



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"

John 8:32

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Surely there is not a single person who has not heard or used phrases such as "Life is not a walk in the park", "When life takes the wind out of your sails, it is to test you at the oars". and so on and so forth.

Does one seriously think about why one comes into this world? Earthly life is quite complicated and, in many ways, filled with pain and suffering. Why do most people want to have children, if they understand perfectly well that life is not easy and there are many worries and problems ahead of them? Moreover, each person knows very well that one day they will surely die. Before this happens, they must also survive the death of their



be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail" (Luke 1:26-38 NIV).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal

life" (John 3:16 NASB). As we see from the above, the key to immortality lies with Him. God endowed His Son Jesus Christ with unlimited power over everything, including death. The Lord showed the whole world His power over it when on the third day He rose

THE KEY TO IMMORTALITY

parents, with the exception of those cases when death comes to a person suddenly and unexpectedly. It turns out that all people come into this world only to die one day. Is it not cruel when people consciously, so to speak, continue the human race and doom their children to suffering, pain, and death? In fact, if a person does not have a future, he comes to this world in order to die one day. Can you be happy if you know in advance that your child will have to someday go to the grave? What hope can parents give their child if, apart from birth and death, they know nothing else? From birth to death is a segment that most of humanity lives without hope for the future. From generation to generation people are filling in this earthly gap, filled with suffering and grief, trying to find the key to immortality. Mankind has been engaged in these studies for many centuries, inventing different ways to stay youthful, transplanting stem cells and more. However, the search for immortality still remains inconclusive for them. All this is passed down from generation to generation. People are afraid of death and by all means seek immortality. In every possible way they try to extend their earthly life. But alas, they do not see the most essential thing in front of them. How can the spiritually blind see what is so obvious and always near? Only a few on earth firmly know and believe that there is a key to immortality — just as there is only one way by which a person gains eternal life.

For Christmas, I would very much want as many people as possible to be aware of the love and mercy of God towards us sinful people. After all, it was He our Heavenly Father who gave us the key to immortality and showed us the path to eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ; whom He sent into the world for the sake of our salvation.

The birth of Jesus Christ is God's gift to all mankind. He who accepts this gift and realizes all its value, receives the grace of God.

Every time I read the Gospel about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, I read it with great trepidation. May someone's heart, like mine once, come alive in faith by reading these lines!

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you'. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end'. 'How will this be', Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will

from the dead. Since then, the key to immortality is in Jesus Christ. And now, as the Holy Scriptures say, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13 KJV).* However, people are blind and because of their blindness they are always tormented by questions of afterlife. Being of elderly age scares many; because, apart from oblivion, people see nothing more in front of themselves. They seek immortality, but for some reason they don't seek eternal life. The mere word "death" gives horror and fear to people. But the Lord, while on earth, unequivocally told His disciples: *"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28 NLT).* The Lord made it clear with all of this, that beyond the limits of earthly existence there is life. What could be more encouraging for people than the words of Jesus above?

Both then and now, the Lord reaches out to all people with His saving hand. He specifically shows the path by which a person will certainly find salvation. Once apostle Thomas asked Jesus a question regarding the way. Jesus replied: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NLT).*

The question arises: are people really so blind that they cannot see the real key to immortality? After all, the Lord is always so close, so close, He is everywhere and in everything; but sadly, few turn to Him. Given the doubts and unbelief of mankind, the Lord says to all mankind through His Word: *"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3 NIV).*

Today I want to ask all unbelieving people, "Before asserting that there is no God, did any of you try to turn to Him through repentance?! After all, any statement should always be based on undeniable evidence. Do you have this evidence?!"

The birth of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection from the dead were predicted by the prophets several centuries before His actual incarnation. Everything came true to the smallest detail. Today, as Jesus Christ Himself said, "blessed are those who have not seen and believed", that is, those who in the bustle of earthly existence were able to find the key to immortality. All that remains is to make the right choice — to turn to God with repentance.

The Nativity of Jesus Christ is the immense love of our Heavenly Father for us sinful people. It is through Jesus Christ and through repentance and faith in Him, that we receive the gift of the key to immortality — eternal life. Whoever wants to receive it, let him not hesitate to turn to the Lord.

In conclusion, I want to quote the words of the prophet Isaiah: *"Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing" (Isaiah 40:26 NIV).*

I. GORIK.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

MARYLAND CHURCH HELPS COVER \$1.8 MILLION IN MEDICAL DEBT FOR 900 FAMILIES

A small church in Annapolis, MD, has made a big impact on 900 families across the state.

Revolution Annapolis, a non-denominational church, sent out letters last Monday to families in 14 different counties informing them that their medical bills — some a few hundred dollars and others hundreds of thousands of dollars — had been forgiven, wiped clean, with no strings attached.

The 170-member church raised \$15,000 in December and in January partnered with the non-profit, RIP Medical Debt, to forgive \$1,893,288.73 of medical debt in central and eastern Maryland.

"We did this because we believe it is the church's job to be good news to the people in its community", Lead Pastor Kenny Camacho told Fox News. "We want our city to look and feel different because we are here, period".

The church's original goal was to help Annapolis, but as more and more money came in, they realized they could have an even greater impact and reach.

"Our hope is that this project will challenge other churches and organizations to do more. We are a small church... but God ended up doing more with our \$15,000 than we could have ever hoped", Camacho said. "We can all make a difference".

Revolution was inspired after seeing a Texas megachurch connect with RIP Medical Debt to cover \$10 million in medical debt for 4,000 local families and veterans around Easter last year. Pastor Stephen Hayes of Covenant Church told Fox News they wanted to impact their community in a meaningful way instead of spending the usual amount of money on Easter promotion, they gave it to the non-profit.

"We began to ask the question", Hayes said, "If our doors closed tomorrow, would our city even notice?"

They will notice now.

<https://foxnews.com>



CHRISTIAN NEWS

HOW ONE SIMPLE PHRASE SAVED MY MARRIAGE

Family life is not always happy and cheerful. But trying to make it better is within the power of each of us, says the famous writer Richard Paul Evans.

"My oldest daughter, Jenna, recently said to me, "My greatest fear as a child was that you and mom would get divorced. Then, when I was twelve, I decided that you fought so much that maybe it would be better if you did". Then she added with a smile. "I'm glad you guys figured things out".

For years my wife Keri and I struggled. Looking back, I'm not exactly sure what initially drew us together, but our personalities didn't quite match up. The longer we were married the more extreme the differences seemed. Encountering "fame and fortune" didn't make our marriage any easier. In fact, it exacerbated our problems. The tension between us got so bad that going out on book tour became a relief, though it seems we always paid for it on re-entry. Our fighting became so constant that it was difficult to even imagine a peaceful relationship. We became perpetually defensive, building emotional fortresses around our hearts. We were on the edge of divorce and more than once we discussed it.

I was on book tour when things came to a head. We just had another big fight on the phone and Keri had hung up on me. I was alone and lonely, frustrated and angry. I had reached my limit. That's when I turned to God. Or turned on God. I don't know if you could call it prayer — maybe shouting at God isn't prayer, maybe it is — but whatever I was engaged in I'll never forget it. I was standing in the shower of the Buckhead, Atlanta Ritz-Carlton yelling at God that my marriage was wrong, and I couldn't do it anymore. As much as I hated the idea of divorce, the pain of being together was just too much. I was also confused. I couldn't figure out why marriage with Keri was so hard. Deep down I knew that Keri was a good person, and I was a good person. So why couldn't we get along? Why had I married someone so different than me? Why wouldn't she change?

Finally, hoarse and broken, I sat down in the shower and began to cry. In the depths of my despair powerful inspiration came to me. You can't change her, Rick. You can only change yourself. At that moment I began to pray. If I can't change her, God, then change me. I prayed late into the night. I prayed the next day on the flight home. I prayed as I walked in the door to a cold wife who barely even acknowledged me. That

night, as we lay in our bed, inches from each other yet miles apart, the inspiration came. I knew what I had to do.

The next morning I rolled over in bed next to Keri and asked, "How can I make your day better?"

Keri looked at me angrily.

"What?"

"How can I make your day better?"

"You can't", she said. "Why are you asking that?"

"Because I mean it", I said. "I just want to know what I can do to make your day better".

She looked at me cynically.

"You want to do something? Go clean the kitchen".

She likely expected me to get mad. Instead I just nodded.

"Okay".

I got up and cleaned the kitchen.

The next day I asked the same thing.

"What can I do to make your day better?"

Her eyes narrowed.

"Clean the garage".

I took a deep breath. I already had a busy day and I knew she had made the request in spite. I was tempted to blow up at her.

Instead I said, "Okay".

I got up and for the next two hours cleaned the garage. Keri wasn't sure what to think.

The next morning came.

"What can I do to make your day better?"

"Nothing!" she said. "You can't do anything. Please stop saying that".

I explained to her that can't, I made a commitment to myself.

"What can I do to make your day better?"

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because I care about you", I said. "And our marriage".

The next morning, I asked again. And the next. And the next. Then, during the second week, a miracle occurred. As I asked the question Keri's eyes welled up with tears. Then she broke down crying. When she could speak, she said,

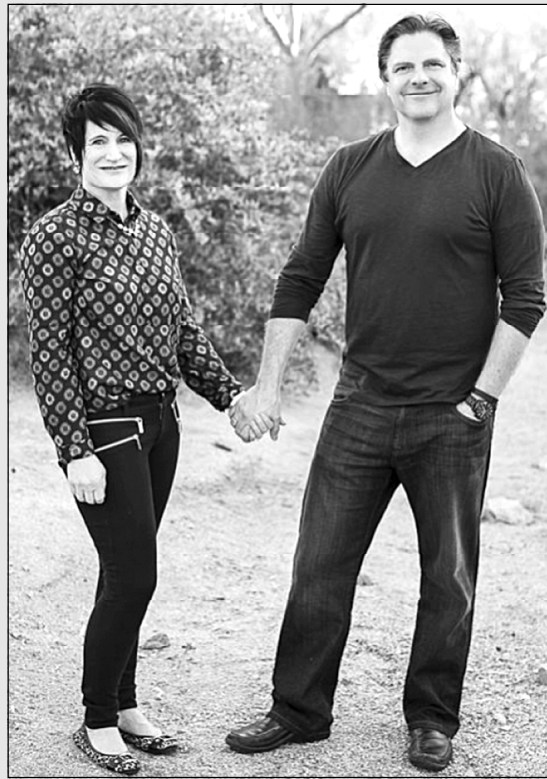
"Please stop asking me that. You're not the problem. I am. I'm hard to live with. I don't know why you stay with me".

I gently lifted her chin until she was looking in my eyes.

"It's because I love you", I said. "What can I do to make your day better?"

"I should be asking you that".

"You should", I said. "But not now. Right



Keri and I have now been married for more than thirty years. I not only love my wife, I like her. I like being with her. I crave her. I need her. Many of our differences have become strengths and the others don't really matter. We've learned how to take care of each other and, more importantly, we've gained the desire to do so.

Marriage is hard. But so is parenthood and keeping fit and writing books and everything else important and worthwhile in my life. To have a partner in life is a remarkable gift. I've also learned that the institution of marriage can help heal us of our most unlovable parts. And we all have unlovable parts.

Through time I've learned that our experience was an illustration of a much larger lesson about marriage. The question everyone in a committed relationship should ask their significant other is, "What can I do to make your life better?" That is love. Romance novels (and I've written a few) are all about desire and happily-ever-after, but happily-ever-after doesn't come from desire — at least not the kind portrayed in most pulp romances. Real love is not to desire a person, but to truly desire their happiness — sometimes, even, at the expense of our own happiness. Real love is not to make another person a carbon copy of one's self. It is to expand our own capabilities of tolerance and caring, to actively seek another's well being. All else is simply a charade of self-interest.

I'm not saying that what happened to Keri and me will work for everyone. I'm not even claiming that all marriages should be saved. But for me, I am incredibly grateful for the inspiration that came to me that day so long ago. I'm grateful that my family is still intact and that I still have my wife, my best friend, in bed next to me when I wake in the morning. And I'm grateful that even now, decades later, every now and then, one of us will still roll over and say, "What can I do to make your day better". Being on either side of that question is something worth waking up for.

Perhaps this story will be able to save at least one family. Surely this is exactly why Richard posted it on the Internet.

<https://www.richardpaulevans.com>

Can a believing (saved) person lose their salvation and go to hell? To answer this question, you need to find out 1) what it means to perish or lose salvation, and 2) what it means to be saved.

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

CONFIDENCE IN ONES SALVATION

I. PERISH / DESTRUCTION

1. What does it mean to perish? Jesus came to this world to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). What does it mean to be a perishing sinner in the eyes of God? Why does God's wrath abide on unbelievers (John 3:36)?

The main reason that we were (or continue to be) perishing sinners, on whom the wrath of God abides, is in our relationship with sin, that is, the inability to manifest the character of God in our actions, behavior and thinking.

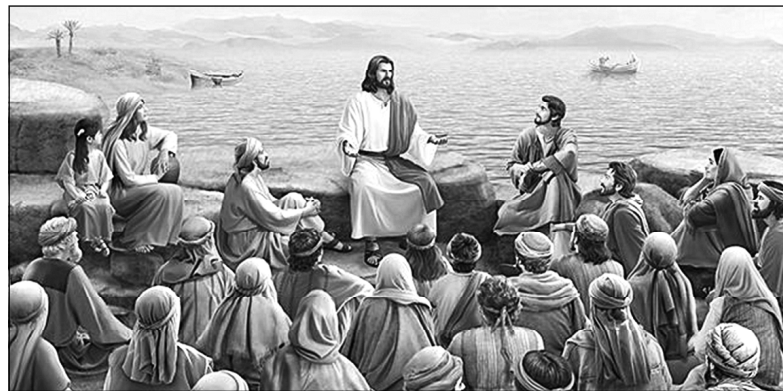
Are we sinners because we sin, or do we sin because we are sinners? Both are true. The Bible teaches that we are all guilty of sin (Romans 3:23 — For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Romans 3:10-18 — As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understand, 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; also Mark 7:20-23).

The Bible also teaches that we are born with a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5 — Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me), inherited from Adam (Romans 5:12 — Therefore, how sin entered the world through one person, and death by sin, and so death passed to all people, because in it everyone sinned).

The punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23)!

☉ **Physical death** (separation of the soul from the body) is the result of the sin of Adam, which spread to all of humanity (Romans 5:12-14 — Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned, after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come).

☉ **Spiritual death** (separation of the soul from God) — a state of mind transmitted to us from Adam through our first parents



(Ephesians 2:1, 5 — And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. ... Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace ye are saved...)

☉ **Eternal death or second death** (culmination and continuation of spiritual death) — the eternal separation of the soul with God in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14 — And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works).

The Word of God describes our condition until we believed in Jesus Christ as being in the wrath of God (John 3:36 — He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him).

II. THE RESCUE. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

Salvation is of the LORD (Jonah 2:9).

Colossians 1:13 says that God ...delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: This means the following.

1. God delivered us from spiritual death — the state in which we were born — and quickened us together with Christ (Ephesians 2:5). Our sins are forgiven. We are no longer perishing sinners.

2. God has given us a new life in Christ, full of God's blessings. This happened when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ...

3. God's blessing is as follows:

☉ **Restoration** is the work of the Holy Spirit, which consists in renewing the identity of a Christian, transforming him from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life (John 3:5 — Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except

a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot, enter into the kingdom of God; John 10:10 — I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly; John 10:28 — And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never, perish, neither, shall any man pluck them out of my hand; 1 John 5:11-12 — And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life).

☉ **Justification**. God declares the believer righteous because he has put on the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:21-26 — ...Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus).

☉ **Liberation** from the dominion and authority of sin (Romans 6:2-14 — For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace).

☉ **We are the gift of Heavenly Father to the Son** (John 17:2-24; John 10:28 — And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never, perish, neither, shall any man pluck them out of my hand).

☉ **We are part of the spiritual Body of Christ** — the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 — For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit).

☉ And many other gifts and blessings of God.

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III. CAN A PERSON LOSE SALVATION?

1. Different opinions on this topic

Many churches teach differently on this topic. Some believe that it is impossible to lose salvation while others believe that it is possible to lose salvation. Those that believe that it is impossible to lose salvation base their belief on Biblical verses such as **John 10:28**: *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.* Who argues against this? Is someone truly stating that it is possible to snatch someone or something out of God's hand? Of course not! He is God!

The conversation is not going on about theft. And if you think about it, it is **not about loss.** Salvation is not an item that you could lose it. **Salvation** is God's free gift of **eternal life.** We receive it willingly. God cannot force us to accept this gift because we have a **free will!** We can receive this gift or we can decline it. We can also accept it, and later reject it. This unfortunately happens with people. Those that proclaim that it is impossible to lose salvation forget about free will and the concept of freedom of choice.

It is true, it is impossible to lose salvation, but it is possible to reject it!

2. What does the Bible say about the loss of Salvation?

Revelation 2:25 — *But hold fast what you have till I come.*

Revelation 3:11 — *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*

Exodus 32:32 — *Yet now, if You will forgive their sin — but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. (What this book is, is explained in **Revelation 21:27**: *But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*)*

Psalms 68:29 — *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.*

2 Peter 3:17 — *You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked...*

2 John 1:8 — *Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.*

Romans 11:21 — *For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.*

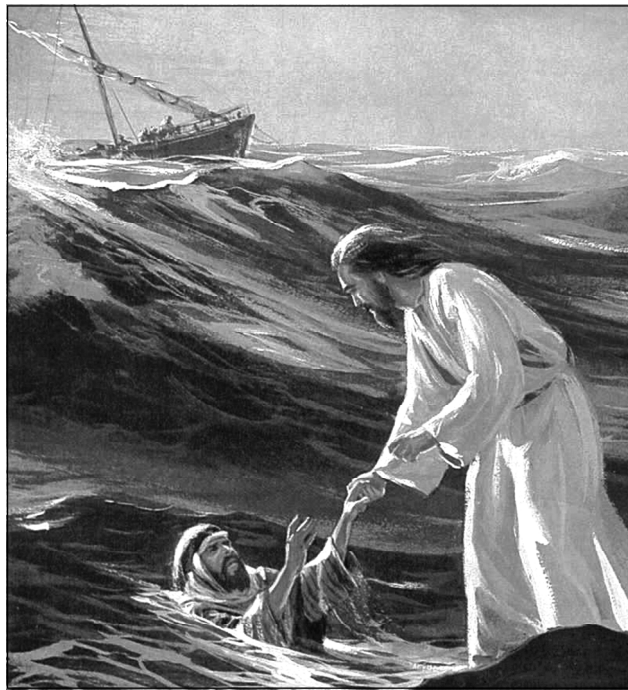
Colossians 1:21-23 — *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature*

under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Hebrews 6:4-6 — *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

Philippians 2:12 — *Therefore... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;*

2 Peter 1:10-11 — *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to*



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. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God!

3. The testimony of a Christian lifestyle

The faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died for our sin, is the only requirement for salvation. The facts listed below, from our Christian life, testify that we are the children of God who have re-

righteously, and godly in the present age...

☉ We know that we have eternal life because we have a relationship with God.

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

4. God's testimony

A. Holy Spirit's Testimony

Romans 8:14-16 — *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father". The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

1 Corinthians 12:3 — *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

B. Jesus's Testimony

John 10:27-30 — *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.*

C. The testimony of the Word of God

Romans 8:35-39 — *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter". Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

CONCLUSION

Dear friend, The Lord God has given us all the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. We have a free will and we are in a position to decide if we want to accept this gift or not. It is impossible to buy it or earn it. It is possible to accept it through faith in Jesus Christ or to reject it by the lack of faith. This choice needs to be made during the person's lifetime because it will be too late after death.

The rest of your life here on earth, and in eternity, is dependent on the choice that you make today. Be wise and may the Lord bless you!

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" was kindly provided by the Bible Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada
<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/027.htm>

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

CONFIDENCE IN ONES SALVATION

make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As it is evident from the above cited verses of the Bible, it is impossible to lose salvation but it is possible to reject it (to fall away)!

3. The conditions of falling away from salvation

The only condition for our salvation is faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. We receive salvation and justification by our faith (**Ephesians 2:8-9** — *For by grace you have been saved through faith...*). This is why the Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please Him (**Hebrews 11:6**) The conclusion is: falling away from the faith is falling away from salvation.

Falling away from faith can occur in different ways:

1. Falling away from the true Biblical teaching (joining a cult, a sect, other religions).
2. Falling into sin, a sinful lifestyle (a conscious disobedience of God).
3. Renouncing the faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

IV. CAN I HAVE ASSURANCE IN MY SALVATION?

1. What is assurance

Webster's Dictionary gives the following definition of the word: *confidence of mind or manner: easy freedom from self-doubt or uncertainty.*

2. Is it possible to have assurance in our salvation?

A lot of people are tormented by the question of their personal salvation. If you are also bothered by this question, I suggest that you read and answer the following three

questions that will help you figure out your relationship with God.

A. Do I believe in Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for my sin? Have I received Him as my Savior?

The Bible teaches that this is the only requirement to receive salvation (**John 1:12** — *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God...*).

B. In the question of assurance of my salvation, who do I trust more, my feelings or the Word of God?

This is what the Bible teaches: **John 3:36** — *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*

John 5:24 — *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

C. Do I think that my salvation is more dependent on my own good works than on what God has done for my salvation?

The Bible teaches that we are not in a position to earn salvation. God and his grace has made salvation possible for all of us (**Titus 3:5** — *...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us; Ephesians 2:8-9* — *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*)

The Bible teaches that if we have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior, then we can be **100 %** sure in our salvation (**1 John 5:11-13** — *And this is the testimony: that God*

ceived salvation through Jesus Christ.

☉ We know that we have eternal life because God has said that we already have it.

God's Word teaches that we have the gift of eternal life as soon as we receive our Savior (**1 John 5:13** — *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.*)

☉ We know that we have eternal life because our life has changed ever since we became Christian.

2 Corinthians 5:17 — *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

Maybe these changes are not very visible to those around us. Never the less, this Bible verse proclaims that a person who has received Jesus Christ is a new creation. This means that the promised changes from the Word of God will indeed happen in the person's life and in time, they will be visible to others.

☉ We know that we have eternal life because we have an unquenchable desire to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ with those that surround us.

Romans 1:16 — *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (gentile).*

☉ We know that we have eternal life because we desire and strive to lead a Godly life.

Titus 2:11-12 — *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,*

TOO LITTLE OR TOO MUCH?

P A beggar was sitting on a street corner when he saw the approaching king who was walking. "This is a rare opportunity to ask something from the king, he will surely give me a lot!" The beggar was delighted. When the king reached the beggar, the beggar, with a pleading voice, asked for a coin.

The King looked at the beggar and said: "And why am I supposed to give you a coin? I am the king, you my subject give me something".

The beggar replied that he did not have anything, but the king insisted: "Look in your pockets, you will find something". The beggar complied and found a piece of bread, an apple, and a handful of grains of rice. He decided that it was not worthwhile to give the king the bread or the apple and so he gave the king five grains of rice. The



king smiled: "See, you had something for me". The king took out 5 golden coins from his purse and handed them to the beggar; 1 gold coin for each grain of rice. The beggar exclaimed: "King, I have more grains, I am willing to give them to you!"

The king shook his head. "I will accept only that which you gave to me not expecting a reward. Five grains of rice, 5 coins, that's all".

A sad parable don't you think? The man was not only poor but also greedy and because of this, lost an

opportunity to receive more. We love to receive much when we have given little and that is why we lose blessings.

God does not need our offerings. But he does want to test your heart. He wants to test you not because He doesn't know you, but because He wants you to find out about yourself. If you are generous, sharing with others and sacrificing, doing so you respond to the immense generosity of God who gives you everything that you have and who sends countless blessings. Use the opportunity to be generous.

"But who am I, and who are my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You" (**1 Chronicles 29:14**).

If the king approaches you right now and asks you to give him something, what will you give him?

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LARK

The lark was singing beautifully in the field. He was praising God who had given him this wonderful day, a wonderful world, the sky, air, and a wonderful life! People looked at this singing creature and marveled: "So little and yet he sings so loudly!"



The lark was looking down on the people and was wondering to himself: "They are so big and are the crown of God's creation and yet they sing so quietly..."

<https://pritchi.ru>

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CAN LOVE INCLUDE HATE?

"Hate is one step away from love". Perhaps this is not just a quote by an unknown author, it is the standard for human life. For such a saying became a reality for many people throughout human life. How could that be? Many people have asked this question. After all, it is not even comprehensible how love for a person can be transformed into hatred. What does it take for a loving person to hate his neighbor? Is it possible to love today and hate tomorrow? As practice shows, this is quite possible, and it is not only possible in specific cases, it happens very often. How is it that people love each other, and they can say they are soul mates, and then suddenly hatred appears between them and it escalates into revenge and curses. Maybe people in such cases only thought that they loved one another?! After all the "real love" cannot suddenly turn into hatred!

To better understand if hate can abide in the midst of love, I turned to the Scriptures and found this. In the thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians there is an amazing test of love, which was recorded by the Apostle Paul who was inspired by the Holy Spirit. By reading and analyzing this test, any person can easily determine the degree of his love for his neighbor, if it really is in him. This is what the Apostle Paul said:

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13 NIV).

When you read this passage that was a revelation by the Holy Spirit, you involuntarily realize how imperfect our love is. We simply lack the strength to implement much of what the scripture talks about. Even if something abides in each of us, from this test of love found in the gospel, there is also much

we need to impart in ourselves so that our love is perfect and so we will be able to truly love our neighbor as God loves us all.

Among believers, there is certainly progress in love for one's neighbor, however, even among us believers our love is not so perfect that we can be confident that there will never be a place for hatred of one another. For the Lord, through his Word, says to us who believe: **"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 John 4:20 KJV).



It becomes obvious that the Lord sees and knows the evil heart of man in many ways. The Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans in the instruction says:

"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:9-21 KJV).

Of course, all these instructions can be carried out only with a loving heart, because it is simply unrealistic for a person without such a heart to

perform all of this. Answering the question whether love and hatred can coexist, we can confidently say: hatred can exist if our love is imperfect. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ through his Word calls us all to perfection. He calls for the love with which He himself has loved us. As the gospel of John says, **"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 KJV).

It is to perfect love that the Lord calls us — one that does not contain hatred at any point. Because otherwise we will not be able to fulfill His commands, which are recorded in the sermon on the mount. After all it clearly states:

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:44-48 KJV).

Of course, one can acquire such love in oneself only through constant contact with God. His Spirit must fill our whole nature, that is, there must be a complete fusion of man with God. Only under such circumstances will love from hate be at an unattainable distance. It is only under such circumstances that we can truly love, protect, value and respect our fellow human beings.

Every day I ask the Lord to strengthen my faith and to fill me as much as possible with the love and wisdom that he possesses. As said above, **"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"** (Phil. 3:13-14 KJV).

There is a wonderful prayer of St. Francis, which I, along with other prayers, pray every day. I believe that love and hate are incompatible things. The one who hates, he simply likes no one and has never liked anyone. I propose that we should all pray this wonderful prayer:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life".



I. GORIK.

1. The Birth of Jesus Silenced

☉ This event is more talked about as a holiday.

☉ When it comes to Christmas, the identity of the birth of Jesus is being omitted (silenced).

☉ It is customary to speak of Christmas as a holiday, and not as the birth of Jesus Christ.

☉ The wise men did not come to the feast of Christmas, but to the born child. They came not just to worship, but to worship the born king.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. ...When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:1-2, 9-11 KJV).

2. Belittling Jesus Christ

☉ The born baby Jesus for many remains a baby, and no more.

☉ We even make the mistake of speaking of the birth of Jesus happening in our hearts. That's not so.

☉ Scripture says that we are experiencing a process of being born again, not the birth of Jesus in our heart. There (in our heart) He comes as Savior, Lord and Master.

☉ We recall the historical fact of Jesus' birth. But we do not speak of Him today as Lord, Savior, Redeemer, God, Lord of lords, King of kings, and so on.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10 KJV).

3. Silence about the full significance of the Birth of Jesus Christ

☉ What is the meaning or

significance of the birth of Jesus Christ?

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David,

Contemporary Errors with the Celebration of the Birth of Jesus



fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:20-21 KJV).

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15 KJV).

☉ People should know why Christ came to this world!

☉ His birth is not just another birth of a baby.

☉ His birth had a purpose strictly defined by God: He had to save people from their sins, He had to die for people.

☉ Without this, the birth of Jesus Christ loses its true meaning.

☉ He was born in order to die. That is His destiny. It should not have been otherwise.

☉ His death is not a universal fate, because all people die.

☉ His death was purposeful and known before His birth.

☉ Do we talk about this when we celebrate the Nativity of Jesus?

☉ God talked about this.

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the

parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:25-35 KJV).

So, the modern mistakes associated with the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ:

- 1) Disconnection of the birth of Christ,
- 2) Belittling of Jesus Christ,
- 3) Silencing the full significance of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Do not make this kind of mistake when celebrating this holiday — the Birth of Jesus Christ.



Aleksandr KOLESNIKOV,
Rivne, Ukraine.



CHRISTIAN NEWS

A homeless man was left without shoes, but God sent him an unexpected answer

A woman who was driving in a taxi in Lower Manhattan during morning rush hour. At a traffic light near the WTC she noticed a runner stopping near a homeless man on the sidewalk. The man took off his sneakers, gave them to the guy and after a short conversation went on barefoot...

She shared this touching story and video on Twitter, writing, "Our true self manifests in what we do when no one is watching us".

Antonella says she initially thought the runner was going after the money he had in his sock, but then saw him take off his sneakers.

The man who gave his shoes to a stranger, she said, was a hero, and she'd like to know the hero's name. Antonella adds that she was incredibly lucky to notice and film such a moment.

Journalists found the homeless man. He turned out to be a guy named Joe Arroyo. He shared his story: "I was sitting here, homeless and hungry. My shoes ripped, so I took them off. I asked for money from passers-by to buy myself a new pair. I would never have thought that



someone would come out, take off their shoes and just give them to me!"

That's exactly what happened. Joe said that the man running past noticed holes in the bottom of his

sneakers, stopped and turned to the guy with the words: "I've been blessed my whole life. God was very kind to me. I feel like I have to bless you, too", then he took off his shoes and gave them to Joe.

Then the man left barefoot. The woman who was filming the video stopped at a red light and Joe noticed she was recording. At first, Joe thought it was all rigged.

"He sent someone to start recording to make him seem like a hero", he said. "But no, I can really see that it was from the heart!"

Joe has been living on the streets for years and admits he had difficulties, but said he was doing everything he could to get his life back on track.

"If you give me a chance, I'll be your best employee and will work overtime", he said.

As for the runner, a man who took a few minutes to help someone else, Arroyo is very grateful to him.

"Thanks to him. I wanted to hug this guy then, but it would look crazy: a homeless man hugging someone here..." he adds.

A message from a Hollywood director

Filmmakers John and Andy Erwins took the box office with their film "I Can Only Imagine", which was released in 2018 about the life of Mercy Me front man Bart Millard.

Despite previous successes, they were pleasantly surprised when the film "I Can Only Imagine" brought in more than eighty-three million dollars.



In a recent interview with Pure Talk on Pure Flix, John Erwin gave some useful advice to Christians. "If God is calling you to something and you believe it, never give up", he said. Erwin said that he and Andy had learned from their successes and failures along the way and that their perseverance had indeed paid off.

The Erwin Brothers have launched Kingdom Studios, a Hollywood initiative that will help tell interesting stories, and they plan to release two films each year.

"We combine two things that we care about most — great stories and incredible artists", Erwin said.

Andy Erwin added that the brothers will be working with talented voices to help tell spectacular stories, explaining, "We can do together, what none of us can do individually".

<https://gshelp.org>

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

My path to healing through trials and difficulties

My name is Oleg Reus. I was born in 1970 in a time when we were confidently embracing communism and all working in the plants and factories of the huge country called the USSR. To feed me, my parents were always at work and I grew up on the street. In first grade I already had a reputation in the children's section of the police station because I stole a teacher's wallet. Then there were fights, thefts, petty hooliganism — that's how I grew up.

But time came to join the army. Everyone said that they will make a man out of me. I served from 1988 to 1990 in the Armed Forces of the USSR. When I demobilized into reserve, it was the time of brigades, racketeering and armed showdowns between factions.

I didn't stay long at large. First one term, then another, and I went downhill: I was overwhelmed by the allure of crime. That's when I got addicted to drugs. It was like I got caught in quicksand and couldn't get out. I couldn't give up this nastiness, so I decided to end my useless life. I came home, took a knife and I don't know why but I said these words: "Lord, forgive me", and put the knife deep into my stomach. The blade passed a millimeter from my solar plexus, which caused me to spend fourteen hours on the operating table. At that moment the Lord spared my life but I did not even consider this and after I was discharged from the hospital I continued my criminal way of life.

But once again while serving time, I got sick with disseminated tuberculosis of the lungs and I was sent to the hospital. As I remember now, I sat in the room near the grated window and looking out saw freshly built coffins along the chain link fence. I thought at the time, "This is probably my end". At that time I weighed forty eight kilograms and realized that I didn't have much time left.

Since I was in the infirmary, I couldn't write letters home. And at that time my mother somehow was told that two people had died in the hospital where I was staying and that I was one of them. It wasn't until three weeks later that I was able to write home. When my father opened the mailbox and saw the letter from me he ran home and shouted loudly to my mother, "Tamara, our Oleg is resurrected!" It was a miracle to them. My mother did not want to believe that I was gone and when she found out that I was alive she was very happy and thanked God. But I was seriously ill and when the doctor

asked if I had relatives because they wanted someone come take my corpse. I was horrified to realize that I was going to die soon.

When I returned to the barracks and sat down on my bunk I remembered the words of my brother which he said when he came to see me: I needed to hold fast to the Lord. At that moment I realized clearly that I didn't want to die. I was scared and I fell to my knees and prayed to God for mercy, that I still want to live. And the Lord heard my prayer.

When I suddenly began to recover I was called by a doctor and he began to say that I did not have tuberculosis. "Whose x-rays were taken in your place? You think your cool", he says, "and decided to pretend? You'll be in the special unit to explain yourself". Then I realized that the Lord had healed me, and I began to thank Him. Tears of joy filled my eyes. I was sure that God saved my life. It was a real miracle! I firmly decided then that when I got out I will serve the Lord.

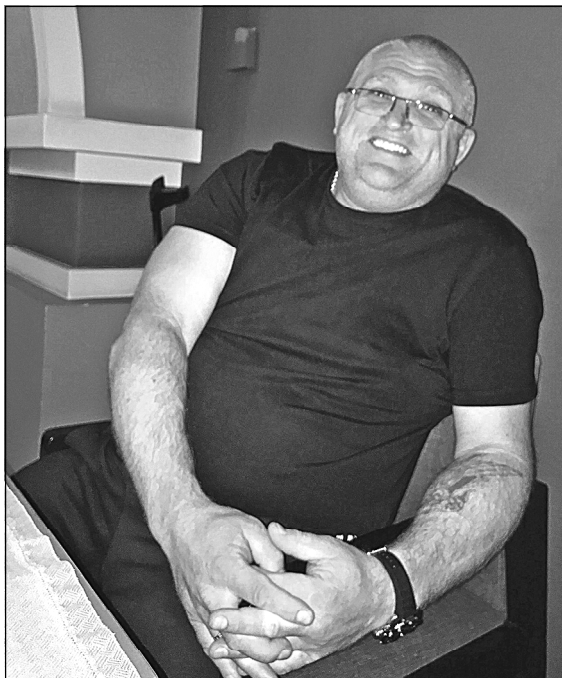
To my greatest surprise I was released on parole despite the fact that I was a malicious violator of the detention regime. When I was released in 2001 and came to church, I made a covenant with the Lord by a holy baptism of water.

After I was released I got a job as a janitor. I swept, plowed the snow, scraped the ice. My buddies came to see me with a broom in my hands. They said they got me hooked on a broom. The fact is that my former way of life did not allow me to pick up a broom or a rag, but I understood that if I did not break everything that I built in myself in all those years as a criminal then nothing good will come of me.

As time went on, we served the homeless, drug addicts and alcoholics with a small team. There I met my future wife. She came to church two years before me. Before that, she had been on drugs for eleven years but the Lord saved her and in 2003 we got married. However, immediately after the wedding I was in the hospital because of a recurrence of tuberculosis of the lungs. From there I was transferred to another hospital where I had a stone removed from my kidney.

After the surgery I was diagnosed with lymph node cancer. The metastases were

already in the lungs. My wife and I prayed and asked God to have healthy children. When Olga became pregnant, all the doctors unanimously said that it was necessary to abort the child as this put her life in danger. According to the doctors, the drugs she used to take had a 100 % malformation rate of the fetus in the womb and at best she would give birth to a freak, and at worst neither she nor the child would to survive. But we said that we believed in



God and that if He decided to give us a child, so be it. However, we had to write a statement to remove the responsibility from doctors in case of death. Nevertheless, Olga gave birth to a perfectly healthy child without any defects. Today our daughter is fourteen years old, and we thank God for her.

While the Lord gave us a daughter and I was diagnosed with cancer, I was in the hospital with kidney tuberculosis and once again realized that I could die, but God gave peace and calm to my heart. I decided that I should go to the pastor to pray for me with the laying of hands, for it is written: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church..." And when I came to this prayer the pastor asked me if I was ready to accept the will of God. I said, "If God tells me to die, can anyone stop it? And if He says to live, can anyone change His decision?" And then the pastor said "We will pray".

When I arrived at the oncology health center for hospitalization, I had to undergo all the procedures again: X-rays, tests and lymph node biopsy. And unexpectedly, the previous diagnosis was not confirmed. I called the doctor who gave me the initial diagnosis but he said that the cancer markers were off the scale and there could be no mistake. I realized that the Lord had healed me again. As a result the oncologist told me that he had good news and bad news. The good one is that I don't have cancer, and the bad news is that I have hip tuberculosis. After that I was transferred to a hospital where people with bone tuberculosis stay. There I was in a cast from my chest down to my feet. The left leg was in the cast completely, and the right leg had a cast down to the knee. They also put a wooden crossbar between the knees. That's how I laid for almost a year. It was a difficult time, but the Lord supported me.

After I was discharged from the hospital I started walking with two crutches. Almost three years every Wednesday and Saturday I visited the maximum security prison No. 14 in Odessa and once a week I went to a service in the regional hospital. In total I was on crutches for eleven years.

But a year ago the issue came up of replacing the joint or amputating the leg. Brothers and sisters from all over the world collected funds for the surgery and eventually I went to Chernivtsi where I was put in the Angelholm clinic. But when they took a blood test and found hepatitis C, and fourth-degree fibrosis, the operation was denied and I had to go back to Odessa.

After coming home, my wife and I bought medicine for two, as she also was found to have hepatitis, and underwent treatment. And when the Lord freed us from hepatitis, the question of the surgery arose again, which required money. But thank God, again brothers and sisters from the church helped and I went to Kyiv. There I had surgery and now I walk without crutches and can better serve my God.

The Lord has led my wife and I in an amazing way through all the trials and difficulties, and now we have two daughters and two grandsons: one seven years old and the other — a year old. I am a prison chaplain, ministering in detention centers and preaching the gospel. I am immensely grateful to the Lord that I can work on His fields and praise His name!



Oleg REUS, Ukraine.

How John Rockefeller once became the richest man in the world

Today, the name Rockefeller is synonymous with such words as success, fame and money. At the end of the nineteenth century John Rockefeller made a fortune which according to Forbes, equals four hundred and nine billion US dollars in today's dollar (accounting for inflation). At the peak of his career, he controlled ninety percent of all-American oil, which according to Fortune magazine makes him the richest man in the history of world.

But few people know that John Rockefeller was a diligent Baptist, sacrificed his first tithe at sixteen and never tried alcohol and cigarettes in his life. But let's start from the beginning.

John Rockefeller was born in a very poor family. His father left them when John was still young, so he was forced to go to work as a teenager. The first job as a clerk brought him pennies, but on the recommendation of his mother, having received the first salary, he donated ten

percent of it to the local church. Qualitatively doing his job, the young John asked that the employer raise his salary. When the employer refused, twenty-year-old John, along with his brother, decided to open their own company.

Starting his business with kerosene and changing it to gasoline in time, Rockefeller was able to make a fortune equal to one and a half percent of the economy of the whole country. Working tirelessly, he became the most famous capitalist in the history of America.

It is said that as a teenager John Rockefeller had two dreams: the first to live a hundred years, and the second to earn one hundred thousand dollars. He almost reached the first one, as he died at the age of ninety-seven years, but for the second dream he more than reached it.

I think that from such a person there is something to learn, so I present 5 things that can be taken as an example from his life.

1. Remain yourself. Despite his fabulous wealth, threats, and constant requests for alms, Rockefeller went to work every day by public transport. They say that in his house there was mediocre furniture and he bought himself a suit once a year. In other words, wealth did not spoil him.

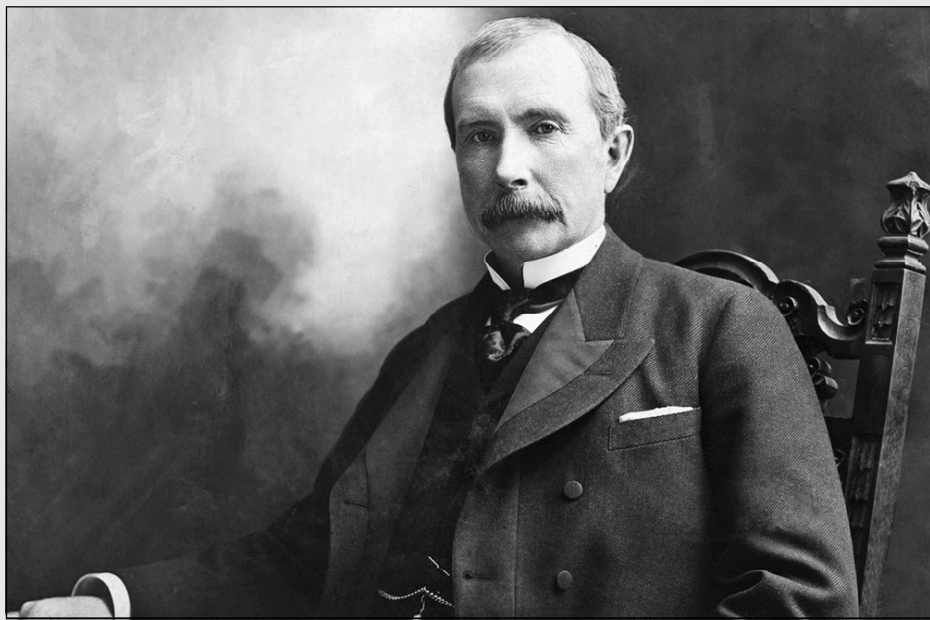
2. Faith in God. John was born into a Christian family and belonged to the Northern Baptist Church, which advocated the abolition of slavery. After moving to New York, John immediately began serving in the independent Eire Street

Baptist Mission Church (later the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church), which eventually became associated with the Northern Baptist Convention (the current name of the convention is American Baptist Churches in the United States). There he taught at Sunday school, preached and even swept the floor from time to time. For him, religion was the driving force, and he believed that faith was the source of his income. "I believe that the power to make money is God's gift. It's my duty as a Christian: firstly, to make

deliver goods to people's homes for free. Keeping quality and offering affordable prices, Rockefeller really crowded out its competitors.

5. Adapting to change. In 1867, John began to make money on kerosene, which at that time was very popular, since it was used as fuel for kerosene lamps.

But when, in 1879, Thomas Edison provided the world with an electric lamp, a threat loomed over John's business. Kerosene, which was used in kerosene lamps, was slowly



money, and secondly, to make as much money as possible in order to give out as much as possible to those in need", he said.

3. Sacrifice. Starting with tithing, John increased his donations until he became the greatest philanthropist of all time (in 1905, the tithe of the Baptist church he donated to amounted to \$100 million). Rockefeller constantly donated finances to churches, missions, medicine and education. With the money donated by him several places where built including the famous University of Chicago, the Rockefeller Medical Institute (later Rockefeller University), and the famous UN headquarters in New York. At the end of his life, John gave away most of his fortune.

At the age of fifty, he withdrew from business to devote himself entirely to charity. To do this, he even hired a Baptist minister, Frederick Gates, to help him distribute his wealth. Frederick told him: "Mr. Rockefeller, your fortune is rolling on you like an avalanche. You must give it faster than you receive. Otherwise, she will crush you, your children and even grandchildren!"

4. The ability to compete. It is believed that John removed competitors at all costs, but this is not so. When he began production of gasoline, the main task was low prices and quality service. At that time the automotive industry was only in its infancy so fuel was sold in a select number of places. The company Standard Oil, founded by him, offered to

forced out of the market by a new invention.

Realizing that times are changing, John decided to switch from kerosene to gasoline. Having hired several chemists, Rockefeller built an oil refinery and founded a new company called Standard Oil. With the increasing number of cars and the growing need for fuel, in just a few years, a company in the United States became a monopolist, employing one hundred thousand people.

In today's world, market changes force corporations out of business. How many of you remember Ericsson, Siemens, BlackBerry or Motorola mobile phones? Why are they not on the market today? Or maybe one of you remembers Maxell, Fuji, TDK, JVC audio cassettes? Time is rapidly changing, and companies that do not understand this on time are leaving the business.

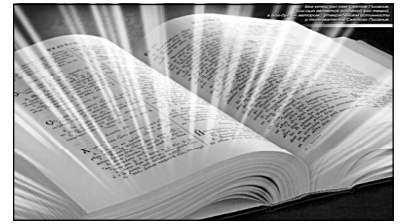
Despite the fact that in 1911, on the personal initiative of President Roosevelt, Standard Oil was divided by the antimonopoly committee into thirty-two companies, the Rockefeller family was able to recover and continue to do business. Today, such giants as Chevron, ExxonMobil, Esso, are direct descendants of the once famous company Standard Oil.

A few years ago, while walking around Manhattan, on Fifth Avenue, I came across a whole complex of nineteen skyscrapers known as the Rockefeller Center. Looking at these huge buildings, I thought: "This is what a simple person's dream and faith can do".

* * * <http://www.romansavochka.com>

PASTOR'S WORD

Sometimes during a journey people are forced to return back to their starting point due to forgetting something or their transportation breaking down. Usually people get upset about it. But what if this happens in the journey of life — when on the way to a goal of their life a person realizes that they missed something important or went in the wrong direction?



A similar case is described in the first two chapters of Deuteronomy. But the reasons for returning were much more serious.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, he miraculously led them across the red sea through the parted waters and through the uninhabited desert. God knew that the Jews would have a difficult task ahead — to seize and to then live in the land of Canaan, which was inhabited by people who were stronger and more numerous than them. Therefore, He prepared them for the road. He allowed them to walk into insurmountable difficulties and before their eyes he solved their problems. He did this so that the Jews would understand who was going with them and who was leading them. The Lord wanted to change their minds, so that in the long run they could rely on Him and trust Him to win great victories.

After manifesting His care, protection, and miracles, God invites them to become His special people to which they gladly agree (**Exodus 19**). God's cultivation of faith in the Jews and teaching them patience and obedience continued all the way to the promised Land. For this reason, God led them in plain sight: at night, with a pillar of fire, and by day, by a cloudy one. At times, the Lord stopped them for a certain period without explanation, then led them further according to His own known schedule. Sometimes the Lord allowed interruptions in the provisions of the bare essentials — to farther develop obedience, patience and trust in God's leadership.

When they came to the promised Land, *flowing with milk and honey*, for which they had made a journey of many months through the wilderness, they stopped. They sent out twelve scouts ahead of them to inspect the land, and they brought back information that was near fatal to the Israelites. Ten of the twelve scouts brought and conveyed to the people their fear and disbelief about the possibility of seizing the land by military means. They supported their report with logical arguments: the cities of the promised land were surrounded by impregnable walls, and the people who inhabit it were strong and tall. After such glorious manifestations of God's care and power, it was unnatural for the Jews to not have complete confidence in such an Almighty God and in the question of land ownership! Two of the twelve scouts had even brought that up. But alas! The vast majority of Jews had not learned to trust God. They did not trust in the involvement of God, with his infinite possibilities, but, instead got frightened by the report of ten spies, crying from seeming despair and saying stupid things. They did not pass the final exam! The caring God is distressed! The ten spies, that infected the Israelites with disbelief were punished and died. The training which lasted over a year was inconclusive. The students did not pay attention. There will be no second chance for them. Their children will be the ones entering the promised land, but only when some time has passed (**Heb. 4:1-2**).

After that, they turned around and were led back to the same Red Sea, which they had earlier crossed and fled from the Egyptians. God now commanded them to go in the opposite direction from the long-awaited goal, away from the promised land. Now they had much time to reason and analyze their unbelief in God and the rebellion that followed.

In either way, God ended up telling them: *Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea (Deut. 1:39-40).*

Was it easy to go back to Egypt, which just a little more than a year ago they had fled? And this is just after they already anticipated an end to this tiresome journey and managed to inhale the fragrance of the fruit of the promised Land? No, that was obviously not easy. However, so commanded the Lord!

In this return, and even in the death of the older generation, God had displayed his justice and wisdom. God used this situation to teach his people something. It is not so important when they will be in the promised Land, as it is important the quality and condition of their hearts. And it was for the attainment of this right state that God taught them these painful lessons.

As God lead the people of Israel back, he performed a great work on the souls of the younger generation. And although it was necessary on a daily basis to bury seventy-two people, or more than four tons of human bodies, it was not in vain. Together with the dying Jews they buried unbelief and disobedience. And if the older generation could not serve as a good example for the younger one in how to believe and be obedient to God, then the younger generation could learn from their failed example on how to believe. **And that, too, is instructive.**

Deut. 8:2-5 — *And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered*

PASTOR'S WORD

DEALING WITH OUR MISTAKES

thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.

The right attitude to ones mistakes can serve as a lesson for the future. If only we were to not justify ourselves and not leave these instructive moments unnoticed. After all, the analysis of one's previous life and lifestyle and the completion of a fair trial over oneself is one of the most blessed instruments for spiritual growth. Judgment on oneself is important not only to restore the lost relationship with God, but also to correct the recurring mistakes of the past! And it works very simply, just as in time of injuries and misfortunes we do not remember about minor scratches: where they occurred and under what conditions. But the deeper the wound and the more pain we have experienced in connection with it, the greater the likelihood that we will remember the circumstances under which it happened. And this should be a warning to us from repeating our past mistakes.

However, some people are stuck in their past due to the fact that they are blaming someone who, in their opinion, was the cause of their failures. This is not constructive thinking, but rather the influence of one's sinful nature seeking self-justification. This is what deprives people of their future. They will go on deprived of the great blessings prepared by God.

It is important that judgment is conducted under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who does not condemn the innocent and does not justify sin. A fair trial is usually preceded by a study of oneself, about which the Bible speaks repeatedly:

Zeph. 2:1 — *Examine yourself carefully...*

2 Cor. 13:5 — *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

What is a fair trial of oneself and how is it performed?

In response to this important question, we must note that all human affairs will be brought to God's judgment, good or bad. And before the white throne of the last judgment (**Rev. 20:11-12**), the defendants will be deprived of the opportunity to change something. But in our lives such an opportunity exists. This was the case with the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, who at a certain time in his life deeply realized his guilt, humbled himself, and was pardoned by God (**1 Kings 21:29**).

Ecl. 12:14 — *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Rev. 20:11-15 — *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

Gal. 6:7 — *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Christians have the privilege of judging themselves — in order to avoid God's judgment

Some may ask: *So is the sacrifice of Christ not enough for our forgiveness? Didn't He sentence judgment for us?*

You can ask counter-questions to this: *And what judgment does the Word of God speak of? But was it not enough for the Corinthian sinner (1 Cor. 5) to sacrifice Christ for forgiveness, that the apostle Paul decided to betray him to Satan in the exhaustion of the flesh, so that the spirit would be saved?*

It turns out that there is a huge difference between unconscious sins that are the result of spiritual infancy, and the arbitrary, voluntary, conscious sins of those who have long believed and who are in the covenant with God. This is a completely different attitude.

1 Cor. 11:31-32 — *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*

Self-trial, like any other trial, is aimed at establishing justice in accordance with established laws.

A fair trial of oneself should be carried out for the following main reasons:

- in satisfaction of divine justice,
- for personal correction,
- to avoid God's judgment.

During life on earth, a person has the opportunity to judge himself, to be condemned by the world. But it imposes responsibility on the person acting as the judge as they need to be true and honest in bringing justice on themselves.

The Bible, conscience, and the Holy Spirit helps us in this regard. If a man judges himself rightly, then Christ will act as a lawyer and a defender, justifying the repentant, but if a man justifies himself while guilty, then God is forced to act as a judge. And if the Lord judges a person here on earth during their lifetime, it is good, because the case will not be transferred to the last judgment, where nothing can change.

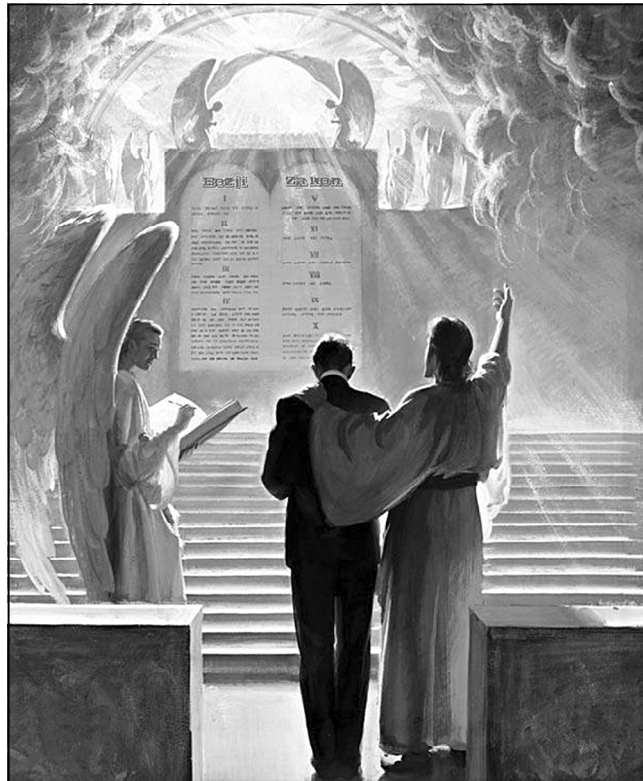
The biblical character Assaf once spoke of the trial of the slaughter: **Psalm 72:13-14** — *...was it not in vain that I purified my heart, and washed my hands in innocence, and exposed myself to wounds every day, and reproaches every morning?*

How did he do it? How did Assaf expose himself to wounds? After all, a Christian has no right to injure or mutilate their body since it is a temple of the Holy Spirit living in it and it belongs to God. So what wounds is Assaf talking about?

1 Cor. 6:19-20 — *do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought at a high price. Therefore glorify God both in your bodies and in your souls, which are the essence of God.*

Obviously, we are talking about psychological wounds from healthy self-condemnation. Because judgement needs to be carried out morally on his mentality that is a carrier of an old, broken nature. After all, it is this which is the culprit of all sinful inclinations and distortions from/of the will of God. Bringing himself pain, a person contributes to the fact that in the future, given the psychological pain experienced, he will avoid unnecessary mistakes in decision-making.

The more pain, the stronger the memory. Judgment upon oneself, upon the manifestations of one's old nature, is the work of God. Thus, the spirit of man who is the representative of God, wins if they choose to condemn in ourselves our old fleshly selves, who after the fall of man began to express itself often. Thus, the Christian who judges themselves



participates in the process of expelling from their flesh the remnants of the devil's inheritance, which we all received after our ancestors sinned in the garden of Eden. This inheritance is often referred as Adam's (old) nature.

Gal. 5:16-18 — *I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh, for the flesh desires against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: they are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. If you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.*

The process for judgment means the following:

• Accusation of sins (thanks to conscience and the Holy Spirit).

John 16:8 — *...and He, coming, will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment...*

Rom. 2:15 — *...they show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, as evidenced by their conscience and their thoughts, then accusing, then justifying one another.*

• Careful Examination. This process involves the consciousness and will of man.

Zeph. 2:1 — *Examine yourself carefully...*

2 Cor. 13:5 — *Test yourselves whether you are in the faith; examine yourself.*

• Regret for what has been done, repentance and confession.

Jer. 3:13 — *Only admit your guilt...*

1 John 1:9 — *If we confess our sins, He, being faithful and righteous, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Let me remind you that we are not talking about unbelieving people for the first time turning to God with repentance. In regard to them, the Bible says:

2 Cor. 5:19 — *...because God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself, not imputing their crimes to men...*

All that has been done in the world by unbelieving people who do not know the truth is forgiven by turning to God with repentance.

But now we are talking about Christians who have known the truth, are born again, have made a Covenant with God and deliberately sin. It is in the absence of judgement of ourselves we are experiencing God's punishment for any sins at the unescapable judgement at the white throne after death.

And yet the question remains: **What sentence can a man pass upon himself when he discovers a sin?**

It depends on whether the sin was an unconscious mistake or a deliberate and a conscious crime. For unintentional sins, it is sometimes sufficient to forestall the process of judgment and turn to the Calvary sacrifice, through which we obtain forgiveness. But with regard to conscious, intentional, arbitrary sins, there is a different approach. On this occasion, the New Testament says:

Heb. 10:26 — *For if we, having received the knowledge of the truth, sin arbitrarily, there is no more sacrifice for sins...*

1 Cor. 11:31-32 — *For if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. If we are judged, we are punished by the Lord, so as not to be condemned with the world.*

One of the most effective sentences we can pass on ourselves is confession in front of witnesses (not secret). It contains elements of self-realization. This is just what our old nature is very afraid of. This is a blow to our image, which carnal people carefully guard. This is what king David of Israel understood, as seen in the reading of these verses:

Psalm 51:17 — *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite (repentant) heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

And as a result of this correct understanding, David writes a song (**Psalm 51**), in which he condemns himself for his conscious crime, and gives it to sing in the house of God, where thousands of Israelites came. No, he did not hide his crime, but he confessed and found a way to make his sin public. This is the judgment!

Psalm 51:2-5 — *Wash me many times from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I am conscious of my iniquities, and my sin is always before me. To you, to You I have sinned with one accord, and have done evil in Your sight, so that you are righteous in your judgment and pure in your judgment.*

But, following the further biblical narrative, however, it can be seen that the repentant David did not escape the just punishment of God for his self-conscious sin.

We see that this principle also applies to New Testament Christians. After repentance in conscious sins, a Christian can experience the joy of restoring a lost relationship with the Lord, the consolation of the Holy spirit, but at the same time can pursue a just punishment, so that there are no claims later.

And the restoration of relations with God is one thing, the retribution for perfectly conscious sins is another.

For arbitrary sins, God judges, and the punishment depends on the depth of repentance and on the measure of God's knowledge, that is, on the spiritual age of the sinner. The magnitude of God's penalty is quite different: to a person who repents and judges himself, it will not be the same as to a person who acts lightly with regard to their sins.

1 Peter 4:17-19 — *For the time has come for the judgment to begin with the house of God; but if it first begins with us, what end is there for those who disobey the Gospel of God?*

Today, it is more and more noticeable how the judgment of oneself is leaving the daily practice of the Christian people. Because of this, many Christians remain with pronounced manifestations of the old nature, such as pride, resentment, search for their own, selfishness and thirst for entertainment.

Isaiah 59:15 — *Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey; and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.*

Isaiah 59:8 — *The ways of the world they do not know, and there is no judgment in their paths; their ways are crooked, and no one who walks in them knows the world.*

We shall not lose the opportunity given to us to test, to examine, and if necessary, to judge ourselves. All in order to reflect Christ and his character in our lifetimes, in order to appear before Him undefiled and blameless (**2 Peter 3:14**)!

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

“For to me, to live is Christ...” (Philippians 1:21)

Hello, dear editorial office of the newspaper “Prisoner”. I want to testify what our Lord Jesus Christ did in my sinful life. I know that many people joyfully read your newspaper, and the majority of them are in prison. When I was in prison I myself liked to read something for killing time. Unfortunately, I was there not for faith, but for venal crimes.

My name is Yuri. I was born and raised in Kyiv in the old district of Nyvky. I was raised by a single mother. My childhood was at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. Since it was difficult for my mother to earn and educate me at the same time, I spent a lot of time with friends on the streets. I tried nicotine, alcohol and drugs very early.

I have always been attracted by companies of older children. This led to the fact that I began to engage in criminal activity: theft, robbery, etc... And of course, I liked drugs. At first, I liked this lifestyle. However, I wanted to be a “cool guy”. Neither the prison nor the people who were robbed by me scared me.

I went to jail as soon as I turned eighteen for the first time. I was caught for house invasion. Being in the pretrial detention center, I was thinking about the meaning of life for the first time. One of the reasons is the Gospel book I got in my hands. Of course, I did not understand much in it (almost nothing), but, nevertheless, it opened up a different world for me. Because of this, I increasingly wanted to start my life from scratch. As a result, I began to pray to the Lord and ask Him to help me, and the miracle came at some point. I was released by the court. The judge gave adjournment of sentence. Unfortunately, I again started the old life.

After the release, my self-esteem went up even more because I was proud by the fact that I was in jail. My life outside of jail



did not last long; I was again wanted for apartment thefts.

I really didn't want to go to jail and more often remembered about God. It seemed to me that if He helps me to get out of these problems, my life will definitely change. Unfortunately, I did not stop using drugs or doing criminal activities although my mother agreed to sell an apartment in Kyiv and go to the suburbs to save me. However, the change of residence did not do anything. I found the same friends in Brovary and ended up in jail very soon.

And again, God was knocking on my heart. Once again, I began to read the Gospel, and after a year and a half I was pardoned. While sitting in prison I was thinking: “Well, that's it! Now I'll get my life together. I'll work like all normal people”.

Upon my release, I got a decent job and income but I returned to the drugs again. Drugs did not stop me from meeting a good girl and starting to live with her. It so happened that I lived a double life. There was enough money for both myself and my family.

This could not continue for a long time. My sinful nature did not allow me to stay at this job and I quit. However, the necessary dose of drugs was already too large to be able to quit immediately at that time. I ended up returning to my past ways and immediately ended up in jail. After that my girlfriend broke up with me and everything became as before: me, God and circumstances.

When I went to jail for the third time, my health was already low. However, I really wanted to live. And again the Gospel fell into my hands again. One of the cellmates I had known for a long time wrote a prayer of repentance on a piece of paper for me. He said that it will help me since I am reading the Bible. And you know it really began to function in my life! I quit smoking and cursed less. I began to live differently even while I was in prison. As a result I was again released from the courtroom without evidence proving my guilt. However, when the handcuffs were unfastened and I was released I returned to my former life forgetting about God and about the promise to Him.

In less than three months I was called to stand before a judge. I was told that the case was returned from further investigation and that I will be imprisoned. I realized that soon I will be going to prison again. It so happened that at the same time I was offered to go for rehabilitation. I was promised that if I behave well, they will make a certificate from the church for the court. I realized that it is possible to kill two birds with one stone: get free of drug

addiction and imprisonment if I am lucky. I agreed.

When I entered the rehabilitation center, I immediately felt that I am at home. I saw people who could easily be called “former users of drugs” even though I was told that it is impossible to be a “former”. Their love captivated me, although I had a difficult character. After a few days I repented and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at a meeting in the church. And the Lord began to change me. I got real freedom: I was no longer drawn to either smoking, drinking, or anything else! I wanted to know the Lord and serve Him.

In the church I met our pastor who was involved in prison ministry. His name is Victor Mural-Sikorsky. I really wanted him to include me in the list of prison ministers so I could visit different prisons. I had a great desire to tell everyone that there is a way out and that this way out is in Christ! Meanwhile, I began to serve in a rehabilitation center.

I had a long trial and when I was finally sentenced for four years, I realized that my real prison ministry began. God Himself included me in the list of prison ministers, and I can serve Him with my life. In prison, I met many of my old friends whom I began to testify of Christ. Unfortunately, most of them did not understand me thinking that I had lost my mind. On the contrary, I acquired my mind! The Lord has changed me and is still changing me. I was released on the condition of house arrest two years later.

Today I continue to serve God, Who has given me much more than I asked and deserve. He radically changed my life. I still go to jails but as His servant. Now I am responsible for the prison ministry in the central region. I am married, have a son and love God very much.



Yury YAKUSHENKO, Ukraine.

“MY MOTHER HAD AN ABORTION IN THE EIGHTH MONTH

A newborn girl who weighs just over a kilogram lay in wires and tubes in a block for newborns on August 29, 1977. There were no alarmed parents nearby who would hold the baby's hand desperately wanting her to survive. Mother of Melissa Ohden left the Iowa hospital believing that the baby died as a result of a saline abortion.

The abortion was unsuccessful but Melissa's mother had no idea for thirty-six years that the child had survived. After Melissa learned about the dramatic beginning of her life, she spent almost two decades trying to find the answers. She found out that the biological mother did not want to have an abortion. Melissa also learned that she is alive thanks to a nurse, who heard the weak cry of a thrown away child as medical waste. In a series of terrible details, it turned out that another nurse was on duty that day. She instructed others to “leave the child in the room to die”. Unbelievable fact is that heartless nurse was the grandmother of the baby.

These facts would make the other person embittered and cruel, but Melissa who was adopted by a loving family, reunited with her biological mother last year. She found the strength to forgive.

“I found out that when my mother was nineteen, she was forced to have an abortion by

her grandmother, who worked as a nurse in a hospital. Mother didn't know that I survived. Thirty years passed before she found out the truth. It was a long and painful journey from shame and anger to faith and forgiveness”.

Battle to Live

Doctors at Sioux City Hospital in Iowa estimated that Melissa's mother was in her thirty-first week of pregnancy when she had a saline abortion, a method that is no longer used in the United States and Great Britain. Melissa suffered from Hepatitis B, respiratory distress and seizures. It was expected that even if she survives, she would have vision, hearing and developmental delays. The girl was transferred to a hospital in Iowa City three weeks later. The nurses who took care of the baby gave her clothes and booties. One of the nurses named Mary decided that the newborn should be named; she named her Katie Rose. At the age of three months, the baby left the hospital. She was adopted by Linda and Ron Ohden. The couple also adopted another girl named Tammy four years earlier.

For many years, her foster parents and nurse Mary kept in touch by postcards, letters and photographs. When Melissa grew up, she also



began to communicate with Mary.

“Our friendship with Mary has been going on for several decades. It made me feel special because the nurse looked after me when no one else did”.

By the age of five, Melissa progressed in her development and was completely healthy.

The Bombshell Moment

Parents never hid from their daughters that they are foster. “Tammy and I constantly argued like all ordinary sisters. During one of the fights when I was fourteen, she blurted out: ‘At least my parents wanted me!’

I ran to my foster parents and they told me that I survived after a failed abortion. They did not want me to know

this. My world collapsed that evening. I was angry, scared and felt guilty for surviving”.

Melissa spent most of her teenage years with enormous emotional burden. She developed bulimia and became addicted to drugs and alcohol.

“I was drinking heavily to numb the pain. But my parents never realized how much I was hurting because I was so good at hiding it”.

The Search for Truth

Melissa pulled herself together and headed off to the University of South Dakota to study political science. She would later learn that her biological mother had attended there as well. And astonishingly, her maternal grandmother — the very woman who orchestrated the abortion — was a professor at the university during the time Melissa was there. “I didn't know this at the time of course, but I look back and wonder if we ever unwittingly crossed paths”, said Melissa.

At 19, the desire to know more about her background eat away at her and she began her search to find her birth family. There was little information on her adoption papers, so their identities were a mystery. Coincidentally, she soon ended up moving to Sioux City, where the failed abortion had taken place, which gave her the

chance to search local records. She pored over phonebooks, newspapers on microfiche, and year books at the library, not knowing her birth mother's name but looking for someone who looked like herself. She also put an advert in the local newspaper appealing for anyone with information to come forward, but to no avail. After years of futile hunting, Melissa came across a startling lead when she was 30. “I knew my maternal grandparents' surname and where they had been employed, so that was a big piece of the puzzle”, she said. “I was flicking through a nursing college year book when I came across a woman, I suspected was my grandmother. I still didn't know at this stage her full role in what happened”. She sent them a letter, but only her grandfather wrote back. “He said my live birth was not the intention the day I was born. He also made it clear I wouldn't find my birth mother through them because they were estranged from her. It was evident their relationship with my mother was never the same after my birth. I couldn't put my finger on it but I knew then something sinister had gone on”.

Questions and Answers

Melissa left the search for a short time. She was already married to Ryan by then. Now

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

I had an unhappy childhood. My family members were not believers and I knew nothing about God. I was raised according to street rules. I dropped out of school in fifth grade. I was active in sports, first freestyle wrestling then horseback sports. However it did not stop me from smoking cigarettes and marijuana. I aspired to become a leader and did not want to give up leadership to anyone. Before all my peers, I used a knife and then a gun. I embarked on a criminal path and soon got in jail.

while I was bleeding and called doctors. After that I started thinking that maybe my life will be happier outside. I began to wait for my release.

When I was in prison, I was in different situations but I always tried to keep my honor and decency. These qualities were the meaning of my life.

I was released at thirty-three years old, at the age of Christ. I decided to celebrate my birthday but I got into a terrible accident which resulted in a torn liver and spleen,

times killing the people inside. Once I got out of the car for a few minutes, meanwhile the car was shot up and only one person survived. Another time, my car was shot from a very close range, the bullets hit my seat but I somehow survived. There was also an attempt when the bullets hit the stereo player and glove compartment. Something protected me from death. I thought I was some kind of special and lucky. There were two more terrible accidents in my life but I still survived.

eyes. I have never seen anything comparable in my life. All these people wished me well and good health, they prayed for me. I began to come there more often.

Doctors were telling me that my leg is not completely healed and if a blood clot come loose I will die immediately. They did not allow walking but I still went to church. Pastor Vazha prayed for me. During the prayer I suddenly felt relief. Something changed in my body. When I

Everyone Chooses Their Own Path in Life

I was almost killed at a young age. Someone stabbed a knife under my shoulder blade. It touched my heart but by some miracle I survived. This attempt did not stop me. On the contrary, I began to strive for self-affirmation in the criminal world. I met some "real" thieves at the age of seventeen. I was inspired by their ideas.

I did not spend much time out of prison after my first release. My second term was in a high security prison. There were many more after the second one: Tbilisi prison, Pokrov, Vladimir, Zlatoust. These were my worst times. Officers tried to break my character and turn me away from the criminal lifestyle. However, I still endured all the horrors.

While being in prison (a total was seventeen years and four months), I met believers and even liked to philosophize with them. Unfortunately I didn't progress beyond conversations. It seemed too submissive for me which was not characteristic of me. In addition, I had many other things going on because I was entrusted with the lives of many people.

I led the masses, strove for life, and at twenty-six became a "thief in law". I had met many thieves. One was nicknamed Mistress. His mother was a believer. I often talked to him about his mother and her faith. She really wanted her son to become a believer. However, he had other goals and was devoted to the criminal life.

My position in the criminal world did not bring me satisfaction. Because of this, I once tried to commit a suicide in a cell. I cut my veins but someone saw me



Vitaly KOZYREV today

If I tell my story in details it will take up many volumes. However I want to tell the main story: how I became a believer. I have often been in hospitals. One day I was in a serious physical condition. I was tormented by pains from which I could not fall asleep. A pastor named Vazha came to visit. He prayed for me and my pains went away. I quickly fell asleep.

When I was in the hospital for the last time, the doctors said that I had three or four days left to live. They notified all my relatives and asked them to prepare for my death. My sister remembered Pastor Vazha and called him. Vazha came with his friend, preacher Misha from Kyiv. They immediately began to pray for me. Then other believers came from his church and also prayed. After the prayers a miracle began to happen. The diseases went away and my body grew stronger. When the doctors came to look at me for the third time they did not see me because I left the hospital without any help. I immediately came to the believers who rejoiced very much in seeing me. They sang and praised God; I listened to their words. Then they invited me to the church. I went with them and met there again with Pastor Vazha. All the believers began to pray for me. Next time I came to the church Pastor Vazha asked: "Can you talk about how God healed you?" I agreed. There were a lot of people. When I began to speak I saw warmth in many

left the church, I thought that I would no longer go to the hospital but instead I would devote my life to God and He decides if I live or die. God did not want me to die; on the contrary, He began to help me. He freed me from drug addiction and continues to heal me.

Now I soberly look at everything. I study and weigh the Word of God. I see how God acts in my life; therefore, I am becoming stronger and stronger in faith. How can I not believe in Him when my whole body, except my spine and brain, was disfigured and broken? Now I can play soccer. Inwardly I became a different person and absolutely do not regret that I became a follower of Jesus Christ entrusting my life to Him. I weighed and analyzed all my ways and realized that they led me to hell. The Word of God leads me to eternal life in heaven. There were different things in my life but now I don't even want to think about it. Everyone chooses his or her own life path. I chose my own path with God. I have many friends and acquaintances and I know that if someone explains to them clearly and intelligibly who God is and what He has done for us, they will never reject Him.

There are many different people around us and I want them to become Christians who believe in Jesus Christ. I can't talk about God as well as those who have believed in Him for a long time but I ask everyone: "Show me a different, correct, righteous and beautiful path than the one shown by Jesus Christ? What could be better?"

Vitaly KOZYREV, Russia.

OF PREGNANCY BUT I SURVIVED"



they have two daughters; the eldest was born at the same hospital where Melissa was born.

When Melissa was thirty-six, a cousin of her biological mother contacted her. He said that her parents were college students.

"My mother was in sports; she had an irregular menstrual cycle so she did not realize that she was pregnant with me. I was told that she did not want to have an abortion but my grandparents did not approve her relationship with my father. It was a shock for me because I was thinking many

years that my mother did not want me. I was worried that my mother had to go through this. I found out that my mother's sister came to the hospital and tried to get her out but the staff said it was already too late".

Melissa wondered how she could be adopted without her mother's consent. She came to the conclusion that the signature was simply faked.

Reunion

Finally, a mother's cousin helped Melissa contact her mother after seventeen years of searching.

"I can't even remember who wrote first but I remember that we were both shocked. My mother did not think that I am alive. We talked before meeting for three years. I think we were both afraid of failure. Then I gathered my strength and offered to see each other. She enthusiastically agreed. At first I wanted to run away when we met last May. I was scared. We hugged and cried. She felt a great guilt but I told her that I do not blame her for anything. I also forgive my father and grandmother".

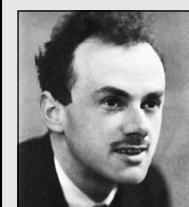
Melissa found out that her grandmother passed away a few years ago. She also found out that she has two stepsisters. Melissa has already seen one of them and plans to meet with the other in the near future. She also saw her mother several times and maintains constant contact with her.

Melissa released a book about her life. She is also a founder of a community for supporting abortion survivors.

"I keep in touch with two hundred and twenty-three survivors of abortion; they are mainly from the United States. Thanks to my faith I learned to forgive. It doesn't make what happened okay, but it releases you from the pain. We are all human and we all make mistakes. We are all human beings and we make mistakes".

<https://dailymail.co.uk>

QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE



Paul Adrien Maurice DIRAC (english theoretical physicist)

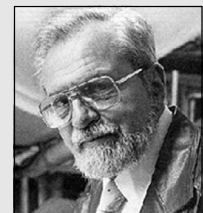
"God is a mathematician of a very high order, and He used very advanced mathematics in constructing the universe. Our feeble attempts at mathematics enable us to understand a bit of the universe, and as we proceed to develop higher and higher mathematics, we can hope to understand the universe better".

Frank Frederick BORMAN (a retired United States Air Force colonel, aeronautical engineer, businessman, and NASA astronaut)



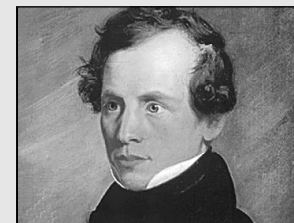
He was the commander of Apollo 8, the first mission to fly around the Moon, and together with crewmates Jim Lovell and Bill Anders, became the first of 24 humans to do so. To Gagarin's statement that he didn't see God in space, Frank Borman answered very succinctly: "I also did not see Him, but I saw traces of His presence".

Josef Allen HYNEK (an American astronomer, professor, and ufologist; best remembered for his UFO research)



"I know very few scientists who told me that they are atheists. I know many astronomers who are definitely religious people. They have a great respect for the Universe and for the One who created it. Faith in God does not matter if it does not appear in a person's daily life".

Samuel Finley Breese MORSE (an American painter and inventor)



He invented the telegraph and Morse code was named after him. The first words of the telegraph message were taken from the Bible: "What hath God wrought!" (Numbers 23:23). Morse was a Christian who undoubtedly glorified God.

The first few months after I decided to follow the Lord I ended up being under a lot of influential movement in which faith appeared quite often. I started reading books dedicated to this theme but after some time, I felt that there was a lot of repetition and I felt like I was walking in a circle. Perhaps, that is the reason why everything that concerned faith became a boring matter.

Imagine that you were being fed something and you were told that it was borsht but it was soup that had undercooked cabbage with some tomato paste added in. And then, when someone actually invites you to eat borsht, you recall the soup with the strange look and taste and you gracefully decline the offer without knowing what you were actually saying no to.

I think we are discouraged to search for depth and authenticity because there are so many shallow teachings out there. Encountering a spiritual fake does not only bring us to disappointment but it also kills the search for that depth for many years to come.

Shallow teachings on faith lead us to underestimate the meaning of faith in its relation to God. Later, when I read the Holy Bible, I suddenly realized that in our relationship with God, faith is the key factor without which it is impossible to please God. I am grateful to God that He helped me overcome the disappointment and revived the desire to delve into the nature of faith! Such thoughts and reflections are listed in this article.

A shallow approach to faith causes us to call a devout believer a non-believer. We can even state that we lost our faith when in reality our faith is sky-high. It is a rather uneasy moment in our life when our faith does not really look like faith.

Apostle Paul tells Timothy: *Fight the good fight of faith...* (1 Timothy 6:12) Because we do not believe, our life has and will continue to have many troubles. Jesus came to Nazareth and could not do anything there because of the people's disbelief. According to Scripture, most of the blessings that do not come to our life do not come into our life due to our disbelief. God acts only according to our faith. We hear the testimonies: God healed my illness; He fixed my financial hardships and living needs; He gave me the chance to give birth to a child, etc. We hear these stories and know that all of this happens because people asked and believed. However, this is a single "but".

In the original text, the word *feat* sounds like *agony*. When we speak of agony, we talk about a very unpleasant experience. In other words we can say that Paul said the following, *Timothy, go through everything with dignity when your faith experiences agony*. You have to agree that when we pray for a certain person or ourselves and we get that healing, we cannot call that agony. We cannot say that in that moment (of answered prayer) we experienced torment. On the contrary we feel wonderful, rejoicing, and life seems to be bright and wonderful.

Let us turn our attention to the "biggest believer" chapter in the Bible (Hebrews 11) and read the excerpt from verse 33 to verse 35: *...who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.*

These are the testimonies that we publish in mass media. We invite people and say, "Tell us what God did in your life". This is faith. Yet, the downside of modern Christianity is that our faith ends in the first half of verse 35 in Hebrews 11. The letter of faith continues. Later, it tells us: *Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised...* (Hebrews 11:35-39).

Are you familiar with the feeling you get when you listen to the testimony of a mother

who prayed for her son's healing and he was healed while you are the woman who prayed just as hard but instead you buried your son because he did not make it. Or that feeling when people tell you how they prayed and now instead of being stuck in two little rooms they moved into a spacious home while you have been living in the same quarters for decades struggling with the size limitations while your prayers were no worse? Apostle Peter is in prison when an angel opens the door for him and he walked out but other heroes of faith prayed and the doors remained shut. They ended up dying in prison. We do not like the latter type of testimonies. They make us feel sad and lower our heads. They lead us to ask questions for which we cannot find answers to and we do not understand why someone prayed and received while

A FEAT OF FAITH

another prayed and did not receive. And then someone tells you, "You just did not have enough faith". Scripture, however, tells us, *there were other who had a different experience. They did not believe any less. They did not pray any less. They just had a different outcome.* I think that is what the feat of faith is.

The key sayings are found in verse 39 in chapter 11 of Hebrews: *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised...*

This is a paradoxical statement. The God who never lies gives a promise and the people who were given this promise did not receive what they were promised. Does this not turn your Christian perspective upside down?

Looking over these verses leads us to another important moment that is noted twice: *might gain an even better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35) and something better for us (Hebrews 11:40)*. We need to grasp one very important thought that will continue to find support in the duration of this article. If we are believers and we trust in the Lord but we do not receive that what God has promised us in His Word, there is a single reason for this — God prepared something far better for us. There are many passages in the Bible to support this but I would like to bring a single example to your attention. We can learn a lot from the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

The Holy Bible tells us that they were people who always acted according to God's commandments. They read that if they were to fulfill God's commandments then God would bless their fields, property, ancestors, and that the wife would be fertile. As a priest, Zechariah most likely had his own copy of the Holy Scriptures that he turned to after a long work day. They probably sat together with his wife in the evenings and read together. They certainly had to have the question, "Why are we not getting these blessings?" Those around them probably looked suspiciously at Elizabeth and would say, "It looks like she and Zechariah have some sins in their life". This is exactly why later Elizabeth says, "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people". Her neighbors also read the Law (Torah) and they knew that the righteous would be blessed and have children while Zechariah and his wife did not. Neither Elizabeth nor Zechariah had an answer for this question. They were perplexed. God promised and did not give what He promised. Yet, they continued to pray. I think they continued to pray until the end of her child-bearing years. But then came the day when Elizabeth informed Zechariah that it was too late to pray when she thought she could no longer get pregnant.

We see two faithful people but the promises that they read about were not fulfilled. Why did they not step away from God? Why didn't Zechariah take off his priest attire the day Elizabeth told him that she could no longer have children? Why did he not leave everything behind and say, "How can I serve before a God who lies?"

This is all because the Bible says that there is a time when our faith is taken to another level... a feat... when our entire being argues with itself and you do not have any answers but you still manage to take the next step of faith with the help of love.

You say, "I love God even though I do not understand Him". And when the enemy asks, "Where is your God?" You answer the question with another question, "Where else do I go? He has the source of eternal life!"

Once, I caught myself wondering that my life has some burning issues. I also understood that if I leave God then my issues will vastly multiply. And Zechariah and Elizabeth continued to follow after God. Zechariah continued to come to the temple even though the "why" remained within. Yet, he and Elizabeth continued to serve God. And do you know what happened? An angel came to him at a time when Zechariah was no longer expecting anything.

Some teachers of faith think that Zechariah was an unbeliever because he told the angel that it was too late since he

unanswered, this means that God is preparing something far better for us. Sadly, not all of God's children agree to walk this path to the end. When Christians only make it halfway, their disbelief strengthens. When they complete their path, their faith becomes remarkably strong. Elizabeth lived through mockery and Job's friends thought he had hidden sins.

On construction sites Christians worked with former inmates. Christians and hooligans did not become Communist Pioneers. This is not the best association for believers when they were having their feat of faith. However, this is a feat when you continue to have faith despite everything else.

*God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways all our*

*lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.*

*God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care.*

*God hath not promised smooth roads
and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep.*

Anne Johnson Flint

Did Timothy need to have feats of faith? Apostle Paul was a man who outstretched his hand and the dead would revive. Timothy was a young man and you know what Timothy had? A sick stomach and frequent ailments. Instead of rebuking Timothy's faith with "Timothy, focus on your faith! When will your faith be sufficient for healing?" Or, "Timothy, wait a little longer. I will come and lay my hands on you and because of God's grace on me, I have the gift of healing", Apostle Paul turns to giving Timothy pharmacological advice.

I can imagine Timothy amongst people who thought that faith is only miracles. I think they served as a reason for his disappointment. Yet, Paul knew that God who could resurrect and heal among other miracles would stop and say "not this time". Paul knew how strange Timothy could feel from seeing Paul heal others while he himself would grab at his stomach from pain. How is that? And through this all, the Bible considers Timothy a Believer with a capital B. These are the moments when Christians are to pray, "God, I absolutely do not understand You but I will continue to follow after you. May Your will be done!"

In my life, I had a situation where God could change everything in a single instant. Yet, He did not change anything. Those around me would rebuke me. I would listen to sermons and others words but I would feel worse and worse. I felt bad knowing that God could change everything in a moment but He refrained from doing so. When my condition reached its peak, I went to a secluded place and told God, "Lord, I am starting to think you do not love me with everything happening right now. But I still choose to follow you. I choose to believe Your Word".

Something happened in that moment. Day by day, things started to get a bit better. Perhaps, someone is in a similar situation. They are listening to someone's testimony and instead of being happy for the person, they exclaim, "Lord, why don't you change my situation?" Know that these words do not mean you do not have faith. This means that in this moment you need even more faith and this is what **Hebrews 11:36** talks about. Notice: These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Maybe your "better" will come after your resurrection from the dead, but God never lied to anyone and those who put their trust in Him will receive what they await. May this article serve as an encouragement for the believers not an excuse for their disbelief. May each reader remain honest before God, before the church, and before their own self!



**Presbyter Vladimir MENSHIKOV,
Perm, Russia.**



*Drawing by
Igor OSOKIN,
Russia*

and his wife were old. I hear as these "teachers of faith" tell Zechariah "You have broken the law of positive confession! You did not proclaim words of faith! This is why nothing works out for you!" No, there is such faith that can say something contrary. Sara, for instance, laughed at the words of the angel while Abraham said, *If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!* (**Genesis 17:18**). God sees past the "not so right words of the 'right' faith" just as he sees past the "right words of the 'not so right' faith".

And so God gives Zechariah and Elizabeth not five, or seven, or even ten kids which would be a great joy for a Hebrew family. He gives them one child and Jesus would speak of this child in **Matthew 11:11**: *Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.* There needed to be a forerunner who would prepare the path for God. There needed to be a special person and special parents. There was a need for parents would tell themselves, "We will follow God even if we do not always understand him. We will follow Him no matter what". There was a need for spiritually mature and strong in faith people. I think when God was looking for such people, He gave the chance to others but in times of crisis they would say, "No, we cannot serve God who cannot keep His promises". And as a result, God says, "Here are the ones I will trust to raise my forerunner" when he looks at Zechariah and Elizabeth. As a result, Zechariah and Elizabeth parented a child who did not waste his time at clubs and cafes, but in the desert! Today we think, "How do I keep my child away from an IPAD?" And here was a son who would go to the desert seeking God. Nothing interested him as much as God. He did not even find much interest in tasty food. Can we say that God did not keep his promise for this family?

Zechariah and Elizabeth are people who had a feat of faith. They were people who held onto their faith while overcoming torment and crisis, doubt and disappointment.

When we pray and our prayers are left

HELL OR REINCARNATION?

TOPIC FOR
REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the idea of reincarnation has become very popular. Today we will try to look at this theory through the prism of the **Holy Scripture** and find out what the Bible says about this: is a person only given one life, or will he die many times and move to other bodies until he reaches perfection? What awaits a person after death: heaven/hell or life on earth in a stranger's body?

In order to answer these questions, we will analyze concepts such as hell and heaven, and find out what is said about them in the **New and Old Testament**.

There are many direct and indirect references to hell in the Bible. The words and expressions used to mean hell include the following: fiery hell, Hades, hell and the gates of hell.

I. HELL

1. In the New Testament

Fiery hell. The word *hell* (*Ge Hinnom*) in Hebrew means the *Valley of Hinnom* (*Valley of the Sons of Hinnom*). This valley is near Jerusalem. Its name was figuratively used as the name of the place (or condition) of eternal punishment. Most biblical translations translate it as hell.

Mark 9:43-48 — *If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched". And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched". And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched".*

Luke 16:19-31 — *There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in hell, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame". But Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us". Then he said, "I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment". Abraham said to him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". And he said, "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent". But he said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead".*

In the understanding of the Jews, Lazarus was also in hell,

because both heaven (Abraham's bosom) and fiery hell were in the world of the dead.

Matthew 16:18 — *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*

The **gates of Hades** will not prevail. Hell, in simple terms, is an invisible world (the Hebrew word *sheol* is used in the phrase gates of Hades, which means the land of the departed, dead). The ancient pagan peoples divided hell into Elysium and tartar, similar to how the Jews divided hell to the **bosom of Abraham** and **fiery hell** (read



Luke 16:25). Christ went down to hell (**Acts 2:27, 31** says so), but was not in fiery hell.

2 Peter 2:4 — *For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...*

The chains of darkness of hell in the original translate as *Tartar* (the word *tartaros* comes from *Tartaros* — the depths of hell — and means to suffer eternal torment).

2. In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the expression of the *gates of hell* (*sheol*) has only one meaning — death, perdition.

Isaiah 38:9-10 — *This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness: I said, "In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years".*

Conclusion: thus, the word *hell* in the Bible refers to concepts such as death, the world of the dead; eternal suffering and torment awaiting a person after death.

II. HEAVEN

The word *heaven* in the Bible refers to the following concepts: the garden of paradise (Garden of Eden) on earth, heavenly paradise, the kingdom of God (Kingdom of Heaven), and eternal life. Let us consider how and where exactly all these terms are used in the Scriptures, and also, we will analyze what is hidden behind them.

1. The Garden of Eden

A. Mentioned in the Old Testament:

Genesis 2:8-9 — *The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

Genesis 3:23-24 — *...therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.*

B. Mention in the New Testament:

Luke 23:42-43 — *Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom". And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise".*

only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

1 John 5:11-13 — *And this is the testimony: that 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. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.*

Romans 14:17 — *...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

C. Eternal life begins during our physical life

Some argue that eternal life is life after death. However, they are mistaken. Since eternal life is a personal relationship with God, then it begins at that moment when a person begins to get to know his Creator. Thus, eternal life begins during our life, and not after death.

John 5:24 — *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

1 John 3:14 — *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.*

Luke 17:20-21 — *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you".*

III. IS REINCARNATION POSSIBLE?

The Bible does not teach about reincarnation. God did not hide from people what awaits them at the end of life: physical death is inevitable in the same way as God's judgment, after which a person spends eternal life with God in paradise, or eternal life without God in hell.

1. Death is inevitable

Ecclesiastes 9:5 — *For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.*

Ecclesiastes 12:7 — *Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it.*

As you can see, the Bible openly states that after death, a person does not migrate to insects, animals, fish or other people. Life is given to man only once. Reincarnation is fiction, self-hypnosis and a way to lull our own conscience and justify our unwillingness to obey the only God and Creator, Who we all have to give an account to after death.

2. Judgment is inevitable

Hebrews 9:27 — *And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment...*

Ecclesiastes 11:9 — *Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.*

2 Corinthians 5:10 — *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done*

in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Matthew 13:40-42 — *Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 — *...which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

IV. LIFE AFTER DEATH

As you already understood, death is not the end of our existence. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. The body dies, and the spirit of man — his true self — continues to live. What awaits this human spirit after its separation from the physical body? God, Who wants everyone to be saved and attain knowledge of the truth, did everything so that after death, a person would be with his Creator, and not go to hell.

For this, God Himself came to earth in the form of a man and died for our sins on the cross, so that by faith in Jesus and His saving sacrifice, we could receive the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. Those who faithfully accepted Jesus Christ as their God and Savior received the gift of eternal life.

1. Not all of us will die...

Corinthians 15:36-55 speaks of what will happen to believers in Jesus Christ during the second coming. In an instant, their mortal bodies will be transformed and become like the body of Christ. Those who died in the Lord before the day of the second coming will also receive the same bodies.

2. Redemption of our bodies

Romans 8:17-25 — *...and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*

(Continued on the 12th page)

HELL OR REINCARNATION?

(Continuation.
Beginning on the 11th page)

3. Jesus is the resurrection and life

John 11:23-26 — Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again". Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

4. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead

Colossians 1:18-20 — And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Romans 8:29 — For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Philippians 3:20-21 — For our citizenship is in heaven, from which

we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. By His example, those who believe in Him will also be resurrected on the day of resurrection in order to forever abide with their God and Savior in Heaven.

5. The resurrection of life and the resurrection of judgment

The Bible speaks of two different resurrections. There is no doubt that absolutely all the dead will be resurrected. The only difference is that some will be resurrected in order to continue to live and continue fellowship with God, while others will be condemned to eternal suffering and life without God, which they chose while still alive, rejecting their Creator and Savior Christ.

John 5:28-29 — Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

What good and evil deeds are we talking about? What needs to be done in order to resurrect for life with God, and not for torment and suffering in hell?

Dear friend, it isn't about works. It is about the choice you made while living in the body: either you chose God and accepted His gift of eternal life, given to you in Jesus Christ... or you rejected God, rejecting His priceless sacrifice.

Eternal life cannot be bought with money (everyone knows about it!), or good deeds (few people know about this one!). No matter how good, kind, honest, caring, generous, and so on, we are, this will never be enough to cover all our weaknesses and sins against God and our neighbor. The only thing that can save you is God's mercy and His grace revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Faith is the only condition for salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9 — For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

CONCLUSION

God gave man free will. How you handle it is your own business. You can believe in anything you want: in reincarnation (migration of souls)



or in the absence of life after death. The truth does not depend on your opinion or belief. It exists independently of each of us, as does God Himself. We can reject it, or we can accept it. But we will pay for our decision ourselves. And the price for this mistake will be our life.

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" kindly provided by the **Biblical Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada**
<https://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/002.html>

JASMINE

When a man complained to one old man about his sorrows, the old man told him: "In our monastery, one monk knows his way around jasmine. In November, he cuts it and puts it in a dark place, but then later, the plant is covered abundantly with leaves and



flowers. That's how it happens with people: you must first stand in darkness and cold, and then there will be a lot of fruit".

IRON

A piece of iron was living happily and then it began to rust. The rust kept eating away at and the iron wanted to die. The iron wanted to get rid of the rust so much, that it began to ask God: "God, save me from the rust!" Next to the iron lay a file. The file heard how



iron was begging God to save him from the rust and offered iron his help. "Not from you!" exclaimed the iron. "You are so rude and cruel! God will send me someone else, some soft paste or a velvet rag!"

At this time, a worker passed by, saw that rust had spread over the iron, took a file in his hands and began to clean the rust from iron with it. "Not with the file, not with the file!" the iron groaned. When the worker heard the iron creak, he said: "Just the right file for this rust, you can't take it off with anything else!"

A FATHER'S WILL

One believer had an unbelieving son. The father was very worried but could not instill religion in his son. Sensing the approach of his death, he called his son: "Fulfill my one request".

"Which one, dad?"

"When I die, come into this room fifteen minutes a day for forty days".

"What should I do during that time?"
"You don't have to do anything. Just sit. But no less than fifteen minutes a day".

The son buried his father and fulfilled the request exactly: he appeared every day in the room and just sat. And in this way, forty days passed, after which the young man himself came to church and became a deep believer.

Only many years later did he realize



how wise his father's will was. The father realized that young people have a fast rhythm of life, sheer vanity and no time to think about the eternal: about the meaning of life, about their soul, about immortality and about God. But if they stop and be in silence — they might begin to think deeper about their life.

<https://pritchi.ru>

ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper "Prisoner" has the status of the two languages: Russian and English. "Prisoner" is printed in the Ukraine and in America. However, the newspaper is published and distributed exclusively by voluntary donations. For all those wishing to contribute to the success of "Prisoner" all the requisites are indicated in the last column of the newspaper. For those in America who wish to donate to the newspaper "Prisoner" and support the prison ministry, there is a tear off form, where you can donate and specify what you want the donation to go for. God bless you!

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

Hope of Freedom
P.O. Box 4053
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That you may say to the prisoners, "Go forth", To those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves" (Is. 49:9).

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Questions:

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Dear readers of "Prisoner"!

The publication 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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Our contacts:

redakciya.uznik@yahoo.com
tel.: +380645225707
+380661395801

Mailing address in U.S. for the newspaper "Prisoner":

Hope of Freedom, P.O. Box 4053 Everett, WA 98204

Editor **Trubitsin Igor Evgenyevich** (pseudonym **Igor Gorik**)

Responsible for the issue **Irina Dolgushina**.

Design and Desktop Publishing **Pavel Vladimirov**.

Translation services

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