

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

«And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free»

(John 8:32)

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From year to year many countries across the earth celebrate Christmas. For the past 2000 years this day (December 25 and January 7) Christians annually gather in churches and praise God the Father that he revealed to the world his only begotten Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born by Mary. We read in *Matthew 1:23* «Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us». The prophet Isaiah announced and recorded this prophecy centuries before the real Christmas (*Isa. 7:14*). He also prophesied the role played by Jesus Christ when he came into the world. God had a plan in advance for the salvation of mankind, which he revealed the to people through the prophet:

«Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors» (*Isa. 53*).

While reading this prophecy, a question comes up: «Why does God even needed such a plan if he could solve any problem without it?» Of course, God could solve every problem in the universe, but for the salvation of sinful men there had to be an innocent sacrifice, by believing everyone can have eternal life. For God is love (*1 Jn. 4:8*), and therefore he did not wish anyone death.

The Gospel says, «For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life» (*Jn. 3:16*).

The birth of Jesus Christ and all of his life on earth, right up to the very death on the cross, were revealed to us as an example to follow. In Jesus Christ, God the Father has revealed his love to the fullest extent. The Scripture says, «In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins» (*1 Jn. 4: 9-10*). How great was the love of God for us sinners that God gave his sinless

Son as a sacrifice for our sins! Apostle Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians (*5:21*): «For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him».

After the birth of Jesus Christ, and through his sacrifice, we gratefully come to know the fullness of God's love. Christ demonstrated this love through his life on earth. It is no coincidence, that the Lord left us the legacy of two basic commandments: love God and your fellow neighbor for faith without love cannot be faith. Faith is the basis of all love, and this love is not human, but God's. Jesus Christ commanded it to His disciples, saying, «A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another» (*John. 13:34*). The Lord drew the disciples to love one another just as he loved them. For only the power of God's love can completely change a person and bring him to holiness as close as possible.

CHRISTMAS



Unfortunately, in today's world, many Christians love is far from perfect. Christians measure themselves with many biblical teachings, but they rarely test themselves if they have love. That's why there is so much judging between different religions in terms of the truth of a particular church. They all in one voice say that they love God, but in fact the love of many is false.

Despite the fact that love for God comes first in two main commandments of love, loving your neighbor also remains essential. Apostle John writes in his letter: «If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?» (*1 Jn. 4:20*).

Today many Christians lost interest in their love for others. A significant number of Christians live according to the tenets and doctrines of the Church, but are very far from the main commandments. Love is only given to those who love you; on more they do not have enough. The Lord in His Sermon on the Mount asked the audience: «For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?» (*Matt. 5:46*). Of course fulfilling the commandment «Love your enemies...» is simply impossible.

I really like the admonition of apostle Paul, where he says, «Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself» (*Rom. 13:8-9*). From this text it can be concluded that no command or instruction from

the Bible can be fulfilled if we do not first love others as we love ourselves. It is this love that opens the door to a love for God and fulfillment of all His commands and precepts, which he left us.

The birth of Jesus Christ showed us a true example of a genuine and selfless love for all things in this world. After all, Jesus Christ has commanded us with this love, saying, «...love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another» (*John 13:34*).

The test of love «agape» (Godly love) is in the first book of Corinthians, the thirteenth chapter:

«Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity».

If someone in these cheerful days of Christmas still lacks such love, then hurry to improve it. As is stated in the book of James (*1:22*): «But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves».

I. GORIK.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Chaplains in Latvian prisons (prison priests) have been working since 1997, and all this time they were without pay. However, the authorities felt their work is so important and necessary that the summer of 2002, the Cabinet of Ministries adopted the «Rules of the chaplaincy service». Chaplains are entered in the state, and their work is paid by the state. The leadership of nine denominations have the right to nominate candidates for Chaplains; the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Riga metropolis of the Roman Catholic curia, the Latvian Orthodox Church, the Latvian Old Believers' Pomorskaya Church, Latvian United Methodist Church, the Latvian Association of Baptist parishes, the Latvian Association of Seventh-day Adventist, Riga Jewish religious parish and the Latvian Association of Pentecostal Churches.

Sergei RUSALEEV — one of the Latvian prison chaplains, from Grivsky high security prison in Daugavpils. He was first tied to the prison in the early 80's, when he came to work as a craftsman. Then he put on the insignia — he became an officer, inspector of operations.

Sergey admitted that when he worked as a representative of the administration, his work did not change anyone: «I was working and receiving a salary, but none of my efforts corrected the prisoners. It saddens me, I did not see the point in this work, and was disappointed. But as I became a Christian, I noticed that my work started to bear fruit. The Chaplain is like a switchman on the railroad: where he directs, that's where the load goes. And when I direct a person to God, I know that God will bless. When I see, a criminal — a dangerous rotten man, wanted by nobody in this life — suddenly go on the path of salvation, when I see that his life is changing, he becomes kind and wants to help others, after his release he has a family, children, whom he wants to give happiness, I am happy. I see that God changed this man's life. And I'm just a small instrument in God's hands».

Sergei was born in Sochi. After moving to the city of Kirov, region Urzhum, his mother began to attend Christian services. Several of Sergei's relatives were



evangelical ministers, but Sergei himself, until the age of 28, did not want to know about anything to do with God. He was passionate about karate, yoga, searching of spiritual forces in space. Career, sports, family ... Working with dangerous criminals did not improve his character, but seeing the many lives of criminals, he more than once thought: who can change the destiny of man, help him change, and free him from alcoholic and nicotine addictions?

One day, sitting in his office, Sergei clearly heard a voice: «Who is God? Why are you warring with him?» At first he thought he went crazy — there was no one in the room, security all around. Who then was speaking? He remembered his mother's words: «Even if you go away from me, you cannot hide from God». Then he stood up and said: «If this is you, God Almighty, then reveal yourself to me. If you prove that you exist, I will serve you». Soon the holidays arrived, and Sergei went to Urzhum — to visit his mother. Throughout the next thirty days, the Creator proved His existence over and over. When the rain was pouring, God said, «You will see the sun right now» — and the clouds parted above his head. His relative's household had a misfortune: they brought in the dead baby. During the prayer, the room filled with an invisible force, and the child began to cry. Only God can give life back!

Sergei realized that he was a lost sinner that he needed a Savior, and at the last service before returning home, he repented. Salvation came, freedom came; he was freed from his alcohol and nicotine dependence. To Daugavpils, he returned a changed man.

It was 1985. The KGB could not ignore this «sectarian». At first, he was offered co-operation and a good life, but on one condition — to visit only the Orthodox Church. They threatened: «If you continue to read the Bible and talk to others about what is written in it, we'll hide you so well that not a trace will be found». Sergei was summoned to the Department of Internal Affairs and offered to make a choice: his job or Christ.

«I decided — says Sergei — that I will serve Christ. I was fired from work, right before my promotion. The reason was «Inconsistency in his post».

Since then, I kept in touch with the prison not as a representative of the administration, but as a Christian. I had some friendly prisoners with whom I used to work — whom were the first I brought the gospel to. I then wrote to them. The first prisoner, who repented and accepted Jesus as his Savior, was Vladimir Krylov. He now lives in Riga, a member of the Evangelical Church and has a wonderful family. One can say I gave God the first convict, when I was still in uniform».

In 1990 when in Latvia, the Latvian Christian mission started working, Sergei Rusaleev as its representative was given a pass to come to the prison as a preacher. Of course, for the prisoners it was a curiosity; how could a person who recently walked in uniform now suddenly walks with a Bible. According to the law, only someone who got theological education can become a chaplain. Rusaleev graduated from Bible College, and has a Bachelors in Theology.

— **After losing a prestigious job, you become a janitor. How did your family take the news?**

— Lena and I only had two children then. My relatives, thought it was madness (their stance was that I should believe in God, but not lose my head over it). My wife at that time already shared my belief. In the house we had a Bible and we prayed together. These trials only united our family, although at first it was hard for Lena — she was the wife of an officer, but became the wife of a janitor.

My mother in law grumbled: «Sold out faith, you antichrist!» Neighbors laughed: «Probably got drunk, that's why he got kicked out». Or even worse: «Sectarian's place is in Siberia». They did not understand this path. Although it is a normal Christian way: we have to sacrifice something, make a choice, often to our detriment. But God never leaves a person injured. And even if the Christians are suffering and persecuted to death, as we see from history, they are not afraid to lose something, because they believe in eternal life. It provides an incentive here on earth, to live and undergo difficulties in hope that this will not always be the case. We believe that death — is not the end but only the beginning of eternal life.

PRISON CHAPLAIN SERGEI RUSALEEV

— **When you returned to the prison, how did your former fellow officers meet you?**

— When I had to leave the system of the Internal Affairs, some laughed others simply remained silent, and others sympathized, thinking that I was lost, entangled in some religious web. But years have passed, and now, when I return to the same prison, they see that God did not leave me. The former warden met me and said: «I never thought Sergei, you will once again be able to return».

— **Does your work with prisoners have its own specifics?**

— As a rule, prisoners usually do not trust each other. They can sit in the same cell for years and not open up to each other because they are usually strangers to each other. Each has his own problem; each is tormented by sin, life, and destiny. They are already separated from the world by concrete walls, even in the cell itself by distrust. Why is that? Because they do not know who works for whom there. Say something wrong and you will ruin much in your life. A chaplain — a man «from outside», is not a representative of the administration, not a prisoner but outsider, at the same time he is a priest, a Christian, a man of God. To such a person, prisoners talk about themselves, their family and open their soul. It is no secret that the inmates are limited not only in movement but also in communication.

— **Do prisons need chaplains?**

— I believe that chaplains in prisons are very necessary. Everyone, including the prisoner has an inner need to worship God, to tell someone about their experiences, problems, and no one has the right to take it away. People want to talk to a priest, especially when there are difficult circumstances. There are, according to statistics, about 70% of them. Prison administration cannot meet the need for this. There are those in prisons, — continues Sergei — who learn on their own. In the prison Grivsky, a prisoner studied by correspondence with the Moscow Bible Institute. It was I who brought in the appropriate materials, and organized correspondence.

— **Do you think that establishing chaplains is a timely decision?**

— Perhaps it is already too late; because if a person is in prison, he is usually spiritually uneducated. We have examples in Latvia where former prisoners — dangerous for the society in the past, became Christians after contact with chaplains, who are believers. It would be interesting to calculate how much an uncorrectable criminal costs the state. Therefore, the work of a chaplain is beneficial for the state.

— **Do you know many of those reformed?**

— I do not keep count, but perhaps it's necessary. When I see a person who visits the chapel and get spiritual freedom, it's a guarantee if not 100%, then 99% that he will never return to prison. Because when you talk with him, its immediately noticeable that obvious changes took place — he does not drink, does not smoke, he does not have hurt and anger, his speech is not filled with criminal slang and obscenities. You see an open soul. It is clear that this person wants to live differently. He was freed spiritually in prison. And if he is free here, when released, he begins to work and try to return that which he lost, but in an honest way. He prays, seeks no connection with the criminal world, but with the believers and the Church. With some, frankly, I did lose contact, with some I still meet.

— **How, in practice, can prisoners exercise their right to freedom of conscience?**

— If a prisoner wants to talk with a priest, he writes a statement. The administration signs it, and I go to church and invite the priest of a particular denomination. Invite, escort to prison, and ensure their communication — is my job. The work of a chaplain is very voluminous because the chaplain is the organizer of spiritual work. A prisoner is entitled to meet with any priest, whom he trusts.

— **Do you work every day?**

— Yes, five days a week. My schedule is designed to cover all the inmates. It is also the responsibility of the chaplain to work with the administration. In accordance with the 15th paragraph of «Rules of service of the chaplain» of Cabinet ministries, it is spiritual work not only with the prisoners, but also with prison staff. This is also necessary.

— **Is the work of a chaplain akin to the work of psychologist?**

— There are psychologists in prison, and this is also an innovation in the prisons of Latvia. Psychologists, in my opinion, measure the temperature and diagnose. They can roughly say what a man is going through, but they cannot penetrate the human spirit. It is subject only to God. No wonder the Bible says: **«For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart»** (Hebrews 4:12). That is, only the Word of God can penetrate the spirit of man through the Holy Spirit. There is now a need for the involvement of a priest, which is quite a responsibility.

— **You have many years associated with prison. Are they really needed?**

— As long as there are lawbreakers, there will be Prisons. The struggle against evil and punishment for crime — is a part of civilization. However, the number of prisons in our country clearly indicates that we have a sick society. There will be fewer prisons only when the heart of man, the family, and the community will welcome the gospel. But not just as a book, which takes place on the shelf, but as life, so that man would live by the Word of God. Only then comes healing and blessing.

— **You meet with chaplains of other prisons. Do you have common problems?**

— Before, the problem was to enter prison, to receive permission. The chaplain must know the laws by which the prison lives — written and unwritten. It is no accident that in the course for chaplains, training seminars were conducted in which we were taught how to work inside prisons. I had worked in the Department of Interior Affairs and knew a little about the system, others were not familiar with it, they did not know all the dangers and difficulties of this job.

In prison, chaplain is between two millstones: the administration and the prisoners. The latter think you work for administration, and the administration, vice versa. Everyone knows that in a car, for normal operation between moving parts, there should be oil. So here we are, we chaplains, act as oil. I sometimes feel this pressure from both sides, but I have hope in God: He gives me security and defense.

Sometimes a priest comes to prison and is told: «What can you teach us? You're a saint, just try to be in our skin!» For these, different testimony is necessary — from someone who was a criminal and was incarcerated.

Sergei Rusaleev works not only as a prison chaplain. He is an elder, a pastor of a Pentecostal Church «Revelation» in Daugavpils.

— **Latgale is traditionally considered the most backward corner of Latvia. How does it live for a large family here?**

— I think we are blessed people. Maybe we do not have those things which wealthy people have. But in our family there is peace, understanding and harmony. There is bread on our table every day, we dressed and shod. We have a house, telephone, electricity, water, heating system, even a computer and a car. God takes care of everything. The children breed rabbits. We have a garden: there is opportunity to work with our own hands.

Gorduma gave us a 6-bedroom house four years ago. It was an answer to our prayer for the improvement of our living conditions; before, we lived in a 3-room apartment. They called me once to the town hall, and a high official asked, pointing to the sky: «God helps you?» I said: «Of course.» Then he handed me the keys to the house, saying: «We want to help you». Now this house serves as a house of prayer — it is small for church, but we accommodate. Thus, we don't have to pay for rent. After the Sunday service, the children go to the second floor; there they Sunday school. God provided everything, for we were praying for a prayer house.

(Continued on the 3th page)

Ask and you shall receive



Many converts to Christianity very quickly become discouraged in their faith because God supposedly does not answer their prayers. At first they apply themselves with great zeal to read the Bible and some parts of their readings they immediately apply to themselves. A lot of attention is paid particularly where Jesus Christ promises something. Such as: **«ask, and it shall be given to you...», «all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive», «for everyone who asks receives»** etc.

Focused on such places of Scripture, many simply overlooked that the main spiritual meaning is the search for God's Kingdom and His righteousness. As it is written: **«seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you»** (Matthew 6:33). Unfortunately, many people have faith that begins not from the search for the Kingdom of God, but from personal mercantile requests. People, not having yet properly repented and fully realized their sin before God, begin to ask for His help in personal needs. Many people think that their faith is strong enough that God could solve any of their problems, such as buying cars, apartment, new clothes, etc. People basically only pay attention to what God promised to do, but what they themselves must do for God, His mercy to them — somehow they overlook. In many minds, only one thing was ingested: **«ask, and it shall be given you»,** but what to ask for — they don't even think.

Apostle James in the fourth chapter of his epistle begins with these words: **«What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions»** (James 4:1-3).

Apostle James best reveals in his message the reason why many Christians ask God for things which they do not receive. It is sad, but the fact is, not all people come to God for spiritual nourishment and the desire to truly become co-heirs of the Kingdom of God. To such believers the apostle Jacob says his frank cry: **«You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says in vain: «He yearns jealously over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us»? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, «God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble». Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you»** (James 4:4-10).

The above clearly shows that God does not accept the hearts of proud, double-minded and hungry for friendship with the world. Therefore, it is said that only God gives grace to the humble. Because He, unlike anyone else, knows every human need and certainly fills it, if He sees that all of the person's effort is directed toward reaching the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ in his sermon on the mount, very clearly emphasized those who will be blessed in the Kingdom of God: **«Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. «Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you»** (Matthew 5:3-12).

What happiness it is, to be among the blessed! This is what we all need to strive for, triumphing and growing in our faith. And when asking God for something, ask for that which will serve His glory. Likewise, as said, ask without the slightest doubt. Because: **«...a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways»** (James 1:8).

As for personal needs, the Lord perfectly knows what we need in the first place. One day, He asked those assembled: **«And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, «What shall we eat?» or «What shall we drink?» or «What shall we wear?» For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. «Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble»** (Matthew 6:28-34).

And the Lord further advises: **«Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also»** (Matthew 6:19-21).

In conclusion, I would like to say with words from the sermon on the mount: **«Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened»** (Matthew 7:7-8).

You should never forget one thing: for what are we asking, what are we looking for and what are we striving for. God bless us all!

I.GORIK.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Prison chaplain Sergei Rusaleev

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— Was it scary when you chose to have many children?
— When we lived without God, the question of whether to have many children was not even mentioned. We got married in March 1983. In 1985 we became Christians, before my wife was baptized, she decided: «As many children as is God will to give, is how much I'm willing to have».

God has His own plans, but the fear of having many children was not there. My uncle had 12 children, our Bishop also 12, a friend of the family — 16. I saw that many large Christian families live without resenting life. Both the parents and children are happy.

Years passed, and I began to notice that God had a plan for each child. And the Lord provides what's necessary for children.

Every Christian needs to constantly make choices; this was confirmed in a conversation with my eldest daughter Svetlana Rusaleevich. She is finishing music school and the vocal teachers unanimously are telling her to be an opera singer. For this she would need to enroll in the Conservatory and leave her hometown and go to the capital. «I have long thought, prayed, and consulted with my parents. No, I do not need the Conservatory and worldly glory. I need to be here, in Daugavpils. Who will play at services if I leave? I'll go to Daugavpils University, become a teacher. I want to serve God» said Svetlana.

She told that one of the brothers was recently summoned to the military enlistment office and was placed on the list to be a future draftee. He immediately said that he will not take the oath or take up arms. «A pacifist?» chuckled the officer. «No, a Christian». In Latvia now, there is no persecution for religious beliefs, but the usual military service lasts 1 year and alternative is 2 years. Therefore, the decision to lose an extra year of young life cost something too.

I remember a few years ago, just after meeting the family Rusaleevich, I asked Sergei if he is sure that his children would also become believers. He answered me with the words of Scripture: **«Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it».**

Prepared for publication by Irina ANTONOVA, Daugavpils, Latvia.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Nick Vujici had a second son

Nick Vujicic, renowned speaker and motivator, became a father for the second time. On the 7th of August 2015 a wonderful child was born at 3.023 kg (6.66 lb). Just as the first son, the boy was born completely healthy. The couple named him Dejan Levi.

«We are so thankful to receive beautiful Dejan! Kanae is doing great, and it's love at first sight between the brothers». Nick shared with his subscribers on Facebook.

At 3:49 pm Nick published a request for prayer support for Kanae and his unborn son, and with faith wrote: «We thank our Heavenly Father for this wonderful child and his good birth». At 8:05 pm he was being congratulated, which came to his page on the social networks, more than 6000 in the first three days.

On the 14th of February 2013, was born Kiyoshi James Vujicic his first son.

Nick is one of the most famous and popular motivational speakers in the world, has a beautiful wife and sons. Just by his existence, he gives hope of «normal» life



to thousands of people. He was born with tetra-amelia syndrome — a rare disease, characterized by the absence of both hands and feet. In the year 1990, greatly distressed about his physical handicaps, the boy tried to commit suicide, but eventually realized that his achievements in life can inspire others. Now Nick is constantly traveling, he has visited in 55 countries, speaking in schools, hospitals and gathering whole stadiums, motivating people to change, helping them cope with depression. As the director of the non-profit organization «Life without Limbs», he gives up to 250 lectures and seminars per year.

Russia had a chance to get acquainted with Nick on his visit in April 2015 in the program «Life without Limits».

«We constantly acquaint our readers with the life and work of Nick and very much hope that this remarkable man will inspire many changes in life.

We wish to be the same purpose-driven and thank God for all that we have around us», — shared one of the founders of the Christian youth newspaper «7D-format» Roman Koshkin.

Information service
«Hidden Treasure».

DISCUSSION CLUB

I. OVERVIEW
OF THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

1. The formulation of the commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Exodus 20:8-11 — Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 — Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant

Deuteronomy gives us one more reason, why a person must sacredly keep the Lord's sabbath day: ...remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day. In other words, the Lord teaches us: «I freed you from slavery and want, the Sabbath day to be the rest day, in which you will be free from all doings».

In this way, observing the Sabbath day also includes:

* Remembrance of exodus from Egypt and of God The Redeemer.

* Awareness of the parallel between the Egypt's slavery and slavery of sin.

* Remembrance of our Savior Jesus Christ.

II. REASONING
ON THE SABBATH DAY

The Sabbath is God's gift. The Sabbath is God's grace, poured out by the Lord unto his creation. This is precisely why the Sabbath was created for people: And He said unto them: the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath (Mark 2:27).

So, in order to enter into God's rest it is only possible through the faith in Jesus Christ.

The synonym of God's rest is salvation and eternal life. The opposite of God's rest is eternal suffering in hell, described in Revelation 14:10-11 — ...The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Question #6: If true Sabbath Rest is only possible in Christ, then what is the Sabbath, which the Lord commanded the Israelites to keep in His Law?

Answer: The Old Testament's Sabbath is an allegory of the Sabbath rest in Christ, being that the Old Testament's Law is a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things (Hebrews 10:1a): Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things

We read about it in the Gospel of Mathew chapter 28; Mark chapter 16; Luke chapter 24; John chapter 20.

B. The disciples of Christ gathered for worship on the first day of the week.

John 20:19 — Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you!

Acts 20:7 — And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 — Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

5. Worshipping God on Sunday is not an innovation from the New Testament.

The first Christians were not the only ones who glorified the Lord on Sundays. In the Old Testament the Lord ordered His people to gather for worship not only on the seventh day, but also on the first day of the week:

A. The Lord's order before He gave the commandments.

Exodus 12:16 — And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

The Law of God was given to the nation of Israel in the 20th chapter of Exodus, but 8 chapters before that, in chapter 12 of Exodus, the first day was highlighted as holy day of rest during the passover celebration. This decree was given to the Jews BEFORE, they were given the commandment to keep the Sabbath day; these rules were given to Moses and Israel BEFORE they were given the commandment of keeping the Sabbath day on the mountain of Sinai.

B. God's decree about holidays.

The feast of unleavened bread: Leviticus 23:6-8 — And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

The feast of tabernacles: Leviticus 23:33-38 — And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord.

Notice that the first and the eighth day of the week — is Sunday!

6. The day of rest and the day of Salvation.

The day of Salvation begun from the moment Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and has risen on the third day, according to the Scriptures. From that moment direct access to God was opened, the door to His rest.

This day already lasted around 2000 years. Anyone who accepts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as God, enters into God's rest. The Word of God proclaims: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now it is the day of salvation! (2 Corinthians 6:25). Therefore our day of rest already began and is every day now for already 2000 years, and not only on Saturdays.

John 4:24 — God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

That means, we must worship God not only at a certain place and not only on a certain day, but at all times and all places.

During the discussion about holidays and special days, apostle Paul did not say, that it is necessary to keep the Sabbath day. He said the opposite: One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Romans 14:5).

So therefore, our worries today should not be about «are we keeping the Sabbath day?» but — «Have we entered into God's rest through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?»



The material for the newspaper «Prisoner» was gladly presented by
Biblical discussion club,
Montreal, Canada
<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/201.htm>

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

Leviticus 23:3 — Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.

2. Promises of the Lord, associated with the fourth commandment.

Isaiah 58:13-14 — If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Lets focus on a few things:

A. How is the Lord names the sabbath day: my holy day, delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable.

B. How, according to God's opinion, can a person honor the Sabbath day:

* treat the Sabbath day, as God's sacred day;
* on this day put aside your usual work;
* not catering to your whims on this day;
* not engaging in idle talk on this day.

By the way, it would be useful to apply this to how every single one of us spends Sundays.

C. What promises has the Lord given to the Jews, who honor the Sabbath day.

* The Lord promised to give such a person joy in the Lord;

* The Lord promised to raise them to the heights of the earth;

* The Lord promised to give to them the heritage of Jacob, their ancestor.

3. The structure of the fourth commandment.

A. Decree (commandment): remember, keep; sanctify.

B. Details: six days are working days; seventh day — end/pause work for each and every one.

C. Explanation of, why the seventh day is a rest day: ...because the Lord rested on the seventh day; ...because the Lord freed you from the Egyptian slavery.

4. What does «remember» mean?

The word «remember» contains much more, than the simple ability of the mind to remember something. The commandment calls us to actively fulfill the Lords command, which demands a complete involvement of a person in the process of complying with this commandment, and not just their mental activity.

The word Zakar is used in Exodus which means «remember», «remind». The word Shamar is used in Deuteronomy, — which means «to keep», «comply», and «follow».

A. Sabbath day as the day of remembrance about creation and about God The Creator.

Interesting how, the fourth commandment doesn't just simply command to keep the Sabbath day, but explains, why we have to do that. The reason, written in Exodus is: «For in six days the Lord created heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them; and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. In other words, the Lord teaches us: «I have created this earth in six days, and rested the seventh day, that is why you must, by my example, rest one day a week».

In this way, observing the Sabbath day includes acknowledging the following facts:

* The earth is not our possession.
* God is the Creator and the Lord of the Universe.
* We must obey and serve God.

B. Sabbath day as a day of remembrance of exodus from Egypt.

According to the teaching of the New Testament, the Sabbath Rest is Christ Himself, and a relationship with Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Anyone, who accepts the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, enters into Christ's rest.

The spiritual meaning of the Sabbath rest we read in Hebrews 4:1-11 — Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Question #1: About whom does the 9th verse speak of, that «There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God»?

Answer: About God's People, the Jews, which were given the Law of God as a mandatory condition of the Covenant, which the Lord God made with the Jews after their exodus from Egypt (refer to the book of Exodus). Today some people wrongly understand, that this verse when referring to God's People, means all the believers in Jesus Christ. However that is not quite right. The context of the verse shows, that it is talking precisely about the Jews. About it shows another fact, that this letter is addressed precisely to the Jews, which from the ancient times have been chosen as God's people. If in the letter addressed to the Jews, it was talking about the believers in Jesus Christ, they would be addressed as Christians or disciples, as it was common in those times.

Question #2: What does the phrase mean: There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God?

Answer: It means, they are still keeping the sabbath day.

Question #3: What does the word «still» mean?

Answer: It means: «for the time being», «so far», «till now».

Question #4: Why does the Sabbath still remain for the Jews?

Answer: Because they have not obtained God's rest: Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief (Hebrews 4:6); And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:18-19). Pay attention to the reason why the Jews did not enter into God's rest: because of their disobedience and unbelief.

Question #5: When will the Sabbath end for the Jews, and does it end at all?

Answer: The Sabbath is God's rest. The Jews who have not accepted the offering of Jesus Christ on the cross, have not entered into God's rest yet. For to enter in it and to obtain it (God's rest) is possible only in Jesus Christ, Who said of Himself: «Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... (Mathew 11:28).

to come; but the body is of Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

III. SATURDAY OR SUNDAY?

Today a lot of believers still argue about what day is the holy day: Saturday or Sunday, and which day should we worship the Lord and gather at church for worship.

A lot of people think that we Christians — must keep the Sabbath day, as the Jews do. However it is not quite right. Below is the explanation.

1. The Commandment of the Sabbath day was given to the Jews, not the pagans.

A lot of people today call on to Christians to keep the Sabbath day of rest, forgetting, that God's Law was given by God to the Jews, not to the pagans. The Covenant, which God made with the people in the times of the Old Testament, is a Covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This is precisely why in Deuteronomy this commandment refers to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt: ...And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:15). Also in the Book of prophet Isaiah the Jews are given a promise that God will bless the Jews if they keep the sabbath rest: ...I will give you the heritage of Jacob your father... (Isaiah 58:14 (BBE)).

2. We Christians are not under the Law but under grace.

If someone believes, that in keeping the Sabbath, he is fulfilling God's Law, then he is deeply wrong. Because first of all, nobody, except God himself, is able to fulfill His Law. For, violating at least one commandment (even in thoughts), a person becomes a violator of the whole Law: For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all (James 2:10).

Second of all, the Law was given, to make a person realize his sinfulness, not to pretend, that he is able to fulfill the Law: ...Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20)

Third of all, Christians are not under the Law, but under grace. They died to the Law, in order to live for Christ: So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4).

3. We Christians already entered into God's rest through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath remains only for those, who because of their disbelief and disobedience to God have not yet entered into God's rest through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3, 4). This refers and to those Jews who are not believers, and to the non-christian cults (cults, imitating Christianity) like Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, as they do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as God.

However it is impossible to deserve salvation and forgiveness of sins by keeping the Old Testament's Sabbath. The Lord saves us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ's sacrifice, and not by deeds: For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

4. We worship on Sunday, the day of the resurrection of Christ

There are two good reasons why the Christians, beginning from the first century of our era, gathered and continue to gather for worship on Sunday, not Saturday:

A. Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week.

WHY DO GOOD CHRISTIANS EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF ABANDONMENT BY GOD?

Why do Christians who devote their lives to God, have difficult times, during which they feel that God has left them? The inner peace of heart disappears — there's emptiness inside, there is no inner calm. Reading the Bible is not inspiring, it becomes hard to pray... as if God does not hear and does not react. What is it? Should it be like this? Or is this avoidable?

I myself faced these feelings in the beginning of my walk with Christ and I remember how much confusion and fear I went through. At one point I was sure that God had left me forever... And even though I was in the church, among the faithful, but I could not get an answer to the question: «What is happening to me? Did anyone have similar experiences?»

Jesus Himself experienced what it meant to be left by his Heavenly Father. It was His

2 Cor. 7:10 — *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.*

Num. 14:34 — *...for the number of the days in which you spied out the land, you shall bear your sins forty years, a year for a day, that ye may know [what it means] to be left me.*

3. The test of our maturity.

Sooner or later, we have to renew our love and loyalty to our Lord on the matter. Good and easy to serve God when the heart is full of joy, and heart burns first love. But this is more the result of the impact on us of the Holy Spirit. And how do we tend to love God? To what extent are we willing to sacrifice himself for his principles? It is detected when taken away from us God's closeness, warmth sweet spiritual feelings, impulses sacrifice and we are alone with the achieved skills of obedience to God. Sometimes, these periods can last long, and very long.

2 Chron. 32:31 — *Only by ambassadors of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of*

they might have life and have it more abundantly.

6. The impact on our senses are far from reality.

When you are healthy, then you lightly and cheerfully perform moderate physical work, but when you have a fever and you are seriously ill, the execution of this work becomes a real problem. You have shed sweat, body aches, dizziness... You may feel that you are about to lose consciousness. What changed? The work remained the same, but you are wrong. Is not it?

Similarly it happens in the spiritual life. Your relationship with God is the same, and nothing you do not consciously sinned. God continues to take care of you and keep everything under control, but your feelings today special effects: fear, anxiety, depression. You can not understand why this has befallen you and the consequences of which it is. Or is it the result of demonic effects or just physical infirmity. Doctors say that such experiences may be the result of

CHRISTIAN NEWS



Kent Hovind: Christians are not ready for what's coming

American evangelist and young-earth creationist Kent Hovind gave an interview after his release from prison, in which he noted the unpreparedness of Christians in America to persecution, **The Christian mega portal Invictory.com reports.**

«It was just an amazing journey. I now understand why part of the Bible was written in prison. Being in prison gives you a complete new way to look at thousands of things — said Hovind. — Difficult times are coming for the Christians in America and around the world. Christians in America are absolutely not ready for what is coming».

The scientist added that he was glad that God led him through such tests. «I am very happy that God allowed what happened to me to happen, even though it was very painful and unpleasant. For many, this meant that if I was able to go through it, then they could as well. My heroes in all this are those who supported me, like Daniel, of whom we read in the Bible, who went through similar tests», — said Hovind.

According to Hovind, Joni Tada Erekson in his wheelchair, whom he never met, was his inspiration for those years.

«Whatever happens, this world is not our home, we are just passing through it, — he said. — Except for 3 days, I spent thirty days in a «hole», where you have absolutely nothing. There was a time when they were ready to release me. They (the prison guards) put handcuffs on you, take you out, and then check the cell. If they find anything left over from lunch, you stay there. They found a small bag of salt and said, «No, we can't let you out». They keep you addicted from the first to the last meal. In general, it's a long and very interesting story».

Hovind said that God was always with him, and Hovind encouraged people caught up in such situations, to trust in God. Hovind also noted that during his stay in prison, through his ministry, about 800 people came to Christ. According to the scientist, some of them raise doubts of their sincere repentance, but he had also seen those who were completely born again.

«It's amazing to watch spiritual growth. Some seeds you plant and you see them grow quickly, but with others — you plant and watch for a while, not really knowing what's happening», — said Hovind.

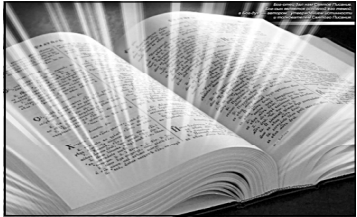
According Hovind, some people who came to Christ needed support, so Hovind appealed to the various ministries so that they would support these new Christians.

Kent Hovind — an American evangelist and young-earth creationist, known for his seminars on «scientific creationism», which (using scientific evidence) declares the inconsistency of the theory of evolution.

Aleksander BORISENKO.

The Pastor's Word

ABANDONMENT



darkest hour in the whole process of redemption of the human race. On the cross, He burst out: «My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me!» — Confirming that experiencing the agony of separation was quite painful... Holy God has nothing to do with sin, but at that moment the sinless Christ, who took the sins of the world upon himself, became biggest sinner in the universe...

Isa. 53:5, 6 — *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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Being left by his Heavenly Father was a tremendous torture for Jesus Christ, which earned humanity. All this punishment befell him in full, as «...the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all».

WHY SHOULD FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF ABANDONMENT?

There are several reasons that are better known. Let review them.

Feelings of abandonment may be:

1. The evidence of God's disapproval to that after which these feelings came. We should mentally go back to the time when the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit began to leave, and inner darkness started overcoming our heart... If these were indeed sinful things, we need to recognize and condemn ourselves that we gave them a place in our mind; repent and turn to God for forgiveness. And if this was divided us from holy God, God's peace and joy once again will be restored in our hearts.

The reasons of separation from God can often be our thoughts, words, and feelings. That they have not made further destructive work both in ourselves and in others around us, such a mechanism is triggered God's disapproval as abandoned by God.

2. The means of education.

In times of continuing God's blessings, we may think that all this is the result of our righteousness and merit. To crept pride has ruined us, God has to show us who we really are without him. To do this, he has to «move away» from us «short distance» and wait... Although this period of abandonment painful but very successful in helping us to see who we are ourselves, without God, and to get rid of self-importance and pride. Usually at such times we can see a irritability, intolerance, resentment, and all the signs of our shabby, crude nature. After our insight: remove pride, haughtiness, arrogance, independence from God — we are usually more inclined to come to repentance toward God and continue to live a fruitful, God-dependent life. Ultimately, painful periods of abandonment turned into a blessing for us.

the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him all that was in his heart.

4. Test to determine our rewards.

God appreciates faithfulness of His children, and generously rewards. The evidence of our faithfulness manifest in the tests, one of which is a sense of abandonment by God.

Let us recall the biblical Job, the faithful who set an example to future generations.

In addition to the loss of children, property and health, he felt a sense of abandonment by God. Here's how Job describes his experience: *Why hide your face (God), and consider me for thine enemy? (Job. 13:24).* But we know that all these tests it had a happy ending.

Jesus said *... Verily I say unto you, There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or sisters or wife, or children, for the*

changes in the body at the hormonal level. As well as a chemical imbalance in the body leading to such feelings and sensations. And if so, whether it is necessary to give in under the influence, or worse, under the domination of these feelings? Is not it better to go with faith, in spite of the Lord? You may ask: «Does it ignore the existing problem?» No, not to be ignored, but does not consider it a problem.

Wise Solomon says: *He who observes the wind will not sow, and who looks at the clouds will not reap (Eccl. 11: 4).*

In manual sowing the seeds can not be sown in gusty winds. In some places it would be a lot of seeds that will interfere with each other to grow, and in the other is empty. Also, when rain bread compressed so preet and rot. Therefore, the absence of wind and rain at planting at harvest is extremely important. But perhaps unfounded, vain anxiety that surely will leave farmers with no crops. For too restless farmer can not sow and reap, not because the weather does not correspond to, but because he expected she was going to go bad. And work in his field is, and precious time is running out...

That's why the apostle Paul tells Timothy: *...Preach the word; be instant in time and at the wrong time, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).* In other translations, it sounds like *...when it is popular or not popular; in season or out of the respective season; at convenient times or inconvenient.*

Should not we take this counsel to itself? It is necessary to seek God, to pray, to visit the house of God, read the Bible, and when drawn to the heart, and when this is not the slightest desire. And when this has inspired, and just by custom. When our soul rejoices or when crying. Just as working people go to production work all the time, whether they have this desire, or it disappeared. Let our memory will remain the biblical phrase: *With all perseverance (Rom. 2: 7; Eph. 6:18).*

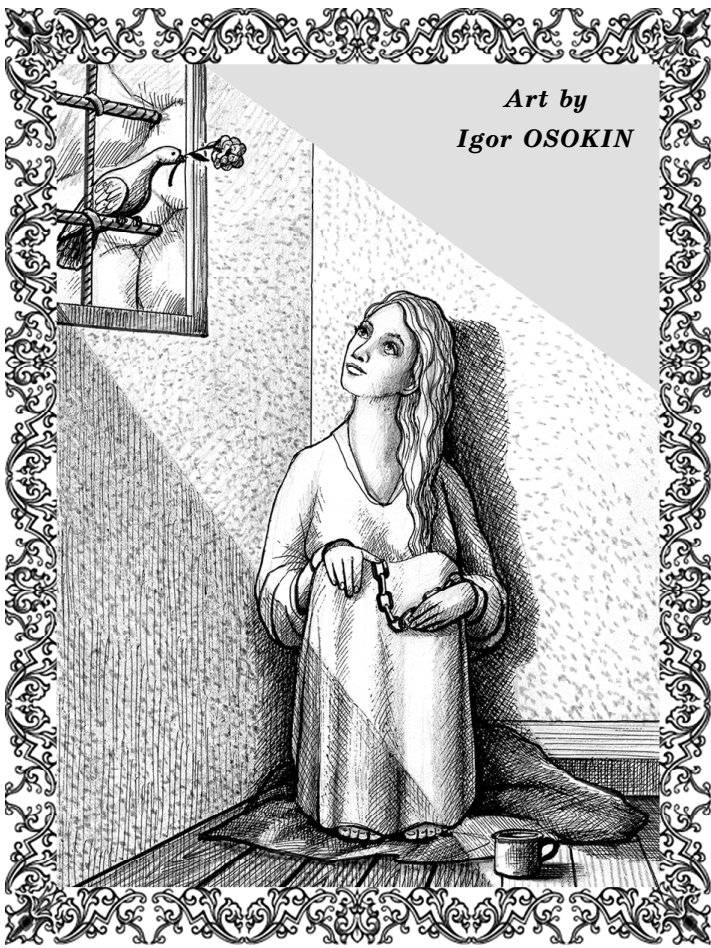
Christian should be stable, not be driven gusts of conflicting feelings, the sources of which can be, as we said, medical reasons, feedback environment or demonic influence.

Eph. 3:18, 19 — *...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

So how do we resist lustful feelings, impure thoughts, not to be defiled so we must resist melancholy, «bad mood», laziness and causeless downcast.

Concluding discussions on this topic, I want to recall the text of Scripture:

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5:16-18).



Art by Igor OSOKIN

kingdom of God, and would not get much more in this present time, and in the world the future of eternal life (Lk. 18: 29-30). James in his epistle as it sums up the thought of Jesus, *...having been approved, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him (Jas. 1:12).*

5. The result of demonic influence, seeking to destroy the soul of a Christian.

The devil is the enemy of God and all of God. If you are born again, and the kingdom of God is within you, the enemy of God is also your enemy. The more you sanctify your inner, the greater will be the pressure of darkness and evil outside. If the devil is fighting for our souls, so they represent a serious value, and it comforts us.

Ing. 10:10 — *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I am come that*

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS



the worst phrase of my life: «Your baby is dead!» I could not believe my ears.

— God, this cannot be true, our daughter will rise again, and you raise the dead!

I lay in intensive care and did not know how to tell my husband, family and my grandmother the terrible news. I waited for someone to come in and tell me «Your baby is alive!» But it did not happen, and I had so many questions for my Lord...

I heard a lot of things: some said for a medical error the obstetricians should be punished; others asked, «Well, where is your God?» It's hard to say, but I knew and felt that my God is with me, and He was telling me that I need to forgive everyone. I'll say this truthfully, it was not easy, but through this was my husbands and my healing. Thank Jesus that we have managed to become even closer in this situation! And of course, many thanks to our brothers and sisters of the Church for their support in this difficult period for us. Gathering His strength, we again began to work for the Lord. There were moments when I cried a lot and asked God: «Why is everything so?» But one day I realized that He will not give me an answer, because I was not in a place to fully understand His Will. Then after some time the Lord said to me through His Word: «...today I say to you that I will give you back twice as much» (Zechariah 9:12, ASV). With this promise, I

Believe in God, enjoy your life, And you will always find happiness

Peace be with you, friends, brothers, sisters and all who read this newspaper! My name is Ksenia, I'm 35 years old, a native of Irkutsk. By the Grace of God, in 2012, the testimony of my salvation had been published in the newspaper «Prisoner». I thank the Lord and the people who are involved in this edition, I am thankful that I can add to the story of my life.

Let us briefly recall that my story has a criminal history with drug addiction. Ten years of a parasitic way of life have left their mark in the form of chronic diseases: hepatitis C and HIV. But eight years ago God came in my life and I became a different person. The Lord has blessed me to serve in different cities to the same people who I once was, that is, drug addicts, prisoners, and deeply lonely people. However, I didn't have what every woman wants. In 2013, the Lord led the way and introduced me to a wonderful man, a good brother and a loyal friend who later became my husband. Soon after Vladimir, (Who also had a history with drug addiction) and I got married, we were sent on a missionary trip to Bratsk, a small town in the north of Eastern Siberia. Three of us went there and started doing what we had been called to do: to pray for the city and the people, preaching the gospel, helping drug addicts, prostitutes, trying to do wherever the Lord told us. Through it all, we learned to love people more earnestly, to rejoice, to win, and most importantly, trust in the Lord more than anything!

Soon there was good news, I was pregnant, and we were expecting the birth of a child. This was such a joy! The feeling that we will become parents for the first time overwhelmed us. Serving the Lord became even more joyful, I was full of energy. We knew that we would have a girl, and decided to name our daughter Alexandra. We worked and waited for her appearance into this world. Pregnancy proceeded normally, but shortly before the birth I started having problems with my vision, I was put in the hospital earlier to prepare for Caesarean section as my vision problems made it impossible for me to give birth on my own. Everything was like a nightmare from there on. It was later discovered that I was given an incorrect diagnosis and because of this they missed the scheduled date for the cesarean section. During the overdue delivery, I heard

was able to live, to believe, to serve, and three months after the tragedy, I learned that I was pregnant. Of course, doctors frightened me, saying that I cannot give birth so early, the sutures are still fresh and my illness can dangerously affect my life and the life of the child, how funny it is to hear, when God Himself tells you different. By all human standards, I should have been long dead. But the Lord Jesus is so wonderful to me! God blessed me with an absolutely healthy son Roman! I currently do not have the opportunity to be fully committed in the missionary service until Roman has grown up, but every Saturday with my brothers and sisters in Christ, we go to the city and evangelism, sing songs with a guitar or synthesizer, we show modern stage productions, pantomimes about Jesus to young people and all other people, and testify about personal salvation. My husband serves people with various addictions in rehab and organizes evangelization.

We will try to convey to our son — and perhaps, God willing, not our only one — faith and love for the Lord, as well as the most important spiritual principles so he would live this life in purity and dignity.

I do not know why terrible things happen, but I believe that there are good reasons for this that only He knows. Most importantly is putting your trust in Him. I pray that my story will become someone's light and hope that God is a loving father to all. And when you believe it, dear soul, The Lord will open to you where He says «...you will be certain that I am the Lord, and that those who put their hope in me will not be shamed» (Isaiah 49:23, BBE). May the Lord bless you and fill you with His peace, love and grace wherever you are!

With love and prayers for you,

Xenia u ANQING (Polyakov), Bratsk, Russia.

Editor's note: in the third issue of «Prisoner», we published a frank testimony of sister Ksenia Polyakova, which was called «The story of my life». Today, all the staff (volunteers) of the newspaper «Prisoner» with joy in their hearts say, «Thank God for these miracles and changes in the life of Xenia!»



Only Jesus Can Cure From Drug Addiction



enough that soon I would be next. When I was on «Kumar» (for alcoholics this is called a hanger), I would take my mom by her throat, and choke her until she would give me money for more drugs.

By age 30, I was a full blown drug addict and alcoholic. I had no family, and no friends. No one needed me. That's when I thought about committing suicide. I restrained only because of fear of going to hell. I had no hope, and didn't believe in any-

Dear friend! What you are reading right now is my letter — it's not a coincidence. And if you believe in Jesus Christ at least a little bit, it can turn into a great blessing for you in the future. It could completely change your life for the better, regardless of where and in what condition you are now. I say this so confidently, because I was once at a crucial point in my life where I wanted to end my life, but the Lord had different plans for me.

thing good. That's when I first began to pray to God that He would save me. And then a miracle happened!

I met a man on the street, who told me that Jesus had delivered him from many of his problems. He advised me that for this to happen, I should at least just start going to church. It was a surprise to me, but nevertheless I started to attend church. At first it was very hard for me; I often stumbled, fell, but still would rise, and attend church,



I'll tell it all from the very beginning.

As a child I was very disobedient. I had no respect for my parents, therefore did whatever I chose. At first I started smoking with my classmates. At the age of 13, at a wedding I was poured some vodka, and for the first time I got very drunk. From that moment on I began to look for a situation where I could repeat that drunken state. At the age of 14-15 I tried smoking pot. I liked very much. I hated school but somehow I finished the 11th grade, and at the age of 18 I tried heroin.

It is no secret that under the influence of drugs, I uncovered another world. It was an illusion, a deception by the devil. I've been an addict for the next 14 years. During this time, no matter where I turned, no matter where I went for treatment — nothing and no one could save me from the curse of these drugs. I buried almost all of my friends and knew well

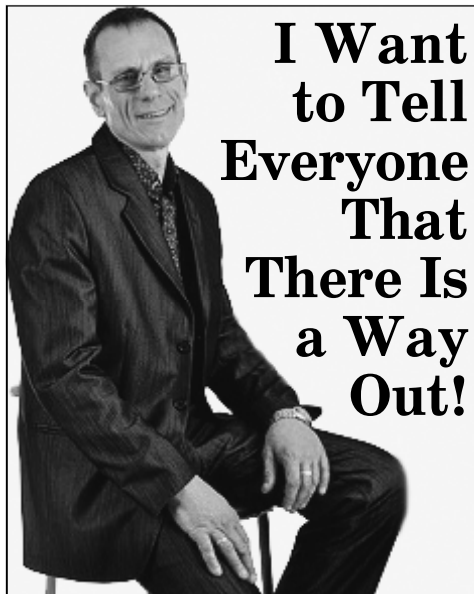
where I would fall to be healed at the feet of Jesus.

After about four or five months the Lord delivered me from drugs, alcohol and smoking. I stopped swearing, and became a completely different person. Today, marks five years since I gave my Life to Christ. I graduated from the Bible Institute «Sunset» and the Lord blessed me with a wonderful wife — a sister in the Lord. I have the freedom and opportunity to earn money; I can sleep in peace, for I know that I will not waste it on sin.

The brother, who introduced me to Jesus, is named Victor Shuka. Together we visit people in jail and tell them about Christ.

Whoever wants to live, live a pure life, and live in abundance. He loves you, knows everyone by name, and even knows the number of hair on one's head. Praised be Jesus Christ! God bless us all!

Roman SHEKA,
Kiev, Ukraine.



I Want to Tell Everyone That There Is a Way Out!

I am one of the pastors of the Church «Awakening», the director of the «Awakening» charity fund, and the curator of the church's rehabilitation ministry; I have a loving and understanding wife, real friends. I am certain that it is never too late to get an education. And in 2011 I became a student of «Vision», an International Christian University.

But before this happy moment, my life was full of resentment, evil, hate, drugs and crime. In 1995, law enforcement agencies sentenced me to eight years of imprisonment in a penal colony. During the time I remained in prison, I was delivered terrible news from home — my younger sister died of a drug overdose. Following her, my mother left the world. She drank alcohol, and the cause of death was a micro-stroke. So at 37 years old I buried the two closest I had. The one and only consolation was that once I would be at liberty, I could still see and embrace my father, whose every day was on count since he was sick with cancer. I had years in store to evaluate and weigh the life I had lived...

In eighth grade I started taking drugs, living by the rules of the streets as I looked for truth and respect in the criminal world, but found betrayal, hypocrisy and rot. Thoughts about how to fix the errors already made brought me to a dead end...

And so, after eight years, I was finally free! «But what do I do now? What do I occupy myself with?» I thought. Leaving the prison, I had to be marked off at the district. On the street near the district I met a childhood friend, Victor Kuryachiy. At first glance I did not recognize him. He happily began to speak to me, and in his eyes I saw peace — which I so lacked. He knew the meaning of his life. Victor talked about his future plans and the amazing girl who had agreed to establish a family with him. He spoke of how he had said farewell to his past life, and told me that he goes to a church. He invited me to go with him to a church service the next Sunday, to which I came. To my surprise, in one place and at one time there were so many cheerful, smiling, friendly people. The purpose of my coming to church was praying for my father, as his condition deteriorated. As I listened to the sermon, it seemed as if the pastor, Anatoly, was speaking personally to me. My heart filled with tears for past mistakes: and during the prayer I decided to give those mistakes to Jesus. After saying a prayer of repentance, I literally came to life; I now had hope. God miraculously freed me from drugs, alcohol, smoking, sexual immorality and lies. I wanted to tell all my friends that there is a way out. I realized that I was freed by God and was not alone.

I read literature about people being freed from addictions; began to conduct rehabilitation meetings at home. The center was not as effective as one would have hoped. And God put the desire in my heart to go to the village and open a rehabilitation center for everyone who wanted to free themselves from alcohol and drug addictions. While working with people, God greatly changed my personality. Going through difficulties, I saw how Jesus performed miracles in the lives of those whom I serve; I saw saved and liberated lives. Like-minded people and friends joined to help me, ready to respond to a problem.

Serving God and people, I have gained that which I sought so long: peace, joy, fulfillment of my needs and the demand for my abilities.

Igor BOROVSHYUK, Ukraine.

Sometimes we look at someone homeless or drunk and think: «This is a finished person», and sometimes put a cross on a person because, according to human reasoning, it is impossible for him to change. But the Lord touches his heart, pulls him out of the pit, from that ruinous state, takes away his dirty clothes, washes him and says, «Go and sin no more.» And you see the person change, come to church, repent, get baptized, throw away all his bad habits and begin to serve God, and after a while even become a minister. You say it's impossible? The impossible to man is possible with God!

I will tell you about myself for God's glory. I learned from experience that only the Lord can change us, that no human has the strength to be good enough to please God. Even the disciples of Jesus Christ once asked him: «Who then can be saved?» He responded: «*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*» (Matthew 19:25-26).

I was born in Tbilisi, in a non-believer family, even though all of us were considered Orthodox. Icons hung at our house, and mother told us that God exists and that we need to fear the Lord. But we did not live according to God's commandments. In 1991, I got into a difficult, unpleasant story and realized that only God could help me. I walked around to all the temples, and put up candles, but the problems persisted. And one time I met a neighbor who invited me to an evangelical church: «Well why do you go to the icons. It's only an image; they will not help you». I thought, «It seems as if she's right. Indeed, what is an icon? A picture. Hang up any picture; will it help you?» And I went. I thought it unusual there: no candles, no icons, understandable sermons, happy, praying people...

I began attending this church, asked to pray for me, and very quickly received an answer to my prayer. I remember that. However, even though I went to the services, I had not had a personal encounter with God. I received a degree in political education — on the political party line, and graduated in 1991. And in that year the party system collapsed, the country collapsed, and I understood that all this is deception and lies, that all this, it turns out, is not necessary to anyone. Thus, it turned out that I received an education, spent years on that, but did receive a diploma (and I wasn't the only one).

The war started here in Georgia, people began to leave the country. And I left to Latvia, since I had friends there and I used to go there often for vacation and to have a good time. I was 27 years old at the time and was not yet married. I did not plan to leave for long, hoping that the war would soon end and I would come back. But the war continued, the borders closed, and I was left with a Soviet passport in a separated Latvian country. I had to live somehow, work somewhere, but I could not get a job: destruction was everywhere and I was looked upon as a foreigner, a Georgian, black... There was so much distrust concerning me, even though we had a very honest family and had always lived honestly, the way our mother taught us. But how do you prove your honesty? I was a Georgian, and that was enough. I did not fit anywhere, and life itself pushed me into criminal structure. I met Georgian guys who did wicked things, and gradually became involved and became one of them, an adventure seeker. Drinking, partying, easy money appeared lots of money. But deep down in my heart, I still had the desire to live a quiet, normal life.

Meanwhile, my mother and sister, who remained in Tbilisi, became Christian. They became interested in where I had went, and they went to the same church. They believed, repented, were baptized, became members of the church and began to pray for me. When we talked on the phone, my mother always asked, «Son, do you go to church?» I kept answering, «Yes, mom, everything is fine». But in reality: what is God and when all is well?

I had the desire to live a normal life, but nothing worked. That was when I decided that I needed to get married. I believed that I would get married and a married life would put everything in its place. I met a good Russian girl, Irina, my future wife. She, too, was not a local. She had come to Latvia as a result of allocation after finishing the Nikolaev Shipbuilding Institute, and worked in Riga at a car-building factory. Irina had come from a good family, her father an officer and thus, she had been brought up in strictness. There

were girls of a free behavior around, smoking, drinking. But she was a decent girl, and I thought that she was just what I needed in life. I pretended to be a good guy, or as they say, threw dust in her eyes, and proposed really soon. She said yes and we got married. Soon after, her eyes opened and she understood who I really was. I had a gun, my bandit friends came to me, I would disappear for several days once in a while. Irina of course was brought to tears and went to her friends, asking them why they hadn't warned her... Her friends had known who I was, but kept silent from fear, as I had threatened them.

So our married life began. A week or two, sometimes a month we'd live normally, and then I'd put a gun in my pocket and go out the door. Gone one day, two, three, sometimes even six. Imagine what she went through: she went to the police, to hospitals, to morgues, looking for me. This is the kind of life I had: death around me, someone would get killed, someone would get slaughtered, blood, death, funerals. Friends died — young men...



Aleko Gvenetadze (Latvia, Riga):

«I learned from experience that only Lord can change us»

In October, 1993, our son was born. Oh, I thought, a son, thank God, I'll finally settle down and live a normal life. After a month or two, I was back at it. My family was being destroyed, and it went towards divorce several times already. At this time, a neighbor came to us and started talking about God. She and her husband had gotten into a car accident, her husband had died, they were gathering her bones yet here she was testifying. I listened, listened and realized that she is an evangelist from the same type of church as the one I went to in Tbilisi. I was interested. She invited us to church, which at that time, the church met at a Riga Carriage Factory club. The neighbor said she would come for us on Sunday. And indeed, she came early in the morning. I thought, «She's such a pest». But we didn't feel comfortable saying no, since she was waiting with a child. So for the sake of decency, we went. We went one time and I had no desire to attend church anymore. But our neighbor came for us the following Sunday as well, with it raining outside. I thought, «How can I get rid of her?» I told my wife, «You got in contact with her, but do we even need it?» Nevertheless, we still went. We quarreled on the way and when we got to the church, I said, «You go wherever you want, but I'm not going anywhere». I took the keys from my wife and thought, «I'll go drink some beer. I'm too nervous...»

As we drove, the rain stopped and the sun came out. I went to the beer booth and suddenly heard a voice talking to me, not outside, but right in my mind, «Why are you making Satan happy? Go to church and I will be glorified in your life». I felt ill at ease, even a little scared. I stopped and heard the same thing a second time. I turned around (it's as if some power assisted me in turning back) and went to the service. I came and sat near the back. I listened to sermons, songs, and at the end of the service there was a call for repentance. Many people repented that day, including my wife. I wanted to go, too, but it was as if someone held me back and my legs turned into lead. But the people in the hall were praying, such an intense prayer going on, and at one point it was as if a breakthrough happened and I escaped. I stepped forward and when given a microphone to repent, I felt someone starting to choke me, leaving me unable to say a single word. People saw that I was standing with the microphone, almost suffocating, and prayed. And then I burst, tears flowing down my face. «Lord, forgive me, have

mercy, help me...» My wife and I left the service as doves in love: «Forgive me», «And you forgive me too». We came home and I called my mother: «Mom, we were in church today and repented». My mother was delighted, bursting into tears. Mother prayed so much for the both of us. A mother's prayer is precious in the eyes of the Lord. We later found out that we, in Latvia, and she, in Georgia, were part of the same brotherhood, the same church of evangelical Christians.

...When we returned back home, thoughts immediately came to mind: «When my friends come, and what will I tell them? How will I refuse?» My wife and I got on our knees and prayed: «Lord, they will call, come, and what do we do? Save us and protect us». No one came. The second day, third day, and no one came or called... My wife and I began to attend all the church services during the week, all the seminars. Such a thirst for God appeared so many questions. The first thing I immediately felt after repentance was that my mouth was cleansed. Profanity is almost a normal thing for men, but

this was the first noticeable fruit of my repentance. Time passed, and as I met friends in the area, they were surprised, «We thought you fled to Georgia». «No», I said, «we began to attend church and became believers». They twisted their finger near the temple, and that was it. Then they saw that our second son was born and then the third... Over five years, we had four children born, one after the other. They said, «That's it, he's crazy...» One, however, said, «You will come back to us sooner or later». But I never went back. Thank God! I testified to many and they saw that our life had changed, but some just said that they wouldn't be able to change their life that way.

In 1994. A year after we repented, Irina and I were baptized on the same day, than spiritually baptized, and up to this day we still serve God in the Riga church. God saved our family and blessed it abundantly. We now have a job, a house, were gifted a car, and when it broke down, were gifted another one. We live, rejoice and praise God together. We've definitely had many difficulties in our life, which for that matter, everyone who chooses to follow the Lord has. It was especially difficult right after repentance. I wouldn't come home without \$100 before, but after repenting, while I didn't have a job, we sometimes had to cook porridge on water or simply remain hungry. But God gave the strength to resist, and the church supported us. I had no specialty in a job, so I began looking for temporary jobs, and then was offered the job of a janitor. So I, a person with a higher education, took a broom into my hands and worked as a janitor for four years. Then I washed the floors of a supermarket during the morning for six years, finding little jobs during the day. I have learned some things now and work as a builder. I serve the Lord.

At church, I am responsible for the youth ministry, for organizing Sunday school lessons and summer camps for the children, the teenagers and the youth. My wife is a Sunday school teacher. In March of 2009, I was ordained a deacon. Over the course of several years already, I attend the Ilyutsiyemskuyu women's prison every Sunday, preaching the Gospel. And we preach at various prisons with the brothers, and lead Christian radio stations as well. Serving God is wonderful. I came from the world and know that there is nothing good there. It sometimes happens that young people, especially from religious families, gravitate toward the world. «What do you want to see there?» I ask. «Tell me and I'll tell you. I'll tell you what it is, why it's bad and what it will lead to». I have seen a lot and have things to tell young people. Christ came into my life and everything changed. Everything changed within me, everything changed at home, everything changed within my family, everything changed 180 degrees. Where would I be if not for the Lord? Eighty percent of my peers and my former friends are no longer alive — some were killed, some died in a car accident, some turned into drunkards or became a drug addict and died. My former friends recognized me in prisons and came up to me, asking, «How did this happen to you? You lived the life we did». One came up and said, «Aleko, how lucky you are! If you only knew what a happy person you are». I replied, «I know that I am an extremely happy person».

I know it. I've traveled the world and seen many beautiful places. But I will tell you frankly that the most beautiful place on earth is the church. There is no other. You will never find a better place. This, I am telling you for sure!

Prepared for publication by Irina ANTONOVA, Daugavpils, Latvia.



THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION

I. THE MEANING OF «CHRISTMAS» AND «GIFT»

Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ. A gift is a present or token of appreciation that is given willingly and freely.

II. GOD'S GIFT TO PEOPLE ON CHRISTMAS

God's gift to people on Christmas is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

1. Just one present!

A. Just one present! People love to get as much as they can for Christmas. However, God our Father prepared just one amazing gift for every one of us — Jesus Christ!

B. This one gift is for all people of all nations (not just for us!).

C. It is a gift for all time (not only for us in the present day or for those who lived 2,000 years ago).

2. The same exact gift every year!

A. God's gift is unique!

B. God's gift is perfect.

loves me. 1 John 5:3a — In fact, this is love for God: to **keep his commands**.

• Reading and studying His word, the Bible:

John 5:39 — *You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, Romans 10:17 — So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

• Loving your neighbor:

John 13:34-35 — *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

• The most precious gift is our acceptance of God's gift: Jesus Christ and the salvation that he gives.

1 John 5:11-12 — *and the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His*

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

C. God's gift is the best that can ever be received.

D. The gift of God is completely sufficient!

E. God's gift is priceless!

F. In the Bible the gift of God is called ineffable (that is, no words can describe its value). 2 Cor. 9:15 — *«Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!»*

Question: Why is this gift of God so special?

Answer: Because this gift is Life! Because this gift is Truth! Because this gift is the Lord our God Himself! John 3:16 — *«For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.»*

Romans 6:23 — *«For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.»* What gift can be better than eternal life?

III. OUR CHRISTMAS GIFTS

1. Three things that grieve Jesus on his birthday:

A. People give gifts to each other, forgetting whose birthday it is! Let me ask: How would you feel if you invited guests for your birthday, but instead of bringing you presents they gave presents to each other while completely ignoring you? When Jesus was born, he was given presents: Mathew 2:10-11 — *«When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.»* Why do people forget about gifts for the true hero of the occasion?

B. People give each other gifts at Christmas, without even mentioning the name of Jesus!

C. Usually people give each other useless gifts for Christmas! Very often we give each other things that we would not want to receive as a gift. Some people re-gift things they do not want. Compare your gifts with the unique and amazing gift of God. Oh, how different they are!

2. Our Christmas gift is Jesus Christ.

Some argue as follows: «Jesus is not among us in the flesh like other people, which is why we cannot give him a gift and instead give them to each other». Others ask: «Jesus is God. He has everything. He does not need anything. What can we give him?» So, let's answer this question: what kind of present can we give Jesus?

A. Spiritual Gifts

The point of a gift is to please someone, bring them joy and show your respect for them. And now let's think about it, what brings joy to our Lord? How can we show Him our love and respect? How can we please Him?

• Obedience to God and His commandments:

John 14:21a — *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who*



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

• Another priceless gift to God is not only accepting His salvation, but also sharing it with our friends and the people around us by telling them about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Mark 16:15-16 — *And he said to them, «Go into the entire world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.»*

B. Other gifts for Jesus on Christmas:

If you thought that you can only give Jesus spiritual gifts on his birthday you were wrong. To further understand this let's take a look at what the Bible says:

Matthew 25:31-40 — *«But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. «Then the King will say to those on His right, «Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.» Then the righteous will answer Him, «Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?» The King will answer and say to them, «Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.»*

Jesus is not with us in the flesh as he was 2,000 years ago. However, we can still bring him presents on His birthday: feed and clothe the poor, help those in need, visit the sick, lonely, and those suffering.

Jesus said: *...to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.*

<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/083b.htm>



Well, here comes the New Year. Which one is this? Two-thousand sixteen! But why only 2016? Did God create the earth 2016 years ago? As it turns out, No! So what happened before year 1? There was another year and then another before that and so on. So then how come we are only expecting 2016?

That is exactly what we will discuss today...

I. THERE ARE TWO ERAS IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND

1. Before Christ.

A. In the beginning.

• The creation of man: Genesis 1 and 2.

• The fall of man: Genesis 3.

• The destruction of man by the waters of the flood: Genesis 4-7.

B. Man's second chance.

God gave man a second chance after the great flood: Genesis 8 — Malachi 4.

2. The New Era.

The new era in history begins with the birth of Jesus Christ: Matthew 1.

A. Modern chronology.

Before our Era — before the birth of Christ (before Christ).

Our Era — *Anno Domini* — which means «in the year of our Lord».

With the birth of Christ, a new era in the history of mankind began. As we know, the Bible consists of two major parts: the Old and New Testament.

Question: What separates the New Testament from the Old?

Answer: The birth of Jesus Christ.

B. How is this reflected in the history of mankind?

With the coming of Christ began a new era, which is called «the day of salvation».

2 Corinthians 6:26 — *Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

• This day did not begin with the birth of Buddha, Krishna, or other religious figures. It began only with the arrival of God to earth in the flesh in Jesus Christ.

• No one in the world denies the fact that the new era began with the arrival of Christ.

Many great people were born throughout the history of mankind. However, the new era did not begin with their birth or death. It began with the coming of Jesus Christ. This again proves that Jesus was not a regular person, but was in fact God Himself. Because only God determines the «times and seasons» in the history of the universe: Acts 1:7 — *«...And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.»*

In addition to the two historical eras (before and after the birth of Christ), there are two spiritual eras. Let's talk about them...

II. TWO SPIRITUAL ERAS

In a person's life, there may be two spiritual eras:

1. The era of spiritual ignorance and living in sin.

This era begins from the moment of physical birth.

A person is born a sinner and a slave to sin.

Genesis 6:5 — *The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.*

Psalms 14:2-3 — *The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*

Romans 1:21-23 — *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*

Romans 3:10-18 — *... There is none righteous, no, not one, There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they*

have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Romans 7:18a — *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.*

Ephesians 4:17-19 — *So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.*

Paradoxically, the era of spiritual ignorance is not limited by time. It may continue into the New Testament era. And for some people it still continues because they are in a state of spiritual ignorance and sin.

2. The era of spiritual regeneration (renewal).

A. This era begins with a spiritual birth (being born again).

John 3:5-6 — *Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

B. This era and a new birth were promised by God.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 — *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*

Ezekiel 11:19-20 — *And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within [a] them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.*

C. This era and the new birth begin with our repentance.

An example of repentance is written in Psalms 51:11-13 — *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

The Lord calls for repentance: Isaiah 55:7 — *Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

D. This era begins with the birth of Jesus Christ in our soul

Rebirth is possible only through Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17 — *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

Romans 8:9-11 — *however, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

The most interesting thing is that we did not choose the historical era in which we live. We were born into the Christian era—the New Era. However, we choose our spiritual era. We ourselves choose what spiritual era we want to live in. Whether we live in sin and bitterness, or live in the rebirth and joy of salvation through Christ. Acts 17:30 — *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.*

We all live in the present historical era: «our» era — the era of salvation. But do we take advantage of such a privilege? Have we accepted God's amazing gift of salvation? Or do we still continue to eke out our miserable sinful existence?

<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/083c.htm>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Answer: There are many misconceptions about the identity of the Holy Spirit. Some view the Holy Spirit as a mystical force. Others understand the Holy Spirit as the impersonal power that God makes available to followers of Christ. What does the Bible say about the identity of the Holy Spirit? Simply put, the Bible declares that the Holy Spirit is God. The Bible also tells us that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, a being with a mind, emotions, and a will.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is God is clearly seen in many Scriptures, including *Acts 5:3-4*. In this verse Peter confronts Ananias as to why he lied to the Holy Spirit and tells him that he had «not lied to men but to God». It is a clear declaration that lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. We can also know that the Holy Spirit is God because He possesses the characteristics of God. For example, His omnipresence is seen in *Psalms 139:7-8*, «*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there*». Then in *1 Corinthians 2:10-11*, we see the characteristic of omniscience in the Holy Spirit. «*But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God*».

We can know that the Holy Spirit is indeed a divine person because He possesses a mind, emotions, and a will. The Holy Spirit thinks and knows (*1 Corinthians 2:10*). The Holy Spirit can be grieved (*Ephesians 4:30*). The Spirit intercedes for us (*Romans 8:26-27*). He makes decisions according to His will (*1 Corinthians 12:7-11*). The Holy Spirit is God, the third Person of the Trinity. As God, the Holy Spirit can truly function as the Comforter and Counselor that Jesus promised He would be (*John 14:16, 26, 15:26*).

What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

Answer: The concept of «blasphemy against the Spirit» is mentioned in *Mark 3:22-30* and *Matthew 12:22-32*. The term blasphemy may be generally defined as «defiant irreverence». The term can be applied to such sins as cursing God or willfully degrading things relating to God. It is also attributing some evil to God, or denying Him some good that we should attribute to Him. This case of blasphemy, however, is a specific one, called «the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit» in *Matthew 12:31*. In *Matthew 12:31-32*, the Pharisees, having witnessed irrefutable proof that Jesus was working miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit, claimed instead that the Lord was possessed by the demon Beelzebul (*Matthew 12:24*). Now notice that in *Mark 3:30* Jesus is very specific about what they did to commit «blasphemy against the Holy Spirit».

This blasphemy has to do with someone accusing Jesus Christ of being demon-possessed instead of Spirit-filled. As a result, this particular incidence of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be duplicated today. Jesus Christ is not on earth — He is seated at the right hand of God. No one can witness Jesus Christ performing a miracle and then attribute that power to Satan instead of the Spirit. The closest example today would be attributing the miracle of a redeemed person's changed life to Satan's power rather than to the effects of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The blasphemy of the Spirit today, which is the same as the unpardonable sin, is the state of continued unbelief. There is no pardon for a person who dies in unbelief. Continual rejection of the Holy Spirit's promptings to trust in Jesus Christ is the unpardonable blasphemy against Him. Remember what is stated in *John 3:16*: «*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*». Further on in the same chapter is the verse «*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*» (*John 3:36*). The only condition wherein someone would have no forgiveness is if he is not among the «*whoever believes in Him*», for it is he who «*rejects the Son*».

What is the difference between a talent and a spiritual gift?

Answer: There are similarities and differences between talents and spiritual gifts. Both are gifts from God. Both grow in effectiveness with use. Both are intended to be used on behalf of others, not for selfish purposes. *First Corinthians 12:7* states that spiritual gifts are given to benefit others and not ourselves. As the two great commandments deal with loving God and others, it follows that one should use his talents for those purposes. But to whom and when talents and spiritual gifts are given differs. A person (regardless of his belief in God or in Christ) is given a natural talent as a result of a combination of genetics (some have natural ability in music, art, or mathematics) and surroundings (growing up in a musical family will aid one in developing a talent for music), or because God desired to endow certain individuals with certain talents (for example, Bezalel in *Exodus 31:1-6*). Spiritual gifts are given to all believers by the Holy Spirit (*Romans 12:3, 6*) at the time they place their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. At that moment, the Holy Spirit gives to the new believer the spiritual gift(s) He desires the believer to have (*1 Corinthians 12:11*).

Romans 12:3-8 lists the spiritual gifts as follows: prophecy, serving others (in a general sense), teaching, exhorting, generosity, leadership, and showing mercy. *First Corinthians 12:8-11* lists the gifts as the word of wisdom

ANSWERS ON HOLY SPIRIT

(ability to communicate spiritual wisdom), the word of knowledge (ability to communicate practical truth), faith (unusual reliance upon God), the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues (ability to speak in a language that one has not studied), and interpretation of tongues. The third list is found in *Ephesians 4:10-12*, which speaks of God giving to His church apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. There is also a question as to how many spiritual gifts there are, as no two lists are the same. It is also possible that the biblical lists are not exhaustive, that there are additional spiritual gifts beyond the ones the Bible mentions.

While one may develop his talents and later direct his profession or hobby along those lines, spiritual gifts were given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of Christ's church. In that, all Christians are to play an active part in the furtherance of the gospel of Christ. All are called and equipped to be involved in the «work of the ministry» (*Ephesians 4:12*). All are gifted so that they can contribute to the cause of Christ out of gratitude for all He has done for them. In doing so, they also find fulfillment in life through their labor for Christ.

It is the job of the church leaders to help build up the saints so they can be further equipped for the ministry to which God has called them. The intended result of spiritual gifts is that the church as a whole can grow, being strengthened by the combined supply of each member of Christ's body.

To summarize the differences between spiritual gifts and talents: 1) A talent is the result of genetics and/or training, while a spiritual gift is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit. 2) A talent can be possessed by anyone, Christian or non-Christian, while spiritual gifts are only possessed by Christians. 3) While both talents and spiritual gifts should be used for God's glory and to minister to others, spiritual gifts are focused on these tasks, while talents can be used entirely for non-spiritual purposes.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives today?

Answer: Of all the gifts given to mankind by God, there is none greater than the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has many functions, roles, and activities. First, He does a work in the hearts of all people everywhere. Jesus told the disciples that He would send the Spirit into the world to «*convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment*» (*John 16:7-11*). Everyone has a «*God consciousness*», whether or not they admit it. The Spirit applies the truths of God to minds of men to convince them by fair and sufficient arguments that they are sinners. Responding to that conviction brings men to salvation.

Once we are saved and belong to God, the Spirit takes up residence in our hearts forever, sealing us with the confirming, certifying, and assuring pledge of our eternal state as His children. Jesus said He would send the Spirit to us to be our Helper, Comforter, and Guide. «*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever*» (*John 14:16*). The Greek word translated here «*Counselor*» means «*one who is called alongside*» and has the idea of someone who encourages and exhorts. The Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in the hearts of believers (*Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 12:13*). Jesus gave the Spirit as a «*compensation*» for His absence, to perform the functions toward us which He would have done if He had remained personally with us.

Among those functions is that of revealer of truth. The Spirit's presence within us enables us to understand and interpret God's Word. Jesus told His disciples that «*when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth*» (*John 16:13*). He reveals to our minds the whole counsel of God as it relates to worship, doctrine, and Christian living. He is the ultimate guide, going before, leading the way, removing obstructions, opening the understanding, and making all things plain and clear. He leads in the way we should go in all spiritual things. Without such a guide, we would be apt to fall into error. A crucial part of the truth He reveals is that Jesus is who He said He is (*John 15:26; 1 Corinthians 12:3*). The Spirit convinces us of Christ's deity and incarnation, His being the Messiah, His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension, His exaltation at the right hand of God, and His role as the judge of all. He gives glory to Christ in all things (*John 16:14*).

Another one of the Holy Spirit's roles is that of gift-giver. *First Corinthians 12* describes the spiritual gifts given to believers in order that we may function as the body of Christ on earth. All these gifts, both great and small, are given by the Spirit so that we may be His ambassadors to the world, showing forth His grace and glorifying Him.

The Spirit also functions as fruit-producer in our lives. When He indwells us, He begins the work of harvesting His fruit in our lives — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (*Galatians 5:22-23*). These are not works of our flesh, which is incapable of producing such fruit, but they are products of the Spirit's presence in our lives.

The knowledge that the Holy Spirit of God has taken up residence in our lives, that He performs all these miraculous functions, that He dwells with us forever, and that He will never leave or forsake us is cause for great joy and comfort. Thank God for this precious gift — the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives!

What are the names and titles of the Holy Spirit?

Answer: The Holy Spirit is known by many names and titles, most of which denote some function or aspect of His ministry. Below are some of the names and descriptions the Bible uses for the Holy Spirit:

Author of Scripture (*2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16*): The Bible is inspired, literally «*God-breathed*», by the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. The Spirit moved the authors of all 66 books to record exactly what He breathed into their hearts and minds. As a ship is moved through the water by wind in its sails, so the biblical writers were borne along by the Spirit's impulse.

Comforter, Counselor, Advocate (*Isaiah 11:2; John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7*): All three words are translations of the Greek *parakletos*, from which we get «*Paraclete*», another name for the Spirit. When Jesus went away, His disciples were greatly distressed because they had lost His comforting presence. But He promised to send the Spirit to comfort, console, and guide those who belong to Christ. The Spirit also «*bears witness*» with our spirits that we belong to Him and thereby assures us of salvation.

Convicter of Sin (*John 16:7-11*): The Spirit applies the truths of God to men's own minds in order to convince them by fair and sufficient arguments that they are sinners. He does this through the conviction in our hearts that we are not worthy to stand before a holy God, that we need His righteousness, and that judgment is certain and will come to all men one day. Those who deny these truths rebel against the conviction of the Spirit.

Deposit, Seal, Earnest (*2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14*): The Holy Spirit is God's seal on His people, His claim on us as His very own. The gift of the Spirit to believers is a down payment on our heavenly inheritance, which Christ has promised us and secured for us at the cross. It is because the Spirit has sealed us that we are assured of our salvation. No one can break the seal of God.

Guide (*John 16:13*): Just as the Spirit guided the writers of Scripture to record truth, so does He promise to guide believers to know and understand that truth. «*God's truth is foolishness to the world, because it is spiritually discerned*» (*1 Corinthians 2:14*). Those who belong to Christ have the indwelling Spirit who guides us into all we need to know in regard to spiritual matters. Those who do not belong to Christ have no «*interpreter*» to guide them to know and understand God's Word.

Indweller of Believers (*Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 6:19*): The Holy Spirit resides in the hearts of God's people, and that indwelling is the distinguishing characteristic of the regenerated person. From within believers, He directs, guides, comforts, and influences us, as well as producing in us the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*). He provides the intimate connection between God and His children. All true believers in Christ have the Spirit residing in their hearts.

Intercessor (*Romans 8:26*): One of the most encouraging and comforting aspects of the Holy Spirit is His ministry of intercession on behalf of those He inhabits. Because we often don't know what or how to pray when we approach God, the Spirit intercedes and prays for us. He intercedes for us «*with wordless groans*», so that when we are oppressed and overwhelmed by trials and the cares of life, He comes alongside to lend assistance as He sustains us before the throne of grace.

Revealer, Spirit of Truth (*John 14:17; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16*): Jesus promised that, after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit would come to «*guide you into all truth*». Because of the Spirit in our hearts, we are able to understand truth, especially in spiritual matters, in a way that non-Christians cannot. In fact, the truth the Spirit reveals to us is «*foolishness*» to them, and they cannot understand it. But we have the mind of Christ in the Person of His Spirit within us.

Spirit of God, the Lord, Christ (*Matthew 3:16; 2 Corinthians 3:17; 1 Peter 1:11*): These names remind us that the Spirit of God is indeed part of the triune godhead and that He is just as much God as the Father and the Son. He is first revealed to us at the creation, when He was «*hovering over the waters*», denoting His part in creation, *along with that of Jesus who «made all things»* (*John 1:1-3*). We see this same Trinity of God again at Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit descends on Jesus and the voice of the Father is heard.

Spirit of Life (*Romans 8:2*): The phrase «*Spirit of life*» means the Holy Spirit is the one who produces or gives life, not that He initiates salvation, but rather that He imparts newness of life. When we receive eternal life through Christ, the Spirit provides the spiritual food that is the sustenance of the spiritual life. Here again, we see.

Teacher (*John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:13*): Jesus promised that the Spirit would teach His disciples «*all things*» and bring to their remembrance the things He said while He was with them. The writers of the New Testament were moved by the Spirit to remember and understand the instructions Jesus gave for the building and organizing of the Church, the doctrines regarding Himself, the directives for holy living, and the revelation of things to come.

Witness (*Romans 8:16; Hebrews 2:4; 10:15*): The Spirit is called «*witness*» because He verifies and testifies to the fact that we are children of God, that Jesus and the disciples who performed miracles were sent by God, and that the books of the Bible are divinely inspired. Further, by giving the gifts of the Spirit to believers, He witnesses to us and the world that we belong to God.

www.gotquestions.org/questions_Holy-Spirit.html

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS ABOUT SALVATION

Is Jesus the only way to Heaven?

Answer: Yes, Jesus is the only way to heaven. Such an exclusive statement may grate on the postmodern ear, but it is true nonetheless. The Bible teaches that there is no other way to salvation than through Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself says in *John 14:6*, «**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**». He is not a way, as in one of many; He is *the* way, as in the one and only. No one, regardless of reputation, achievement, special knowledge, or personal holiness, can come to God the Father except through Jesus.

Jesus is the only way to heaven for several reasons. Jesus was «**chosen by God**» to be the Savior (*1 Peter 2:4*). Jesus is the only One to have come down from heaven and

returned there (*John 3:13*). He is the only person to have lived a perfect human life (*Hebrews 4:15*). He is the only sacrifice for sin (*1 John 2:2; Hebrews 10:26*). He alone fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (*Matthew 5:17*). He is the only man to have conquered death forever (*Hebrews 2:14-15*). He is the only Mediator between God and man (*1 Timothy 2:5*). He is the only man whom God has «**exalted... to the highest place**» (*Philippians 2:9*).

Jesus spoke of Himself as the only way to heaven in several places besides *John 14:6*. He presented Himself as the object of faith in *Matthew 7:21-27*. He said His words are life (*John 6:63*). He promised that those who believe in Him will have

eternal life (*John 3:14-15*). He is *the* gate of the sheep (*John 10:7*); *the* bread of life (*John 6:35*); and *the* resurrection (*John 11:25*). No one else can rightly claim those titles.

The apostles' preaching focused on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Peter, speaking to the Sanhedrin, clearly proclaimed Jesus as the only way to heaven: «**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved**» (*Acts 4:12*). Paul, speaking to the synagogue in Antioch, singled out Jesus as the Savior: «**I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through**

him everyone who believes is set free from every sin» (*Acts 13:38-39*). John, writing to the church at large, specifies the name of Christ as the basis of our forgiveness: «**I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name**» (*1 John 2:12*). No one but Jesus can forgive sin.

Eternal life in heaven is made possible only through Christ. Jesus prayed, «**Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent**» (*John 17:3*). To receive God's free gift of salvation, we must look to Jesus and Jesus alone. We must trust in Jesus' death on the cross as our payment for sin and in His resurrection. «**This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who**



believe» (*Romans 3:22*).

At one point in Jesus' ministry, many of the crowd were turning their backs on Him and leaving in hopes of finding another savior. Jesus asked the Twelve, «**Do you want to go away as well?**» (*John 6:67, ESV*). Peter's reply is exactly right: «**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God**» (*John 6:68-69, ESV*). May we all share Peter's faith that eternal life resides only in Jesus Christ.

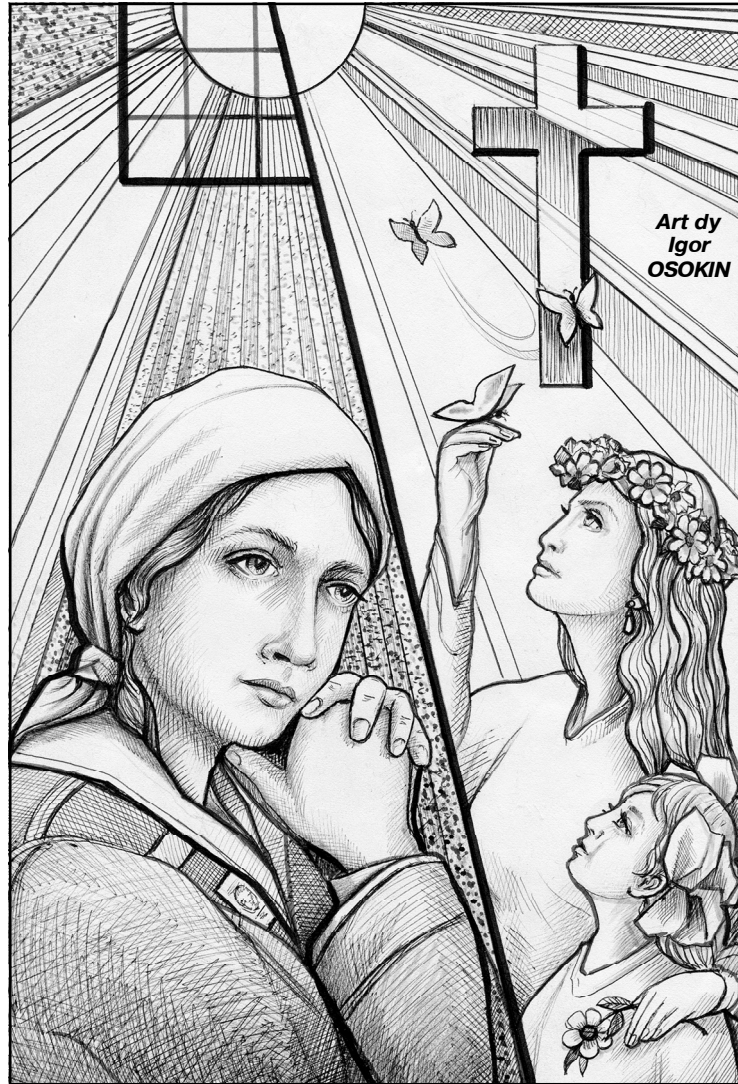
How young can you be and ask Jesus to be your Savior?

Answer: There is definitely no age requirement for salvation. Jesus Himself declared, «**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these**» (*Matthew 19:14*). As soon as children are old enough to understand that they have sinned (*Romans 3:23*), that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins (*Romans 5:8; 6:23*), and that they must place their faith in Jesus for salvation (*John 3:16*), then they are old enough to be saved.

A child does not have to understand all the complex issues that are part of the doctrine of salvation. The Bible often encourages us to have faith like a child (*Matthew 18:4; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17*). It is important that parents make sure that their children understand the basic issues (as described above), but the promise of *Acts 16:31* is equally true

with regard to an adult or a child: «**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**».

Little children, whether born of believers or unbelievers, may be chosen of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and have the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and so enter into heaven. At what point in their lives they come to a realization of these things will vary from child to child. Some young children have especially tender hearts and, upon hearing that Jesus died for them, are immediately aware of their sinful natures and are compelled to respond. Others of more sanguine personalities may not come to this awareness until they are much older. Only the Lord knows the thoughts of the heart and we trust Him «**to seek and save that which is lost**» (*Luke 19:10*) according to His perfect will and timing.



have believed in Him (*John 1:12*). If you have Jesus, you have life. Not temporary life, but eternal.

God wants us to have assurance of our salvation. We should not live our Christian lives wondering and worrying each day whether or not we are truly saved. That is why the Bible makes the plan of salvation so clear. Believe in Jesus Christ (*John 3:16; Acts 16:31*). «**If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved**» (*Romans 10:9*). Have you repented of your sins? Do you believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins and rose again from the dead (*Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21*)? Do you trust Him alone for salvation? If your answer to these questions is «yes», you are saved! Assurance means freedom from doubt. By taking God's Word to heart, you can have no doubt about the reality of your eternal salvation.

Jesus Himself assures those who believe in Him: «**I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand**» (*John 10:28-29*). Eternal life is just that — eternal. There is no one, who can take Christ's God-given gift of salvation away from you.

We hide God's Word in our hearts so that we do not sin against Him (*Psalms 119:11*), and this includes the sin of doubt. Take joy in what God's Word is saying to you: instead of doubting, we can live with confidence! We can have the assurance from Christ's own Word that our salvation will never be in question. Our assurance of salvation is based on the perfect and complete salvation God has provided for us through Jesus Christ.

www.gotquestions.org/questions_salvation.html

(Continued on the 12th page)

CHRISTIAN APHORISMS

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- When we accept Jesus Christ, holiness begins. When we revere Christ, holiness grows. But when we cannot live without Christ — this is complete holiness. Christ is our perfect holiness.
- When the growth stops, the downfall resumes.

SACRIFICE

- b The sacrifice God desires most is you.

LIFE

- The Life-giver decides what a life is worth.
- Pursue God in life and God will never leave you.
- You will begin to truly live when you turn to the living God.
- Surrender your life to God; He will bring order to it better than you can.

KNOWLEDGE

- What we know is limited, but what we do not know is infinite.

How can I have assurance of my salvation?

Answer: Many followers of Jesus Christ look for the assurance of salvation in the wrong places. We tend to seek assurance of salvation in the things God is doing in our lives, in our spiritual growth, in the good works and obedience to God's Word that is evident in our Christian walk. While these things can be evidence of salvation, they are not what we should base the assurance of our salvation. Rather, we should find the assurance of our salvation in the objective truth of God's Word. We should have confident trust that we

are saved based on the promises God has declared, not because of our subjective experiences.

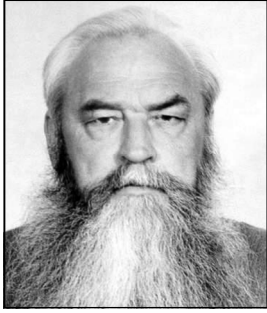
How can you have assurance of salvation? Consider *1 John 5:11-13*: «**And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life**». Who is it that has the Son? It is those who

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

CELEBRITIES AND THEIR FAITH

Ulrich JELINEK —

president of the industrial company «North» in the state of New Jersey, USA. The world-renowned inventor and designer of instruments and systems for space exploration.



«I never had a conversation with people without telling them about my faith in Jesus Christ. (Jelinek often did lectures in special seminars at universities and at conferences of professional scientists.) As a forgiven sinner, I have an eternal relationship with God who created the universe. My wish is to speak the gospel to others at every opportunity».

Wernher von BRAUN —



a U.S. aerospace engineer credited with the successful launch of the astronauts to the moon.

«One of the most fundamental laws of nature, confirmed by science, is that nothing in this psychical world is without cause. It is simply impossible to imagine Creation without a Creator.

Nothing is so well organized and created as our Earth. The universe must have a Designer, the Master, and the Creator. There could be no other conclusion».

Elmer William ENGSTROM —

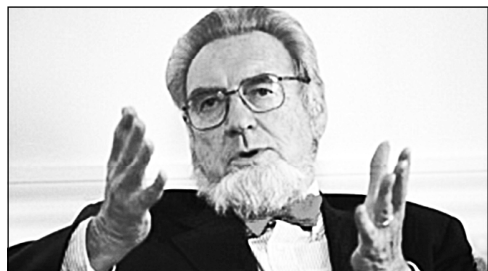
world known scientist, a pioneer in the field of color television. He was awarded the degree of honorary doctorate by fourteen universities.



«I see a well thought-out and designed plan by which the creation is finished. Today, I see the hand of God over His creation and also see how the prophetic statements of Scripture are fulfilled. The Bible is the supreme authority for our lives. We have to take it all in by faith and ask God to give us wisdom to understand the Scripture. Then we need Christ in our personal lives. In our days, the return of Christ is proclaimed to an extent it has never been before».

C. Everett KOOP —

chief surgeon of Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, USA. One of the most famous surgeons of America.



«I know that God never makes mistakes. God gave the natural laws of a child's development before birth. But there are other laws that violate the order in a child's development. My faith is not shaken when I see a man walking down the street fall and break his arm. I see no reason to blame God that sometimes a child is born with a birth defect, any more than to blame God for that hole in the sidewalk where the man has fallen».

Praise be to Jesus Christ! Peace to you and your precious hearts, dear brother Igor, and all brothers and sisters who are working on the newspaper «Prisoner»! I dearly greet you in the name and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has loved us and saved us with His blood. Once we were just blind sheep, but now we are the people of God. Once we were not forgiven, but now we have obtained mercy from God. Praise and glory be to Jesus Christ! I want to thank those who send this paper and also want to share the joyful events in my life. I will write my short testimony.

My name is Victor Yurchenko. I am 54 years old and serving a life sentence in ZIK-58 in the city of Izyaslav. I lived my life carelessly. I was trying to live a life of pleasure, going where I wanted, doing what I wanted. Sin seized me completely and I was a slave to sin. The prison has become my home, because I visited my parent's home only occasionally and for short times. With my nasty and vile acts, I pushed away my loved ones. My mind was in a stupor. Sometimes I would wake up for a short time and get frightened, knowing I was drowning in a sinful swamp. I wanted to escape from reality, but where? Reason came to me often only when I was already wanted for a crime. Guilt and remorse accompanied me constantly. All this tormented and seared my mind, so I tried to dull my conscience with alcohol and forget everything for at least a short while.

Before that I was sentenced three times and was serving my time in prison for various crimes. I always had a great desire not to go back to a criminal lifestyle again. But I could not resist because I did not let God into my heart. In my mind I was very much like a god, and therefore did not need anyone's help. My pride did not allow me to humble myself in front of someone or humiliate myself by asking something from others. However, it was only an outer mask; the reality was quite different. I was already on the «edge of the cliff», and it was urgent to take action. It is true that no matter how many threads of evil are twisted, the end will still come. And I was no exception. My last crime landed me in life imprisonment. At the time of trial, I did not even try to make excuses. It was just a shock and an awareness of what I had come to because of my sinful life. Looking back, I saw only ruins and burnt bridges.

The first feeling after hearing the life sentence proclaimed is total bitterness, because ten years ago, the word «lifer» (lifer is a person who is imprisoned for life) was equivalent to the word «grave». After some time, I began to search for God, because I understood that it was better to live in captivity with God than to go straight to hell without Him. Unfortunately, sincere repentance did not come to me from the first time. I was not completely open to God, and therefore did not feel the joy of forgiveness which comes to a man after sincere repentance. It took some time to turn to God again.

But this time, after my heartfelt repentance, the load on my shoulders dropped off. I got such happiness and peace in my soul.

I realized that the Lord accepted my repentance, forgave me and loves me very much. The Lord surrounded me with attention where brothers and sisters in Christ came and helped me grow spiritually, helped me properly understand and think as the Bible teaches. They also helped me financially. Communication with Christian people, the children of God, opened my eyes more and more to all of my wrongdoings against my loved ones. I wrote my mother a letter, in which I placed a poem that I made up called «Repentance», where I sincerely expressed myself and asked her to forgive me.

Since my repentance and growth in faith, I never stopped thinking about getting baptized. The realization of this was impossible for our institution at that time. However, all I needed was patience.

In late 2014, I was transferred into a workers' cell. There I met with my new cellmates, Anatoly and Sergei. Sergei, like me, came to repentance and together we

My way to God was difficult and long

were preparing for baptism. We talked, prayed and enlisted the support of our dear Ternopil Church, which was always nearby. Thank God, at this time the administration has given permission for baptisms to take place. Seven people were baptized that day. Rostislav Mikhailovich Belosevich and brother Igor from Khmel'nitsky church conducted the baptism.

Everything happened so unexpectedly. The baptism was videotaped, the mood was

If a person has repented, it is important to confirm that with baptism. Having accepted Christ, we have also crucified our old man, and baptism is the symbol of a funeral for that sinful man. A person who has repented should be baptized as soon as possible, to get rid of the burden of sin and the past life. Following Christ is also not easy, but the Lord will never leave us, you only need to believe and trust in Him.

From now on, I have become a little part in a large mechanism — a member of the Ternopil Church of Christ. I praise and deeply thank God that He sent strong, wise and wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ my way, who helped me all of this time and took care of me in every possible way. I love them all. May the Lord bless all of His children, who do all that He commanded!

To those who still have doubts I want to say, Go to God, for He is the foundation, the Rock on which our feet are confident. The Savior came to save His people from their sins. And you are among the saved by His grace. Let the quiet joy of salvation warm your heart forever! May our Heavenly Father grant you plenty of all His gifts and favors!

I also want to say that one should not lose heart. A life sentence is not death or a useless existence. Life goes on here as well, and God (if one wants) is able to change one's life. God is able to change your life and fill it with God's love, peace and joy.

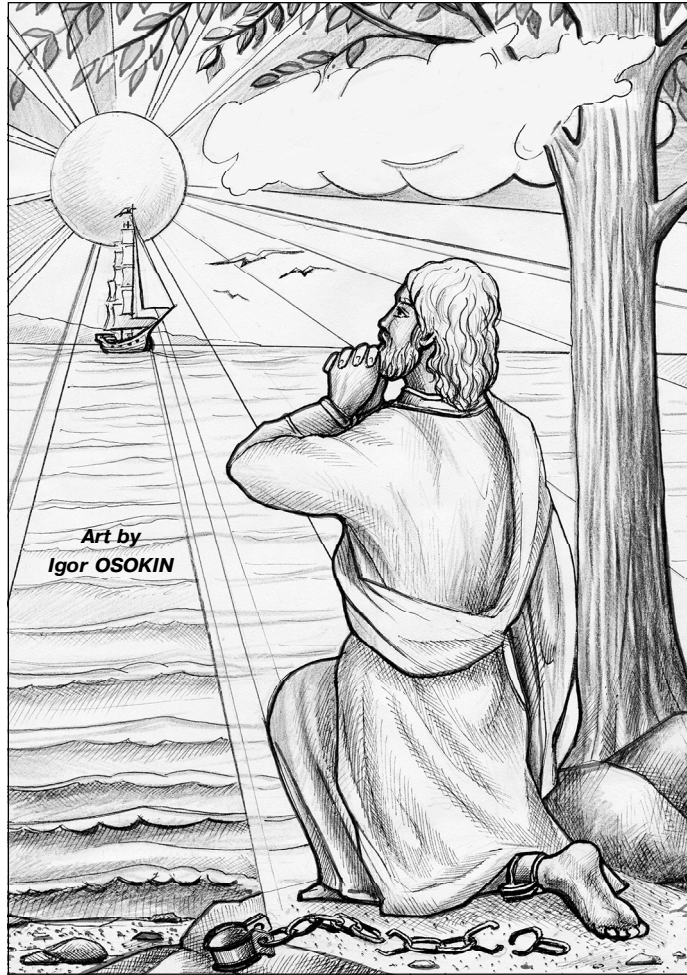
Not only did He make the heaven and earth related, He also made us related to each other! How much did Jesus give us By taking flesh on Himself! There is no price that can be put On this fellowship with God's children!

There are tears in the eyes, and a song in the heart, Thanking Him for His birth!

For those who are in prison and were baptized, let the Lord's strong hands hold you and cherish you. Let your love for Him grow stronger every day, and let your heart be loyal and faithful in spite of the difficult road you are walking. Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

With sincere respect and brotherly love, brother

Виктор ЮРЧЕНКО,
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г. Изяслав, Хмельницькая обл.,
Украина, 30300.



good, and it was a great day, but there was no emotion; there was just an inner joy and my brain constantly replaying everything that was happening. Only a week later I started to emotionally enjoy and share my experience with brothers, sisters, relatives and friends. Thank God and our Saviour Jesus Christ! It's truly a great privilege for a sinner to become a new creation in union with the living God and to devote his or her future life to God. We have become joint-heirs with Christ! I do not think and do not want to return to my previous way of life.

Our first communion soon followed. Even until this day, we remember our first communion with a joyful smile. Personally, in my memory that day will last a lifetime.

ATTENTION!

Dear readers! Today the newspaper «Prisoner» is written in two languages: Russian and English. «Prisoner» is printed in Ukraine and America. However, the newspaper is published and distributed entirely by donations. For all who want to contribute to the prosperity of «Prisoner», all details are listed in the last column of this issue. And for Christians in America who wish to donate to the newspaper «Prisoner» and assist with the prison ministry, below is a tear-off coupon which can be filled out and sent with a designation for the donation. God bless you!

Our main focus is ministering to inmates in jails and prisons.

Hope of Freedom
P.O. Box 4053
Everett, WA 98208



Hope of Freedom

That you may say to the prisoners, «Go forth», To those who are in darkness, «Show yourselves» (Is. 49:9).

MY DONATION:

For prison ministry For the publication of this newsletter (Prisoner)

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Questions:

Peter: (425) 346-4945, petyawa@gmail.com
Dasha: (206) 604-4594, dasha1@uw.edu

You may also donate online through PayPal at our website www.hopeoffreedom.org

We are now a federally-recognized 501(c)3 organization, so you can deduct your donations to us from your taxes!

QUESTIONS ABOUT SALVATION

(Окончание. Начало на 10-й стр.)

Lately we often hear a distorted interpretation of salvation through faith. The Bible says that salvation without Christ, without God's grace, is impossible, no matter how perfect and righteous one is in the eyes of others or their own. This is what Christ said: *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John. 14:6 KJV)*. Similarly, filled with the Holy Spirit the apostle Peter said: *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts. 4:8-12)*. Even Cornelius, pious and God fearing, and his entire household, was not an exception. He had to hear and believe



no need to call believers and once saved to (continue to work on) their salvation. The allegory of this second stage is the journey of the people of Israel from the Red Sea to the Promised Land. In this segment, the lustful and grumblers were identified and killed. The following texts from the Gospels say about this important stage of the Christian path and the personal responsibility of a person to abide in salvation or reject it.

Philip. 2:12 — *...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Lk. 21:19 — *In your patience possess ye your souls.*

1 Cor. 15:2 — *through which also ye are being saved, in what words I*

SALVATION THROUGH FAITH REGARDLESS OF WORKS

in Christ as the only way to salvation: *And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter & he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do (Acts 10:5-6)*.

However, there are people who say that the manifestation of Christian piety is not necessary, as this will invalidate the salvation bestowed by Christ, which in itself is completed and needs no human supplementation. They ask: «Has Christ left our salvation unfinished? Or he needs human help? Or our human attempts may change our status of salvation in Christ, which we received exclusively through faith?» Then these people point to such texts in Scripture: *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5)*.

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

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2: 8-9).

Many of these people have a very good motive. They want to warn Christians from deviating from the standpoint of faith towards achieving salvation by works, which happened to the Christians living in Galatia, whom the Apostle Paul severely rebuked, saying: *Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith (Galatians 5:4-5)*.

Still, what's wrong? What is the fallacy of this notion, for it has a foundation in the Scriptures? Let's examine it carefully.

Almost all of the texts that speak of the insolvency of salvation by works, meant not the pursuit of holiness in the Spirit of the New Testament, but the observance of the Mosaic Law with its regulations pertaining to the flesh (festivals, ablution), or the so-called ceremonial part, does not really free man from the power of sin and give him a new heart. As the apostles had to work in a common understanding that salvation is solely dependent on observance of the law, so they had to say, and assert that performing rituals does not save, only faith in Christ. That is why the Apostle Paul repeats in his epistles: *...not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Gal. 2:16)*.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Eph. 2: 8).

In saying this, the apostles did not want, in any way to quench the desire for pure, holy and pious life of Christians, as do preachers who appeal to the flesh do today. They were saying

this to those who turned to Christ and yet remained committed to the law; those whom as a safety (what if not everything is right Christianity) left hope for the Old Testament and showed that the way to Christ was not made known to them in full. These part-Jew, part-Christian posed a great danger to the churches of converts, bringing confusion and division.

Some Western theologians, taking basis off these texts of Scripture addressed to the believers in the transition period, interpret that the applying of human effort in achieving practical holiness is contrary to the doctrine of salvation by faith. They deny the need to subdue and enslave the body. As a result of this, easy Christianity was born, which is not similar to Christ in appearance or in spirit. These are people who are hard to classify as Christians, but to call them completely non-believers, I do not dare. For them there is no struggle, as their lives largely remain the same, without any changes; physical appearance, mannerisms, speech, interests - all worldly, carnal.

But what it is even worse, they have no desire for improvement, because the state in which they are found today seems perfect.

The meaning of the Biblical word salvation is broad, and precisely in its wrong interpretation lies the main problem. The Scriptures of the New Testament speaks of three phases or stages of salvation of the human soul.

I. THE FIRST STAGE: SAVED

Eph. 2: 8, 9 — *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*

Calling, repentance, forgiveness of sins, adoption, or, in a word, born again is the first and important step in God's salvation. This mostly depends on God's calling, as well as the consent of the person to submit to God. Without this initial great miracle of salvation everything else is meaningless. Yet this is the beginning. Many people experience this first stage of salvation but not all follow Christ further. An allegory of this phase of salvation is the egress of the people of Israel from Egypt. After passing through the Red Sea, and seeing their captors dead, they found true salvation from slavery. But if they did not go on, their salvation would have ended in death in the waterless desert.

Rome. 8:24 — *For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*

II. SECOND STAGE: SAVING

The second stage of salvation is longer and includes the process of sanctification and spiritual growth. Therefore, we find a call to attain salvation in the Scriptures. If, in addition to calling and repentance which are a testament to ones salvation, nothing is necessary, there would be

proclaimed good news to you, if ye hold fast, except ye did believe in vain (YLT).

Lk. 16:16 — *but then came the preaching of the kingdom of God, and everyone makes his way into it by force (BBE)*.

1 Tim. 4:16 — *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (KJV)*.

III. THE THIRD STEP: WILL BE SAVED

The third, final and concluding stage of salvation is expressed in the entrance of the Israelites into the Promised Land, and for the New Testament Christians; the kingdom of heaven. For this reason, the apostle Paul advises to look at the outcomes of the mentors and in which state they passed and imitate their faith. The end identifies all. The Jews came out of Egypt went through two phases of salvation, but the third, the entrance to the Promised Land was given only to Joshua and Caleb of all the Jews who left Egypt as adults.

Matt. 24:13 — *who endures to the end will be saved (ISV)*.

1 Pet. 1:9 — *Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul (KJV)*.

Rome. 5:9-10 — *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*

Considering all that was said, let's imagine a newly convert to whom it is said: «Everything necessary for your ultimate salvation and entrance into the kingdom of heaven, Christ did. Since you believe, then that is enough, and you don't need to do anything: it is not necessary to pacify and subjugate the body, it is not necessary to delve into yourself, for this is the work of humans through which one is not saved». What irreparable damage will be caused to this convert! Through precisely through the above said principles is spiritual growth.

One time the author of this article had to talk to a new generation of Christians and pointed out the need to delve into oneself and *purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John. 3:3)*. To which came the reply: «It's devilry» The interviewer turned out to be a supporter of contemporary Western theology, the falsity of which many are not aware of. For how hard it is for one filled with the euphoria of a false salvation, admit the idea that something wrong. What a pity that the tragedy of the many false teachings will only know at the end when nothing can be corrected. Today, they do not want to hear anything... even the voice of their conscience, calling it slander of the devil and seek to stifle and suppress it. God have mercy! What levity in the most important issue — the salvation of ones soul?!

Alexander BORISENKO.

Dear readers of «Prisoner»!

The newspaper office requests that you enclose your postal address with your material (testimonies, sermons, articles, etc.) for publication in «Prisoner». If you enclose photos with your material, we will be glad to publish them.

And for those of you just on the way to God, it's time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer:

«Lord Jesus, I believe you are God's Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!»



PRISONER

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