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**BELIEFS THAT MATTER MOST**  
**By Westlake Taylor Purkiser**

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**PREFACE**

The purpose of this little book is to try to place "the faith . . . once delivered unto the  
saints" (Jude 3) in a setting of interest and meaning for young people in the last half of the twentieth  
century. Much of the material was published as a series of articles in Con quest running through  
1958, and is reprinted with the permission of Dr. J. Fred Parker, who was Conquest editor at the  
time.

Readers of textbooks will note the absence of quotation and footnote from these pages (except for the church Manual) . The reason is not that the author owes no debts of acknowledgment. Those who know the literature will recognize how extensive the indebtedness is. But the aim of the book is not proof but explanation. Therefore the devices of technical scholarship have been set aside, without, it is hoped, losing altogether accuracy and carefulness of statement.

To be more accurate, our title might read, Some Beliefs That Matter Most. Many topics of importance are not treated at all, and others most briefly. This is in part due to the origin of the book as a series of periodical articles, and in part to the desire to give more space to subjects about which there is apt to be more misunderstanding.

Two men were arguing about the Monroe Doctrine, and one accused the other of being un-American. To this his neighbor hotly replied: "But I believe in the Monroe Doctrine. I love the Monroe Doctrine. I would fight and die for the Monroe Doctrine. All I said was, I don't know what it means."

To tell again what the Christian faith means is the reason for sending forth this survey of Beliefs That Matter Most.

My thanks are due to Ponder W. Gilliland former executive secretary of the N.Y.P.S., without whose interest this book would not have been possible.

W. T. Purkiser  
Editor, Herald of Holiness

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### 01 -- BELIEFS ABOUT THE REALM OF FAITH

Religion is one of the great facts of human life. Even those who will have nothing to do with it, as they say, cannot deny its worldwide importance. Humanity is incurably religious.

It may fairly be said, then, that man will worship -- something. His gods may be false gods. As is noted of the "self-made man," he may worship his "creator," himself, and this is the greatest idolatry of all. But he will worship. He will devote himself and his life to that which he believes to be of greatest worth. He must choose whom he will serve. Martin Luther said it well: "Whatever, then, thy heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly thy god."

#### Beliefs Are Important

This means that whether we will or no we are concerned with the realm of faith. True, we live in an age which boasts of its hard-boiled "realism" and which looks with question at beliefs and believing. The worship of science and what is supposed to be its loyalty only to fact has seemed to crowd faith and religion over to the margin of life, if not outside its deepest concern entirely.

What we all need to do is some clearheaded thinking about Beliefs That Matter Most, and first of all about faith itself in relation to life as we must live it. For, as we shall see shortly, not only the just live by faith, but the unjust also. Just as the real question is not "Shall we worship?"

but "Whom (or what) shall we worship?" so the final question is not "Shall we believe?" but "What (or whom) shall we believe?"

## 1. The Nature of Faith

First let's talk about what believing is. Believing, in general, is taking as true what cannot be proved with absolute certainty and holding it with such confidence as to live by it. In this way a belief differs from an opinion. Opinions are what people argue about; beliefs are what they live by.

There is a close connection between faith and life. All human beings live by faith. We believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, and nobody comes along to argue the point very seriously. But who would try to prove absolutely before it happens that the sun will rise? We believe that when we eat food it will give us strength, but many have eaten and died. Ideas of which we can be absolutely sure are few and far between, and most of them will be found to be certainties in the realm of the spiritual.

To put money in the bank and to accept a check are acts of faith. Even money itself is based on faith in the government that issues it. Love, marriage, confidence in the integrity and honesty of our friends, even conversation—all these, and hundreds of other details of life we take very much for granted, are cases of believing. Most times, the faith is justified. In some instances, unfortunately, it proves to be mistaken.

## 2. Faith and Fact

This brings up another very important point. The value of a belief does not depend on the sincerity of the believer. Nowhere in life is it true that "it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere." The most dangerous people in the world today are those who believe a monstrous lie and are utterly sincere in that belief.

You see, Paul in II Thessalonians 2 points out that there are those who believe a lie and are damned in that belief. He shows that they have had abundant opportunity to know and believe the truth, but refused to do so. And he says that our salvation depends on "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (v.13).

Ponder this last phrase a bit, and the matter becomes clear. The two important words are, of course, truth and belief. They belong together but sometimes get separated. Truth stands for that which is actually the case. Belief stands for our conviction as to what is actually the case.

Thus there may be truths which are not believed, just as there may be beliefs which are not true. But truth is only of value as it is believed, and beliefs are safe only when they are true. It is never enough, therefore, to be sincere in believing. We must be right in what we believe. On the other hand, truth may be presented to us but we may fail or refuse to believe it.

Remember, we are not saying that sincerity is not important. What we are saying is that it is not sufficient. All who are saved are sincere. But it does not follow from that fact that all who are

sincere are saved (or safe), any more than the fact that all sheep have tails permits one to conclude that all animals with tails are sheep. Some are goats.

### 3. Faith and Choice

Comes now another point which must be considered. Believing is something we do, and we may choose to believe or refuse to believe as the case may be. Of course there are some beliefs we seem quite compelled to hold, at least if we want the world to make sense for us. But in most areas, believing is a voluntary act. We choose to believe or we choose to doubt. That is to say, there is an element of commitment in belief.

If this were not so -- that is, if believing were something we were forced to do and about which we had no real choice--then we would no longer be free, but mere machines obeying the strongest impulses coming to us from without. Life would lose its meaning, and both right and wrong, truth and error would be labels that make no sense. Everything that is reasonable shouts that this is not so. The lives we live are the results of the beliefs we hold. And the beliefs we hold are not forced upon us without our consideration or consent. They are the response of mind and soul when faced with the claims of truth.

### 4. Faith and Reason

It is very unfortunate that people have fallen into the habit of contrasting faith and "reason" as if they were something poles apart and not very friendly toward each other. In reality, both faith and reason are channels whereby we come to a knowledge of the truth. They are allies, not enemies. However the "man of reason" may pooh-pooh faith, or the man of faith may discount reason, both are the image of God in man and both are vital to human existence.

True, faith may bring us to affirm that which reason cannot fully grasp. Someone has compared faith with the paratroopers who drop behind the enemy's lines and hold the position until the shock troops of reason can move in and take over. It is the nature of faith to go farther than reason is able, at the moment, to penetrate.

If we had to live within the narrow limits of what we can understand, we should all starve to death or perish from thirst and cold. Who can fully understand the mysterious life processes whereby a grain of wheat, planted in the ground, will multiply itself a hundred times over? But will you refuse bread at the table because you cannot fully understand the wonder of life? Is there a man of reason who can completely tell what electricity is in its real nature? But faith can push the button and rejoice in the light while reason puzzles over the mysteries of electrical and magnetic energy.

Believing, then, is both simple and profound. It is common to all people and yet priceless in the values it brings to life. Its worth is not in sincerity or strength alone, although it is worthless if it be not both sincere and strong. Its worth lies in the truth it grasps, and in its power to bring our lives into harmony with God and the great unchanging and underlying principles of this universe in which He has placed us.

## The Object of Religious Faith

The foundation of all religion is belief in the Supreme Being whom we know as God. Almost all people believe in some kind of God. Real atheism is rare indeed. The most dangerous enemy of religion is not theoretical atheism. It is what is called "secularism," or practical atheism, which does not deny the existence of God in theory but which just lives as if He does not matter.

### 1. Knowledge by Experience

For the true Christian the answer to the question, "Why do you believe in God?" will usually be in what he has found in his own experience. "He met me one day, and my life was changed. I believe in God because of what He has done in and for me."

Though there are many other reasons for believing in God, there is none better than this. I may think and argue about the existence of one of whom I have read and about whom I have learned some facts. But I never question the existence of a person I have met myself. This is just to say that there are two kinds of knowledge: there is knowledge about; and there is acquaintance with. Acquaintance with always carries a conviction and a certainty far beyond that of knowledge about.

### 2. A Reasonable Faith

But we need to consider some of the other reasons which may be given for believing in God. Most of them depend on the fact that this universe as we find it must be explained somehow. It is here as certain fact which no one can deny. The problem is how to account for it.

a. Cause and Effect. Here belief in God as the Creator offers the only really good answer. All of the explanations of evolution without God require far more faith than the simple but profound statement of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created." How can anyone really believe that all this vast universe with its intricate and marvelous structure only happened through the blind and meaningless gropings of natural law?

Dr. C. A. McConnell in his charming little story Daughter of the Hill Country tells of Keren-happuch Day, nicknamed naturally "Happy" Day, the little daughter of an agnostic country physician. Sitting on her father's lap on the lawn of their southern home, looking up at the brilliant stars one summer evening, Happy asked, "Daddy, who made the stars?" "Nobody made the stars, Keren," the doctor replied. "They just happened." And to all her childlike insistence this was the only answer he would give.

Returning from his calls the next afternoon, Dr. Day found a strange sight on the floor of his study. There were his sterile surgical instruments scattered about, and the remains of the family goldfish, which had evidently undergone major surgery with fatal results. Their heads were off, their tails removed, and their insides were out.

Filled with an almost certain suspicion, the doctor called Keren-happuch. "Happy," he demanded sternly, "who did this?" With wide-eyed innocence Happy looked up at her father, and

returned him the answer he had given her the night before, "Why, nobody did it, Daddy," she assured him. "It just happened."

Of course Happy's reasoning was as good as her Father's had been. If the stars and the universe could just "happen," then the mischief on the study floor could just happen too. But this isn't the kind of world where things "just happen." Someone, talking about naturalism's claim that the universe is the product of blind chance and unthinking law, said, "I believe in God because I do not believe in miracles." What he meant was that it was easier for him to recognize the handiwork of a Supreme Creative Personality than to believe in the greatest of all "miracles," that such a world as ours could come to be quite by accident.

b. The Alternatives. Really now, is there any choice open to us other than these two? Either our universe is the creation of an infinite God or it is the result of unseeing and unthinking forces out of which chaos becomes the parent of order and things happen without an adequate cause to explain them.

Doesn't it actually look as if faith in God as the Creator demands less credulity than faith in "evolution," or "law," or "matter," or any of the modern substitutes for God? When you come right down to cases, the most touching and childlike "faith" to be found is the "faith" of the philosopher or scientist who believes that this universe has its source in something unintelligent and without conscious purposes. This is in fact a shortcut to nonsense.

c. Purpose and Meaning. Again, the kind of universe this is gives us some clues as to its source. Everywhere we turn we find evidence of purpose and meaning in the world. The very fact that things which do not make sense seem to jar us so much shows that most things do fit into a rational picture. We simply cannot get away from the conviction that things which fit together have been designed together, and that which has meaning and makes sense is the product of intelligence and a Supreme Mind.

One great scientist, Sir James Jeans, said he could as soon suppose that a dozen monkeys pounding the keys of a dozen typewriters would eventually type all of the books in the library of the British Museum as to believe that this universe of ours is the result of pure chance and unintelligent force.

d. The Personality of God. Included in the belief in God as Creator are other important beliefs about God. One is that He must be a Person. This does not mean that He has a body or physical form, but that He is infinite Mind which conceives rational purposes and acts to carry them through to the finish.

It is true, we must not think of God as limited in ways in which we are limited, by space and time. However it is also true that we are made in His image. Therefore the reason, the feeling, and the capacity for choice which we find in limited measure within ourselves are reflections of what God is, without, of course, the limitations of the human.

e. The Meaning for Faith. Since God is an infinite Person, and has created human beings in His own image, it must be that His purposes for the persons He has made are good and perfect.

God has placed us in a world wherein we may grow in goodness and in a love for truth and righteousness. But the same capacity which makes us able to do that which is good and right also makes us liable to sin and evil. All of our experience shows us that God and His universe are on the side of good and right, and opposed to sin and evil.

This leads us to believe that the Creator-God will also be the Saviour-God, that He will not leave us to grope our way through life with no signposts to guide us, and with only a great darkness at the end of our journey. That God is infinite means that we should never expect to know all there is to know about Him. But that He is infinite also means that He is able to find ways to "get through" to us, to disclose or reveal himself to us.

For it is not enough for us to know that God exists. We need to know what kind of God He is, and what His purposes and plans for us may be. The world we live in does not make sense without believing in God. No more do the lives we live make sense without believing that God has in fact made himself known, showing us what life is all about and offering us His help in living it.

### How God Reveals Himself

Christianity claims one great and fundamental difference from all the other religions of the world. All religions involve man's search for God, or whatever is thought to be ultimate in the universe. The Christian faith rests solidly on the conviction that God has not waited for man to find Him, but has come to the human race with a divine self-disclosure, climaxing in the coming of His only begotten Son, whose redemptive work we shall later see.

This revelation of God, as it is called, is a personal revelation. It is communication, in various ways, from Person to persons. It is the disclosure by God of himself in His redemptive purposes, a disclosure made to persons created in His own image. He does not make known a system of truths as such, but himself. As Blaise Pascal long ago said, the God of the Bible is not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who makes himself known as the Saviour and Companion on the long way man must go.

When we come to ask, "How can these things be?" we find that God has made himself known to man in three major ways: through His mighty acts in history; supremely, in His own Son; and by the inspiration of His Spirit in the Scriptures. We must look briefly at each of these three channels of revelation.

#### 1. God's Revelation in History

Particularly in the centuries before Christ, "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel" (Ps. 103:7). It was by His mighty acts, chiefly, that the Lord God made known His will. Revelation was a record of what God did: calling Abraham to "go out under the stars," not knowing whither but certainly knowing with whom he went; delivering His people from the bondage of Egypt; making a covenant with them at Sinai, and giving them His law; directing them in the conquest of the promised land; raising up David, His servant, to prefigure a Greater who was to come; judging the idolatry and sin of His people in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities; bringing back a purged and chastened remnant from the Exile.

By His mighty acts in history God taught the great lessons set forth particularly in the Old Testament. He is a God who loves and chooses a people for His own. He is no mere bystander, no "honorary President of the Universe," but the sovereign Lord of human history. As the great prophets watched the events of history through the eyes of faith, they saw in the rise and fall of nations a divine purpose unfolding. It is instructive to remember that the Jews called the historical books of the Old Testament "the Former Prophets." God speaks in history.

But the salvation history of the Old Testament is on the face of it an incomplete history. It looks forward to the mightiest of all the acts of God, the coming of the Christ. History merges into prophecy. Hindsight blends into foresight. Man has his little day, but the day of the Lord is yet to come. The political kingdom which was lost to Israel must be replaced by a kingdom of God, which awaited the coming of its King. Here we are led to the greatest of all the channels of revelation.

## 2. The Revelation of God in Christ

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1:1-3a, RSV).

The supreme and final self-disclosure of God is "very God himself incarnate in Jesus Christ our Lord," of whom John writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:1, 14, 18).

It is then the Living Word of God who is the perfect revelation of the Father. In fact, it is difficult to see how a divine Person could truly be made known to human persons other than through an incarnation, that is, the taking of human nature. A personal God can be known only through personality. The greatest of all the acts of God is summarized by Paul when he says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19).

## 3. The Revelation of God in Scripture

To this it may rightly be said, "But God's revelation in history and in His Son took place many centuries ago. How can we today know the Lord?" The answer is to be found in the written Word, an inspired record of the mighty acts of God and an inspired interpretation of the redemptive life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. The Book for the Ages. The Book which brings this knowledge to us is the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. As President Woodrow Wilson once said, we know the Bible is the Word of God because we find it the key to our own happiness, our own duty, and the meaning of life. God's Spirit comes to us through the Scriptures and confronts us with His gospel.

The Bible is a very old Book, and yet it speaks to our age as clearly and with as much fitness as it spoke to the sixth century before Christ or to the first century A.D. It is always timely because its truth is timeless. The human nature it describes with such frankness and accuracy hasn't changed across the ages, nor has the working of God in human life.

A closer look shows us that the Bible is actually a sacred Library of sixty-six books, thirty-nine of which were written before Christ and make up the Old Testament; and twenty-seven in the New Testament, written within fifty or sixty years of the time of our Lord. The Book says of itself that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:21).

b. The Humanity of the Bible. This gives us two very wonderful facts about the Bible. First, it was holy men of God who spoke and wrote the Word of God. For you see, if God were to speak to men, He would need to speak through men, in language we can understand, using terms that grow up within the realm of human experience.

These holy men of God came from every station and walk of life. They were shepherds, priests, prophets, kings, farmers, fishermen; some rich, some poor; some highly educated, others untrained in the schools. The words they used were words that came from their own experience, and they wrote in every different kind of style.

So the humanity of the Bible is one of its chief sources of strength. It speaks to us in language we cannot mistake. We find reflected in its pages the kinds of persons we are. The quick and the slow, the impulsive and the deliberate, the intellectual, the man of action, the person of deep feeling-whatever be our particular type of temperament or personality, we can find ourselves in the pages of the Word.

c. The Divinity of the Bible. But the humanity of the Bible is only half the truth. The uniqueness of the Scriptures is not in their human body, but in the divine Spirit who inspired the writers and who uses the truth to bring us to God. While it was holy men of God who wrote, they wrote and spoke as they were moved by the Spirit of God.

Here we find a marvelous likeness between the written Word of God in the Bible and the living Word, or the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have already seen that in the first of John's Gospel, Jesus is described as the Word. He was in the beginning with God and He was God. Yet He was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

Now the central Figure of the Christian faith is God in human form, the God-man, Jesus Christ. In the next chapter we shall see that He was a complete and perfect human being-perfectly human. But He was also the fullness of the Godhead-perfectly divine. All His earthly life was a complete blending and union of humanity and Deity. That He was man did not make Him less God. That He was God did not prevent Him from entering fully into human experience with the exception of sin.

In this same wonderful way we find the blending of the human and the divine in the Bible. That its earthly authors were men like us does not make it any less the Word of God. That it is divine in its inspiration, that its preparation was guided and preserved from error by the Spirit of Truth, does not prevent it from meeting us on our own level and judging sin and unrighteousness among us.

d. The Bible as the Word of God. But another point must be made. Just as the Christ was the God-man through and through, so the Bible IS the Word of God in its entirety. That is, Jesus was not partly human and partly divine. He was completely God and completely man, in every particle of His being. So the Bible, in its wholeness, is God's Word through men to man.

There are those who like to say that the Bible is not the Word of God, but that it contains the Word of God. But this immediately robs the Book of its authority over human life and thought. For who is to say what part is, and what part is not, the Word of God? That is, if we think only in terms of the Bible as containing God's revelation, immediately we put up our own reason, or instinct, or judgment to decide how much is truly God's Word and what is merely the human shell in which the kernel is contained.

And so we find some who would cut out one part and some who would cut out another. Some would drop off the story of creation, others the account of the Fall. Many would like to get rid of the miraculous parts of scripture. By the time all of the critics get through cutting and chopping away what each of them thinks is the human husk, there isn't very much left.

Probably part of the problem here is that we tend to think only in terms of our own generation and our own ways of looking at things. We forget that God's revelation in the Bible was given to the entire race: all men everywhere and in all ages. Sometimes we impatiently think that God's Word should be given us in our own twentieth-century thought patterns. What we do not remember is that, while all of the books of the Bible were written for us, they were each written to people who lived through the centuries past; and that God loved and cared for them as much as He loves and cares for us. Much that is found in the Old Testament will make new sense if you keep this in mind.

e. People of One Book. There is one very practical conclusion which follows from all of this. If the Bible is God's Word, then we should know it better and love it more than any other book. Like John Wesley, each of us should determine to be "a man of one Book" -- not that we will read or study no others, but that every other will be rightly related to the truth brought to us by the Scriptures.

One of God's ancient writers poses the question: "Wherewithal shall a young man [or, of course, a young woman] cleanse his way?" Then he gives the answer: "By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:9-11).

"We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the universe; that He only is God, creative and administrative . . . [1]

"We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith." [2]

\* \* \*

#### For Further Discussion

1. In what way does faith demand commitment?
2. Why is it not enough simply to be sincere in what one believes?
3. What is the best basis for truth about God's real existence?
4. State some of the points which make faith in God a reasonable faith.
5. In what ways may God be said to reveal himself to man? What are the place and value of each?
6. What is meant by the "humanity of the Bible"? the "divinity of the Bible"?
7. What is the chief objection to saying that the Bible "contains the Word of God"?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### 02 -- BELIEFS ABOUT THE TRIUNE GOD

In our last chapter we saw that religious faith has for its object the supreme Person we know as God. We also saw that the God of a moral universe such as this in which we live would surely make himself known to His creatures. This, the Christian affirms, takes place through God's acts in history, the sending of His Son into the world, and in the Bible as the Spirit of Truth who inspired it makes it live for us.

What, then, may we believe about God? One man said that to him God was a kind of "oblong blur." But faith is not the result of our groping after God. In the truest sense it is our response to God's revelation as He confronts us in Christ through His Spirit. Here, in a nutshell, is what Christians mean when they speak about the Trinity.

#### The God And Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Nothing more important has ever been said about God than that He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:3). All the rays of truth which had shone through the pages of the Old Testament are gathered together and focused in one blazing light in the face of Jesus Christ. He shows us what God is. For the God of the Bible is the God who is like Christ.

## 1. A God of Holy Love

Much has been written and said about God which gives us help in understanding Him and His ways with men. All through the Scriptures, God is declared to be infinite Spirit; eternal in being, that is, without beginning and without end; unchangeable and perfect; present everywhere, and all-powerful; all-knowing, all-wise, and all-good; a God of justice, truth, and grace. He is the one sovereign Lord of history who sits in judgment on all human sins, national and individual. But beyond all this, He is a God of holy love. "This is what we see when we think about Jesus. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," our Saviour said in the memorable John 14:9-10, .... the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me he doeth the works."

That the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of holy love summarizes the teachings of both the Old and the New Testament. There is a sense in which the holiness of God stands out more in the Old Testament and the love of God stands out more in the New Testament. But this must not be pushed too far. The Old Testament declares God's love: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). The New Testament tells us how great that love is: "For God so loved . . . that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16)." Likewise the New Testament declares God's holiness: But like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living" (I Pet. 1:15, ARV), even as it quotes the great affirmation of the Old Testament: "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

Nor may these two terms, holiness and love, be permitted to drift apart. Holiness without love would leave us a God of judgment and wrath. Love without holiness would make of God little more than a noble sentiment. In the combination of holiness and love we most clearly see "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

## 2. The Holiness of God

All attempts to describe the holiness of God run head on into the limitations of our human experience. There is a majestic radiance in the divine holiness which is almost the equivalent of Deity itself. A constant rebuke to any flippant familiarity is the reverent awe with which men of old viewed the "Holy One of Israel."

God's holiness implies His unceasing antagonism toward all which is sinful and defiling. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). It also means His unfailing support for righteousness, truth, and integrity. Jesus prayed for His disciples in what is most truly the Lord's prayer, in the seventeenth chapter of John: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (v.11). We shall note in a later chapter that both of these aspects of God's holiness are involved in the holiness to which He calls His people (I Thess. 4:7). There is both an inward cleansing from impurity and inner sin and a positive anointing for service and righteous living.

## 3. The Love of God

That God is love is the confident assertion of the Apostle John (I John 4:16). All of His grace and all of His gifts flow from this fact. It was divine love which prompted the creation of man, which initiated the plan of human redemption when sin disrupted God's first purpose, and which sent His Son into the world to reconcile the human family to the Father. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10).

God cannot be other than love. Even what the Scriptures describe as the wrath of God is an expression of His love. The contradictory of love is not wrath but hate. Wrath is the other side of love, the unfailing op position of God toward that which destroys those He loves.

A father once heard his two young sons in serious conversation. The older was scolding the younger: "If you are bad, Daddy won't love you." The father called his boys to him. "That is not quite right," he said. "When you are good, Daddy loves you with a love that makes him happy. When you are naughty, Daddy loves you with a love that makes him sad." That the love of God is just and holy and punishes evil does not make it any less love. In fact, anything less than this would not be real love at all. To let sin run wild and evil go unpunished would be careless indifference and not true love.

### The Lord Jesus Christ, Our Hope

At the heart of the Bible towers the figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. What He is and what He taught are the touchstone by which every belief that belongs to the Christian faith must finally be interpreted.

There is something about Jesus which needs but to be told in order to draw out words of admiration and respect. Even those who have been doubtful about religion in general are quick to give high estimates of the person and character of Jesus.

But Christian belief about Christ means much more than general approval of what He did and taught. "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42) is a question which cuts right through to the core of the faith any person holds, and divides between belief and unbelief. To be a Christian means more than to have correct views about Jesus, but it can scarcely mean less.

Actually what we know about Christ intellectually depends on the testimony of the Scriptures. That testimony, taken as a whole, is clear and unmistakable, and witnesses to two great facts about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We mentioned these in the last chapter as picturing two great truths about the Bible itself, but now must come back to look at them again.

#### 1. Perfect Humanity

The first of these great facts in the testimony of the Bible to Christ is the fact of His perfect humanity. He was not half human and half divine. He was completely human, so much so that He could be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" and be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Of this we must never lose sight. The only way God could truly reveal himself was by taking the form of human nature, and in the person of His Son showing us both what He is and what He would that we should be. A heavenly being might announce the demands of the law, but the grace and love of God could be seen only when shown in living personality. We could not be reconciled to God unless our Reconciliation partook of our nature and could clasp our hands as well as the Father's hand.

## 2. The Deity of Christ

The other great fact to which the Bible witnesses is the fact of Christ's deity. It is not enough to talk about "divinity," for there were many "divinities" in Bible times, and many "gods" were worshipped by citizens of the Mediterranean world. Had the early Christians been willing to settle for the "divinity" of Jesus, they would have had no persecution-for where there are many gods, there is always room for one more. And even today there are people who talk much about the "divinity" of man or the "spark of divinity" in every human soul.

The Christian affirmation about Jesus is that He is truly God, and it is faith in His deity for which saints and martyrs gave their lives. They gladly took their place in "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). They spoke of "the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (I Tim. 3:16). They lived in hope of "the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, RSV); they spoke of Him as the Word who was in the beginning with God and who was God (John 1:1); and they worshipped Him as "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

This great faith was strengthened by the fact that Jesus was not born by natural processes of birth, but was born of a virgin, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who question the virgin birth of Christ should ponder well the alternative to this belief, for the Scriptures make it unmistakably clear that Joseph was not the father of our Lord. It is incredible that God would permit the incarnation of Christ to take place in such a manner as the only alternative to the virgin birth would suggest.

## 3. Purpose of the Incarnation

Why, it must be asked, did God thus take human form and in the person of His Son invade human history, dividing the ages asunder into E.C. and A.D. in what one has called the compelling "logic of the calendar"? No better answer can be found than in the classic reply given by St. Paul, and quoted earlier: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19).

Here are volumes of theology in nine words. The great tragedy of human sin had brought estrangement from God. The just claims of the moral law must be met, a law in which sin is followed by death as certainly and inevitably as night follows the setting of the sun. By becoming himself our Sin Offering, who had no sin for which to die, by His death on the Cross providing an acceptable substitute for the penalty for our sins, by being raised again for our justification, the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the Saviour of all who believe in Him.

#### 4. The Faith in Christ

These last words give us a point to weigh carefully. Nowhere does scripture promise eternal life to those who have right ideas about Christ, as important as such ideas may be. Always the words are "Believe in," or, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

For believing can mean two things. It can mean only "holding as true certain ideas about." Or it can mean, as it really should, "holding such ideas about as to make a life commitment to." Faith is not just a matter of intellect. It is an act of the will. It means trusting in, commitment to, choosing as a controlling principle of life.

So faith in Christ is saving faith when it leads to a surrender of life to His will and a complete trust in His power to save. But the results of faith like this in our lives are not only what we do about it, but what He does in us. And He works in us through His Holy Spirit.

#### The Holy Spirit of God

When Jesus faced the Cross, He told His disciples of the dismay and heartbreak His leaving would cause them. But with these warnings He gave some of His greatest promises. "I will pray the Father," He said, "and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17).

It is to beliefs about the Holy Spirit that we turn next in surveying the Beliefs That Matter Most. It would be hard to think of any that matter more in the practical living of the Christian life.

##### 1. "Another Comforter"

Christ said of the Spirit that He should be another Comforter. The word here is sometimes translated "Advocate," or as it means in the original, "One called alongside to help."

Even the older English word, "Comforter," has an interesting depth of meaning when applied to the Spirit of God. It does not mean "One who gives solace or comfort in grief," as it would suggest to us today. Rather it is taken from two Latin terms: *con*, which means "with"; and *fortare*, from which our "fort" and "fortification" comes, which means "to strengthen or empower." The Comforter, then, is One who comes with power, to make Christians strong.

We shall see in the next section that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity means recognition of three divine Persons in one nature or Godhead. The Third Person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit.

Here are two key points. The first is the personality of the Spirit of God.

##### 2. The Personality of the Spirit

It is never right to refer to the Holy Spirit as "It," although this is found in the King James Version for grammatical reasons (e.g., Rom. 8:16). For, you see, in Greek the noun "Spirit" is neuter, and the pronoun is therefore made to agree. But we should always be careful to use the pronoun "He," or "Him," or "His," when speaking of the Holy Spirit. He is as much a divine Personality as is Jesus or the Father-God.

Another item is the use of the name "Holy Ghost" in the King James Version. When quoting the Bible we ought to be careful to quote it accurately, and that would mean using the words as translated. However, it is well to recall that terms have a way of changing their meanings across the centuries. This has happened to a number of words which had much different meanings when the King James Version was made in 1611 from what they have for us today. For this reason it is better to use the name Holy Spirit when speaking about the Spirit of the Lord.

A number of different names and titles are used in the Bible to refer to the Third Person of the Trinity. In the Old Testament, He is spoken of as "the Spirit of God," or "the Spirit of the Lord." We are told of His creative work in the second verse in the Bible, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).

In the New Testament, He is called "the Holy Spirit," "the Comforter," "the Spirit of Christ," "the Spirit of truth," "the Spirit of grace," "the Spirit of adoption," as well as "the spirit . . . of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

### 3. The Deity of the Spirit

The second key point to consider about the Holy Spirit is His deity. Here the Bible teaches that a lie to the Holy Spirit is a lie to God (Acts 5:3-4); He is eternal, as are God the Father and God the Son (Heb. 9:14); and the Church uses forms of baptism and benediction which join the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in parallel and equal terms (Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14).

### 4. The Spirit and the Christian Life

But we must turn now to consider the place this Divine Person holds in the Christian way of life. How important this is may be summed up by saying that all contact between God the Father and Christ Jesus the Son on the one hand, and the human soul on the other, is through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught this clearly in His last talk with His disciples as given in John, chapters 14 through 16. The Holy Spirit is to take the Master's place in the lives of Christians (14:18); He is to teach all things, and remind of what Christ had taught (14:26); He is to inspire testimony to Christ (15:26-27); and it is better for Christians to have the Spirit with them than to have the actual presence of the Lord Jesus in the flesh (16:7).

a. His All-inclusive Work. We can thus see that there is no spiritual life at all without the Spirit of God. Before we are converted, we are awakened and convicted by the Holy Spirit (John

16:8). The beginning of a truly Christian life is the birth of the Spirit (John 3:5-6). We need to be not only born of the Spirit but baptized with the Spirit as well (Matt. 3:11). And throughout his Christian life the believer continues to be led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14).

b. The Divine Executive. This is why Dr. Daniel Steele called the Holy Spirit "The Executive of the Godhead." He illustrated the doctrine of the Trinity by pointing out that in any one government there are three functions or powers. There is the legislative or law-giving function, embodied in the Congress in our government. Then there is the judicial function, as seen in the courts of the land. And finally, there is the executive function, expressed by the president and his cabinet.

So in the Trinity, there is God the Father, the Lawgiver. There is Jesus Christ, His Son, the divine Judge of all mankind. And there is the Spirit of the Lord, the Executive.

Just as all of the relationships of the individual citizen with his government and the actions of the government with regard to the individual are through the executive branch of the government, so the Holy Spirit is the One who actually works within human life the will and plan of God.

c. The Unpardonable Sin. Beyond doubt, this is why the one unpardonable sin mentioned in the Bible is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31). To commit this sin is to cut off the soul from all possible contact with God and His grace. Because, as it were, the wire is cut, no messages for help and no answers of pardon can be sent or received.

It is most important then that we keep a reverent attitude toward the Holy Spirit. Through Him and His work within us is brought to us what Christ our Lord purchased on the Cross for us. Right beliefs about the Spirit are a vital part of the Christian system of Beliefs That Matter Most.

## The Trinity

We have found it impossible to talk about the God of the Bible without using the terms Triune and Trinity. To this difficult truth we must now give brief consideration. Here, in sharp focus, is the great belief of historic Christianity which ties together our faith about God, about Christ, and about the Holy Spirit. It is the conviction that God is Three in One: that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three Persons in one nature. There are not three Gods, but the one God subsists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### 1. The Basis of the Truth

It is no use to pretend that we can perfectly understand all that is involved in the doctrine of the Trinity. But it will help us to remember that this great faith is not a theoretical or abstract doctrine concocted to puzzle the understanding-a kind of religious intelligence test. Rather it grows out of the practical life and faith of the Christian community. It is the result of putting together three great facts: first, the fact of the unity of the Godhead; second, the fact of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; and third, the fact of the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. None of these facts can be surrendered without giving up the faith of the New Testament. The need to put them together and hold them in proper balance is what gives rise to the doctrine of the Trinity.

## 2. The Limits to Be Observed

That God is one in nature or essence and three in person is the truth we strive to grasp. Most explanations tend to sacrifice either unity or trinity. That is, they tend to come out with either three Gods or with one God in three manifestations or operations. None of our analogies, however helpful, seem quite adequate: whether governmental, psychological, physical, or biological. Here, as elsewhere in the realm of faith, when the explanation seems to elude us, we must hold the more firmly to the facts. This does not excuse us from using our heads and thinking hard about the Christian faith, but it does caution us not to pretend to infallibility in interpretation. The mind which is not modest as it thinks about divine things is almost certainly mistaken.

With this caution and within these limits, then, we may note that any one government consists of three functions as stated before: the legislative, the judicial, and the executive. There are not three governments in such a description, but one. Each human individual will be found to be a sort of trinity, with reason, will, and affections making up a psychological unity. A radiant physical body, such as the sun, exists in space as a gravitational center radiating light and heat. Finally, a biological organism possesses a high order of unity. But it is a unity in plurality, many organs and cells sharing a single life.

"We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the universe; that He only is God, creative and administrative, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose; that He, as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. [1]

"We believe in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead; that He was eternally one with the Father; that He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, are thus united in one person very God and very man, the God-man.

"We believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that He truly arose from the dead and took again His body, together with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven and is there engaged in intercession for us. [2]

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune Godhead, that He is ever present and efficiently active in and with the Church of Christ, convincing the world of sin, regenerating those who repent and believe, sanctifying believers, and guiding into all truth as it is in Jesus." [3]

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### For Further Discussion

1. What is the relation of the holiness and the love of God?
2. Discuss the importance of holding in proper balance the belief in the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ.

3. What is the importance of the virgin birth of Christ?
4. What is the reason for using care always to speak of the Holy Spirit as "He" and "Him"?
5. What is the place of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life?
6. What three facts are put together in the doctrine of the Trinity?
7. What opposite dangers are to be avoided in thinking about the triune God?

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### 03 -- BELIEFS ABOUT REDEMPTION

Several times in previous chapters we have intimated that God's purpose for human beings was a saving purpose. Another word for this is "redemption." In its literal meaning, to redeem is to buy back or recover; to obtain release, as from captivity, by paying a ransom. A closer look at the term as used throughout the Bible shows that it involves three elements: the victim to be redeemed, the state or condition from which redemption is needed, and the means or cost by which release is provided. These will serve as the divisions of this present chapter. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?"

God's great concern and purpose throughout the ages has been related to the human race. In order to understand redemption we must know something about those who are its objects. Next to God, man is the most important theme in the Bible. Genesis introduces us first to God in His creative work. Immediately, however, it turns to human nature and the place of humanity in the creation of God. Someone has noted the relative importance of the human soul in relation to created things: "Genesis gives two chapters to creation and fourteen to Abraham."

#### 1. The Origin of Man

Many wrong ideas about human nature are corrected in this early Genesis account of man. It forever sets aside all of the naturalistic philosophies which would find humanity to be nothing more than the last product of an evolutionary process, with only a little more highly organized central nervous system than the animals.

It is interesting to note that there are only three times in the first chapter of Genesis where the word "create" is used. All the other works of God are described by the use of the words "made" or "let there be." The three "creations" are the material universe (v.1), conscious life (v.21), and the human self (v.27).

The Bible recognizes the fact that our physical bodies are of the dust of the ground. The truly important element in human nature is found in the words "spirit" and "soul" -- for God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life (literally, "the spirit of life"); "and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).

## 2. The Image of God in Man

It is in the realm of the spirit and the soul that we bear the image of God. This is what makes us more than animals; what, indeed, makes us citizens of two worlds. Physically, biologically, we live in the world of nature, our bodily lives sustained by the same sort of processes that sustain the lives of animals. Mentally, spiritually, we live in a higher realm, in which we have capacities far beyond those of any other living kind.

While it is true that sin has marred the moral image of God in human nature, man still retains much of the natural image of God in his capacity for intelligent thought and the ability to make real choices. If it were not for this, we should not only be lost forever from God, but would have no capacity to respond to His grace when it is presented to us.

## 3. Citizenship in Two Worlds

That we as human beings hold citizenship in two realms causes many of the tensions and pressures we feel upon us. The pull of the physical and natural is very strong. Some live their lives almost wholly on the level of satisfaction of merely animal needs and appetites.

On the other hand, it is almost impossible for a human being to be entirely satisfied to live as a vegetable or an animal. There is the pull of the spiritual world, and the pressure of a sometimes dimly felt but always real moral law. Man alone, in all earthly creation, is subject to the sense of "ought."

## 4. The Nature of Human Freedom

One of the recent fads in the study of human nature is known as "determinism." Expressed in a number of ways, this is the idea that people are the creatures of their heredity and environment, and their actions are the result of the play of outside forces upon them. In its extreme form this view is fatalism, and results in a passive surrender to circumstances.

Nothing could be further from the truth about man as seen in the Scriptures. The Bible does not deny the strength of sinful tendencies or the fact of human earthiness. But it does strongly affirm the fact of freedom of choice. God's enabling grace is given to all, making it possible to rise above bondage to the flesh and to circumstances.

## 5. The Proper Goal of Human Life

Closely connected with the fallacy of determinism is the notion that questions of good and evil in human life are decided by the pleasure or happiness certain forms of conduct yield. Many teach today that whatever in life promises the greatest happiness or pleasure is therefore good and right.

Against this is the biblical belief that life is not a goblet to be drained, but a measure to be filled-that we are not here in this world to see how much we can get out of it for ourselves alone,

but to make a contribution and to leave humanity at least a little better for the fact that we have lived. The chief end of man is not to be happy, but to deserve happiness.

True, the raw materials of human life may be used to build taverns of sensuality and lust. But they may also be used to build temples, consecrated to God and the upbuilding of His kingdom in the hearts of men. As one has written:

Isn't it strange  
That princes and kings,  
And clowns that caper  
In sawdust rings,  
And common people  
Like you and me  
Are builders for eternity?

Each is given a bag of tools,  
A shapeless mass,  
A book of rules;  
And each must make,  
Ere life is flown,  
A stumbling-block  
Or a stepping-stone.

## 6. The Implications of Immortality

In this connection, we must never forget the clear teaching of both reason and scripture that man is a creature destined to live forever. The real self, the soul which is what we truly are, does not die when the body perishes. This adds a new and a true dimension to human living. It is one thing to make all our choices as if the threescore and ten years more or less that we spend here on earth were all there were to it, and something quite again to make our choices with eternal horizons in mind.

To so live does not mean to be otherworldly and impractical. It does mean to live and act as immortal beings should live and act. We can never measure our success by what we leave behind us. We can measure it only by that to which we go. And it is by laying up "treasures in heaven" that we can most effectively serve God and our present age.

It was the Psalmist who said, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3-4) How great and worthy is his answer: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field" (Ps. 8:5-7)!

The Curse of Sin: The Serpent's Fang

At the beginning of the chapter we saw that redemption points to the victims to be redeemed, and to the state or condition from which deliverance is needed. It is to the condition into which man has fallen that we next turn our attention.

### 1. The Human Predicament

All observers of human life are struck by the strange malady which afflicts mankind. In a world filled with natural resources sufficient for a peaceful and abundant life for all its people, instead of serenity and peace we find the terrors of war, hatred, lust, violence, and selfishness.

What has been called "the human predicament" needs explaining. Why is it that the vast potential of man's life in this world is so widely defeated? There certainly must be some explanation for the universal misery brought about by "man's inhumanity to man."

The Bible answer, and again there is no better, is that man's disease of soul and spirit is the result of the "serpent's fang." It is sin. Vice is the violation of the laws of nature. Crime is the violation of the laws of man and society. Sin is the violation of the laws of God. No thoughtful person will deny that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

### 2. The Origin of Sin

But contrary to many sociologists of today, sin did not originate in a slum. As far as humanity is concerned it began in a garden, the Garden of Eden. And it began when the first parents of the race chose to disobey God's command, and at the serpent's suggestion followed the path of self-will. From the third chapter of Genesis clear through to Revelation, the testimony of the Bible is the same. The human spirit is diseased with sin, and all its choices and acts are colored by this deep lying malady.

### 3. Sin a Twofold Problem

For sin, as the Bible teaches, is of two sorts. This is shown by the very form in which we find the word. It is used as a noun in the singular, "sin," and usually means a state or condition of the soul, as when Paul says in Rom. 6:12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." And it is used as a verb, as when Jesus said, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). Here it has to do with a deed, an act, something within our power to do or not to do.

a. Sin as Condition. We are all born in sin as a state or condition, with a moral nature deprived of God's holiness and therefore depraved. Some have puzzled about how this sinful condition could be passed on from one generation to another, since those characteristics which we acquire during the course of our lives are not transmitted to our offspring.

The answer to the puzzle may be seen in part when we reflect that in the Garden, by their first sin, Adam and Eve lost the holiness in which they were created, which was given to them by the presence of God. They became depraved because they were deprived of God's righteousness by their sin of disobedience and rebellion. They could not pass on what they did not possess;

hence their race was depraved because deprived of the righteousness which its parents did not have.

Of course, no illustration is really able to shed full light on human experience at this point. But we all know that a man who squanders a fortune brings poverty on himself and on his children. Sin as a state or condition is more than the absence of righteousness, but it has its source in the loss of holiness just as blindness results from the loss of sight, and darkness from the absence of light.

b. Sin as Act or Deed. Then, there is the problem of sinful lives. Sin has been defined as "putting at the center of life our own self-seeking will in place of God's self-giving will." The Bible teaches that the essence and core of sinful living is unbelief. Jesus said, for example, that the Holy Spirit would reprove the world of sin, "because they believe not on me" (John 16:9). Hermann Schultz long ago stated: "The main root of sin is unbelief which sees in the gift of God's love an unfriendly limitation."

Doesn't this truly sum it up? Why do people break the kindly and beneficial laws of God, and choose instead their own self-centered ways of life? Is it not that they are driven by suspicious unbelief which doubts that God's will is really good, and which claims that man's way is better?

#### 4. Sinning as Willful

Let's get one thing straight, though. With all the fact that sin is so common and so widespread, let us not fall into the snare of thinking that humanity is sinfulness. There are two ways people get around the uncomfortable fact of sin. One is to deny it -- this is the way of unreligious people. The other is the way of many religious people -- to make it so broad that it takes in all sorts of mistakes and failures, even those which are unconscious and unavoidable.

To label everything sin, and to claim that no human being can live without sin, as many do today, is to all intents and purposes to make sin of no particular account. To speak of sinning every day in word, thought, and deed, with the idea that this is becoming Christian modesty, is to miss by a million miles the Bible emphasis on the nature of sin and of salvation from sin.

Scripture describes sin in all its awful, hideous reality as that rebellion which counts for nothing the holy law of God. Sin always involves choice and will. It is not unwitting and involuntary. And those to whom the gospel comes but who refuse the deliverance from sin which it offers become "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (I Cor. 11:27) because they affirm by that act the principle which crucified the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### 5. The Only Hope

But there is one happy fact about sin, and only one. That fact is that Jesus Christ came to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). By the dynamic power of His cross the sins of the life may be forgiven and the sin of the nature cleansed away (I John 1:9). There is no other remedy for the sickness of the soul. The venom of the serpent's fang is fatal; but, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

## The Cost of Redemption

The third idea in redemption is the cost or means of delivering from the state of bondage those who are held captive. Some moderns would try to do away with this as an important part of Christian redemption, but to do so is to lose its real power and meaning. If we ask the question of the New Testament Church, "By what means or at what cost is our redemption purchased?" there is only one answer: "The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:19).

Here, if anywhere, we enter the very "holy of holies" of the Christian faith. It is from his knees that one must view the Cross. Any other perspective is bound to distort it. That "Christ died for our sins" (I Cor. 15:3) we may affirm with the great apostle with no shadow of uncertainty. How the death of Christ brings new life to us we may not be able fully to understand or explain. The fact of the atonement is indisputable. Theories about the atonement may be less sure.

### 1. The Cross and the Love of God

One thing must be said first, and said so clearly that none can misunderstand. Redemption in Christ is, above all, the supreme revelation of the love of the Father (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). There is a half-truth which soon becomes a whole error in the notion that in some way or other Christ stood between the merciless wrath of the Father and the hapless sinner. A little girl came home from Sunday school and startled her mother with the statement, "Mamma, I love Jesus, but I hate God." "Why, what ever do you mean?" her mother asked in horror. "Well, my teacher said today that God was angry with us because of our sins and wanted to send us to hell; but Jesus died in our place and wouldn't let Him. So I love Jesus but I hate God."

The ghost of an ancient theology lingers in the words of the child. It grows up when we let the Incarnation drop out of sight and allow the Cross to stand alone. Then atonement becomes the offering of a perfect human life to God, purchasing merit or paying penalty, the benefits of which may be dispensed to human beings through a priest or by the "immutable decrees" of the Father himself. The corrective is to say again, as we have said twice before, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19). Calvary stands in the purpose of the Father (Acts 2:23) as the means whereby God redeems man unto himself.

### 2. The Scope of Redemption

There are at least three great needs to which the cross of Christ answers in the relationship between God and man. To see these clearly will help us toward an understanding of the cost and scope of our redemption. The first is that God's judgment on sin is not arbitrary, to be set aside at His pleasure, but is the result of what He is and must always be so long as He is God. The second is that sin always comes to human beings masked, incognito, and must be shown for what it is. The third is that the powers and personifications of evil which have held human life in bondage must be broken if there is to be a real deliverance, and if the power of the divine Spirit is to rule. To each of these we must give a moment's attention.

a. The Divine Nature and the Judgment of Sin Any biblical understanding of the Cross must start at the great description Paul gives of justification through Christ Jesus: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26).

The word "propitiation" is a difficult term to define clearly. It has been used in ways which miss by a million miles the biblical truth about the atonement. On the other hand, it stands for the fact that the cross of Christ meets a deep and fundamental demand of the nature of God: "that he might be just" and at the same time "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." The Cross at once vindicates the holiness of God and His forbearance in the remission of sins.

There is a symbolism of this in the form of the Cross itself. Its upright beam stands for the righteousness and holiness of God, which must always issue in judgment on sin. Its horizontal beam stands for the love and grace of God. Whenever love and grace are confronted by sin, the result is a cross. The Cross shows what sin costs, and that the supreme cost is borne by God himself. God in Christ bore the consequence of human sin at Calvary, and as a result the loving Father may forgive for Christ's sake those who repent and believe, and still maintain His holiness and justice, without which He would not be God.

b. Sin Unmasked. Not only does Calvary vindicate God's holiness and reveal His love; it unmasks human sin. Sin's greatest strength is the fact, as has been said, that it comes incognito. In a thousand clever ways it disguises itself. It masks itself behind excuses, rationalizations, circumstances, and the influence of others. The Cross strips the mask away, and shows sin for the vicious monster it is, the utter, stark rebellion against the love of God which is its real nature.

You have never seen sin as it is until you have looked at it in the light of the Cross. The dim light of popular moral standards in our day is "the night in which all cows look alike." But the holy love shining from Calvary makes all the shades of color and differences of quality appear. In a mission Sunday school one Easter the workers gave each child a beautiful, white Easter lily. A lady noticed one little child from a slum home looking at her lily while tears washed two little paths across none-too-clean cheeks. "What's the matter, Darling? Don't you like your lily?" the worker asked. "Oh, yes, it's lovely," the child replied; "but I never knew before how dirty I am."

c. "Christus Victor." No one has really grasped the New Testament teaching about the Cross until he has heard the victorious note of triumph over sin, death, the devil, and all principalities and powers which the Early Church put into its preaching. Here is not defeat in any sense, but deliverance. Christ is not the Victim of the hatred of evil men or of tragic circumstances. He is the Victor over sin, and death, and all the principalities and powers of evil which held men bound. Who can miss the thrill of triumph in the words of Paul: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it [that is, the Cross]" (Col. 2:13-15)?

Here is the reason why the New Testament writers stress so tirelessly the resurrection of Christ. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). In the resurrection of Christ we have the great sign and seal of the victory of the ages. As one described it, D Day arrived at last. The impregnable fortress of sin and evil was breached. The adversary fights on, but he fights as a foe whose final defeat is sealed and certain. All the tyrant forces which hold men in slavery were defeated by God in Christ, who overcame them forever by His own action through the sacrifice of Calvary.

Let us see one thing more here. This was not only a once-and-for-all-time victory over the principalities and powers of evil in the universe; it was the starting point for Christ's continuing action through the Spirit in spreading the fruits of His victory to individual human hearts and lives. The victorious Christ is our Eternal Contemporary. We do not worship Christ of the crucifix, but Christ the living and present Lord. In His victory we triumph: now over sin; and finally, when V-Day comes, over death. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11).

"We believe that original sin, Or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which every one is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until eradicated by the baptism with the Holy Spirit. [1]

"We believe that Jesus Christ, by His sufferings, by the shedding of His own blood, and by His meritorious death on the cross, made a full atonement for all human sin, and that this atonement is the only ground of salvation, and that it is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. The atonement is graciously efficacious for the salvation of the irresponsible and for the children in innocency, but is efficacious for the salvation of those who reach the age of responsibility only when they repent and believe. [2]

"We believe that man's creation in Godlikeness included ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus he was made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam he became depraved so that he cannot now turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God. But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all men, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in his sight.

"We believe that man, though in the possession of the experience of regeneration and entire sanctification, may fall from grace and apostatize and, unless he repent of his sin, be hopelessly and eternally lost." [3]

\* \* \*

For Further Discussion

1. What is the image of God in man?
2. What conclusions may be drawn from belief in immortality?
3. What does the Bible say with regard to man's predicament and its origin?
4. In what sense is sin a twofold problem?
5. What is the practical result of calling every human imperfection "sin"?
6. What is the distinction between fact and theory in the atonement?
7. What three great needs in the reconciliation of God and man are supplied by the cross of Christ?
8. Why does the New Testament lay such stress upon the resurrection of Christ?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### 04 -- BELIEFS ABOUT THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

It was out of the night he came -- not by reason of cowardice, but eager for private conference with the Master.

His name: Nicodemus.

His background: religious training and strict morality.

His need: a hungry soul, bound by sin and perplexed by doubt.

Jesus spent no time with incidentals. He went directly to the core of spiritual need. "Ye must be born again," He said.

How like ourselves is Nicodemus! We can almost hear him say it. Is there just a trace of sarcasm? "How can a man who's getting old possibly be born?" Can he, by some magic, start again with new physical life?

The need, Christ replies, is not a physical rebirth. It is a rebirth of spirit. To start life afresh in a physical sense would not really help, for "Flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit." What is needed is spiritual life; and spiritual life begins only with a spiritual birth--new birth, birth from above, the birth of the Spirit.

But Nicodemus is not done with argument. "How on earth can things like this happen?" is his way of saying, It's impossible: I can't understand it (John 3:9 -- quotations from Phillips' translation of John 3).

Jesus answers, "You cannot really understand the mysteries of earthly things, the blowing of the winds, the changes of the weather. How can you hope to understand heavenly things?" But salvation is not in understanding. It is in accepting. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:11-12).

Here we meet the Bible view as to the nature and beginning of the Christian life. It is not the result of education, or culture, or self-discipline. It is not turning over a new leaf; it is receiving a new life. It is not reformation; it is regeneration.

## A Personal Experience

It must be noted first that the beginning of the life in Christ is an event with a calendar and a geography. It has a time and a place. "Conversion," as we commonly call it, is a distinct epoch in the Christian's life.

### 1. Mistaken Ideas

It is not correct to say that "all men are sons of God by nature." By nature we are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3) and children of the devil (I John 3:8, 10). To become children of God means a personal response to a personal Christ who confronts us with His claim to our life-loyalty.

Being raised in a Christian home by Christian parents does not make an individual a Christian. As has been said, "God has many children, but no grandchildren." Such is the mystery of the human soul that each for himself must decide the way his soul shall go.

Faithfully attending church and Sunday school and accepting church membership does not make one a Christian, any more than going to a garage (as Billy Sunday said) will make one an automobile. Nor is baptism sufficient. One young man who tried to substitute baptism for personal salvation wryly confessed that he had gone down into the water a dry sinner and had come up a wet sinner, and that was all there was to it. Baptism means something only when it is "an outward sign of an inward work of grace."

Even a correct knowledge of Christian doctrine and a firm assurance of its truth does not of itself save. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19) -- and are demons still.

### 2. Open to All

All of this means that salvation is open to all on the same terms. God has no favorites. He predestines to eternal life all who will accept for themselves the mercy and grace offered in the gospel of Christ. What that acceptance means we shall shortly see. Here it is important to grasp the truth that God elects to salvation all who savingly believe on His Son and our Saviour. Since all may be saved, all are without excuse; and he who is not saved when given the light of the gospel must accept the fact that he alone is responsible for his condition.

## The Human Side of Salvation

There are, to be sure, two sides to religion. There is the human side, and then there is the divine side. The human side of conversion or the new birth is described by the Scriptures as repentance and faith.

### 1. Repentance

Jesus told the Pharisees that the reason they were not touched by the preaching of John the Baptist while many publicans and sinners were converted was because "ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:32). Paul, likewise, in Acts 20:21, summarizes his preaching with the statement that it included "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Speaking of the beginning of the Christian life, the writer to the Hebrews refers to "the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Heb. 6:1).

Now there are those who teach us that to be saved all that is necessary is "only believe." But the references just quoted show us that, before we can believe God to forgive our sins, it is necessary to repent

Repentance, to be sure, is often misunderstood. Most folks, probably, would say that repentance is "a godly sorrow for sin," and they would imagine that they were quoting the Bible. However, what the Bible really says is, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (II Cor. 7:10). For, you see, repentance is not a feeling or an emotion. Repentance is an action, a decision. It is the choice to have done with sin and all that would displease God, to confess sin, to forsake it, and to "go out of the sin business." Someone rightly said, "You can spell repentance with four letters: Q-U-I-T."

God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). Repentance is the strait gate and the narrow way which lead to life in the Kingdom. John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), Jesus himself (Mark 1:15), Peter (Acts 2:38), and Paul (Acts 20:21) all preached it, and the modern pulpit may neglect it only at its own peril.

Closely tied to repentance is "restitution," which means the making right of past wrongs done to others, insofar as such is possible. This is not only an Old Testament teaching (Exod. 22:3 ff.); it is shown in the New Testament in the actions of the jailer at Philippi, whose immediate reaction to the gospel was to wash the stripes his lash had laid upon the backs of the apostles (Acts 16:30-33). Indeed, sincerity and common honesty would demand no less.

In some cases the only repair of past wrongs possible is a humble confession to and an honest attempt at reconciliation with those who have been sinned against. Jesus said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

The penitent attitude is also seen in our willingness to forgive, and to keep on forgiving, those who wrong us. An often repeated word of the Master is found in Mark 11:25: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Such a saying evidently bothered Peter. "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times?" The reply of Jesus was, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22; cf. vv. 23-35).

## 2. Faith

Faith, on the other hand, is the opposite side of repentance. Really, these are not two, but one. Repentance turns away from sin, and faith turns toward God. Dwight Moody's famous definition of faith was an acrostic:

F-orsaking  
A-ll  
I  
T-ake  
H-im.

The first two letters involve what we have just called repentance: forsaking all that is sinful and displeasing to our Heavenly Father, contrary to His Word and to our own consciences. The last two letters spell out the meaning of faith: taking Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour. The I in the center is the pivotal point of personal decision and commitment.

It is said that a soldier described his conversion to Christ in the following words: "I was marching down the high road to hell when the Captain of my salvation called, 'Halt! Right-about-face! Forward march!'" This is not theological language, but it rather clearly describes the connection between repentance and faith. The one is impossible without the other, just as one cannot turn his back on the north without turning his face toward the south. Repentance, turning the back on sin, and faith, turning the face to the Saviour, are two sides to the same process.

Just as there can be no faith without repentance, so there can be no repentance (in the biblical sense) without faith. To confess sin without receiving forgiveness by faith is but to flaunt iniquity in the face of God.

It cannot be said too often that faith means much more than "assent to the truth of the gospel." It means commitment to and trust in Christ. Martin Luther said, "The only faith which makes a Christian is that which casts itself on God." After having been separated wrongly for many years in modern theology, faith and obedience are now being seen again as very closely related terms-so closely tied together that one leading scholar of the present claims that they may almost be used interchangeably. The song writer saw what the theologians had missed:

Trust and obey,  
For there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus,  
But to trust and obey.

## The Divine Side of Salvation

When we turn to the divine side of salvation, we also find two aspects or phases. When we repent (with confession and forsaking of sin) and believe (receiving Christ as a personal Saviour by faith in His atoning death), then God does two things: He forgives the past, and He imparts newness of life for the present and future.

### 1. Justification

Forgiveness is what we call "justification." It means that God wipes out the record of our transgressions and holds them against us no more. The record of our past sins is in God's sight as if it had never been.

It should be noted that justification is by its very nature "remission of sins that are past" (Rom. 3:25). To teach, as some do, that God's forgiveness at once includes all past sins, all present sins, and all future sins, is to indulge in dangerous fantasy. Forgiveness discharges the debt of past evils as far as guilt and penalty are concerned.

A caution should be stated at this point also: forgiveness relates to the guilt of sins, but does not necessarily mean that all of the consequences of the sins of the past are taken away. Justification is a legal act in the mind of God which does not of itself change the temporal status of the justified person. That is, to the extent that sin involves physical and social consequences, these may have to be borne even after justification has cleared the divine penalty. A young person who weakens his physical body in "sowing wild oats" or "having his fling" will have to live with suffering, disease, and limitation for the rest of his life. One who involves himself in a sinful and impossible marriage relationship may never be free from the scars and may suffer the results in personal unhappiness, even though the initial sin be forgiven.

Jesus illustrated this truth in what we know as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" in Luke 15:11-32, when he quoted the father's words to the older brother, "All that I have is thine" (v.31). There was forgiveness for the younger lad and reconciliation with his father, but the fortune he had carried with him to the far country was gone. He had "wasted his substance with riotous living" (v.13), and returned empty where he had gone away full. Let it never be forgotten: the journey into the far country is more costly than any of us can afford. While the wounds of sin may be healed, the scars remain.

### 2. Regeneration

The second part of God's work when we repent and believe is to impart newness of life. This we call "regeneration." It literally means what Jesus talked to Nicodemus about, a new birth. "If any man be in Christ," said Paul, "he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17).

While justification may be described as a change in God's attitude toward us, regeneration involves an actual change which takes place within us. It is the beginning of what we shall in the next chapter call "sanctification," the work of God's Spirit in saving us from the dominion of sin.

For sin in our lives involves not only guilt, but slavery as well. Paul makes it very clear, especially in his classic discussion in Romans 7, that no person can free himself from this bondage by his own will. Only by "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5) can we be saved from the sinful habits and attitudes which are so much a part of the nature of those who live without Christ.

We become partakers of Christ by "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Pet. 1:23). Without this rebirth of spirit, there is no Christian life and walk: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

We have already quoted Paul's vivid phrases descriptive of the New Testament Christian: "in Christ," and "a new creature," to whom all things have become new (II Cor. 5:17). The new life in Christ means a new relationship with God in being reconciled (v.18). It also means a new purpose in life, to serve and please God; a new power in temptation (I Cor. 10:13); and a new sense of the meaning and destiny of human existence.

### 3. Adoption

Very closely related to the new birth is the idea of adoption. This is one of Paul's favorite ways of describing the new status of the believer in Christ (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). It may fairly be said that, while regeneration has to do with the new nature within us whereby we become in truth the children of God, adoption has to do with the privileges and status which belong to those who become God's children. Two in particular may be underlined. These are assurance and inheritance.

a. Assurance In both Romans and Galatians, Paul connects our adoption as God's children with the presence of His Spirit witnessing to the fact that we have been accepted with Him: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16); "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:5-6).

The witness of the Spirit is the sense of assurance God gives to those who savingly believe on His Son. This far surpasses the "wish so" or "hope so" or "think so" with which so many describe their relationship to God. This is a "know-so" salvation. Any other kind is less than scriptural.

b. Inheritance. Paul not only connects assurance with adoption; he also joins with it the idea of inheritance: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be

that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17); "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:7).

## Victory Over Sin

The whole work of conversion deals with the problem of acts of sin in our lives. Justification, as we have seen, settles the problem of the sins of the past by wiping clean the slate. Regeneration deals with the problem of sins present and future by breaking the power of sinful habit and supplying grace to live a life of victory.

### 1. "Able Not to Sin"

It is not that the Christian is not able to sin. It is that he is able not to sin, by the supply of God's grace within his heart. Until he is sanctified wholly, the believer will struggle against the indwelling nature of sin in his heart. But God's promise is of keeping power. "God is faithful," His Word assures us, "who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye maybe able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

It must be admitted that there are many professed Christians who do not experience such victory. Many have been taught to expect nothing better than to "sin every day in word, thought, and deed," and to confess their "sins" each night before going to bed. Some may broaden the idea of sin to take in all sorts of involuntary shortcomings and human frailties, and live reasonably devout lives in spite of their faulty theology. But the tragedy lies in the fact that to expect defeat is to insure it, and if one so broadens the idea of sin as to make everything sin, as we saw in the last chapter, he in effect makes nothing sin. That is, the sharp dividing line between sin and infirmity or human failure is erased, and actual transgressions against the grace and goodness of God seem no more serious than the faults we cannot prevent.

### 2. God's Word Is Clear

Many biblical references could be given to discredit this notion of "sinning sainthood" (e.g., Rom. 5:8; 6:1, 15; 8:2-3; Gal. 2:17-18; I Thess. 2:10; Heb. 9:26, for a starter). But three from I John will serve to illustrate the tenor of the whole: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (2:4); "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (3:8-9); "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (5:18).

Keen eyes may note what seems to be a contradiction between the statement of I John 3:9, "He cannot sin, because he is born of God," and what we said earlier to the effect that being a Christian did not mean one is not able to sin, but rather is able not to sin. Perhaps a paraphrase of the whole of the verse will clear up the discrepancy: "Whosoever is an honest man doth not steal; for his honesty remaineth in him: and he cannot steal, because he is an honest man." This shows clearly the meaning of the "cannot" in the verse. It does not state that the honest man lacks desires

or hands and feet which would make it possible for him to take what does not belong to him. It does clearly state that an honest man "cannot" steal-for the moment he begins to steal, he ceases to be honest and becomes a thief. John makes just that same kind of contrast between the regenerating seed of God and sinning. It is just as impossible to be a "sinning saint" as it is to be an honest thief, a truthful liar, or a loyal traitor.

### 3. Humble Testimony

Again, there is no thought of self-congratulation or spiritual pride here. It is Christ who saves us from our sins. It is His grace which enables us to live to please Him. It would be very presumptuous for anyone to say, "I do not sin." It is a humble testimony honestly offered by multitudes of sincere and true Christians, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth me from all sin." The difference is a real one. The first statement exalts self, and thereby refutes itself-for to exalt self above Christ is in fact to sin. The second statement glorifies the grace of God and puts in first place the cleansing Blood which saves and keeps.

How wonderful is the scope of the life in Christ! Life indeed begins, as the familiar chorus has it, not at birth, nor at twenty-one, nor at forty or eighty, but at Calvary. Here we begin to walk in the newness of life, heirs of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

"We believe that repentance, which is a sincere and thorough change of mind in regard to sin, involving a sense of personal guilt and a voluntary turning away from sin, is demanded of all who have by act or purpose become sinners against God. The Spirit of God gives to all who will repent the gracious help of penitence of heart and hope of mercy, that they may believe unto pardon and eternal life. [1]

"We believe that justification is that gracious and judicial act of God, by which He grants full pardon of all guilt and complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous, to all who believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Saviour.

"We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that gracious work of God whereby the moral nature of the repentant believer is spiritually quickened and given a distinctively spiritual life, capable of faith, love, and obedience.

"We believe that adoption is that gracious act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer is constituted a son of God.

"We believe that justification, regeneration, and adoption are simultaneous in the experience of seekers after God and are obtained upon the condition of faith, preceded by repentance; and that to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness." [2]

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### For Further Discussion

1. How do human beings become the children of God?

2. What is included in "the human side of salvation"?
3. What is the nature of repentance? How is it related to restitution? to saving faith?
4. In what sense is saving faith more than "assent to the truth of the gospel"?
5. What is the divine side of salvation? what is meant by justification? regeneration? adoption?
6. What may be said concerning the true Christian and the problem of sin in the life?
7. How should a Christian testify to the fact of victory over sin?

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## 05 -- BELIEFS ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

That God's work in us does not end with the new birth has been the almost unanimous belief of orthodox Christians from the days of the apostles until now. The most important phase of divine grace working within is known as sanctification.

This leads us to the great area of beliefs about entire sanctification. Unfortunately, many people pronounce the word with accent on the last syllable, "sanctificashun." But it is too important to be shunned. Instead it must be understood and sought.

### What Is Sanctification?

The broadest definition of sanctification, and one with which practically all conservative Protestants would agree, is that it is the work of God the Holy Spirit in relation to the moral character of His people wherein He frees them from the reign of sin and brings them into complete devotion to His purposes and will. This means that sanctification in its widest sense stands for the entire redemptive work of God insofar as our human natures are actually changed and our lives are brought into real harmony with the will of God.

It is quite common to note that in this sense sanctification begins with the birth of the Spirit, which we considered in the last chapter, and is completed in the baptism with the Spirit. What we are really concerned with is, therefore, entire or complete sanctification, as expressed by Paul in I Thess. 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What, then, is sanctification in this fuller use of the term? Perhaps two other definitions will help us understand its biblical meaning. In Thayer's Greek Lexicon we find the original word for sanctification defined as "consecration, purification." Webster's New International Dictionary gives as the meaning of the term, "The act or process of God's grace by which the affections of men are purified, or alienated from sin, and exalted to a supreme love to God and righteousness."

Definitions could be multiplied almost without end. In almost all of them, two sides may be seen. The first of these is variously called consecration, supreme love to God and righteousness, dedication, or setting apart for divine use. The second is expressed as purification, cleansing, alienation from sin, or making holy.

## Breadth of The New Testament Teaching

The Bible describes entire sanctification in several different ways. It speaks of it as the result of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts i 5), which purifies the heart by faith (Acts 15:8-9). It is called purity of heart (Matt. 5:8; Jas. 4:8); cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (II Cor. 7:1); cleansing from all sin (I John 1:7); crucifixion of the old man and destruction of the body of sin (Rom. 6:6); holiness (Heb. 12:14); perfect love or Christian perfection (Matt. 5:48; I John 4:17-18); the spiritual man (I Cor. 2:15; 3:1); the fullness of the blessing (Rom. 15:29); and the rest of faith (Hebrews 4).

Something of the breadth of the New Testament teaching on entire sanctification may be seen in the references just given. It is even more instructive to note that each of the major writers of the New Testament bears testimony to the nature and need of this experience.

### 1. The Writers of the Gospels

In the Synoptic Gospels -- that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke -- we find the contrast drawn between John's baptism with water unto repentance for the remission of sins and Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit as with fire, purging the floor and gathering the wheat into the garner (Matt. 3:11-12; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16-17). Since water and fire do not mix, these baptisms could not be at the same time without a hopeless mixture of figures. Since baptism is an event which occurs at a given time and place, the baptism with the Holy Spirit could not be "gradual" any more than the baptism with water.

a. Matthew. In addition, Matthew stresses the special blessing to the pure in heart (Matt. 5:8). Since all the other beatitudes deal with actually existing classes of people, Jesus clearly taught that there are those whose hearts have been made pure. Speaking of the inner righteousness of love, He also said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

b. Mark. Mark stresses the fact that the source of evil in human lives is within, the depravity of a carnal heart, not defilement from without (Mark 7:21-23). He also states Jesus' teaching that the supreme law is to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:29-31), a standard possible only to those whose love is made perfect through the Spirit (I John 4:12-13).

c. Luke and Acts. Luke teaches that Christ came so that His people might serve God without fear "in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:73-75). He quotes the promise of Christ to the children of God, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13); and gives the command of our Lord,

"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke details the fulfillment of this promise of the Master on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), in Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), for Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17), in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-37, 44; 11:15; 15:8-9), and at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Luke also quotes Paul's words: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32); and the commission of Christ, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).

d. John and His Writings. In the Gospel of John we find the clearest promises of the Spirit ever given before Pentecost: John 7:38-39; 14:15-17; 14:26-27; 16:7-13; and the great prayer of Jesus in John 17:15-22.

Two of these passages deserve special note. In John 14:15-17, Jesus said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Here we see that the promise is for those who love Christ and keep His commandments; the world cannot receive the promised Comforter. He is with the believers, but it is promised that He will come to abide in them in a new and fuller way.

In the high priestly prayer of John 17 we find the key petition in verse 17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." Those for whom Jesus prayed had kept God's word (v. 6); the Lord was glorified in them (v. 10); and they were not of the world even as He was not of the world (vv. 14, 16). The prayer is uttered that they might have His joy fulfilled in them (v.13); that they may be kept from the evil (v.15); that they may be one (v.21); that the world may believe (v.23); and that they may be with Christ and behold His glory in heaven at last (v.24).

In the First Epistle of John we find a strong emphasis on cleansing from all sin and the perfection of love: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7); "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3); and, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (I John 4:17-18).

## 2. The Writings of Paul

Paul's writings are especially full of holiness teaching, since Paul was the great missionary-theologian of the Early Church. In I Thessalonians the emphasis is particularly upon sanctification as a "second blessing," as will be seen by comparing I Thess. 3:10; 4:3, 7-8; and 5:22-24 with the testimony the apostle gave in chapters i and 2 of the sincere Christian experience of these people.

In Romans 6-8, Paul deals with the total work of God in sanctification, both partial and full. Chapter 6 concerns the ideal of holiness; chapter 7 shows that neither the law nor strength of will and character can deal adequately with inner sin; and chapter 8 points to the great deliverance: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (v. 2). It is the Spirit of God who frees from the carnal mind (v. 6), who fulfills righteousness within (v. 4), who guarantees the resurrection of our mortal bodies (v.11), who witnesses to our relationship to God (vv. 14-17), who helps our infirmities, and who guides us in prayer (vv. 26-27).

I Corinthians deals with the urgent need for holiness (3:1-2) and describes its work of love (13:1-13). II Corinthians reminds us of the promises of God to His children, and exhorts: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (7:1). Galatians stresses the need for an inner crucifixion (2:20; 6:14) as the only means of stopping the strife of the carnal flesh against the Spirit (5:17, 24).

In Ephesians we read of holiness in relation to the Church: in God's purpose (1:4); the apostle's prayer (3:14-21); the purpose of the ministry (4:11-13); the "old man" and the "new man" (4:22-24); the fullness of the Spirit (5:18); and in Christ's love for the Church (5:25-27). In Philippians, holiness is set forth as Christian perfection (3:12-15). In Colossians, holiness is pictured as the result of the risen life (3:1-14) with all the ethical demands which follow.

In the letters to Timothy and Titus we read that love out of a pure heart is the goal of the commandment (I Tim. 1:5); that one who purges himself from all which would defile shall be "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:21); while the lessons of grace are described as "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:12-14).

### 3. Hebrews

The apostle to the Hebrews speaks of Christ's sanctifying purpose (2:11), and reminds us that Israel's experience in relation to Canaan is a picture of the believer's rest of faith (cc. 3 and 4). He urges all to "go on unto perfection" (6:1), assuring that Christ is able to save to the uttermost (7:25). The blood of Christ is much more able to sanctify than the blood of bulls and goats (9:13-14), for Christ himself is the Offering whereby we are sanctified through the will of God (10:9-10, 14).

We must "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Failure to do so may result in falling back from the grace of God (v.15, marg.), being troubled by the defiling root of bitterness (v.15), or even suffering the fate of Esau, who sold his birthright for a momentary desire and was rejected when he would afterward have inherited the blessing (vv. 16-17). Since Christ shed His blood to sanctify His people, we should

bear His reproach (13:12-13). Even the great benediction is a holiness text: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (13:20-21).

#### 4. James

The practical-minded James is concerned with both the need of the unsanctified and the remedy for that need: "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (1:8; 4:8). He is eager that religion be "pure" and "undefiled" (1:27), and that the wisdom by which we live be "first pure" (3:17).

#### 5. Peter

Peter notes that sanctification is the work of the Spirit (I Pet. 1:2), that the supreme motivation for God's children to be holy is the holiness of God (I Pet 1:15-16), and that purity comes by way of obedience to the truth through the Spirit (I Pet. 1:22). Through God's promises we may escape "the corruption that is in the world through lust" and become "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). In view of the return of the Lord we ought to live each day "in all holy conversation and godliness" (II Pet. 3:11).

### The Human Side of Holiness

You may remember that when we looked at conversion we found that there were two sides to this great event, the human and the divine. Without stopping to note all its implications here, we may say that entire sanctification also has both a human and a divine side. The human side of holiness is consecration, or setting apart for divine use and ownership. This is largely the use made of the term in the Old Testament, where the chosen people are told to sanctify themselves (e.g., Josh. 3:5), the Temple (II Chron. 29:5), or the sacrifices at the altar (Exod. 29:27).

In the New Testament the human side of holiness is spoken of by Paul as "yielding" or "presenting" ourselves to God (Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1). It is interesting to note that this is clearly said to be something that only a Christian can do, "those who are alive from the dead" (Rom. 6:13), one who is among the "brethren," and partaker of the mercies of God (Rom. 12:1).

#### 1. Repentance and Consecration Contrasted

There is a vital difference between consecration, and the repentance or surrender of the unconverted. The unconverted person may surrender his sins, but only a Christian can present a redeemed personality as a living sacrifice to God. Repentance faces mainly toward the past. Its concern is the guilt and condemnation of past sins. Its goal is forgiveness and the new life in Christ. On the other hand, consecration faces mainly toward the future. Its concern is to make an offering inspired by the mercies God has already given, something which is indeed a "reasonable service." Its goal is cleansing of heart and the fullness of the Spirit.

Here is one great reason entire sanctification must always follow conversion or the new birth. It is not that God is unable to forgive and to sanctify entirely at one and the same moment. It is because we are unable to meet the conditions for both of these workings of divine grace at one and the same moment. For, you see, no one can at the same time come to God as a rebel laying down his "arms of rebellion" and as a child making a complete commitment to the Heavenly Father he loves deeply. There need not be a great length of time between repentance and consecration, but it is psychologically impossible that they happen at one and the same moment.

## 2. Consecration for Life

Be it said also that consecration implies spiritual life, and is for life rather than for death. This is said in both of the consecration passages in Romans 6 and 12. We are to consecrate ourselves "as those that are alive from the dead" (6:13), and to present our "bodies" as "a living sacrifice" (12:1). In this latter verse, particularly, the contrast is with the dead sacrifices of the Jewish altar. The term Paul used for "bodies" is a very broad term which in fact stands for the total personality. As the song writer expressed it, the consecration includes:

Friends, and time, and earthly store;  
Soul and body, Thine to be,  
Wholly Thine, forevermore.

## 3. Consecration a Definite Act

It is worth noticing also that this consecration is always spoken of in a way which implies a complete and once-for-all gift. The form of language is the same Jesus used in speaking of marriage as involving a man leaving father and mother and "cleaving to" his wife (Mark 10:7). It involves an act at a given time with the same complete self-giving implied in the marriage vow: "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer; in sickness, and in health; and forsaking all others . . . till death us do part." This is why "reconsecration" services are as out of place as "remarriage" is in the normal home. A reconsecration is necessary (or possible) only when the initial consecration has been withdrawn.

## 4. Consecration and the Unknown

Our metaphor of marriage may teach us even more truth about this yielding of self to God. Just as true marriage involves much that the bride and groom cannot foresee, so consecration includes "the unknown bundle," as it used to be called. Consecration is the beginning of a new relationship to God, the implications of which will take a lifetime to work out. In this sense there is a progressive aspect to consecration. As new talents develop, new possessions and relationships come, new areas of life open up, they must all be brought under the one great master-commitment which occurred when the self was first presented to God.

Again, it should be said that consecration is not to service, or to the ministry, or to the mission field, or to the church, but to God. Paul describes the Macedonian believers in these words: "But first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (II Cor. 8:5).

Some particular field of service, some cherished ambition, some coveted relationship may be an issue when the believer comes to make his consecration. But the gift is to God himself, to be used as He sees fit.

## 5. Consecration and Faith

Just as repentance is and must be linked with faith, so consecration is and must be linked with faith. For we are not sanctified by consecration, but by faith (Acts 15:8-9; 26:18; Gal. 3:14). At the end of the surrendered will must come a step into the dark, a leap into the promises of God, a "reckoning" that we are "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11). Some find this step very difficult. They long to see and to understand, to "feel" something which would show them that the work is done. But God withholds His blessing until sheer and determined faith, perhaps in desperation, grasps "the promise of the Father." How could it be otherwise? If God first gave feeling so that faith could have some evidence, then the faith would be in the feeling and not in God. And when the feeling changed, as feelings always do, faith would collapse.

The importance of this cannot be overestimated. Consecration is not enough. Thousands of earnest believers consecrate themselves to God, some of them over and over again, but never receive the divine seal on their lives because they do not take this vital step of faith. Really, a gift is not a gift until it is accepted. Until it is accepted it is an offer, but not a gift. So consecration finds its seal and substance in the sanctifying lordship of the Spirit of God. It is completed when, in response to appropriating faith, God seals its acceptance.

## The Divine Side of Sanctification

The divine side of holiness is purification, cleansing from sin, or making holy. This is not something we can do for ourselves; it is what God the Holy Spirit does in us. It, like conversion, has not only a human and a divine side, but the divine side has both a negative and a positive aspect. Negatively, it is the cleansing or purifying work itself, thoroughly purging the nature of all inner sin and unrighteousness. Positively, it is the presence of the Spirit of God in His fullness.

### 1. Cleansing from Inbred Sin

The sin from which entire sanctification cleanses is described in various ways in the New Testament. It is the "carnal mind" (Rom. 8:6-7), "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2), "the old man" and "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:6), or "the root of bitterness" (Heb. 12:15). This is nothing which we have done, but the sinful dispositions and tendencies with which we were born.

a. Theological Terms. Theologians have several other terms by which they describe this nature of inner sin. They call it original sin, or inbred sin, which means that it is native to human nature as we now know it -- "sin in the breed," as Rev. C. W. Ruth used to call it. They speak of it as depravity, which has to do with the tendencies toward actual sinning. They describe it as a "spirit of negation" to the will of God, not subject to His law (Rom. 8:7), a principle within which says, "No," when God says, "Yes," and, "Yes," when God says, "No." As the mother was disciplining her young son, she took him out into the kitchen, set him in a chair, and ordered him

sternly to sit there until she told him he could get up. A little later, from her work in another room, she called, "Johnny, are you sitting there?" He replied, "Yes, Ma. I'm sitting down outside . . . but I'm standing up inside!"

b. Complete Deliverance. Needless to say, no one can love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, or give Him fully acceptable service, as long as that contrary principle exists within. "Suppression" or "counteraction" is a bit like a man who might catch a thief ransacking his house, run him into a closet, and sit in front of the door with a shotgun over his knees to keep the criminal under control. A far better way of dealing with such a situation is to call the sheriff and turn the burglar over to him. God's method is described as "crucifixion" and "destruction" (Rom. 6:6), and means doing away with this sinful nature entirely.

Let no one puzzle over the artificial problem of how the sin nature might get back into the heart if the sanctified believer should backslide. This is on a par with discussing where the darkness goes when the light is brought in, where poverty goes when fortune is received, or where disease goes when health is gained. We all know that the darkness is there when the light is put out, the poverty is there when the fortune is squandered, and disease is present when health is lost. Darkness, poverty, and disease are real and involve positive evils. But they are realities which come as a result of an unsatisfied need. Depravity and "deprivity" are very closely related terms.

## 2. The Divine Enduement

We have already had an indication of what the positive side of God's act of sanctification means. It is the enthronement within of the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying lordship. This is a positive enduement with power for holy living and effective service. It does not have to do so much with the spectacular and world-shaking as with the quiet and pervasive radiance of personality which is winsome and attractive. It is the power, not so much of a drive as of a draw, of a push so much as of a pull. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

### Some Practical Points

But now to three rather practical points concerning holiness.

#### 1. Not Dehumanizing

First, we must always remember that, while entire sanctification as God's act in our hearts takes out the carnal nature, it does not dehumanize us. Carnal dispositions and tendencies are sinful in and of themselves, and can never be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:7). Such attitudes and impulses include envy, jealousy, covetousness, selfish anger, resentment, animosity, malice, pride, cynicism, bitterness, and desire for that which is inherently evil. From such we must be cleansed.

However, there are in our make-up many drives, urges, and desires which are purely human, and essential to life and well-being on this earth. For example, the major instincts --

self-preservation, sex, acquisitiveness, curiosity, ambition (which may be either holy or sinful) -- all may find ways of expression which are in harmony with God's law.

Because these human drives and needs may lead to sin, the sanctified may fall. Carnality must be eradicated; humanity must be suppressed and directed. Paul himself said, "I am my body's sternest master, for fear that when I have preached to others I should myself be disqualified" (I Cor. 9:27, Phillips).

## 2. No Double Standard

Second, God does not have a double standard. Too many young people have the idea that there is a low standard for the justified and a high standard for the entirely sanctified. We sometimes hear, "I can indulge myself in these questionable practices because, you see, I don't profess to be sanctified."

This is a device of the devil to damn the soul. The glory of holiness is that it makes it possible for Christians to live as God's Word requires all His people to live. No child of God may indulge without condemnation in anything he knows a sanctified person would not do.

## 3. Unlimited Growth

Third, entire sanctification is not the end-it is really the beginning. It is not a terminal; it is a starting point. This is what Peter suggested when he described his own Pentecost as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15). The surest indication one has missed the true meaning of Christian holiness is the attitude of "arrival," of complacency and self-satisfaction.

Rather, sanctification is the beginning of a lifetime of growth "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18). It is true, God's sanctifying work is complete in a moment of time, but ours isn't. For the human side of holiness means not only consecration before cleansing, but commission afterward. "Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have" (II Cor. 8:11).

"We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.

"It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.

"Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

"This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases, such as "Christian Perfection," "Perfect Love," "Heart Purity," "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit," "The Fullness of the Blessing," and "Christian Holiness." [1]

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#### For Further Discussion

1. What is the general definition of sanctification? How is it defined in the dictionary?
2. What are some of the different ways in which the New Testament describes entire sanctification?
3. Describe the ways in which the various writers of the New Testament teach the need for and possibility of entire sanctification.
4. What is the human side of holiness? In what ways are repentance and consecration different?
5. How does consecration relate to the unknown future?
6. What is included in the divine side of sanctification?
7. What is it that makes it possible for a sanctified person to fall into sin?
8. Does God have a double standard of conduct, one for the converted and another for the sanctified?

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#### 06 -- BELIEFS ABOUT THE CHURCH AND THE FUTURE

Up to this point we have been considering the Christian faith as if it were quite an individual or personal matter. This is only part of the truth. It may be that we come to God "Indian file," one at a time, in an intensely personal encounter. It is equally true that we go with God together with others who have come to Him, in the fellowship of His Spirit which is the Church.

One of the first acts of our Lord's ministry was to choose a small band of twelve disciples to be with Him, whom He called apostles (Luke 6:13). In response to Peter's inspired confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," He gave the promise: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16, 18). His great commission to them was, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19-20).

## The Church And The Churches

One who reads the New Testament teaching concerning the church is impressed by the fact that the term is used in two ways. It is used in a very general sense to include all who worship Christ in the Spirit, and it is used in a very specific way to describe a given company of Christians. For example, in the first sense, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:25-26); and in the second, "Diotrephes . . . casteth them out of the church" (III John 9-10).

### 1. The Universal Church

The universal Church is the whole number of those who have turned away from sin and have received the grace of God in truth. It is the "holy catholic church" of the Apostles' Creed. It exists in every age and in every clime and nation among men. Its membership roll is the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). It is the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5), the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 21:9), the temple of the living God (II Cor. 6:16), an army militant (Song of Sol. 6:4) and triumphant (Rev. 19:14). It is not an organization, but an organism, a communion of the Spirit.

### 2. Particular Churches

On the other hand, particular churches are composed of individual bodies of believers which share a common faith and carry forward a common program. Particular churches, being human and composed of fallible human beings, are organizations striving together to live the life of the Spirit in a world by turns antagonistic and indifferent, each local church being a community of the Spirit. The churches have creeds, patterns of worship, distinctive methods of Christian service, disciplines of membership, and all together constitute the visible Church on earth.

### 3. The Means of Grace

Particular churches provide for their communicants "the means of grace" such as public worship, the preaching of the gospel, and opportunities for fellowship in service. They are also custodians of the sacraments, of which Protestants generally recognize two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Much more could be said about the Church, its purpose and program in this age. One very practical facet of collective faith and practice has been chosen for more extensive review because of its great present interest.

## The and Divine Healing

Whenever the Church neglects any part of the truth God has given in His Word, there are always those who seize that part and make it more than it should be. This is just another way of saying that behind every cult or heresy in Christendom there is a forgotten truth which is part of the full heritage of the Christian faith.

This is what has happened in the matter of divine healing. Because we have neglected the completeness of God's redemption for humanity, we have turned over to the quacks and cultists one of Christ's precious purchases for us on the Cross-healing for the body as well as cleansing for the soul.

## 1. The Teaching of the Bible

We have only to remember some of the promises of God's Word, and the practice of our Lord and the Early Church, to see that this is true. For instance: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:2-3); "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

Or again: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matt. 4:23); "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:16).

Or from the Epistles: "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom . . . to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit" (I Cor. 12:8-9); "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over [or, about] him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (Jas. 5:14-15).

These verses might be multiplied many times, but enough has been given to show that the Bible teaches that God's power in human life is not limited to the spiritual, as important as that is.

True, there is no greater miracle than the healing of the soul, freeing it from the cancerous disease of sin. Physical healing at its best is but for a brief period of time. Sooner or later physical decay and death come to every human being. The doctor of medicine eventually loses every patient he ever treats. But the healing of the soul is a work that is eternal, that never ends in its health-giving and life-giving potential.

## 2. Faith Healing and Divine Healing

Of course we must recognize that not all nonmedical healing is divine healing. There is a kind of faith healing which is real enough but which has none of God in it. The practitioners of healing cults get results; there is no doubt about that. But no sects are of God which deny the deity of Christ and the power of His blood to save from sin

Faith healing works because there is a much closer connection between mind and body than is often recognized. Physicians and psychiatrists today are telling us that many of the ills which afflict the human frame are "psychogenetic" -- that is, they are caused by mind, and often may be cured by mind. That stomach ulcers may be caused by worry and tension is well known, and when the cause is removed the illness is many times cured with surprising speed. And there are many

cases on record of actual physical paralysis which is entirely mental in source, and may be mentally cured.

We must admit that there is much in this area we do not understand. For whatever medical science can discover about the ways in which our bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made," we may give thanks to God. But we must not be drawn into the snare of believing that all healing without medical means is "divine" healing. Much of it is perfectly natural.

Again, we should understand that in a sense all healing is divine. If this sounds like bringing back through the window what we have just thrown out the door, let me explain. The powers for self-preservation which are such a wonderful part of our physical bodies are God-given powers. Most men of medicine are quite ready to concede that "Nature" does what they cannot do, and that their work is to make possible the restorative action of the body itself. But "Nature" is only an incognito for God. Whatever "Nature" does has its source in God.

However, above and beyond healing through "faith" or mental suggestion and through "Nature," there are wonderful healings which are the result of the direct intervention of God's power in answer to the prayer of faith on the part of His people. This is what we really mean by the term "divine healing."

### 3. Healing as "Conditional"

Does God heal everyone who asks to be healed? To this, the answer has always been, "No." The Apostle Paul had many gifts of healing, but he writes, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick" (II Tim. 4:20). This is because healing is in the atonement "conditionally" -- as the theologians say--rather than "unconditionally," as salvation is. You see, everyone who prays for salvation in repentant faith will be saved, because God unconditionally wills the salvation of all who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

But healing is "conditioned" upon the special will of God, and faith for healing is a particular gift. Let it be noted that the Bible never speaks of "the gift of healing," but always of "gifts of healing." Healing is not a matter of some generalized power given to certain "deliverance preachers" to be used alike on all who flock to their "healing revivals." The Scriptures speak instead of particular "gifts of healing" which are given according to the personal will of God in each individual case.

### 4. Sickness and Sin

Does sickness indicate that the person afflicted has been guilty of sin or carelessness in Christian living? Again, the answer is, "No," and this question should have been settled for all time by the story of Job in the Old Testament. If sickness meant sin, then the saints would never die physically, but God has made an appointment for each of us with the grim reaper (Heb. 9:27).

Yet the glory of the gospel is that sickness, disease, and death do not have the last word with the people of God. Not only are our souls justified and sanctified, but our bodies are destined to be glorified -- to come forth in the likeness of His glorified body. "It doth not yet appear what

we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

Finally, all God's healing work in human bodies has a moral purpose behind it. How often Jesus said to those He healed, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee" (John 5:14); or, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark 2:5)! When God acts with healing power in our behalf, He does it that we may take the health and strength thus given to "serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 7:74-75).

## Eschatology: The Future

Two more topics demand consideration in our brief survey of Beliefs That Matter Most. These have to do with the end of the age, the future. The first is the second coming of Christ. The other is the eternal state. These topics belong to what is called eschatology, a term which means the doctrine of last things.

### 1. The Coming of the Lord

When the Lord Jesus Christ left His disciples to return to heaven, He made two great promises. One of these concerned the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier of the Church: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7).

The other promise concerned His own coming again: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). This special promise of Jesus was repeated with more detail by the angels at the Ascension: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

One of the great recurring themes of the New Testament is the certainty of this promise: Jesus Christ, who went away from this earth over nineteen hundred years ago, is coming back again to receive His own unto himself, and to usher in God's eternal day. This is the believer's blessed hope.

There are two points which must be made first off, if we are to understand the teaching of the Bible about Jesus' second coming.

a. The Time Unknown. The first of these is that no man knows the day nor the hour when Christ will come (Matt. 24:36), and anyone who sets a date is certain to be wrong. One need only point to the Adventist error in 1844 and "the great disappointment" which followed. However, while no one can set a date for the Lord's return, the Scriptures also plainly teach that God's people need not be surprised as by the coming of a thief in the night, but may live in readiness for Christ's coming (I Thess. 5:4). Although many wild claims have been made, there are "signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3) which the discerning may see. To this we shall return later.

It is, of course, divine wisdom which has hidden from human knowledge the exact time of Christ's return. Should that date have been made known, there would be multitudes who would wait until the day before to take care of unfinished business with God. Human nature, sadly, is inclined to be like that. The last day for the payment of taxes is still the busiest of the year!

b. A Twofold Event. The second point which must be made if we are to understand Bible teaching about Christ's second coming is that the same event, the "day of the Lord," will mean different things to different people. More particularly, that day will be the blessed hope to the Church and the day of despair to the unprepared.

For instance, Isaiah gives the anxious question, twice repeated, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" And the answer, full of great symbolic meaning is, "The morning cometh, and also the night" (Isa. 21:11-12). Hidden in this question and its simple and in some ways obvious answer is the key to unlock much of the mystery in the Bible concerning the day of the Lord. For the same revolution of the earth which brings dawn to one half of the globe brings darkness to the other half.

The coming of the Lord is the dawning of eternal day to the people of God. It is the dusk of everlasting night to the unbelieving world. When Christ returns, "the morning cometh" for His people; and "also the night" for the unrepentant and those who are not ready. So there is no contradiction between verses which speak of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night and those which say that it shall not overtake us as a thief. There is no disparity between references to that day as a time of catastrophe and judgment and those which speak of it as a glorious time of vindication for God's people.

c. The Finality of His Coming. At this point we need to take very seriously the truth Jesus expressed in the parable of the bridesmaids in Matt. 25:1-13. Here is the story of ten girls chosen to be bridesmaids at a great wedding. Each of them was given a lamp (or torch) and told to go out to meet the bridegroom when he should come. But half of them failed to take oil with them for their lights.

When the midnight hour came, the cry went out that the bridegroom was coming and all were to go out to meet him. Then "they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (v. 10). The girls who were unprepared were shut out, and when they knocked for admittance heard only the bridegroom's voice, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (v.12).

Let no young heart be deceived by the teaching so common among advocates of a "sinning religion" that there will be a second chance to be saved after the coming of Christ. This is a delusion and a snare. When the Bridegroom comes, the door will be shut, finally and forever.

d. Signs of the Times. One of the startling developments of the last two decades has been the widespread growth of a sense of impending climax in human affairs. While the Church has been neglecting its warning that this age apart from God is doomed, statesmen, educators, newsmen, and military leaders have taken up the grim refrain.

The late General Douglas MacArthur said, "We have had our last chance. If we do not devise some other system than war, Armageddon is at our door."

Robert Gordon Sproul, then president of the University of California, declared: "With the atom bomb now loose, we have found a way to die together, perhaps to the last man. But no scientist has yet devised a formula which will teach us how to live together. To this we had better quickly set our minds all the world around. There isn't much more time."

The late Prime Minister Winston Churchill warned, "If war should come again, warring nations will not only destroy all that we call civilization, but may possibly disintegrate the globe itself." What Mr. Churchill is talking about, of course, is the fact that men no longer laugh at the declaration of II Pet. 3:10 that in the day of the Lord the elements shall melt with great heat and the earth itself be burned up. This has become only too possible with the discovery of atomic and hydrogen bombs. When a young scientist who had worked on the atom bomb project was asked about his university degree, he replied, "I am a doctor of eschatology." Perhaps he wasn't kidding. It may be later than we think.

e. "Be Ye Therefore Ready." The point of Bible teaching about the Lord's return is not to frighten us or restrict our planning for God's work in the future. We are commanded by the Lord to "occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). To do this well, we must make long-range plans: for education, for family, and for the future. The point is rather that we should keep our hearts in readiness for His coming again. Never is the Bible command, "Get ready." Always it is, "Be ready, for ye know not the day nor the hour." May we never live out of sight of the Christian's blessed hope, and the corollary which follows from it: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3).

## 2. The Eternal State

There is a little story that has often been told and that should not be lost. It concerns a young man who was telling an older friend about his ambitions for life.

"After college, I'm going to go to law school," he said.

"And then?" his friend replied.

"Why, then, I'll enter a law office and follow my profession."

"And then?"

"Then I'll get me a stable of racing horses, and enjoy life."

"And then?"

"Oh, then, after I grow old, I suppose I'll retire."

"And then?"

A little less self-confidently, "Why, then, eventually I'll die."

Still the relentless question, "And then?"

There was no answer.

But it is an important question, and it demands an answer.

Grant the universal belief of mankind that this life is not all, and the clear teaching of the Bible that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27), and the probing question, "And then?" cannot be shrugged off.

a. The Eternal Prospect. One of the most important facts about the Christian faith is its eternal dimension. It goes beyond the narrow limits of a single human life and has important things to say about what shall follow this life. Sometimes we hear Christians say, "If there were no heaven or hell, it would still be best to live a Christian life." This is undoubtedly true. There is so much more to the saving and sanctifying grace of the Lord Jesus Christ than to be merely a fire escape.

But the Apostle Paul did not share this full point of view. He said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:19). Our hope in Christ, as wonderful as it is in this life, is yet more glorious when seen in the full light of eternity.

Now curiosity would ask many things about the afterlife which the Bible does not answer. The fundamental questions are answered with complete certainty. The incidental details are veiled from view.

b. Eternal Destiny for All. Among the fundamental certainties of the afterlife in the Word of God is the assurance that all human beings are destined for eternity by virtue of the fact that they are created in the image of God. It has become popular in our day to teach that only the saved will live forever, and that others will cease to be, either at death or after the judgment and a divine act of "annihilation."

However, we must not forget that the same Book which tells of the eternal blessedness of the redeemed also describes the eternal punishment of those who reject God's grace in Christ. We have no basis for hope of heaven unless we also recognize the dreadful reality of an everlasting hell.

c. "Ye . . . Judge Yourselves." The moral directions which are begun in this life are crystallized when for each of us time becomes eternity. As C. S. Lewis has pointed out with almost irresistible logic, when one persists in living outside the will of God, death finally brings about the fulfillment of that wish. It is not an arbitrary judgment on the part of God. It is the granting of the desire expressed by the person's own choices.

This does not mean that God does not judge those who reject His Son, Jesus Christ. It means that His judgment is based on the self-judgment of the individual life. Said Paul, "Ye . . . judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46), and it is exactly the same word used when John described the Great White Throne in Revelation 20 and said, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (v.12). God does not damn men. They damn themselves.

d. Hell. Hell is not a pleasant sight to look at in the New Testament, and many would prefer to dismiss it from their thoughts. But silencing the alarm does not put out the fire. The New Testament term for hell as a place of final punishment is gehenna. It is used a total of twelve times, all but once by Jesus Christ, the loving and gentle Saviour.

Putting these references together we find that hell is a place, not merely a state; it is a place of consciousness and memory; a place of torment and suffering; a place of eternal separation from God and life, so that it is known as "the second death"; a place from which there is no return; and finally, a place to which no one need go if he will accept the grace of God in His Son and our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we read these solemn passages, we sense that God has told us as much about hell as can be translated into the speech of time, but that the reality is more awful than the mind can contemplate. To be shut off eternally from the light of life is beyond our capacity to grasp.

e. Heaven. As hell is impossible to describe fully in human terms, so the glories of heaven go far beyond the capacity of human language to tell. The most magnificent of circumstances are pictured, and it is obvious that the reality goes far beyond the image given. Gates of pearl; streets of gold; a city that needs no sun because the eternal Christ is its Light; the banishment of suffering, disease, deformity, sorrow, and tears-these are superlatives to stagger the imagination and win the heart.

Heaven also is a place, not merely a state. The Bible claims that everything the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit means to the Christian heart here and now is only an "earnest," a foretaste of, or a kind of deposit on what is yet to come (Eph. 1:13-14).

O Saviour, precious Saviour mine,  
What will Thy presence be,  
If such a life of joy can crown  
Our walk on earth with Thee?

"We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again; that we who are alive at His coming shall not precede them that are asleep in Christ Jesus; but that, if we are abiding in Him, we shall be caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air, so that we shall ever be with the Lord. [1]

"We believe in the resurrection of the dead, that the bodies both of the just and of the unjust shall be raised to life and united with their spirits -- 'they' that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

"We believe in future judgment in which every man shall appear before God to be judged according to his deeds in this life.

"We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe in, and obediently follow, Jesus Christ our Lord; and that the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell. [2]

"We believe that Christian baptism is a sacrament signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, to be administered to believers as declarative of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness.

"Baptism being the symbol of the New Testament, young children may' be baptized, upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary' Christian training.

"Baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant. [3]

"We believe that the Memorial and Communion Supper instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is essentially' a New Testament sacrament, declarative of His sacrificial death, through the merits of which believers have life and salvation and promise of all spiritual blessings in Christ. It is distinctively for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its significance and by it they show forth the Lord's death till He come again. It being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints should be called to participate therein. [4]

"We believe in the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. Providential means and agencies when deemed necessary should not be refused. [5]

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#### For Further Discussion

1. In what two ways does the New Testament speak about the Church?
2. What is the teaching of the Bible with regard to divine healing?
3. How can you distinguish between faith healing and divine healing?
4. What is meant by eschatology? What does it include?
5. In what sense is Christ's coming a twofold event? In what sense is it final?

6. What is the importance of belief in eternal destiny?

7. What is the basis for God's final judgment on men?

8. What do the limitations of language suggest concerning the realities of heaven and of hell?

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## ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER 1 NOTES

1 "Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene," Part One, Articles of Faith, Article 1.

2. Ibid., Article IV.

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## CHAPTER 2 NOTES

1 Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene," Part One, Articles of Faith, Article 1.

2 Ibid., Article II

3 Ibid., Article III

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## CHAPTER 3 NOTES

1 "Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene," Part One, Articles of Faith, Article V.

2. Ibid., Article VI.

3. Ibid., Article VII.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER 4 NOTES

1 "Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene," Part One, Articles of Faith, Article VIII.

2 Ibid., Article IX

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## CHAPTER 5 NOTES

1 "Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene," Part One. Articles of Faith, Article X..

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## CHAPTER 6 NOTES

1 "Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene," Part one, Articles of Faith, Article XI.

2 Ibid., Article XII.

3. Ibid., Article XIII.

4. Ibid., Article XIV.

5. Ibid., Article XV.

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THE END