod and the girl defined themselves by what they did—and so did John the Baptist. From the perspective of eternity, the fact John the Baptist died is irrelevant but the *reason* for his death is eternal. Each of players of that drama chose for themselves how they would face eternal judgment.

God has a reason for creating a world in a state of moral free-fall where young girls and potentates can place the heads of prophets upon platters. There is a reason why we live in a world where free will is unrestrained, where politicians sell themselves for power and tyrants, criminals and sin blossom like spring weeds. It is no accident.

The Creator has placed us in a world where the only real currency is righteousness, honesty and honor instead of gold, where truth and wisdom, justice and mercy are the true jewels. The rest is fluff and vanity. We define ourselves by these things—or by their opposites.

God has created us to live in a world that is devoid of its own moral compass. He has given us a blank check called life that we can invest as we see fit. And when it is over, He will ask us what use we made of it.

2. John 2:8 "Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Now draw some out, He said, and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine."

3. Matthew 8:3 "Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said, "be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed..."

4. John 9:6,7 "Jesus...spat on the ground, made some mud, and applied it to the man's eyes. Then He told him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came back seeing."

5. Matthew 17:27 "Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee."

6. Mark 6:20-28

We were born to face the refiner's fire. We have to face the fire if we are to be of eternal significance. The Creator takes sinners and turns them into gold and uses the fires of this world to do it. He creates beauty from ashes and then gives it to *us*.

...To give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD⁷

Behold, I have refined thee...I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.⁸

And I will ... refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God'⁹

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it.¹⁰

It will come about in all the land," Declares the LORD, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it."And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God'¹¹

7. Isaiah 61:3

8. Isaiah 45:6-10

9. Zechariah 13:8

10. Isaiah 45:8

11. Zechariah 13:8

God is in the business of transforming bad to good, tragedy to ecstasy and filling the internal void of spiritual death with the presence and the fullness of God Himself.¹²

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, the length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.¹³

We are His instruments of good, the vessels of His righteousness. We *are* the beauty that He has created. We are the gold that has been purged from the dross with the refiner's fire.

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.¹⁴

It is difficult to understand this when we experience the heat of the fire. But we must not to question His wisdom:

I am the LORD, and there is no one else; There is no God except Me. I will arm you, though you have not known Me,

That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other;

I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.

12. John 14:23 " Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

13. Ephesians 3:16-19

14. Malichi 3:3

Rain down, you heavens, from above, And let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, And let righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it.

“Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker— A piece of pottery among the other earthenware pottery pieces! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’¹⁵

The concept of sincere righteousness is immensely important to God. God values it *exceedingly*,^{16†} and He hates unrighteousness.¹⁷ The lack of righteousness is the reason for the fall of man; it is the reason for eternal judgment—eternal life or eternal death—and it is the reason for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

When He sees us, He does not see our body, but our soul.^{18†} He sees our intent and our sincerity¹⁹ and He understands that He has created us as imperfect beings;²⁰ He searches our heart and deals with us according to what He sees.²¹ He has made us to be fruit bearers, not legalists and functionaries. What we do is irrelevant unless it is done sincerely from the heart, from the fruit that we bear.

15. Isaiah 45:5-9

16. Proverbs 21:21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor." Psalm 89:14 "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne." John 14:23 "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.'" † Here Jesus is saying that those who obey His commands (righteousness) will enjoy the presence of God. Also see John 14:21.

17. Ezekiel 18:4 "The soul who sins will die." Ezekiel 3:20 "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Also see Revelation 21:8.

18. † See Ezekiel 18 for a very clear delineation between the soul and the body and the fact that it is the soul who is the person.

19. First Samuel 16:7 "for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

20. First John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

21. Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every

For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.²²

Anyone who does not recognize how important righteousness is to God does not know God.²³ Righteousness *now, in this life* is overwhelmingly important because our *raison d'etre* is to produce the fruits of the Spirit (righteousness). The decision to accept the righteousness of Christ results in eternal life,²⁴ and the decision not to accept the righteousness of Christ results in eternal death.²⁵ But it is here, in this life and only in this life that we have the singular opportunity to create righteousness.

God *intends* righteousness to be blurred²⁶ with the temptations of the world²⁷ because without obscurity there is no issue to wrestle with; and with no issue to wrestle, there is no choice to be made; and where there is no choice there is no righteousness.

And He said, Go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they

man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” See also Isaiah 64:4-6 where God states that He meets with him that works righteousness, but in one sense our righteous acts can be as “filthy rags.”

22. Hebrews 4:12

23. First John 2:3 "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments;" First John 3:9 "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

24. John 10:28, 29 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of My hand."

25. Revelation 21:7,8 "He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the cowardly, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

26. Matthew 13:15 "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear."

27. Isaiah 6:9,10

see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed.

God is a creator and He has created us in His image. He has created us so that we ourselves can create righteousness and become a vessel containing God Himself²⁸ and become both righteous and eternal. In order to be that person we must encounter adversity and, at times, serious adversity. Adversity is essential because choice is essential. Choice is essential because value is essential. The same was true for Jesus Christ,²⁹ who was spared no pain.

He is the Vine and We are the Branches

We were not created to spend a lifetime churning self-aggrandizement like a mouse in a golden running wheel. We were created in His image. We were created to *create*. We are the branches of the vine of Christ, He created us to create the fruits of righteousness.

I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.^{30†}

We are the branches. Branches bear the fruit; vines do not. We can do nothing without Christ, but it is we who bear fruit. We are the fruit-bearers created in His image. We are independent agents created to bear the fruits of righteousness.

We have been given the inestimable honor of being chosen to create instances of good that *would not exist* without our free choice. And, unlike sin that results in spiritual death,³¹ righteousness results in life and peace.³²

28. John 14:23 "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.' "

29. Second Corinthians 5:21 " He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

30. John 15:5 † Here Jesus Christ is saying all that we do that is apart from Him is effectively "nothing."

31. Romans 5:12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

32. Romans 8:6 "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded [oriented toward righteousness] *is* life and peace."

And it is eternal:

As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no *more*:
but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.³³

... the righteous [shall go into] life eternal.³⁴

...as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might
grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life
by Jesus Christ our Lord.³⁵

Within scripture's continually reiterated concept of righteousness and obedience, God weaves numerous and specific facets. Among these facets are love (God is love³⁶), honesty,³⁷ integrity,³⁸ fidelity,³⁹ courage,⁴⁰ diligence,⁴¹ love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, temperance [self-control]⁴² kindness,⁴³ and others.

As we assimilate these qualities, they become consistent patterns of behavior in us and we become that person. These patterns of behavior are called virtues. Virtues are expressions of righteousness. These virtues are life⁴⁴ and they are eternal.⁴⁵ But they cannot exist without their

33. Proverbs 10:25

34. Matthew 25:46

35. Romans 5:21

36. 1 John 4:8 "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." The love in this passage is "agápe," which means a love that is wholly unconditional.

37. Romans 12:17 "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

38. Psalms 25:21 "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait upon thee." Proverbs 11:3 "The integrity of the upright shall guide them..."

39. Titus 2:2,10 "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience ... shewing all good fidelity..."

40. Psalms 27:14 "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart..."; Psalms 31:24 "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."

41. 2 Peter 1:5 "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge..."

42. Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness [humility], temperance [self-control]..."

43. 2 Peter 1:7 "And to godliness [add] brotherly kindness..."

44. Proverbs 12:28 "In the way of righteousness is life, And in its pathway there is no death."

45. Romans 8:10 "And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the

counterparts. Perhaps the great tragedy of our times is that these virtues are rarely taught to children. We fail our children when we fail to teach them virtue; we are sowing the wind and we will reap the whirlwind⁴⁶ because when they are adults, they will become the sum of their choices, just like us.

Righteousness and virtues are by far the most prevalent aspects of all scripture. In the Old Testament, righteousness permeates the scripture from Cain and Able⁴⁷ to Judges;⁴⁸ it stretches from the Ten Commandments⁴⁹ to the prophet Malachi.⁵⁰ Righteousness is the reason for the Old Testament law. It flows through Psalms like a river of purpose⁵¹ and forms the bedrock of Proverbs.⁵² It is the reason behind all of the prophets and it is the light of their prophecies.⁵³

Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.”; Romans 8:6 “For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.”

46. Hosea 8:7 "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind"

47. Jude 1:11 “Woe unto them! for they have gone the way of Cain...”

48. Judges 21:25 “In those days...every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

49. Exodus 20

50. Malachi 2:17, 3:5 “Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied *Him*? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil *is* good...I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless...”

51. Psalms 1:1 “Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night.” Psalms 11:7 “For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.”

52. Proverbs 21:12 “He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness and honor.”

53. Isaiah “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it.” Isaiah 32:17 “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”

In the New Testament, Christ was crucified for the purpose of providing forgiveness and righteousness⁵⁴ to those who are undeserving.⁵⁵ Righteousness is the core of Christ's ministry and teachings; it is the reason for His death on the cross⁵⁶ and we are made in the likeness of Christ.⁵⁷

Behind all the lessons, the themes, the drama, the history and all the teachings in all of scripture stands this silent giant: righteousness. It is no wonder that God has placed the apple of His eye (man) into a world where man himself can become the author of this eternal jewel.

It is for this reason that the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁵⁸ For without the knowledge of good and evil, there can be neither good nor evil. When man ingested this fruit, the knowledge of good and evil became part of imperfect man who would use it to justify his own sin and condemn the sins of others—or else he would use it to recognize his own sin and turn from it. His choice.

God knew that man would eat the fruit. But God also knew that without the fruit, the choice to be good or evil would be irrelevant. Without the fruit man is morally neuter. Without the fruit, man would not be man. God created man exactly the way he is—and permitted him to fall in order to give him an opportunity to have eternal life⁵⁹ and to experience that life in the here and now by knowing God.

Now this is eternal life, that they may know You,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You
have sent.⁶⁰



54. Romans 3:22 "...the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe..."

55. Second Corinthians 5:21 "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." Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

56. First John 2:2 "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

57. Romans 6:5 "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection."

58. Genesis 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

59. John 14:6 "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

60. John 17:3

Chapter 4

God's Eternal Building

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS FORGED ON THE
ANVIL OF ADVERSITY AND IT IS ETERNAL

HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER
PSALM 112:3,9

Righteous acts are seen but it is the things that are unseen that last.

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.¹◇

The object of Paul's prayer in Ephesians was that Christ would strengthen the spiritual part of man, the "inner man," by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man²

The spiritual part of ourselves is who we really are; it is where Christ resides and knowing God is the source of spiritual strength.

According to His divine power [He] has given to us all things that pertain to life and Godliness, through the knowledge of Him, Who has called us to glory and virtue.³

The message of the Bible is that the spiritual part of man is essentially everything. Life appears to be temporal and material but the temporal and material parts of man are controlled by the inner man. And they lose all relevance the instant that the body dies. The only thing that is left is the soul, which is the spiritual part of man.

And what is the soul? It is what we have permitted Christ to make of it by a lifetime of our choices. Christ lays a solid foundation for what we will build, but it is we who choose what to place on that foundation. We may use ordinary boards or perhaps the finest walnut or mahogany.

1. Second Corinthians 4:18 ◇ This righteousness will last the spiritual lifetime of the person who cultivates it and the spiritual lifetime of the believer is endless ("God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" 1 John 5:11)

2. Ephesians 3:16

3. Second Peter 1:3

Sometimes we use expensive golden bricks of righteousness. But we all build with both to one extent or another. In the end, the wood will burn away and the beautiful dark walnut will burn just as completely as the white pine. Only the gold remains.

For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, his workmanship will be evident, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will prove the quality of each man's work.⁴

We are His building. God is building us:

For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry; *ye are* God's building.⁵

God is not building His building to see it die and be forgotten. The righteousness of the man who fears the Lord endures forever⁶ and the soul of the man who comes to Christ never dies.⁷

Who and what that soul is depends on the choices it makes when choices make a difference. Righteousness lives forever in the soul of the person who cultivates it. We become and we remain what we choose to be.

His Life, a Life that we receive when we come to Christ never ends. Our bodies will die, but our true selves, the spiritual part of us, our soul, will never die because he who does the will of God will never die:

For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he who does the will of God abides forever.⁸

4. First Corinthians 3:11-13

5. 1 Corinthians 3:9

6. Psalm 112:3,9

7. John 11:26 "Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." Christ is saying that everyone who trusts in Him and receives eternal life will never die. He is referring to the soul, not the body.

8. 1 John 2:16,17.

The message is not to secure a guarantee of heaven now so we can collect when we die. It is all one package and it starts *now*. Eternal life and the righteousness that it empowers is not simply a hope of heaven after our death. Eternal life starts *now*, by knowing Christ. To know Jesus Christ is to experience eternal life because Christ *is* the life.⁹

And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou
hast sent.^{10†}

Knowing God is accomplished by righteousness, which is having His commandments and keeping them.

He who has My commandments and keeps them,
he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be
loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will
disclose Myself to him.^{11◇}

But life is not an easy road and it was never intended to be, not for us and certainly not for Christ whose destiny was the cross. Adversity in life is a necessary and principal part of life. Perhaps this concept is best encapsulated in a statement that Jesus makes to Peter, the Apostle:

Simon, Simon behold, Satan had desired *to have*
you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have
prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not...¹²

Satan desired to sift Peter as wheat and apparently had received leave to do so. Jesus warned Peter and was quick to pray for him, but what did He pray? Much like John the Baptist whom Jesus chose not save from a cruel death in a dark prison, Jesus did not pray for Peter's deliverance. Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail.

9. John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

10. John 17:3 † Jesus Christ promises to give us *His* life (John 14:6, "I am...the life"), not an extension of *our* lives, but something entirely different. Our lives will end (Hebrews 9:27 "It is appointed unto men once to die"), but His life will never end because it is eternal (John 17:3). Because His life is eternal, not only will it never end, but also, it never began.

11. John 14:21 ◇ Note that phrase used here is to "have His commandments," not simply to "know His commandments." The word "have" in this verse carries much of the same implications as in English, which is to possess something, to make it one's own, not simply to be aware of its existence.

12. Luke 22:31.

Christ did not pray for Peter's deliverance because Peter's faith was *supposed* to be tried. When we look at what happened to Peter through the lens of the god of this world,¹³ we see God as uncaring, unloving and leaving Peter to be sifted like wheat by Satan himself. But if we look to scripture, we see that Satan was used for God's purpose and Peter's sifting resulted in a much stronger Peter. How else but through adversity could this fisherman-turned-evangelist have obtained the faith and courage necessary to become a pillar of the church and carry the gospel to Asia, Greece and Rome?¹⁴

It is for this reason that Christ was not concerned with the pain that He knew would be coming to Peter. He was concerned with how Peter would respond to it. Would he turn from his faith or would he emerge with a faith made stronger by having withstood the onslaught of Satan?

In permitting Satan to sift Peter like wheat, God was addressing something, some shortfall, in Peter that had to be removed. But if Peter had known the problem, could he have corrected it by obedience and thereby avoided the sifting and the resulting pain? Is that possible? Not only is it possible but scripture is filled with admonitions to do exactly that. Much adversity can be avoided by yielding our will to His.¹⁵

Not only does the process of adversity strengthen our faith and spiritual power, but it also separates the sheep from the goats. He is separating the sheep from the goats by permitting us to define ourselves in the face of adversity.

He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' ¹⁶

The choices that we make define us forever—precisely the way Cain has been forever defined by his murder of Able, or the way Peter was defined by dying for the gospel of Jesus Christ. What we do in this life can never be undone. It can be forgiven¹⁷ and a sinner may be reha-

13. Second Corinthians 4:4 "But if our gospel be hidden it is hidden to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds"

14. Matthew 16:18 "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

15. See Chapter 5

16. Matthew 25:33,34

17. 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins,

bilitated and made into a new creature,¹⁸ but the opportunity to be an author of righteousness in the face of that particular temptation ends at the moment of choice.

If adversity and the requirement to choose were removed from man, then man would no longer be man. Without choice or challenge man is no more real than an actor reading scripts on a stage, speaking courageous pretense, faking courage without fear, receiving honor without price, working without effort or loving without passion. When temptation and adversity are removed from life, real choices disappear. Without adversity we become no more significant than the shadows that flicker across a cinema screen. Turn off the projector and they are gone.¹⁹

Scripture defines choices of good or evil as choices between darkness and light²⁰ and scripture defines the eternally condemned as those who loved darkness rather than light:

And this is the condemnation, that light [Christ] is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.²¹

Note the care with which the above scripture is written. The condemned do not do evil deeds because they love darkness; it is the other way around. The condemned love darkness *because* they commit evil deeds. Their choice came first and what they did determined what they loved. What we do determines what we love; we define what we love by what we do.^{22†}

Now consider the immediate effect of these truths when we choose unrighteousness. Consider the promiscuity of this age. The man or woman who embraces the sexual promiscuity of the world is defining what he or she loves. The more the sin is committed, the deeper the effect of the sin will be. Eventually, true love and fidelity to a righteous

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

18. Second Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come..”

19. Psalm 37:20 "But the wicked and enemies of the LORD will perish like the glory of the fields. They will vanish; like smoke they will fade away."

20. See the interplay between darkness and light in Ephesians 5.

21. John 3:19

22. Consider the profound effect that this truth has upon marriage.

spouse become more and more distant. And as sin becomes commonplace, the question ceases to be *who* one loves but whether one *can* love.²³

God has given to all men the power to acquire endless love through knowing Him.²⁴ Love comes from knowing God.²⁵ Therefore, if knowing God is absent so also is real love. Now consider how this truth can effect a marriage. Love is the core of an excellent marriage and love comes from the presence of God and the presence of God comes from righteousness.

Sin kills. It kills righteousness; it kills love; it kills spiritual things; and it kills relationships including our relationship with Christ.²⁶ † Sin kills; it cuts us off from “all things that pertain to life and godliness²⁷ because God does not remain in the presence of repeated sin.²⁸ Sin causes the branch (the Christian) who continues to sin to become separated from the vine (separated from Christ) and separated branches will be burned in the fires of this world. They wither and they die spiritually because they cease to draw life from the vine.²⁹

23. First Corinthians 6:9a "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [homosexual sin], nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God..."

24. See the author's *Endless Love*.

25. First John 4:7 "Beloved, let's love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."

26. †Knowing Christ is based upon expressing our love for Him by having His commandments and keeping them. See John 14:23 discussed above.

27. Second Peter 1:3

28. John 14:21 "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make Our home with him."

29. See Hebrews 6:6. Any branch is perfectly free to dis-attach from the vine and live for the world, but they are of no eternal value. Dis-attached branches can renew themselves through sincere confession of sin (they should use Psalm 51 to do so) and by relinquishing further sin. See First John 1:9. But it is impossible for anyone else to renew them because they have put Christ to "open shame" by their sin. The sinning Christian is most miserable having rejected Christ and yet not a child of the world. Hebrews 6:6 does not refer to the loss of salvation.

The *entire Bible* is a warning that sin kills.³⁰ Each choice to lie;³¹ † each choice to steal;³² each choice to gossip;³³ † each fornication or adultery produces another piece of spiritual death. Spiritual death is gradual and with each instance it becomes just a little easier to die inside, a little easier to no longer love the light and to turn from it, a little easier not to love at all. Justification for sin is facilitated and Truth is obscured. Spiritual darkness comes.

Just as repeated sexual sins progressively obscure their own darkness, so do all sins become legitimized—and justified—in the mind of the sinner. As cogently stated by one unfortunate young person, “I crossed the line just once because I knew I could always step right back. But when I turned around I could hardly believe how far back the line was.” Sin produces spiritual death and we can feel it. It is a void inside.

In the end it is man who produces his own love for darkness. Sinful choices *produce* the love of darkness and the love of darkness results in God’s condemnation.³⁴ Jesus Christ is the only solution because the cross is the only thing that can give spiritual life to the spiritually dead

...He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”³⁵

And just as we can feel the internal void of spiritual death, we can also feel the peace of spiritual life and the immense peace that comes with the presence of God. It is an actual experience. It is the experience of having eternal life and knowing God.

30. There are 50 scriptures teaching that sin kills. The ultimate consequence of sin is death, not eternal torment in hell. See the author’s *Fate of Unbelievers*.

31. Revelation 21:8 “...all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” † When, in this verse, the categorizations of sin reach the sin of lying, scripture uses a singular emphasis by referring to *all* liars.”

32. Exodus 20:15 “Thou shalt not steal.”

33. Luke 6:37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.” † Obedience to this verse and the verse following, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” is one of the keys to internal peace and spiritual freedom. See the author’s *Endless Love*.

34. Psalm 119:119 “[You reject] all the wicked of the earth *like* dross...”

35. John 5:24

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee
the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou
hast sent.³⁶

It is Christ and Christ alone that gives peace that is beyond comprehension. It is Christ and Christ alone who fills the void, who turns lives around and makes zealots out of atheists and saints out of sinners.

Theology does not do this; change of opinion does not do this; church going and religious ceremonies do not do this. Good works, wafers, speaking in tongues, feeling guilty or falling backward do not do this. Only the actual and spiritually tangible presence of Jesus Christ does this. And the presence of Jesus Christ comes at a cost. The cost is obedience; the cost is righteousness. Salvation is free³⁷ ◇ but knowing God requires obedience.³⁸

Conclusion

Every choice has an eternal effect, and God tells us frankly that He grows the good and the bad together in this life like a farmer who lets weeds grow in his wheat field. God has created a world where both wheat and weeds will grow and we must choose which one we will be.

Wheat is valuable because it yields nourishment (righteousness). Tares (weeds) have no value. Some are attractive, but when eaten they become bitter and they take the place of wheat and deprive the body of the nourishment that it needs. In the end the weeds will be gathered and burned and the wheat will be gathered and placed into God's barn:

Let both grow together until the harvest; and in
the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather
together first the tares (weeds), and bind them in
bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into
My barn.³⁹

36. John 17:3

37. Ephesians 2:8 "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God." ◇ Look at the profound accuracy of this statement. Salvation is a gift because it has to be a gift. It has to be a gift because the price of sin is eternal spiritual death (Romans 6:23). We cannot pay that price and at the same time experience salvation.

38. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love him and disclose Myself to him" Also see Appendix *Knowing God*

39. Matthew 13:30

At that time the righteous shall shine forth as the sun

Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.⁴⁰

And their righteousness shall endure forever.⁴¹

All of the accountings and the rewards at the judgment seat of Christ will arise from a lifetime lived out in life's fabric woven with good and evil, tragedy and ecstasy, dreams and despair. In this fabric, all men are subject to inherent adversities, temptations, pleasures, contentments, virtues, accomplishments, pains and death. If these adversities did not exist, neither would their righteous counterparts. Without adversity, there would be neither wheat nor weeds.

So, what is God doing by placing mankind in a world filled with adversities? He is doing what is His nature. He is creating. He is creating us, not only the physical us, but the spiritual us. And He is creating us to be creators of righteousness in a life where the fruits of His Spirit spill and overflow with the sheer joy of life and love and peace.

His joy is to see our joy. We are His creation and we are His image, and so greatly loved by Him that His goal is our joy, our love, our life our happiness.⁴² He can't help it. That's what He is. God *is* love.⁴³

So God has a motive. He has a purpose for what He does and He can't hide it. His motive is love and his purpose is us, our eternal joy, our love, our life.⁴⁴

But God has a problem. His problem is that in order for us to be all that we can be we must do it freely, of our own choice because to be real we must do it from love. The beauty of love is that it is freely given. Therefore, if we are to love God and love one another and bear the fruits of the Spirit, He must provide us with the right and the opportunity to choose not to participate, the right not to love. He must give us the right to choose—either the right way (the righteous way) or the wrong way.

40. Matthew 13:43”

41. Psalm 112:3,9

42. Galatians 5:22 "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..."

43. First John 4:8 "God is love."

44. See the Appendix *Knowing God - Loving Life*

The sum of it all is that He has created us to yield fruit and that is what we do. We bear our fruit—either bitter or sweet. And in so doing we define ourselves and determine our eternal destiny.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and sorcery; hatred, discord, jealousy, and rage; rivalries, divisions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.⁴⁵



45. Galatians 5:19-23

Chapter 5

Adversity Caused by Sin

BECAUSE OF THEIR INIQUITIES, THEY WERE AFFLICTED

PSALM 107:17.

Much of the adversity that we encounter in life is *voluntary*. It can be avoided by avoiding sin because adversity is the inevitable result of sin.

The primary adversity that sin engenders is a breach in the Christian's relationship with Christ. This is because righteous living is required if God is to make Himself known to us.^{1†} However, righteous living is not required for us to retain salvation once it has been given because it is Christ who purchased our forgiveness with His life. We have no claim upon it and Christ can do with it what He chooses despite our failures. And He chooses not to retract it once it has been given.^{2†}

But the possession of the gift of salvation does not alter the effect of sin, and effect of sin is to kill, whether we are saved or not. If we are not saved, sin will result in eternal death.³ And if we have been saved, sin will kill our present and experiential relationship with Christ, because for Christ to make Himself known to us, we must "have His commandments and keep them."⁴ Therefore, righteousness is essential to knowing God. And for the believer, knowing God is everything.⁵ Indeed, knowing God is the only personal, experiential and immediate benefit from Christianity. Remove it and Christianity and life become an empty shell. Supply it and life is magnificent.

1. †Sins committed by believers destroy their relationship with Christ because the believers' experiential relationship with Christ in this life is contingent upon righteousness (obedience). One cannot continue to sin and enjoy the presence of the savior. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." John 14:21

2. Romans 8:38,39 "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing [including man] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." † See Hebrews 6:4-6, which refers to Christians who have fallen away from their relationship with Christ. They remain saved from the second death, but that is all. God's presence has been replaced by sin. Like an overgrown vineyard that is cleared by burning, the vines are dead, but the ground, the foundation, remains (See First Corinthians 3:12).

3. See Revelation 21:8

4. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them..."

5. Second Peter 1:3 "According to His divine power He has given to us all things that pertain to life and Godliness through [by means of] the knowledge of Him."

Righteousness is not simply doing what seems right or feels right. Righteousness is doing and being what God says *is* right, and one learns what is right by reading scripture. Scripture is not a theological word game; it is the means to an end, the means to a transformation into a lifetime of joy and peace that is so deep it is beyond comprehension.⁶

Scripture is a paradigm of honor and morality that is superimposed on life. When we stay within its construct, we are blessed with the presence of Jesus Christ.⁷ When we fail to follow the paradigm and venture into sin we lose the presence of God. We can never lose God's love, but like a parent whose child sins, the parent must discipline the child. Indeed, it is the same parental love that loves the child that demands the child to be disciplined.

Scripture is a map that shows where to turn in order to walk with Christ and avoid the pain of sin. It is like a flashlight on a dark path at night showing us how to avoid adversity before it happens.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet...⁸

The wisdom of God's word has saved many from significant pain.

By the word of thy lips, I have kept *me from* the paths of the destroyer.⁹

And again:

The entrance of thy words giveth light.¹⁰

And again:

He that follows after righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honor.¹¹

6. Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

7. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose myself [make Myself known] to him." See Appendix *Knowing God*.

8. Psalms 119:105

9. Psalms 17:4

10. Psalm 119:130

11. Proverbs 21:21

Failure to appreciate the wisdom of scripture has unfortunate consequences, one of which is to become effectively spiritually dead. The Christian can never lose his salvation, but he can certainly lose his relationship with Christ and thereby become dead spiritually.

The man that wanders out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.¹²

One does not have to read much scripture to see how adversity can be avoided by obedience. For instance, consider how much pain can be avoided by obeying scriptures such as these:

Do not yoke yourself (in a relationship, a marriage or in partnership) with an unbeliever.¹³

Do not steal.¹⁴

Do not covet (do not permit yourself to strongly desire something that belongs to another—like his wife or her husband).¹⁵

Don't be a fornicator.¹⁶

Don't be a liar.¹⁷

Husbands love your wives¹⁸

Wives, respect your husband and submit to his leadership.¹⁹

12. Proverbs 21:16. Those who are spiritually dead know it.

13. 2 Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness."

14. Exodus 20:15

15. Exodus 20:17

16. 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 "Be not deceived: neither fornicators nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, or extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

17. Exodus 20:16 "Thou shalt not bear false witness..." Proverbs 12:22 " Lying lips [are] abomination to the LORD."

18. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands love your wives, even a Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it."

19. Ephesians 5:22 "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."

Don't commit adultery.^{20†}

Don't cosign a loan or promissory note (become a surety).^{21†}

Forgive. Always forgive. Live in a sea of forgiveness and never never hold a grudge.²²

Don't injure with words.²³

Do not criticize or condemn.²⁴

Love always. Love never fails.²⁵

Do not gossip. Scripture equates gossip with murder and it makes no distinction between gossip that is true and gossip that is false: all gossip, whether true or false, is sin.²⁶ Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy...²⁷

Do not associate with a gossip.^{28†}

20. Exodus 20::14 "You shall not commit adultery." † To adulterate means to pollute. Relationships can be polluted with flirtations as much as with physical adultery. Treating the marriage vow with impunity by threatening divorce is an adulteration of the marriage as well..

21. Proverbs 17:18 "A man void of understanding ... becomes a surety." † God directs with finances.

22. Matthew 18:22 "Then came Peter unto Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventy times seven."

23. James 1:26 "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain."

24. Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment he judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

25. 1 Corinthians 13:7,8 "Love [agape] bears all things, believeth all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love [agape] never fails." † Love that fails is not agape. Agape is God's unconditional love that is acquired with the presence of God. First John 4:8 "God is love [agape]"

26. Romans 1:28-30 "God gave them over to a reprobate mind ... being filled with all unrighteousness ... full of envy, murder ... malignity; whisperers [gossips], back-biters, haters of God ..." Gossip (slander) is one of the worst of all sins. Scripture places it on the same level as murder.

27. Psalm 101:5

28. Proverbs 20:19 (NASV). † Association with a gossip perpetuates slander and gossipy wives kill families.

Be diligent; work hard.²⁹

Don't be wise in your own eyes.³⁰ Instead embrace humility and follow scripture.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.³¹

A good man obtains favor of the Lord.³² So, strive to be a good person.

Avoid the results of sin by not committing it.³³

In the way of righteousness is life.³⁴ Strive for and grow in righteousness.

A prudent man covers shame.³⁵ Don't speak of your own shame or the shame of others.

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.³⁶ Be careful of whom you make your companion.

The simple believe every word but the prudent man looks well to his going.³⁷ Test everything by scripture.

29. Proverbs 6:6 "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways and be wise ... a little sleep, a little slumber: so shall thy poverty come ... and thy want as an armed man."

30. Proverbs 26:12 "Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope of a fool than of him."

31. Proverbs 12:15

32. Proverbs 12:2 "A good man obtains favor of the Lord, but a man of wicked devices will He condemn."

33. Proverbs 12:21 KJV reads "There shall no evil happen to the wicked, but the wicked shall be filled with mischief." The word that is translated "evil" refers to "sorrow that is the harvest and product of sin." See C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsh, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, transl. from the German (Eerdmans Pub. 1975) vol. 9, p. 64

34. Proverbs 12:28 "In the way of righteousness is life and in the pathway thereof, there is no death."

35. Proverbs 12:16 "A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame."

36. Proverbs 14:14 "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man *shall be satisfied* from himself."

37. Proverbs 14:15 "The simple believe every word, but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going." This proverb applies to scripture as well as life in general; a close

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.³⁸

The fear of the Lord creates strong confidence.³⁹

Note that the benefit of some of these warnings is obvious, but some are not so obvious and some yield their benefits in the future. Some people may disagree whether certain conduct is sin. For instance, some people feel strongly that homosexuality is a sin based upon Romans 1. However some disagree and take the position that it is not sin. And in some countries it is illegal to say that homosexuality is a sin. We do not address the issue in this book.

Obedience to scripture produces freedom. That is the reason why committed Christians obey scripture. They do not obey it because it feels good or because they are religious fanatics or because someone told them to. They obey it because they have discovered what happens to them when they do. They discover that they are fundamentally changed into a better, more stable, complete, much happier person. Scripture is like a steak or another nutritious meal rather than a large bowl of ice-cream. It gives us health, strength and nutrition, things that ice-cream can never give.

And scripture is practical. It teaches us to be just plain smart. For instance, it teaches us to look ahead for the threat to come and avoid it:

A prudent *man* foresees the evil and hides himself:
but the simple pass on and are punished.⁴⁰

It teaches us to protect our good name:

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,
and loving favor than silver and gold.⁴¹

It teaches not to be a contrary, mischievous person:

look proves that scripture is reliable and that it is all true.

38. Proverbs 14:27 “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.”

39. Proverbs 14:26 “The fear of the Lord *is* strong confidence...” Fearing God and (therefore) yielding and obeying scripture creates a history of wise decisions, each one of which instills understanding and confidence in scripture.”

40. Proverbs 22:3

41. Proverbs 22:1

Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the [contentious person]. He that keeps his soul shall be far from them.⁴²

And perhaps most importantly scripture teaches us to embrace humility because it is only with humility can we learn:

By humility *and* fear of the Lord *are* riches, honor and life.⁴³

The author once attended a church service where the congregation actually participated in the service, rather than sitting in silence. At an appropriate part of the service a young lady stood up and expressed in very emotional but very cogent terms exactly what these scriptures teach. She said, "Teach me, Lord, so I don't have to learn!"

We have much to learn from these scriptures and from the wisdom of that young lady.



42. Proverbs 22:5

43. Proverbs 22:4

Chapter 6

Adversity in Relationships

THE WISE HEART

Scripture is like a lighthouse that warns us away from damaging relationships.

Make no friendship with an angry man [or woman]; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.¹

Avoid the immoral woman [or man].²

Avoid liars.³

Don't reprove a scorner, because he will hate you for it; but reprove a wise man and he will love you.⁴

Avoid the gossip;⁵ don't be a gossip.⁶ Gossip is a sin that God places on a level equal to murder.⁷

He that keeps his mouth keeps his life.⁸

Contention comes by means of pride.⁹ Avoid the proud and self-centered.

1. Proverbs 22:24

2. Proverbs 5:3-6 "For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a two edged sword. Her ways are movable, that thou canst not know them."

3. Proverbs 6:19 "... the Lord doth hate ... a false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

4. Proverbs 9:8

5. Proverbs 26:22,23 "Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out; so where *there is* no talebearer, the strife ceases." Proverbs 20:19 "...do not associate with a gossip." (NASV)

6. Psalm 101:5 "Whosoever privily slandereth his neighbor him will I cut off.

7. Romans 1:29 "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness ... murder, debate [contentions], deceit, malignity; whisperers [gossips], backbiters, haters of God..."

8. Proverbs 13:3 "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."

9. Proverbs 12:10 "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."

Fools make a mock of sin.¹⁰ Avoid the fool who mocks sin and thereby mocks righteousness.

Shun pride. “Pride goeth ... before a fall.”¹¹

And perhaps the most important:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?^{12†}

These scriptures fit together like the gears of a watch. But they are not written simply to be studied; they are written to be lived. When we live them we experience their power. These scriptures are more than just smart. They are the most effective means to avoid adversity in this life. And they are the means by which we experience the presence and the power of God.

John 14:21 tells us how to experience His presence through sincerely yielding to Him. We love Him by yielding to Him, by recognizing Him as our God, by obeying Him:

He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is who loves Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him [I will make Myself known to him].¹³

This verse is simple and powerful. It teaches that God makes Himself known to those who express their love toward Him through obedience which includes the warnings recited above. God makes Himself known to those who have His commandments (those who learn what His commandments are) and *keep them* (those who obey His commandments), those who obey Him as a means of expressing their love for God.

10. Proverbs 14:9 “Fools make a mock of sin: but among the righteous *there is* favor.”

11. Proverbs 16:18 “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

12. Second Corinthians 6:14 † See an expanded treatment of this subject in the following pages. Many who are old in Christ have seen the tragic accuracy of this scripture too many times. Anyone on the threshold of disobedience would be well advised to reconsider,

13. John 14:21

Scriptural Marriage - Doing the Impossible

Let us consider the advantages of yoking one's self with someone who is wholly committed to scripture and surrendered to Christ. A spouse who is surrendered to Christ is someone who:

1. Treats you better than himself or herself.¹⁴
2. Treats you in the way that he or she would want to be treated.¹⁵ Treats you with patience and kindness. Your mate is someone that is not self centered. He or she never embarrasses you (never acts unseemly), is someone who is rarely provoked to anger; someone who thinks no evil of you and never *speaks* no evil of you. Your mate bears everything and endures everything that you may do. If you are a wife, your husband is someone who would never strike but always take care of you, provide for you and protect you.¹⁶
4. Someone who is edifying to you and intent on building you up and building a family;¹⁷
5. Someone who will always forgive you, and never hold a grudge;¹⁸
6. Someone who will never criticize you or condemn you even if you deserve it,¹⁹ but may, if you wish to hear it, offer you constructive discussion

14. Philippians 2:3 "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind [humility] let each esteem other better than themselves."

15. Matthew 7:12 "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

16. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 "Charity [the word translated as "charity" in the King James version of the Bible is the Greek "agape," which is God's unconditional love] suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth ..."

17. Proverbs 14:1 "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands."

18. Matthew 18:21,22 "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee Until seven times; but Until seventy times seven."

19. Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

or even rebuke if need be.²⁰ If you are a wife, your husband loves you as his own body;²¹ he loves you as Christ loves the church and will sacrifice himself for you. His goal in life is to ensure your happiness and safety,²² and provide for you;²³ he will never criticize or condemn you²⁴ and he will never leave you;²⁵

8. If you are a husband, your wife will yield to you, commit herself to your home and keep it, recognize your leadership, love you, respect you and never speak ill of you²⁶ and never criticize or condemn you.²⁷

9. The committed mate has no desire to relate to anyone else inappropriately,²⁸ much less commit adultery. The committed mate will never lie to you²⁹ or otherwise deceive you.³⁰

10. The committed husband will provide for his wife and his children.³¹

It is easy to see how a marriage of equally committed spouses can be exceedingly pleasant—as long as these virtues continue. How then do we ensure that they continue?

20. Proverbs 9:8 "...rebuke a wise man and he will love thee."

21. Ephesians 5:28

22. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it."

23. 1 Timothy 5:8 "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

24. Matthew 7:1 "Judge [criticize] not..."

25. 1 Corinthians 13:8 "...love never fails."

26. Ephesians 5:23 "For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body."

27. Matthew 7:1 "Judge [criticize] not..."

28. First Corinthians 13:5 Love does not "behave itself unseemly."

29. Revelation 21:8 "...all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Proverbs 19:9 "...he that speaketh lies shall perish."

30. First Corinthians 6:8 "Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud..."

31. First Timothy 5:8 "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

Love is the reason why these virtues continue. With love, mutual service is a pleasure, but without love it is a duty. Love is the motivation, the engine, the energy behind the excellent marriage. Unfortunately, however, human love erodes and the honeymoon eventually ends. The way to avoid it is to secure the actual presence of God, who *is* love³² and keep Him in your marriage. Done properly with yielding and scripture, the honeymoon need never end.³³

See the Appendix, *The Excellent Marriage*.



32. First John 4:8 "God is love"

33. See the Author's *Endless Love*.

Chapter 7

Peace in the Midst of Adversity

WHO MAY DWELL IN YOUR SACRED TENT?
WHO MAY LIVE ON YOUR HOLY MOUNTAIN?
HE WHOSE WALK IS BLAMELESS,
WHO DOES WHAT IS RIGHTEOUS

PSALM 15:1,2

Let us consider two scriptural “nevers.”

Both of these nevers are stark departures from perceived reality. They stand on the very outer limits of faith. They are the guardians of internal peace in the midst of adversity.

Although they were written a thousand years apart and for different reasons, both of them strike the same point: righteousness is a shield to the pain of adversity.

We find the first “never” in Psalm 15 (NIV) when it teaches that he who yields to God’s call to righteousness will never be shaken:

Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?
He whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart;
and has no slander on his tongue,
who does his neighbor no wrong
and casts no slur on his fellow man,
who despises a vile man
but honors those who fear the LORD,
who keeps his oath
even when it hurts,
who lends his money without usury
and does not accept a bribe against
the innocent.
He who does these things
will never be shaken.

We find the second “never” in Second Peter Chapter 1 where we find one of the most astounding scripture in all of the Bible.

As long as you practice these things [righteousness],
you will never stumble...¹

1. Second Peter 1:10

Note that each of these scriptures speaks directly to actual, experiential participation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Help in the midst of trials comes from the supernatural presence and peace of God:

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.²

The supernatural peace of God depends on the supernatural presence of God. And the supernatural presence of God depends on our heart: Do we love Him and do we express that love through surrender to His Word? If we do, we find another scripture that speaks directly to God's interaction with us: He comes to us and makes Himself known to us.

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.³

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.⁴

And with His presence He gives His peace:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.⁵

Knowing God is what eternal life is:

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom thou hast sent.⁶

2. Philippians 4:7

3. John 14:23

4. John 14:21

5. John 16:33

6. John 17:3

Eternal life is Christ.⁷ Without Christ, there is no eternal life. With the gift of eternal life and the promises that accompany it, we became partakers of the divine nature⁸ and we experience His life now in this life when He is with us.⁹

The most tangible characteristic of eternal life in this life is an inner peace that the Christian who is fully committed to obedience to scripture receives directly from God when that Christian surrenders his will to God:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you;
not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not
your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.¹⁰

On the other hand, the most tangible characteristic of disobedience is emptiness, confusion and lack of internal peace.

But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it
cannot rest, whose waters case up mire and dirt.
There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.¹¹

God does not tell us to do anything that He does not empower us to do. Take courage.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.¹²

You are forging ahead into those trials that God, in his own wisdom, has prepared specifically for you and when they are over, they result in strength of character, spiritual maturity and divine equanimity.

7. John 14:6 "I am...the life"

8. 2 Peter 1:4 "...by these [promises] you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

9. John 14:23 "Jesus answered and said If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

10. John 14:27

11. Isaiah 57:20

12. First Corinthians 10:13

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.¹³

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope¹⁴

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.¹⁵

So what is the alternative when we open our eyes in the morning and face the lion of adversity? The alternative is *faith* in the very jaws of loss and pain. And the greater the trial, the more difficult that faith becomes. And the more difficult the faith becomes, the greater becomes the significance of our choice to continue to obey Him and thereby express our faith.

We must remember that the spiritual reality of life is just as real, or more so, than material reality. Stay away from sin and the spiritual reality stands strong and the trial will pass—even through death. But if we yield to sin, spiritual strength will dissipate because spiritual strength is based upon the presence of God. When the foreboding specter of unavoidable difficulty and pain confront you, grip ferociously to the fact that God is permitting it all to happen to you for a reason just as He permitted the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We must trust Him and the effect of a righteous spiritual side of us sustains us through the trial.

The fear, the challenge to our faith, the reaction to the pain, and the emotional upheaval is the trial, not the sin. The sin is what we may do as a result of the trial, but forgiveness awaits us even then. If one curses God because of the trial, it is a sin, to be sure, but God knows that He is testing you and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins¹⁶ which have been paid for at the cross.¹⁷

13. James 1:2-4

14. Romans 5:3

15. James 1:12

16. First John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

17. Romans 5: 6,8 “ For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly...God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet

When we refuse, as a matter of our own choice, to yield to sin, God forges us into eternal value. We win either way. We win when we are crushed in the vice of adversity and we win when we are not. God cannot be out-done. He gives us beauty for ashes.

To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.¹⁸

Faith, patience and obedience are the keys to experiencing eternal life and experiencing internal spiritual peace in the midst of tragedy. The pain of loss and the continuing reality of that pain must be borne and we must endure, but with Christ's help.¹⁹ It is as necessary for us to endure the outrageous happenstance that is part of this life as it was for Christ,²⁰ except He endured much, much more than we will ever have to face. He became sin for us.²¹

Righteous choices in the face of adversity are like golden bricks built upon a solid foundation of Christ:

But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If

sinner, Christ died for us." First Peter 3:18 "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 [the cross], but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit."

18. Isaiah 61:3

19. Luke 22:31,32 "...behold, Satan hat desired that he may sift *you* as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not..."

20. Revelation 5:9,10 ""You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth."

21. Second Corinthians 5:21 " 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."

it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.²²

The bricks become a part of us, as a new creature in Christ.²³ They are eternal as we are eternal.²⁴ Every brick is eternal because it is an act of righteousness²⁵ and their value lies in the very fact that they are forged in the fires of adversity. They are expensive but they never fade. And real love is expensive, Christ proved that for all of mankind.

So, the adversities that we encounter in this journey are far from meaningless: they define us.

The couple who loses a child and still exercises faith in God has created faith where faith would otherwise have died. The man or woman who experiences the untimely death of a parent, a spouse or a sibling can be pressed to the point of ultimate testing and emerge with a faith that is stronger than ever. The spouse who honors a marital vow and lives out a grim marriage faithfully has honored God and has created fidelity and patience that would not otherwise exist. The man who to his own loss honors his word has created an instance of righteousness. The woman who bears extreme physical pain and at the same time quietly submits to the will of God will bear the fruits of the Spirit and has inserted a backbone of iron into her faith. The Christian who faces an untimely death with courage and faith creates exactly that: courage and faith where they did not exist before—and takes them both into eternity with him. The disabled child who overcomes (perhaps a Helen Keller) creates cascades of faith, wisdom, inspiration, hope and love for herself and others.

It is certainly true that each of these people would have chosen not to be the authors of such good at the cost of such adversity. But at the same time, God presented His own Son to be nailed to the cross.

What we endure on earth is not endured in vain. We were not created to exist and then to die for no reason. We were not placed here to spin away our precious years in self-seeking and accumulation.

22. First Corinthians 3:10-15

23. 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if any may be in Christ he is a new creature...”

24. John 10:28 “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of My hand.”

25. Romans 5:21 “...as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.²⁶

In the book of Revelation, Chapter 5 we read of something strange that will happen in heaven. There was a scroll (a book) that was held in the right of God. It had writings on both sides and it was sealed shut with seven seals. An angel was asking "Who is worthy to open the seals of the book?" But he could find no one who was worthy until he found Christ.

It is why Jesus Christ was worthy to open the scroll that is instructive. He was worthy to open the scroll not because He was the Son of God or because He is the third person of the Trinity, or because He is sinless. No. These things are never mentioned. Only one thing is mentioned as the reason why Jesus Christ is worthy to open the scroll and that is the fact that Jesus was slain on the cross and redeemed us by His blood. The point is that *even God Himself had to actually do it.*

In order for God to offer to the gift of forgiveness and peace to an immoral humanity He had to pay the death-penalty for sin for us²⁷ and in doing so became sin for us.²⁸ But, like our choices in the face of adversity, the price of the cross had to be actually paid before our peace could be real. The cost that He paid was immense, but He did pay it.

And because He paid it, we have been reconciled with God and we can feel His peace in the midst of our own trials when we see them in the context of the true, spiritual world in which we live. The pain of loss and the deep cut of serious adversity is still there, to be sure. It is there to be endured but it will pass and we will go on, silent perhaps as we walk slowly forward, but stronger and better able to see the true context of it all and knowing all the while that death is not the end. In the end, He awaits us in a place where there is neither death²⁹ nor tears:

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:

26. Romans 8:28

27. Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin *is* death."

28. 2 Corinthians 5:21 "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."

29. Revelation 20:14 "Death and hades [hell] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.³⁰

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.³¹

That is the nature of God and man.



30. Revelation 21:4,5

31. John 16:33

Chapter 8

Confronting Adversity

RESIST THE DEVIL AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU

JAMES 4:7

Hiding from adversity, or denying it, does not make it go away. How we confront adversities is just as important as how we learn from them.

When adversity strikes, see it for what it is and look beyond it.

If the adversity will result in death, then eternity is on the other side. If the adversity will not result in death then life is on the other side. If that life has been altered by the adversity, then take courage and face it as it is. Make the very best of it and force it to make you stronger rather than weaker.

You are who you are and who you are is your soul, not your body, You are who you are and who you are is your soul, not your circumstances. You are who you are and who you are in your soul, not your physical pain. Your peace and strength lies in your soul, and no one can injure or alter your soul except for you.

Adversity can be an opportunity to find a different, better life. See it for what it is, the hand of God. He does what He does for His own reasons and some of those reasons (benefits) are deep into the future.

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.¹

This passage speaks first to "those who love God." But who are those who love God? Those who love God are those who express it, not just feel it. We express love to God by speaking to Him in His love language. His love language is righteousness and obedience to His word. Rejection of His word places us at odds with Him on the "other side of the fence."

Can you jump back over the fence? Of course. That is one of the functions of adversity. Run to Him.

1. Romans 8:38

The passage speaks also to those who are "called according to His purpose." This means that God has a purpose and He calls some to accommodate that purpose. It is not difficult to see whom He calls according to His purpose. His purpose is righteousness and those who seek it are those who are called. Do you seek to know Him, to follow Him, to yield to Him? The desire to do so is that call.

Does He require you to be perfect before He makes all things to work together for good for you? Of course not. He created you to be imperfect and He is fully aware of it. God has little use for someone who thinks that he is infallible—other than to teach him that he is not. What fruit would such a person bear? So, what does God require of you? He requires the same thing the you require for an excellent relationship on earth: and that is sincerity. Sincerity is essential. Commitment and diligence are required. Good faith and heart are *vital*. Perfection is neither demanded nor expected.

Righteousness comes from faith in Jesus Christ because faith in Christ is expressed in obedience and obedience comes from knowing Him.² And knowing Christ is everything pertaining to life and Godliness.³

Apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as attested by the Law and the Prophets. And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...⁴

The closer to Christ we come the more unrighteous we perceive ourselves to be. As we march on through time it becomes clearer and clearer that Christ is *everything* pertaining to life and Godliness:

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him.⁵

Adversity is made to be confronted head on to make us strong. Faith was made to be challenged and transformed into certainty.



2. John 14:21, 23

3. Second Peter 1:3

4. Romans 3:21,22

5. Second Peter 1:3

Chapter 9

Love and Death

I AM ... THE LIFE
JOHN 4:16

We are God's Vineyard

Eternal Life

Hope for the Unredeemed

Comfort at the End

Who is this God who both kills¹ and loves?² How can these two be reconciled? There is an explanation with two parts.

The first part of the explanation is obvious. We are all mortal and we will all die. It is just a matter of time and only God can determine when it happens. Some lives are long; some are short. That is a reality that we have always known.

The second part of the explanation is more difficult. The second part of the explanation is that death is not the ultimate tragedy. Death is not the ultimate tragedy because, in addition to the hours of our mortal life, Christ offers us the gift of eternal life.³ The ultimate tragedy is to miss it.

Eternal life is given to the soul, not to the body. We know this because all bodies will die whether they are saved or not:

...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.⁴

And sin causes the death of the soul:

Behold, every soul belongs to Me; both father and son are Mine. The soul who sins is the one who will die.⁵

1. Luke 12:5 "Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell."

2. John 8:16 "God is love." John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3. 1 John 2:25 "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, *even* eternal life."

4. Hebrews 9:27

5. Ezekiel 18:4

But souls that have sinned can be forgiven and never die:

...everyone who lives and believes in Me [Jesus Christ] will never die.⁶

The gift of eternal life is spiritual, not mortal; it is given to the soul and not the body (although the soul later receives a resurrection body). Thus there is a clear line between the soul and the body throughout scripture: There is a soul and there is a body and who we are is the soul, not the body. We are souls walking around in bodies.

The most comprehensive delineation of the soul as opposed to the body is found in the parable of Lazarus.⁷ Lazarus was a beggar who was scorned by a rich man daily. The rich man never helped Lazarus, even though he could have. Eventually both Lazarus and the rich man died and Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham but the rich man went to Hades, which is hell, the abode of the unredeemed dead.⁸

The bodies Lazarus and the rich man are dead and gone, but their souls survived the death of their bodies and their souls are still alive. Ultimately the souls of the unredeemed will die eternally in what scripture calls the "second death."^{9†}

When Jesus gives us the parable of Lazarus, He speaks of souls as being persons whose bodies have died. Who they were, their thoughts, their desires, their loves and all of the non-physical aspects of them that define who they are is their soul, not their body.

Paul differentiates between the body and the soul in Romans 7 when he speaks of the "inward man" and the "flesh." He laments the influence of the flesh (sin) on the inward man (the soul). Paul clarifies that the inward man is the person that he really is, but sometimes the inward man serves sin:

6. John 11:26

7. Luke 16:19-31

8. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (University of Chicago Press), 2d Ed. 1958, p. 563, s.v. ᾠδης "the underworld, the place of the dead." This word should be distinguished from "hell." See id. s.v. γέεννα "Valley of the sons of Hinnom...the place of punishment..."

9. Revelation 21:8 "... their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which [referring to which part] is the second death." † The Bible contains no scripture that says the soul that sins shall be tormented forever. The soul that sins shall not be tormented forever in hell. The scripture is clear: the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4). "

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.¹⁰

He wishes to be delivered from the effect of this “body of death” and, indeed, he has found the answer in Jesus Christ:

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.¹¹

The effect of death is to deprive the body of life, not to deprive the soul of life. So there are two deaths. The first death is the death of the body and the second death is the death of the soul.

We are not sparks of life that begin with a Darwinian accident and end in dust. We are souls created by a Creator and we will live for eternity if we drink from the well of eternal life offered by Christ.¹²

Whosoever drinketh of this water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.¹³

It is most comforting and enlightening to contemplate the difference between the body and the soul. The concept is etched into scripture and when we permit scripture to alter our perspective, we find that it is no longer necessary to mysticize the concept of eternal life, or to lament the tragedy of an untimely death, or indeed, to fear our own death—knowing that our death is only one of two deaths, and that we will not die the second one.

10. Romans 7:22, 23

11. Romans 7:24, 25

12. John 4:14 " But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

13. John 4:14

We Are God's Vineyard

God has placed us in a world that is a moral free-for-all and He has done it for a reason. It is no accident that we are forced to make difficult choices and endure pain. There is a reason for it, and that reason is that in this way alone can He create eternal value. We are the branches that bear the grapes of righteousness in His vineyard.

I am the vine and you are the branches; he who abides [stays] in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.¹⁴

We become what we freely choose to do and be. And we cannot freely choose unless both options are open to us: both good and bad. We live in a world of moral light and moral darkness. Ultimately morality is the center of it all and we must choose:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil...he that doeth truth cometh to the light...¹⁵

Eternal Life

The soul is dead because of sin unless Christ makes it alive by paying the penalty for sin:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened [made alive] together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...¹⁶

And you *hath He quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins...¹⁷

The soul that sinneth, it shall die.¹⁸

And how do we know that our soul has become alive? When a dead soul becomes alive—and avoids immoral acts—it experiences the presence of the Creator:

14. John 15:5

15. John 3:19,21

16. Colossians 2:13

17. Ephesians 2:1

18. Ezekiel 18:20

He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.¹⁹

Eternal life is therefore not simply an extension of mortal life. It is an experience. It is spiritual life and it is an entirely different life from our physical life. That is the reason why the experience is called being "born again."²⁰ It is spiritual life that we receive before the body dies and spiritual life is intended to be experienced.

Mortal life has a beginning and it has an end. Eternal life does not. Eternal life, being eternal, has neither beginning nor end. Eternal life has a point of commencement for us because we receive it at one point in time, but what we receive is eternal life, life that never began: we receive Christ's life.²¹ Eternal life in Christ is therefore not simply an extension of mortal life; it is something entirely different.

Eternal life is a supernatural life that is superimposed on mortal life and lived and experienced in this life and thereafter. Eternal life is knowing God.²² We experience this life until we mar it with immorality and sin. It is a marvelous life that must be experienced to be comprehended:

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”²³

One day the mortal life of the Christian will end. But as frightening as it may be, it is not the ultimate adversity. It is the beginning.

For the Christian, the day of his death will be like the old lady who returned to her home on a cold day. She is tired and wants to sleep. Rather than hanging up her tattered old coat, she walks into warmth of her home and drops her arms to her side and lets the old coat slip to the floor behind her. But the real person, the real she, walks on. That is death for the Christian. The worn and struggling body slips away, but the person, the real person continues on without it.

19. John 14:21

20. John 4:6,7

21. John 14:6 "I am...life..."

22. John 17:3 "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

23. John 3:5,6 "...Except a man be born of water [physical birth] and of the Spirit [spiritual birth] he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

That is what Christ meant when He said, "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish."²⁴ He did not mean that our bodies would never die. He meant that our souls will never die. Our stay here is temporary. It always has been.

Hope for the Unredeemed

What of the man, the son or the daughter who dies apparently without accepting Christ and without receiving eternal life?

Consider first that God is in control.²⁵ God is not limited by circumstances or the uninformed choices of man. Salvation that occurs moments before death is no more limited than the boundaries of God's omnipotence and He is limited by neither time nor circumstance. He is not limited by the roller-coaster of youth, the depth of a depression, the death of love or the bullet of an assailant. And He will not permit one pebble on the coast of His eternity to be misplaced by the thoughtless designs of anyone. All good, all evil and all else are under His just control. No matter how godless a death may be, there is always hope for salvation.

If you are the parent, the spouse or friend of someone who rejected Christ to his dying breath, you still do not know that he was not saved. But even if he was not, he will be rightly judged and he will not be burned in hell forever.

Comfort at the End

The greatest evangelical error is the teaching that God will burn all unbelievers alive for the rest of eternity. This is not in scripture.²⁶ The doctrine of the eternal torment of the unredeemed is flatly contradicted by fifty scriptures that unequivocally state that death, not eternal torment is the eternal state of the unredeemed. Since there is no scripture that teaches eternal torment directly for the unredeemed,²⁷ the doctrine of eternal torment has redefined death. Death no longer means death. It now means "separation from God" instead, or some other unbiblical phrase in order avoid the effect of fifty scriptures that teach ordinary

24. John 10:28 (NASV)

25. Ephesians 1:4,5 "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be hold and without blame before Him in love; Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

26. See the Author's *Fate of Unbelievers*

27. There is only one scripture in the Bible that mentions eternal torment and that is Revelation 20:10 which refers to the eternal state of Satan.

death as the final end of the unredeemed.²⁸ They will now teach that death is not death at all but eternal life in hell. Therefore, according to the erroneous doctrine, there is no death. Believers don't die because they live forever in heaven and unbelievers don't die either because they live forever in the flames of hell.

So, what do we tell the dying? Don't worry. Whatever the doctors are telling you, there is no such thing as death. This is cold comfort indeed because the dying know full well they are dying and, for the realistic, the effort to comfort them crumbles in the face of reality.

Undiluted scripture is far more credible not only because it is true, but because it simply fits. Scripture teaches that there are two deaths, not just one.²⁹† The fact that the Bible teaches that there are two deaths, rather than one, is equally embarrassing to the doctrine of eternal torment. It is for that reason that one rarely hears a sermon on the second death in an evangelical church.

The scriptures that teach the second death are most comforting to the dying Christian because they show that death is really death and that death is really real and it is going to happen. What is comforting is that there are two of them. There are two deaths. The first death is the death of the body and this is inevitable. Everybody's body will die. The second death is not for the believer; it is for those who have rejected the salvation of Jesus Christ. Unbelievers will be resurrected and judged for the sins that they committed in life and thereafter they will die a second death that will no be subject to resurrection. They will die an eternal death.

This truth is comforting because it acknowledges that there is indeed an afterlife and that a part of us will survive the death of our bodies. That part of us that survives is the soul; and it will survive because it has been forgiven of all sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This Truth is comforting because it does not deny death. It fits with reality. It leads the dying Christian to understand that who he or she really is is not a body, but a soul.

Death for the believer is much like an old woman who comes in from the cold. She walks into her house knowing that her time has come. She walks slowly toward something that carries a fond memory

28. For instance Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death."

29. Revelation 21:1; 20:6; 21:8; 2:22 † The second death is not coherent to the doctrine of eternal torment, so it is either avoided altogether or it becomes subject to several incomprehensible circumventions. See *The Fate of Unbelievers*.

for her and as she does, she lets her arms fall to her side and lets a worn and painful old coat slip from her shoulders on to the floor. But she (the real she) walks on and finds that all that her precious scripture had told her is absolutely and resoundingly true.



Chapter 10

Christ in Pain

GOD HAS NOT EXEMPTED HIMSELF FROM PAIN

Although scripture makes it clear that God is the ultimate cause of all things, including pain, it is likewise clear that God did not spare His own Son from either physical or spiritual pain.¹

Christ died for the sins of the world² and in order to do this, He became one of us and became sin for us.³ Therefore, for those of us who have committed sin, which is all of us,⁴ in the end it is either the death of Christ or our own death. Our choice.

Perhaps one of the most profoundly illuminating scriptures relating to the issue of pain in this life is found in Revelation 5. The vision of John takes us to heaven when the end of mankind as we know it was fast approaching and Scroll of the Great Tribulation was opened. But not just anyone could open it. Only someone with the proper credentials could open it. So, heaven was searched in an effort to locate someone who had the credentials to break the seals so the scroll could be read. There was only one person found Who had the credentials to do that and that person was Jesus Christ.

It is certainly not surprising that Christ had the credentials to break the seals and open the scroll. But what is very surprising is *why* He had the credentials to open them. This scripture says that Christ had the credentials to open the scrolls *because He was slain*.

Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us ...⁵

1. Scripture teaches that there is one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ is the Son and is therefore divine, the second person of the Trinity and is therefore God. See John 8:58 ("Before Abraham was, I AM.")

2. First John 2:2 "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

3. Second Corinthians 5:21 " He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.."

4. Romans 3:23 "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

5. Revelation 5:9.

This passage does not give any other reason for Christ's qualification. It does not say that Christ had the credentials because He is the Son of God,⁶ or because He is divine,⁷ because He is second person of the Trinity, or because He is the light of the world,⁸ or because He is God incarnate as a man.⁹ Nothing was said of the fact that *all* things had been made through Him.¹⁰ He was and is all of those things, but none of them is the reason why He was worthy to open the scroll. Scripture gives only one reason and that reason is because he was slain.

The point is that *He had to actually do it*. He had to become man, become sin and be crucified before even the Son of God had the credentials to open the scroll. He had to actually become the sins of the world and be crucified in order to pay our death-penalty for sin.

He had to suffer. He had to actually die the death. God's eternal justice required that the sins of the world be paid for, even if it was He Himself who had to pay the price.

Pain is therefore universal and inevitable. And we, just as Christ, have to go through it. God does not exempt Himself from it. And we who are made in His image are not exempted from it. So, when we suffer, let us remember that God did not exempt Himself from pain, pain far worse than ours. But take heart, pain ends and at one point it ends for the rest of eternity and which point our sacrifice, just like Christ's, will end.

And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more nor mourning nor crying nor pain; they will be no more, because the former things have passed away.¹¹

The crucifixion is an overwhelming statement of How God sees both sin and righteousness. Sin is death; righteousness is life. At the cross Christ died as the result of the sins of others (us) and was later resurrected to eternal life because His death was full payment for the

6. John 1:34 "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

7. John 8:15 "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

8. John 8:12 "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

9. John 8:58 "Jesus sayeth unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then they took up stones to cast at him..."

10. John 1:3 "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

11. Revelation 21:4

very sins for which He had died. Therefore, the cross is the ultimate statement of the truth that the wages of sin is death¹² and that the fruit of righteousness in Christ is eternal life.¹³

All who have placed their trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins have appropriated Christ's voluntary¹⁴ sacrifice for the payment of their sins. We are in Christ and we will never die because we have eternal life.¹⁵ This gift of eternal life is free for the taking¹⁶ for whoever wants it.¹⁷ It is free, because Christ earned it¹⁸ and therefore Christ can do with it as He chooses. And He chooses to give it to whoever will take it.¹⁹ Once given, the gift can never be lost because no man, no matter what he does, has either the authority or the power to alter what God has done.^{20†}

12. Romans. 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

13. John 3:15, 4:36, 6:54, 17:2,17:3; Acts 13:48,; 1 Timothy. 6:12, 3:7; 1 John 1:2, 2:25, 5:11.

14. Matthew 26:53 "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently send twelve legions of angels. But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled...?"

15. John 6:40 "And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise Him up at the last day."; Romans 6:23 "the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

16. Ephesians 2:8 "...it is the gift of God."

17. Revelation 22:17 "And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

18. Revelation 5:9. "...for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood..."

19. Revelation. 22:17 "...And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

20. Romans 8:38, 39 "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."; John 6:39 "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." † Other scriptures, such as Hebrews 6:4-8, teach that if anyone has tasted the heavenly gift and voluntarily turned away, it is impossible for us to renew him again to repentance. Evangelism is useless for him. However, the person himself can always repent (First John 1:9). But repentance for Christian is unrelated to salvation; it is instead related to knowing God and experiencing God's presence and peace (John 14:21,23). The more the Christian sins, the more he departs from the presence of Christ and the he will "bear thorns and briars" rather than the fruits of righteousness. This person is a back-slider and eventually he will lose all semblance of Christianity and become useless to God's overall purpose which is for us to become branches attached to the vine of Christ and bear the fruits of righteousness. The reference to the burning in Hebrews 6:8 when the back-slider is "nigh unto cursing" does not refer to hell, but instead to the standard procedure in vineyards where

In order to give us this gift, God did not exempt Himself from pain. He had a cross to bear, and we, who are made in His image also have a cross to bear. Let us bear it well, but take heart; in the end, it ends. But we do not.



dead branches are snapped off and burned.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

We do not live an accidental life that is defined by the span between a birth and a death. We are here for a purpose. We have been created by our Creator to fulfill that purpose. We are not accidents of evolution in a universe of night. We are here for a reason. Our purpose is to bear the fruits of righteousness. We are the branches in the vineyard of God. We create honesty and honor, truth, kindness, wisdom, faith and love. And in doing so we are expressing Jesus Christ, we are vessels of the divine nature chosen and placed here to bloom and to yield the eternal fruit.

But to do it there must be a choice. Righteousness is a choice to do right in the face of trials and temptations. It is a choice to do right in the midst of pain, the choice to do right when all the world is telling us to do the opposite. Ultimately it is the choice to do right for one reason and one reason alone: because God has told us to. These choices define us. These choices are who we are. God creates us; but our choices define us. And ultimately it is our choice to be conformed to the image of Christ or to be conformed to the image of the world.

He places imperfect man in an environment of adversities. He creates a world where righteous choices mean something because wrong ones are easier. He places us in a world where we make a lifetime of choices each of which is either morally right or morally wrong or morally neutral, and we live with the consequences. Each of us makes right choices and wrong choices and there is a history of bad and good, smart and stupid, beautiful and ugly that follows us all. But as we are honed and shaped by our own failings we turn to Him and feel the magic of His hand take the ashes of mistake and tragedy and turn them into eternal value exactly as He did with our Jewish predecessors:

To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.¹

1. Isaiah 61:3

He has created us to love and if we are to love we must have the freedom not to love. He has created us to love because He is love.² We are the branches in His vineyard; He has chosen each of us to yield the grapes of His righteousness, to feed His hungry children, to give water to his chosen, to carry the divine nature in imperfect vessels, to be light and salt in a dead world, to live in Him and to speak His Truth. And it is never too late to start.

Each of us must face the prospect of an eternity of endless death or endless life.

As we look back over our years, we see how our life and our choices have fashioned us to be who we are. What we did with the good and the bad and how we lived out the ecstasies and the pain of life is what has made us. Behind us lies a lifetime filled with family, old friends, lovers, good deeds and sins—memories that flash in the night lighting up choices that we made for good or for ill.

But the brightest light is not in the past but in the present because it is only now that we can take the mistakes of the past and use them to forge a better person who can stand firm in the face of hell itself knowing, with certainty, that this too will end.



2. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

Appendix

The Excellent Marriage

LOVE IS THE KEY

The Forth Love

The Key to an Excellent Marriage

Matthew 7:1

Blessings or Curses

There is really only one secret to an excellent marriage and that is love.^{1†} Love is the secret because it is only love that can provide the *desire* to bless and benefit our spouse. Without love, we may continue to do what we do to perpetuate our family or our marriage, but what we do is done for a different reason, or out of a sense of duty; and there is little pleasure in a life of endless duty.

To be the recipient of the gift of sincere human love is marvelous. To be loved is like listening—transfixed—to a beautiful song, carried by the music and lost in its poetry. What a rare and marvelous gift it is. But to be the singer who sings the song is an experience beyond all measure.

Love is like a diamond engagement ring in a young man's pocket. Its only purpose is to be given away. The diamond is given away for one reason alone and that reason is love. Keeping that love over the years, preserving it through the press of children and living together, can be no small feat and sometimes quite impossible.

But what is this thing called love that becomes the center of life but which we can neither create nor acquire on our own? What is this thing that can be the apex of human experience or the deepest of human pain? What is it really?

Love is affection, no more and no less. It is powerful affection to be sure, but affection nonetheless. What makes love distinctive is not what it is, but what it does.

1. † See the work entitled *Endless Love* by the author. This work discusses the scriptural nature of relationships and healing of marital discord and expands upon this chapter.

Biblical Greek has four different words for love. But English and other languages have only one word for love and they use that one word ("love") to translate the four different kinds of loves in the Bible. So when we read "love" in an English Bible, it could be referring to any one of the loves.

If we are to understand what the Bible is saying about love, we must understand what these four loves are and where the words are used. Three of the four loves are distinguished by who it is who is loved and how. But the fourth love is drastically different from the others.

The first love is the affection between friends. This Greek word is φιλία, or "philia." This is the word from which we derive "Philedelpia," The City of Brotherly Love. Philea is the love between friends.

The second love is the affection in a family. This Greek word is στοργή, or "storgé." Storgé is the natural love of parents for children and children for parents and siblings and other family members or between people who find themselves together for some reason.²

The third is the affection of lovers. This Greek word is έρωσ, or "eros." Eros is the romantic love of lovers. Eros is not sex; it is the "chemistry" that happens between man and woman. It may be expressed by sex, but it is not sex; it is love.

These three loves are defined by their object and by their nature. They are human loves and they are given to all of us. They are indeed beautiful, but they are human and one does not have to live long to discover the frailty of humanity and its loves.

But the Fourth Love is different.

The Fourth Love

The fourth love is not defined by its object; it exists independently. And it is supernatural.

The fourth love is άγάπη, or "agápe."³ The distinguishing characteristic of agápe is that it does not require anything in return. It is the purest form of love. Agápe is love that loves the unlovable. It is agápe that brought Jesus to the cross and sacrifice Himself for the sins of the

2. Although this word is not used in scripture, it is included in the Greek language used in Biblical times.

3. Agápe is translated "charity" in the King James Version.

world,⁴ which necessarily included the sins committed by the very persons who crucified Him.⁵ Agape is supernatural love. We know this because God is supernatural and God *is* agápe:

...God is Love [agápe]⁶

Agápe is powerful. It is not limited by time or circumstance. It is like a train rolling in the night, lights jumping on the passing landscape, quiet villages with bearded men watching it pass, conductors helping others at stations, happy reunions outside the window and warmth inside. It is a loving, gentle train. But it starts nothing can stop it except the train itself.

It is here, at agápe, that the spiritual reality of the presence of God becomes transformed into human experience, where faith becomes perception and where peace passes all understanding.⁷ It is here, and only here, that God makes Himself known in the center of a marriage.

Agápe is the experiential presence of God and the strength that empowers the other three loves. It is a relationship based upon the expression of our love through obedience. We obey; and He makes Himself known to us and in doing so empowers us to love. We perceive Him; we love Him more; He comes closer. It is a magnificent dynamic, a spiral going upward. To know God is to experience eternal life and love that never ends.

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.⁸

Without love and obedience and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, God does not make Himself known. It is for this reason that those who have never trusted in Christ have absolutely no idea of what really happens to committed, obedient believers. Many believe that Christianity is simply a matter of believing in God or not.

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

5. Romans 5:6 "But God commendeth His love [agápe] toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

6. First John 4:8

7. Philippians 4:7 " And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

8. John 17:3 (NASV)

But our eternal state (eternal death or eternal life) turns on what we love because what we love is what God looks at first. Condemnation begins with a perverted love:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.⁹

The Key to an Excellent Marriage

Loves merge.

For instance, we may love a cousin or a sister or brother with both the love of family and the love of friends. The two family members become bonded by two loves rather than one and the relationship takes on both the flexibility of friendship as well as the stability of family.

The same is true for romantic love. Eros merges with other loves. Every lover knows that eros needs more than just chemistry; lovers should be best friends as well as lovers. They need to be soul mates as well as house-mates. When powerful eros merges with deep friendship, it acquires an overlay of easy freedom as the two loves merge into one love.

When the lovers marry, they have all three. They are friends; they are family and they are lovers all at once and each one loves the other with all three loves. They love with the whimsy of carefree friendship, with the structure of a permanent familial bond and with the power of eros. Like metals melting together, eros lends its fire to the other two and all three merge into a easy warmth.

Agápe is just as much a love as eros is. And agápe merges just like eros and the other loves. But when agápe merges, something different happens. Agápe does not bring a different kind of love, agápe brings supernatural strength; and when it merges with the other loves, it gives them supernatural strength. It merges with each love that it encounters and gives it the quality of "unconditionality." It removes the sense of demand and resentment that arise when one spouse fails to fulfill a need of the other. It changes the other loves from love "if" to love "period." Agápe is pure acceptance, pure love. And it will act on any of the loves to the extent that each lover permits.

9. John 3:19 " And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Unlike the other three loves, there is neither hesitation nor failing with agápe. Agápe is constant. It bears all things, believes all things and it never fails.¹⁰ It never takes offense. It bears all of the imperfections of a spouse and does not bow its head when confronted with disappointment. So, to the extent that agápe is present, the human loves take on the strength and continuity that would otherwise be impossible.

Agápe is like a stem cell. It grows into whatever love to which it is attached. When agápe is paired with the love of friends, it transforms philéa into a bond of friendship where there is no criticism, no resentment, no judgment, and no impediment to acceptance. It provides an environment where fidelity and discretion flourish, and wisdom and sound advice are the norm. This was the love that Christ was speaking of when He told His disciples to agápe one another. People who have true access to agápe are people who are easy to know and easy to like because they are extremely accepting.

When agápe is paired with the love of family, it creates a foundation of certainty where history, emotional currents, politics and religion do not cause divisions.

When agápe pairs with the love of lovers it creates a love that is both physical and spiritual at the same time. Fickle eros becomes an oak in the presence of agápe. Eros is transformed into a passion that never fails and a love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”¹¹

Therefore, the merging of agápe into a marriage is everything. When love is strong, the marriage is strong and agápe makes love strong. It is *love*, not relational skill or method, that forms the basis for a strong marriage and love lasts when agápe is present.

The couples who have agápe can love with four loves all at once. They live in continual peace and in love’s unending warmth. Their secret is that they totally accept one another in spite of the other’s faults because God’s agápe fills the empty places left by the failures and omissions of the other spouse.

Those who love with agápe have discovered that *each* of them has faults and that God provides the strength to forgive the faults of the other. Their love does not succeed because a failing can be justified or because the good points of the other spouse appear outweigh the bad points. Their love succeeds because *their love is powerful and results in the*

10. First Corinthians 13:8 “[Agápe] never fails...”

11. First Corinthians 13:7

total acceptance of the other spouse. They have an eros that is empowered by agápe and agápe does not fail. Love is continual and when love is present, it covers a multitude of sins.¹² The key to an excellent marriage is agápe. And the key to agápe is the presence of Christ. And the key to the presence of Christ is righteousness.

Obedience to Christ's command is essential for His presence.¹³

The entrance of agápe into a loveless marriage is like when all the lights in a dark house are turned on all at once. It is the same house, but life in the house has significantly changed. There is no longer any tripping over furniture, no more stepping on children's toys, no more guessing where things are. It becomes easy to work together and those things which were previously viewed as obligations but opportunities for service and help.

Matthew 7:1

The most important thing that agápe does is to enable us to obey Matthew 7:1¹⁴ and Matthew 6:14¹⁵ to the letter. These two scriptures are the tools that agápe uses to fashion a truly excellent marriage.

It is astounding what Matthew 7:1 can do for a marriage or any relationship.¹⁶ Matthew 7:1 is so powerful that after watching it work in one's life, it is easy to understand why those who ignore it are either ignorant of it can do or find that their family is simply not worth the trouble.

Matthew 7:1 and the command to forgive found in Matthew 6:14 transform marriages. They save families because they are the primary ways that agápe is both obtained and expressed. They, perhaps more

12. First Peter 4:8 "... above all things, having fervent love among yourselves, because love covers over a multitude of sins"

13. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

14. Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

15. Matthew 6:14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours."

16. See the author's *Endless Love* at biblebooks.co

than any other scriptures, result in a deep and abiding relationship with Christ in this life and an internal peace that passes human understanding.

Thus, with the practical tools that agápe empowers we find a very crisp and well defined intersection between spiritual truth and practical, day to day, life. In other words, here is where it all happens. Here is where we see the result and experience the power.

How then can we experience this? It's simply really, but quite impossible without the presence of Christ and the power of His agápe. This is what you do: you obey Matthew 7:1 and Matthew 6:14 to the very letter and watch what happens.

Matthew 7:1 forbids all judgment without any limitation.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.¹⁷

Judgment is criticism of the person. So, this scripture tells us that we cannot criticize the person. It tells us to deal with our spouse with acceptance and liberality, no matter what their sin may happen to be. Matthew 7:1 does not say that we cannot ask our spouse to change, nor does it say that we can't mention points of contention or instances of offense or difficulty. All it does is limit how this is done. Essentially this scripture permits us to speak to how something has affected us, but prohibits any statement that reflects on the character of the offending spouse.

Matthew 6:14 forbids unforgiveness without limitation.

If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours.¹⁸

This passage commands us to live in a sea of forgiveness. Forgiveness in scripture has no limitation. We forgive those who injure us even when the injury is serious, and even when the injury is intentional. We take no revenge because vengeance belongs to God alone.¹⁹

17. Matthew 7:1,2

18. Matthew 6:14,15

19. Hebrews 10:30 " 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

Why? Why is scripture so very opposite to our natural inclinations? Because it benefits both parties. It benefits the one who injures by leaving him without the benefit of an argument where he would bolster his self-justification. This leaves him alone with his sin and His God and facilitates repentance and apologize.²⁰ The benefit of forgiveness to the injured party is much greater. When the injured party forgives, it frees him from the destructive fall-out that follows an injury, such as grudges, retribution and hatred, which are themselves serious sin. Refusing to forgive encourages the wrong-doer to self-justify and it seriously harms the victim.

Blessings or Curses

Each of these scriptures carries the promise of a blessing or a curse.

The promise of blessing in Matthew 7:1 is that God will judge us (relate to us in this life) with the same liberality with which we relate to others. This means that we can enjoy an excellent relationship with God simply by extending wholehearted acceptance to others. This means no criticism of the person because criticism of the person is rejection of the person. He is telling us that love is the key. He is telling us that doing everything we are supposed to do but blaming or condemning others in our heart will not cut it. And He is telling us that total acceptance (love) will cover a multitude of our own sin and result in the experiential presence of the living God in us.

The promise of blessing in Matthew 6:14 is God's promise that He will relate to us with the forgiveness with which we extend to others. Got something against someone? If so, then this scripture is telling you to forget about knowing God. Do you forgive everyone and never judge or condemn? If so, then this scripture is saying "Look inward and discover the fullness of God."

But most importantly, these scriptures are experiential. They are crying out, "TRY ME! JUST TRY AND WATCH WHAT HAPPENS!" They are asking in the strongest possible Biblical terms, "Do you have the courage to take God at His word? Or not?" Because living without blame and without condemnation is the key to experience the presence of the living God. Why? Because that is Jesus Christ.

20. Matthew 5:24 "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

These verses do not refer to our eternal salvation because our sin cannot diminish our salvation.²¹ It refers to how God relates to us in this life. It is very much like us (we are made in His image). Holding grudges ruins relationships. And relationships are everything.

Relationships are essential to both the presence and the express of God in us because relationships are where love lives. And love is the key. Because when we love we express God because God is love.²²

Look at the picture that is painted here. It is familiar to all of us. We have lived the same scenario in our own lives. When someone wrongs us and we do not forgive, we do not relate well with them or they with us. And we cannot relate until we forgive and forgive from the heart. The same is true in Matthew 7:1 except it is condemnation rather than unforgiveness.

Why is condemnation and unforgiveness such an affront to God? Because Jesus Christ went to the cross to obtain forgiveness for the very person that we are refusing to forgive.

Thus, by the way that we relate to others, we determine the way God relates to us. When this simple Truth is applied to marriage by both parties, ashes turn to gold dust overnight.



21. Romans 8:38 "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord..."

22. First John 4:8 "God is love"

Appendix

Knowing God

FAITH BECOMES KNOWLEDGE

Why believe anything the Bible says? Is it not just a book of Jewish myths?

Indeed, how can anyone really believe in God? Don't we all live a life without really knowing whether God is there or not? God is invisible, intangible and silent. How can anyone believe that He exists?

These are valid questions and they deserve answers.

There are, of course, volumes written both for and against the validity and the truth of scripture. But most people do not read them before they realize that the Bible is true. Many more volumes have been written about the existence or the non-existence of God, but practically no one bothers to read them before making a decision for Christ. How does anyone bring themselves to believe in an invisible God?

The answer is quite simple. They *try it*. Books don't help. Being religious doesn't help. Pretending to believe does not help. Only God can show you that He is real. And if He doesn't, you will simply never know. It is as simple as that.

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.¹

But if God is God, then He is perfectly capable of making Himself known in no uncertain terms to anyone—and known in such a way that it is clear that the knowledge of Him is actual and not simply a belief or a psychological “crutch” constructed by a needy mind.

So, why does He not make Himself actually known? The answer is that He *does* make Himself actually known. That is the reason that there are so many committed Christians.

But it is by invitation only. *He* issues the invitation, and *we* must accept it. If we don't accept the invitation, we don't go to the party.

1. First John 5:12

The invitation is issued to all.² *So you are invited.* You may choose to accept the invitation or you may decline it. Your choice — it is always your choice.

What must you do to accept the invitation? First the acceptance of the invitation must be sincere, because if God is God, He is going to know your heart. You must, in good faith, intend to accept the forgiveness offered by Jesus Christ. You must mean what you say to Him (there are no magic words here). And all the faith that is necessary is the faith to trust in Jesus Christ sincerely for the forgiveness of all sin, even though you are really not sure He is even there.

And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.³

Note that this scripture does not say to trust in Him because you are certain, or because you just believe, or because someone told you to trust. It says to be sincere; trust "with all your heart."

Don't fall for the lie that tells you that this act of faith is "intellectually impossible" or that it is somehow a "violation of who you really are" or that it is simply "unreasonable." If you sincerely trust in Christ for the forgiveness of all sin and that trust is foolishness, then you have lost nothing. But if you refuse to trust in Jesus Christ and you are wrong, then you have lost everything.

When Christ was sacrificed on the cross, He paid for all of our sins (past, present and future). He was later resurrected demonstrating that His sacrifice was effective and that the penalty for sin had been paid.⁴

We become forgiven and sinless in God's eyes when we appropriate the work of Christ on the Cross by our decision to rely upon what He did there for us. That is absolutely all we have to do to be cleansed from sin. There is no penance to pay (He paid it all), no hail-Mary's, no priest, no preacher, no confessor. Just you and Him:

Believe [trust] on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.⁵

2. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3. Jeremiah 29:13

4. This is called the "gospel," or "good news."

5. Acts 16:31. The words "believe on" mean to "trust in."

And we must all be cleansed from sin in order to become someone to whom God will disclose Himself. That cleansing occurs when we come to Christ.

So, to accept the invitation all you have to do is to honestly trust in Jesus Christ. You don't have to know that it is true in order to try it. One can know that God is real only after God discloses Himself.⁶

Knowing Him is the gift of eternal life:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.⁷

So, after you have trusted in Christ (salvation), when does He disclose Himself to you?

He discloses Himself to you when you yield your will to His and obey His word.

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.⁸

If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.⁹

God's gift of eternal life comes when you trust in Christ. This is the gift of salvation and it is an unconditional free gift, free for the asking. But knowing God — having Him disclose Himself to you — is conditional. It is conditioned on how much you have yielded to Him, or how you intend to live your life conforming to His Word. If you surrender your will to Christ, He will disclose Himself to you. When He discloses Himself to you, you will love Him and discover that all that you never believed was true really is true.

6. John 14:21 "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself [show myself] to him."

7. John 17:3

8. John 14:21

9. John 14:23

If you do not obey His word, He will not make Himself known to you. Why? Because God does not dwell with those who are willfully and intentionally committing sin.

This presence of God is not theoretical, it is actual and it is experienced. This is the reason why so many people tell of their salvation and remain Christians all of their lives. This is “knowing” God,¹⁰ not just believing in God. Simply believing that God exists is of no consequence whatever.¹¹ Everything turns on whether we have actually trusted Christ and whether we actually know Him; nothing turns on your opinion as to whether God exists or not.

So, the “formula” here is to trust and obey. It is not necessary to prove yourself or perfect yourself before God discloses Himself to you. What is important is to place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and sincerely surrender to His will. After you do that, He will disclose Himself to you and empower you to turn from sin. He will show you and you will understand. He will show Himself to you just as He has shown all the others who did the same thing over the past two millenniums.

Christians are not Christians because they liked a particular set of rules or chose particular brand of theology. They are not Christians because they like the idea of a sacrificial Saviour or because they just like the way the Bible set everything up. Most of them never read the Bible and had no idea of what it says. They are Christians because they decided to trust in Christ, discovered the presence of God and found it to be wonderful. In short, they are Christians because they tried something and it proved to be true.

10. John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God...”

11. James 2:19 “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

To the Atheist

To the avowed atheist, let me say that you may be far closer to the Truth than you realize because you are uncompromising and you are honest with yourself. You refuse to engage with an imaginary theological construct for the purpose of creating some type of artificial mental repose. My hat is off to you. You demand a reality that you can perceive.

But if what I am saying is true, then that same uncompromising demand for truth should take you to the point where you try it and try it with sincerity. We all live a life of borders and the border for the atheist is constructed of reason and observation. But if you wish to remain true to your creed, you must be willing to look and see for yourself whether God will disclose Himself or not. You must be ready to trust in Christ for the forgiveness of all sin and the, in the silence of your own heart, begin to discover His commands and keep them. You cannot truly know until you actually do that.

You claim to be rational but in fact your decision not to try Christ is irrational. It is irrational not to make a decision to place your trust in Christ's forgiveness and to surrender to His will *if He will disclose Himself to you*. And if you refuse to try, then without question, there is another reason behind your choice, a reason other than reason.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those
who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it
is the power of God.¹²

Quite frankly, if you do have the courage to walk beyond the limit of your own vision just to see if there is anything there, you will be in for quite a surprise. It certainly surprised me.



12. First Corinthians 1:18

Appendix
Knowing God — Loving Life

A DIAGRAM

ETERNAL LIFE

This is eternal life, **that they may know You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3



EMPOWERMENT

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness **through the true knowledge of Him** ... He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature... Second Peter 1:3,4



YIELDING AND KNOWING GOD

**ADVERSITY and
TEMPTATION**
They make obedience
to be significant

He who **has my commandments and keeps them**, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will **disclose Myself to him**. John 14:21



BEARING FRUIT

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides in Me** and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5



LOVING LIFE

The fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace**, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance... Galatians 5:22

Appendix

50 Scriptures

FIFTY SCRIPTURES THAT TEACH DEATH AS THE
ETERNAL STATE OF THE UNREDEEMED, NOT ETERNAL TORMENT

1. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. Genesis 2:17
2. Knowest thou not since of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet, he shall perish for ever ...” Job 20:6,7
3. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1:6
4. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.
5. Why boasteth thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness...God shall likewise destroy thee for ever He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living.
6. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid of what man can do unto me ... For thou hast delivered my soul from death ... Psalm 56:11:13
7. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever. Psalm 92:7
8. For thou hast delivered my soul from death. Psalm 116:8
9. The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will He destroy. Psalm 145:20

10. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. Proverbs 19:9
11. ... they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. Isaiah 1:28
12. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die. Ezekiel 18:4
13. 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: turn ye, turn ye from you evil ways; for why will ye die? Ezekiel 33:11
14. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help... I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death... Hosea 13:9,13
15. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been. But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance... Obadiah 16
16. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.¹ Matthew 3:12 (Luke 3:17)
17. Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Matthew 7:13
18. Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both the soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28
19. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned [consumed]² in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. Matthew 13:40

1. The Greek word for “burn up” in this passage is κατακαίω, which means to destroy by burning or “burn up.” It is the same word used in Second Peter 3:10 denoting complete destruction. Neither the Greek word nor the English translation of it connotes eternal burning but instead means destruction by burning.

2. See footnote for Matthew 3:12. The same Greek word is used.

20. And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Luke 13:2

21. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. Luke 19:27

22. But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more... Luke 20:35,36

23. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.³ John 3:16

24. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever... John 6:50

25. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death. Then the Jews said to Him, Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death. John 8:51, 52

26. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish John 10:28

27. Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. John 11:26

28. ...Deserving of death. Romans 1:32

29. Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12

30. So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:21

3. Note the symmetry here: either life or death

31. Do you know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? Romans 6:16

32. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. Romans 6:21

33. The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23

34. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. First Corinthians 1:18

35. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. First Corinthians 15:26

36. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' First Corinthians 15:54

37. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; Who delivered us from so great a death... Second Corinthians 1:9

38. To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. Second Corinthians 2:16

39. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. Second Corinthians 7:10

40. ... but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, Who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Second Timothy 1:10

41. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Second Thessalonians 2:9, 10

42. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Hebrews 2:9

43. Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14

44. Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death... James 5:20

45. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished ... but these ... shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness ... Second Peter 2:9, 12-13

46. The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Second Peter 3:9

47. I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Revelation 1:18

48. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. Revelation 2:11

49. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power ... Revelation 20:6

50. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. Revelation 21:8



The doctrine of eternal torment says that God will effectively burn everyone alive for the rest of eternity except for Christians. This is a false doctrine. It is error. The final end of the unredeemed is death, not eternal torment in the flames of hell.

Christ never mentioned eternal torment. In fact, eternal torment is never mentioned anywhere in the Bible except for once, and then to describe the eternal fate of Satan (Revelation 20:10).

The proponents of the doctrine of eternal torment argue that all unbelievers will be punished with the same punishment as Satan and they cite scriptures to support the doctrine. But none of those scriptures actually mentions eternal torment and all of them are broad enough to mean either eternal torment or eternal death. On the other side of the argument, there are 50 scriptures that explicitly state that the eternal fate of the unredeemed is “death” and the words for death used in those scriptures are the all the Greek and Hebrew words for ordinary death in its various forms, ie. the cessation of life.

The doctrine of eternal torment must circumvent these scriptures if it is to retain any credibility. And that is exactly what the proponents of the doctrine do. They circumvent the meaning of all of the Greek and Hebrew words for death by simply redefining death in a manner that will accommodate their doctrine. It is for this reason that we find the colloquialism, “Death in the Bible means separation from God.” This colloquialism is an accommodation to eternal torment because if death can be made into a separation from God, the unredeemed are not really dead and can therefore be burned alive.

But there is no biblical support for this belief and death in the Bible means exactly what it says: death. It does not mean separation from God or any other such circumvention. The Bible contains references to life after death, to be sure, but these do not change the definition of death. Death is still death. It is only a question of what has died. For instance, in the parable of Lazarus⁴ the bodies of two men die but their souls survive and are conversant. Or, in the second death, the soul dies and scripture relates no resurrection following the second death.⁵ The second death is permanent. It is an eternal punishment.⁶

Since the soul does not die with the body but does die later on in the second death, it is necessary to have two deaths. It is for this reason that Revelation teaches that there are two deaths.⁷ Two deaths, however, are difficult for eternal torment to account for because the same Greek word for ordinary death (“thanatos”) has to mean ordinary death in

4 Luke 16:19-31

5 Revelation 21:8

6 Matthew 25:46 “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

7 Revelation 20:14 “the lake of fire is the second death;” Revelation 20:6 “Blessed and hol are those who share in the first resurrection ! The second death has not power over them;” Revelation 21:8 “the second death;” Revelation 2:11 “The one who is victorious will not be hurt by the second death.”

one instance and eternal life in hell in the other instance. When asked what dies in the second death, the proponent of eternal torment must respond, “Why, nothing. Nothing dies in the second death because the second death is really eternal life in hell.” That is why sermons on the second death are rare in an evangelical churches.

It is astounding how far the proponents of the doctrine will go in order to justify their belief that God intends to burn everybody alive for eternity except for them. Their redefinition of death has 50 scriptures meaning precisely the opposite of the dictionary meanings of the Greek and Hebrew words. And those 50 scriptures contain all of the Greek and Hebrew words for death, so the doctrine of eternal torment contradicts every one of them. Death no longer means death in the world of eternal torment; it means precisely the opposite: eternal life (in hell). But, of course, this redefinition is applicable only when the word refers to the eternal state of the unredeemed. Everywhere else the same words mean what the Greek and Hebrew Lexicons say they mean, which is death, pure and simple.

Four thousand years of animal sacrifice were devoted to the ritualized demonstration that sin causes death—all of which point to Jesus Christ, the lamb of God. But 4 millennia are no longer relevant when death is no longer the punishment for sin. And now the majority of evangelical theologians must bow to the only direct source for eternal torment: the apocrypha and the visions of Lucy of Fatima. Eternal torment is no more real than the Catholic wine that turns into blood with the wave of a priest’s hand but still tastes like cabernet. Eternal torment is a Catholic myth that was used to lever cash from the masses to construct St. Peter cathedral in Rome and is still used to compel attendance.

The doctrine of eternal torment is a grave and serious affront to the character of God and a gross contradiction of scripture. It has serious consequences to true doctrines such as the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The doctrine of substitutionary atonement holds that Jesus Christ was the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world by paying our death-penalty for sin on the cross. The doctrine of eternal torment directly contradicts this because it holds that our penalty for sin is not death but to be burned alive forever. Therefore, if our penalty for sin is eternal burning in hell, then Christ did not pay it. Both doctrines cannot be true.

See Fate of Unbelievers by the Author.

