



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

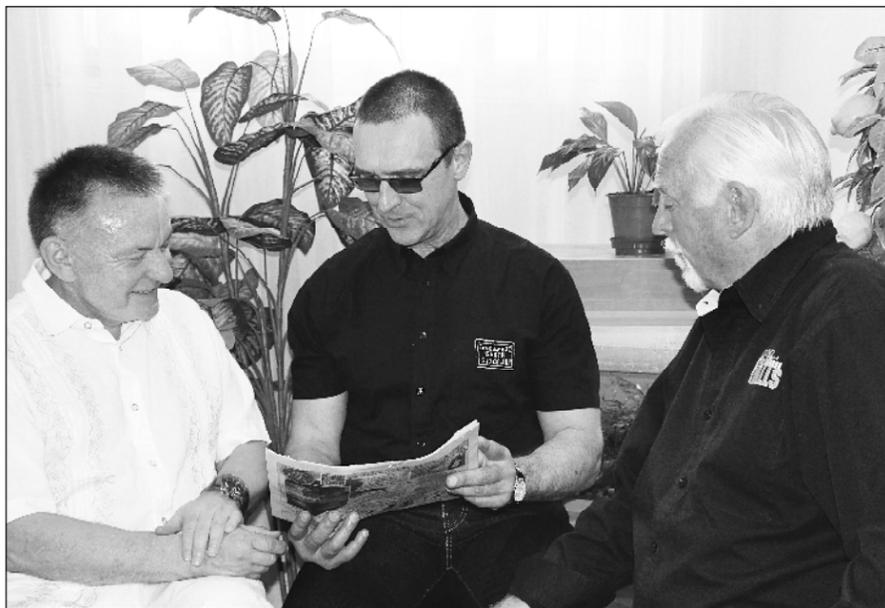
«And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free»

(John 8:32)

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January 1996. Two months ago I was sentenced to death and I was waiting for my execution. I didn't know when and how it was supposed to happen. There were various rumors as to how the sentence was being carried out but of course there were no real witnesses among those who spread these rumors. I was on death row and was waiting for my time to come. For a week and a half I was a believer in Christ, more precisely I repented before God in all my sins and received Jesus Christ in my heart. Of course nothing around me changed but inside me there had been significant changes. My worldview became completely different and everything that used to be pleasant to me became disgusting and hateful. Every day I grew in faith, staying for hours in prayer and reading the New Testament. I was overwhelmed with a sense of great enthusiasm. It was possibly because my time could come at any



From a dream to reality: a personal meeting with Jack Murphy and the editor of the newspaper «Prisoner»

moment; I could be shot today, and yet I was absolutely calm and did not fear death. The only thing that depressed me and bothered me was the uncertainty of how much I still had to wait for my turn to come to be executed. I also felt very sorry for all my relatives as well as the families of the victims, who, through my fault, as well as my relatives, experienced the loss of their loved ones. For both of them to lose their loved ones, but unfortunately I was already powerless to change or correct anything. And all of this stressed me and gave me unrest at night and in the day. And yet I did not know what to do next, what if my execution drags on indefinitely. The last thing that stressed me was what was going on inside of me...

Now I do not remember how it appeared in my cell, but there was a book called «Jewels for the Journey», which really prompted me to do something about my future, if my prison stay happened to drag on for a long time. The author of this book was a former jewel thief who was charged with murder and burglary, his name is Jack Roland Murphy.

When I first read this book, I was shocked that the man sentenced to two life sentences and twenty years in prison (such terms are given in the US) was already freed and moreover, for more than a year had been engaged in missionary service, actively visiting Prisons of America and carrying into them the Good News of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. I read the life story of Jack Murphy and extremely admired this man. Through his testimony God clearly showed me how all-powerful He is, not only to completely change a person, but also to open doors for him/her where, by human standards it is impossible to open them. From a tough guy, God made Jack Murphy into His servant — a sincere man of God.

In the life of Jack, there was a real metamorphosis: God molded a clean vessel from a criminal, which to this

day is an example for many people.

Back then, in 1996, when I first read Jack Murphy's book, I wanted to be like him, more precisely I wanted to dedicate my life, as Jack did, to the service of God and people. In my prayer, I said to God then, «Lord, if you have a plan for my life, as Jack writes about it in his book, then I want to dedicate myself to the cause to which this blessed man devoted himself». I looked in the book at Jack's picture and thought: «Oh, if it was possible to meet with you, I would have much to share with you and tell you...» However, with the realization that Jack Murphy is on a completely different continent, and I was on death row in anticipation of the execution of the death sentence, the thought of meeting with him quickly evaporated.

But time went on, and it was already mid-1997. In our country, a moratorium on the execution of the death penalty was introduced. From time to time I looked in the book of my Brother in Christ Jack Murphy and read the one biblical saying that Brother Jack put into his book. There the verse from Paul's epistle to the Romans was quoted: «*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*» (Romans 8:18, KJV). I, like Brother Jack in my time, thought about the doubt of any kind of glory, if I'm in prison and there is no hope for a future? In general however not fully understanding, I still got deeply rooted into the words of the bible, because in reality I saw the fulfillment of these words in the life of Jack.

In 2000, when we abolished the death penalty in Ukraine and I was transferred to life imprisonment, I began to think more and more about how I can serve God and people. Thank God that by that time I had significantly grown and strengthened my faith and God endowed me with a creative word: I began writing prose and poetry through which I conveyed



my beliefs to other people. In parallel, I began to study in different directions. In the first place was theology, and already incidentally, I studied psychology, folk medicine, and a foreign language. I also graduated in absentia from many international Bible schools and courses before coming to independent editorial work, that is, to run a Christian periodical «Prisoner», whose draft was also compiled by me.

And already in 2014, two years after the first circulation of the periodical «Prisoner», I thought: «Why should I not (through my friends from America) interview the legendary Jack Murphy whose book in its time motivated me to fully devote my entire life to serving God and his people?» I wrote questions to the interviewers and sent them to America to friends, so that they at home could use this interview for the periodical «Prisoner». Thus, many readers of «Priso-

ner» who were not familiar at the time with the history of Jack Murphy could meet him for the first time through our publication, and not only the interview with him, but the whole story of his life. They were published in the editions of «Prisoner» in 2014 and 2015. It was an honor for me to talk about Jack Murphy. In 1996, I could not even dream about it when I first read his book. However, God had His plans on this matter, and His miracles did not end with this.

At the end of January of 2017, friends from America told us that Jack Murphy was going on a missionary tour. When I found out about this, I asked my colleagues on the editorial board to write an official request for his meeting with me. Soon we were informed that a trip to Ukraine was planned for June and that Brother Jack gladly agreed to visit Ukraine for the sake of meeting me. I could hardly believe that this was really happening. But when the team of Jack Murphy sent us copies of their passports for an official request to the Ministry of Justice to visit the UIN-1 city of Vinnitsa, I no longer had the slightest doubt that my meeting with this blessed and legendary preacher (although he himself does not acknowledge this) will certainly take place.

And finally, on June 20, 2017, this long-awaited meeting was held. Brother Jack himself personally confirmed that they had specially come to Ukraine to meet with me, since the newspaper «Prisoner» is already well known in America. Of course, he came not only for the sake of one meeting. The team of Jack Murphy, by the invitation of the «New Generation Church», held an international conference of prison officers in the city of Novomoskovsk in the Dnepropetrovsk region, and also visited several institutions of the penitentiary system in Zaporozhye, Vinnitsa, Lvov and Zhitomir regions.

(Continued on the 2nd page)

From a dream to reality: a personal meeting with Jack Murphy and the editor of the newspaper «Prisoner»

(Ending. The beginning is on page 1)

When I met Brother Jack his eyes shone with warmth and an extraordinary sense of positivity emanated from him. We communicated with him, and it seemed to me that I knew him as real now as in 1996 when I first picked up his book. Now, as then, I admired this brother. Shortly before his arrival in Ukraine, Brother Jack turned eighty. Honestly it was hard to believe since this gray-haired and blessed brother did not look like most elders that are at this respectable age. To date, Brother Jack has visited more than 2,000 prisons in different countries. He is just an amazing person, and looking at him you just want to serve the Lord more. Brother Jack is really an example to follow. When you are in his presence, you get a feeling of youthfulness. In the distant past I could not even dream of this meeting. Then it became my dream, though unattainable at



that time. And after twenty-one years this dream has incredibly turned into a real meeting. When communicating with me, Brother Jack

told me: «We came to Ukraine for the sake of meeting you, because we know your work, which you are doing». These words were beyond me for

any praise. God once again showed me how He is all-powerful. I again and again became convinced that for Him nothing is impossible, if

you believe, trust and live for His glory. And this is the glory that Paul said in his Epistle to the Romans: «*For I think that the present temporary sufferings are worth nothing in comparison with that glory that will be revealed in us*».

To all readers of the «Prisoner» I want to say that there is nothing more inspiring than when you stop thinking about yourself and begin to live for others. Meeting with Jack Murphy once again convinced me of this. Praise and glory to the Lord for everything!

The trip to Ukraine of Jack Murphy and his team is organized by the President of the International Network of Prison Ministries Serge Taran in partnership with the pastor of the «New Generation Church», Andrey Tishchenko.

I. GORIK.

P. S. On behalf of the entire editorial staff of «Prisoner» I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry of Justice for assisting in this meeting, as well as for the management of the UIN-1 city of Vinnitsa for the good organization of this event.

How to understand the verse: I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire?

To correctly answer this question, it is necessary to read this verse completely and in context, because it is the context that sheds light on what is being discussed.

The verse sounds like this, *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see* (Revelation 3:17-18, ESV).

Let's pay attention to the phrase: *I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing*. It is in response that the Lord gives His advice: *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich*.

What is true wealth that is more valuable than gold? The answer is in 1 Peter 1:7: *...so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire... (ESV)*. This is faith, and the test of faith. As for the word «buy», let's pay attention to the fact that the Lord offers to buy not only gold (faith), but also white clothing (righteousness). Neither righteousness nor faith we can buy for money or gold. Spiritual values are not bought or sold. It's not about buying, but about receiving. Our Lord is the only source of true spiritual values and we can acquire them only through Him, and not from anyone else.

Is cremation acceptable for Christians?

Some churches today teach that it is impossible to cremate the body because it contradicts the Christian teaching. Such people claim that God will bring back to life our old body and therefore it cannot be cremated. Interesting logic. The adherents of this teaching forget that in 2 Peter 3:10 it is written: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed* (ESV). The earth with everything on it will burn, including human remains. In other words, the Lord will cremate everything that remains on earth on the day of His second coming.

Usually those who forbid the cremation of the dead refer to the example of Jesus, because He did not receive a new body but quite the opposite: when He rose His former body crucified on the cross resurrected.

Yes indeed, the Lord Jesus resurrected in His former body. But, dear friends let's think, why did the Lord not resurrect in the new body? The answer is obvious: firstly, if He was resurrected in another body then people could say that the transmigration of His soul occurred or that He was buried and now someone poses as Him but came in another body. Secondly, if Jesus had resurrected in another body and His body remained in the tomb, then no one would have believed from the disciples that He was resurrected. And thirdly, if Jesus had another body after the resurrection how would He say to the unbelieving Thomas: *...Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe* (John 20:27, ESV).

When we are resurrected we will have new bodies as it is written in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44: *So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is*

QUESTION-ANSWER



raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body (ESV).

There were 12 Apostles. Why have only four Gospels entered the Bible?

To begin with the Apostles were more than twelve. For example Barnabas and Paul were apostles: **Acts 14:14** — *But hearing this, the apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their clothes* (MKJV); **Romans 1:1** — *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, separated to the gospel of God* (MKJV).

Jacob, the brother of Jesus Christ by his mother, was also an apostle: **Galatians 1:19** — *But I saw no other of the apostles, except James the Lord's brother* (MKJV). Also there was another apostle who was also the brother of Jesus Christ — Judas, who wrote the Epistle of the Apostle Judah.

The fact is that the title «apostle» is similar to the title «missionary.» In Greek, the word «apostle» means «messenger» or «sent.» The apostles are believers in Jesus Christ who, by the attraction of the heart and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, testify to the unbelievers about salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, plant new churches and nurture ministers for the churches of God. That is why the apostles are much more than twelve.

And since there were apostles there were also false apostles, which the apostle Paul warned in **2 Corinthians 11:13**: *For such ones are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ* (MKJV). As for the twelve, the twelve apostles traditionally are the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ whom he personally chose for apostolic ministry even before his crucifixion. And the apostle Matthew replaced Judas Iscariot (**Acts 1:15-26**).

Now let's return to the question «Why only four Gospels were included in the Bible, although there were twelve disciples?»

It is interesting to note that the Evangelists Luke and Mark were not among the twelve disciples and, therefore, not four, but only two Gospels were written by the apostles (Matthew and John, who were among the twelve disciples) and were included in the Bible. Why are there no Gospels written by other close disciples of Jesus Christ?

The Gospel of Luke begins with the following words: *Since many took in hand to draw up an account concerning the matters which have been borne out among us, even as those who from the beginning delivered to us, becoming eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, following all things accurately from the very first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the certainty of those things in which you have been instructed* (Luke 1:1-4, MKJV).

From this passage we can learn two things that will enable us to answer the question posed:

1. First of all, Luke testifies that at that time many were undertaking the writing of the Gospel: *Since many took in hand to draw up an account concerning the matters which have been borne out among us* (Luke 1:1).

Indeed, at that time many (besides the apostles) wrote and composed narratives about the life of Jesus Christ.

However, only the four Gospels are God inspired scripture. The remaining surviving Gospels are called apocrypha, which are not inspired scripture.

2. Secondly, Luke testifies that when he wrote his Gospel he fully relied on the testimonies of the other apostles: *...even as those who from the beginning delivered to us, becoming eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word... (Luke 1:2)*.

The same applies to the Gospel of Mark, which was written by Mark from the words of the other twelve disciples. And if you consider that other apostles made their contribution to the writing of the Gospels of Luke and of Mark, they no longer needed to write additional gospels.

And what would we have if there were twelve or more Gospels? They would only repeat each other. But all that we need to know about the Lord is in the four Gospels. That is why the apostle John wrote in his Gospel: *And there are also many things, whatever Jesus did, which, if they should be written singly, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen* (John 21:25, MKJV). Yet the remaining scriptures could only lead readers away from the truth that the Lord wanted to convey to us and what he delivered in the four existing Gospels. Our task is to learn this truth, to be reconciled to God and to find salvation and eternal life.

Adam and Eve: Were they Jewish?

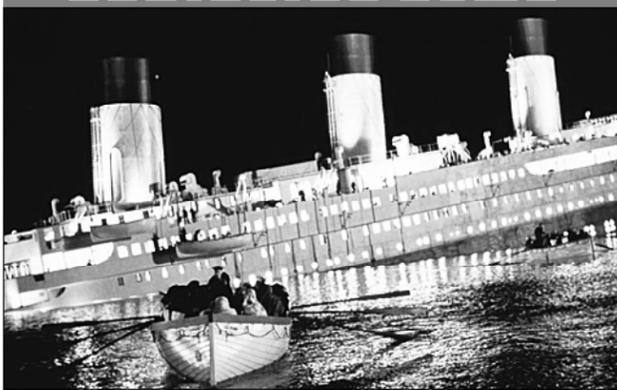
When God created Adam and Eve they did not have a nationality. Modern nationalities and different nationalities were formed after the Flood, and descended from the sons of Noah: Ham, Sim and Japheth. Adam and Eve are the ancestors of not only Jews, but all other nations.

In the Bible it is said that from Adam and Eve all the nations inhabiting the earth took place. And, as is known each nationality has its own name and history. Jews, like the Arabs, descended from Abraham who by nationality was neither an Arab nor a Jew. Abraham was a Chaldean and was from the Ur of the Chaldeans: **Genesis 11:31** — *And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife. And he went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan. And they came to Haran and lived there.*

The history of the Jewish people begins in Ur of the Chaldeans approximately in 366 after the Flood when God called Abraham to go to the Promised Land. But the Jews are not just the descendants of Abraham, but the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who received the name of Israel from God (the God-Bearer). The very name «Jew» comes from the word «Hebrew» (or «Ibri»), which from the Hebrew is translated as wanderer, or traveler. Such a despicable nickname of the Canaanites was called Abram during his wanderings in Canaan: **Genesis 14:13** — *And there came one who had escaped. And he told Abram the Hebrew, for he lived in the plains of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner. And these had a covenant with Abram* (MKJV).

As a nation the Jewish people were formed and formed much later, during the approximately 400 years of their life in Egypt: *And you shall make response before the LORD your God, «A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders»* (Deuteronomy 26:5-8, ESV).

CHRISTIAN NEWS



A Pastor's story — one that Hollywood refused to include in the famous film «Titanic»

On April 14-15, 1912, the giant ship «Titanic» drowned in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean, taking 1517 human lives with it. It was the largest and most luxurious ship ever built by mankind. Its destruction was one of the greatest catastrophes of the twentieth century. Only a few people know that with the destruction of the «Titanic» there is one amazing story that Hollywood refused to include in its famous

film «Titanic». It is the story of a brave pastor named John Harper.

John Harper was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and was a great evangelist of his time. Through him, thousands of people turned to Jesus for salvation. At the age of twenty-five he became a pastor of a small church with thirty members. In a short time period, the church grew to 500 members! In 1912, John received an invitation to preach at the famous Moody Church in Chicago. On April 11th, John sat on the «Titanic» with his six-year-old daughter, set to sail to America. (Several years before, his wife had died). On this unsinkable ship were the grand businessmen, famous British families and other important people. From the start, John walked around the ship and spoke with people about Jesus.

In the evening of April 14th, when most people danced in the ballroom and played cards, John tucked his daughter into bed and began to pray. At 11:40 pm the «Titanic» collided with an iceberg and the ship began to slowly sink. When the passengers realized the reality of everything that was happening, people began to panic. Hearing the sound of the siren, John woke up his daughter, wrapped her in a blanket and climbed onto the upper deck. Seeing all that was happening, he kissed his daughter goodbye and handed her to a crewmember who placed her on lifeboat number 11. Since women and children were being rescued first, John knew that he would never see his daughter again and that she would be an orphan from the age of six. Then John gave his life jacket to a passenger standing next to him, thereby leaving himself no chance of survival. John did not have time for reflection; he began to quickly evangelize to the panicking people. Eyewitnesses said that they saw a young man approaching people and asking them one question: «Is your soul saved?» When people began to quiet down, and the orchestra played «Closer, Lord, to You», John glowed brighter and brighter, fulfilling God's given calling.

On April 15, 1912, at 2:40 am, when the «Titanic» began

to sink, John jumped into the cold water of the Atlantic Ocean joining more than a thousand people who did not fit into lifeboats already floundering in the icy water. Soon John managed to find a fragment from the ship. Grabbing it, the pastor began to swim to people and asked them one question: «Are you saved?» Eventually people began to freeze from the cold, so John moved even faster. In the middle of this chaos and screaming, he directed people to Jesus! John Harper died with one name on his lips — Jesus Christ!

A few years later after these tragic events in the Canadian city of Hamilton, at a church service at one church, a man named Aguilla Webb told an interesting testimony: «I am one of six people who survived in the waters of the Atlantic on that terrible night when the «Titanic» and 1517 people sank. They froze from the cold or sank in the cold waters of the ocean. While I was floundering in the water amid screams and groans of people, one man shouted to me from afar: «Is your soul saved?» I answered him: «No!» Suddenly a wave covered that man, and he went under the water. After a while he emerged and again shouted to me, already in a weak voice: «Is your soul saved?» I answered: «No!» Then in response to me, he shouted: «Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ — and you will receive salvation!» Again a big wave covered him, and he went under the water, so I could not see him anymore. There, in the cold waters of the Atlantic, I reconciled with the Lord».

After reading this testimony, I thought, *Today's world reminds me of the «Titanic»! Vanity, cares, busy important businesses. However, despite the fact that everything looks beautiful and stable, there is one problem — there's a hole. Sooner or later we'll all be in eternity... We can fuss and hang out, or we can, like John Harper, fulfill our calling, preaching to the perishing people. When we come to eternity, I would like to see people who will come up and say: «I believed in Jesus because of your testimony».*

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Our present view of bribes differs somewhat from the concept of bribery given by the Lord in His Word. The following explains the differences in our attitude towards bribery and bribery in our times.

I. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE CONSIDER TO BE BRIBERY?

The Old Testament nouns *kopher* (bribe, ransom) and *shachad* (bribe, gift, reward, fee) are translated in our Bible in the following words: bribe, gift or gift in the bosom, gift or gift secret, bribery and venality.

The biblical definition of «bribe» has two aspects, which are described below:

1. First, in the biblical sense of bribery is the bribery of a judge (court) with the goal of distorting truth and justice.

Proverbs 17:23 — *The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice.*

Types of bribery given in order to distort justice:

- ☉ A gift brought to the judge as a ransom in order to avoid deserved punishment.
- ☉ A gift brought to the judge in order to push or force him to sue an innocent man.
- ☉ A gift to the judge with a view to bribing him, so that he would close his eyes to his case and judge in favor of the bribe-giver.

Isaiah 1:23 — *Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.*

Isaiah 5:22-23 — *Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!*

Micah 3:11 — *Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD's support and say, «Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us».*

Micah 7:3 — *Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire — they all conspire together.*

2. Secondly, in the biblical concept of bribery is also the bribery of a person with the goal of pushing him to sin.

Ezekiel 16:33 — *All prostitutes receive gifts, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors.*

Someone will say: «These are all common words. Is it possible to give more specific examples?» Of course, in the Bible there are more specific examples of how people gave, took, or extorted bribes.

The sons of the prophet Samuel, took bribes and unjustly judged.

1 Samuel 8:1-3 — *And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.*

Ruler Felix hoped that apostle Paul would give him a bribe.

Acts 24:26 — *At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.*

Magus Simon offered the apostles a bribe

for the gift of the Holy Spirit: **Acts 8:18-22** — *Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, «Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit». But Peter said to him, «May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you».*

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus Christ for a bribe of 30 pieces of silver.

II. THE LORD IS AN UNBRIBABLE JUDGE

1. The Lord cannot be bribed; He does not take bribes.

who have evil in their hands, and whose right hand is full of bribery.

It is interesting to see that bribe-takers are compared to sinners and bloodthirsty villains. This is not just a comparison, it is a definition of who bribers really are. They are wicked.

Proverbs 17:23 — *The wicked takes a gift from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice.*

The Lord will not allow those who pervert truth and justice into His dwelling (in the Kingdom of Heaven). **Psalms 14:5** — *Lord! Who can abide in your tabernacle? Who can dwell on your holy hill? He who walks clean and does righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; Whoever does not slander his tongue, does not do evil to his sincere and does not accept reproach against his neighbor; The one in whose eyes the disgraced is despised, but who glorifies those who fear the Lord; Who swears, even if it is evil, and does not change; Who does not*

by the definition of the Bible, «an ungodly, a sinner and a bloodthirsty villain». If a Christian takes a bribe or gift in order to do a job faster and better, which he is obliged to perform anyway, then he is a hypocrite. For the Lord God commands us in His word: *Everything that you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord, and not for men, knowing that you will receive a heritage as a reward from the Lord, for you serve the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-25).*

2. Give bribes or not give?

As for the question of whether it is okay to give bribes, we will immediately say that bribing or bribery in order to distort truth and justice is a crime. Firstly, because such a person does not just give a bribe, but pushes the bribe taker to sin against God and man. Secondly, such a person then takes part in this sin. Thirdly, such a person falls under the same curse as the bribe-taker.

Deuteronomy 27:25 — *The Lord does not*

BIBLICAL OUTLOOK ON BRIBES AND BRIBERY

Deuteronomy 10:17 — *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.*

2 Chronicles 19:7 — *Now let the fear of the LORD be on you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.*

Proverbs 6:35 — [Lord] He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse a bribe, however great it is.

2. The Lord does not need bribes.

The Lord does not take bribes, He accepts the sacrifices of the brokenhearted.

Psalms 4:5 — *Bring the sacrifices of righteousness and trust in the Lord.*

Romans 12:1 — *I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

3. God's Attitude to the bribe-takers. The Lord calls bribery a crime.

Amos 5:12 — *For I know how numerous your crimes are and how sinful your sins are: you are the enemies of the right, take bribes and distort the affairs of the poor in court.*

Amos 2:6 — *Thus says the Lord: for the three crimes of Israel, and for four, I will not repent it, because they sell the right for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals.*

The Lord says that there will be no mercy for such a crime. This statement of the Lord shows how much He hates injustice. The Lord curses the man who perverts justice for bribery:

Deuteronomy 27:25 — *Cursed is he who takes bribes to kill the soul and shed innocent blood!*

The Lord punishes the bribe-takers who pervert justice.

Job 15:34 — *So the house of the wicked will be empty, and the fire will devour the tents of bribery.*

Psalms 25:9-10 — *Do not destroy my soul with sinners and my life with the bloodthirsty,*



TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

give up his silver and does not take gifts against the innocent. He who does this will not be moved for ever.

Isaiah 33:15-16 — *He who walks in righteousness and speaks the truth; Who despise self-interest from oppression, restrain his hands from bribes, plug his ears, not to hear of bloodshed, and close his eyes to not see evil; He will dwell on high places; His refuge is inaccessible rocks; Bread will be given to him; The water will not dry out.*

As you can see, God forbids taking and giving bribes in order to distort justice. The Lord is opposed of taking and giving bribes with such a low purpose.

III. BRIBES IN TODAY'S TIME

1. What is considered a bribe in our world?

In our world, a bribe is any gift given to an official. If we compare this definition with the biblical definition of the term «bribe», then we will see that not every bribe is bribery with the goal of distorting truth and justice. Today, very often officials are given bribes not in order to distort the truth, but in order to do the work that they already have to do on the duty of their service. In other words, people give bribes to employees in order for them to do their work faster and better.

However, we are against the fact that Christians take bribes of any kind.

If a Christian takes bribes to distort truth and justice, then he is not a Christian, but,

want us to have anything in common with untruth, injustice.

Exodus 23:7 — *Depart from iniquity, and do not kill the innocent and the right, for I do not justify the wicked.*

As for bribes as a gift, tips, gratitude, encouragement, etc., then giving such a bribe is not a crime. However, it is necessary to remember the possible consequences of such gifts.

The positive side of bribery

The positive side of giving bribes is that the gift softens the heart of the person receiving it.

Proverbs 21:14 — *A secret gift extinguishes anger, and a gift in the bosom — a strong fury.*

Proverbs 17:8 — *A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner; wherever he turns, he prospers.*

The negative side of bribery

The negative side of receiving bribes is that, firstly, gifts spoil the heart of a person and make him turn a blind eye and secondly, the gifts «distort the cause of the right»:

Exodus 23:8 — *Do not receive gifts, for the gifts of the blind are made by the sighted and distort the cause of the right.*

Deuteronomy 16:19 ...do not distort the law, do not look at faces and do not take gifts, for gifts blind the eyes of the wise and turn the cause of the right.

Ecclesiastes 7:7 — *Harassing others, the wise becomes foolish, and gifts spoil the heart.*

Therefore, the Lord warns us in His Word to abstain from taking bribes.

Exodus 23:8 — *Do not accept gifts...*

Deuteronomy 16:19 — *...do not take gifts...*

Apostle Paul's example (**Acts 24:26**), where he never gave Felix the bribe he was waiting for. Paul also never received bribes. This should inspire Christians to offer bribes not as a monetary gift, but the gift of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His holy sacrifice on Cross.

Material for the newspaper

«Prisoner» kindly provided by

Biblical discussion club, Montreal, Canada

<http://cogmtf.net/Articles/104.htm>

«The fool says in his heart «There is no God». They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God» (Psalm 53:1-2, NIV).

How sad it is, that human society is divided into two categories of people: believers and non-believers. The first — believe in God and affirmatively say that hell and eternal torment is awaiting those without faith in Him. While the latter — sneer and say that God — is only a myth, and that faith in Him is for the weak. As is known, the category of these people is much larger than those who believe that God is real, and His works are the evidence of their faith. So then, who is actually right in this very difficult case?

in the form of quotes. Many are amazed by the deep meaning expressed by a particular author or philosopher. At the same time, very few know that the whole philosophy and all the laws of governments are based on biblical truths. Anyone who has read the Bible at least once, understands that nothing new has been said today except what was said by the ancient prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Also, that the basic laws of the current governments contain only the basics of God's commandments and precepts. In the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, it says: «**Meaningless! Meaningless!**» says the Teacher. «**Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.**» What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains

path is all the same. Scripture clearly sums this up: «**There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death**» (Proverbs 14:12).

While Jesus Christ was on earth, in His Sermon on the Mount He called out to people, saying: «**Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many enter through it; because narrow is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and few there be that find it**» (Matthew 7:13-14).

But thank God that in the present day among the lawlessness and lack of faith on the earth, there are those who, without the slightest embellishment can attest to the world of God's real miracles and His real existence! For those who truly know God, surely felt on themselves and on their

horror approaching old age. If the first (at any age) — have peace and quiet in the soul, then the second — wrenching emptiness. For every person at some stage of their lives clearly feels that void regardless of their earthly status. The human soul cannot be filled with any goods of this world. Only closeness with God gives a person confidence in the future, even if that day on earth will be his last. As the apostle Paul said: «**For me — to live is Christ and to die is gain**» (Philippians 1:21).

Can the unbeliever say about themselves like that? Certainly not. So, it turns out that what for some is joy, and acquisition, for the other — depression, frustration and emptiness full of fear: because for them, there is no light at the end of the tunnel, that is, at the end of life's journey. But the

ABANDON UNNECESSARY ARGUMENTS..!

Perhaps for this dilemma to become open to all, it is necessary to know the reasons behind the statements of these people and others.

So, I will say without any bias, that when you hear talk of unbelievers, in addition to any unsubstantiated emotions, nothing else from them is forthcoming. They argue that there is no God, but cannot explain how the universe was created and all life that fills our planet, including man himself. To the question «Do you really believe that you came from a monkey?» Opponents usually smile and say something unintelligible. The usual memorized version of Darwin's theory of evolution comes out first, but at the same time no one is willing to equate themselves to monkeys or to recognize them as their ancestors. All of this just comes to the point of absurdity: claiming that there is no God, man cannot lead any evidence to support this claim. Vanity and stubborn verbosity — is all of the arsenal that atheists have in such discussions. Personally, I have often heard people with an intelligent face express their «deep» knowledge, describing how there is no God. In such cases, I always immediately asked the same question: «Have you tried asking Him for help, before trying to prove such a thing?» The answer was always the clear «No». How stupid is it to argue what you actually do not know? Why is this happening?

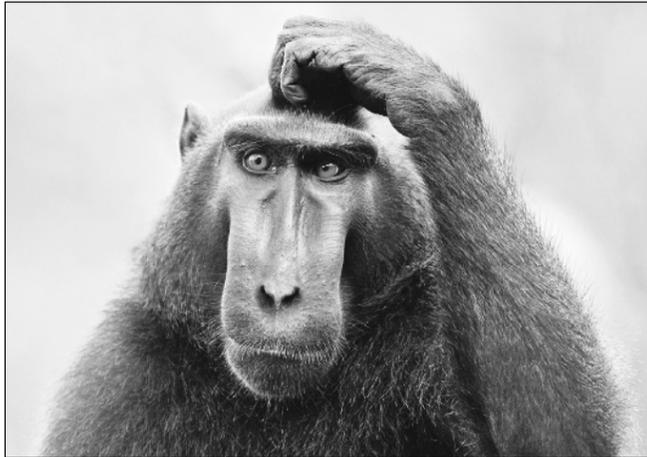
Why do most people not acknowledge God and do not find the need to repent? What keeps a person from being able to recognize God's authority and obey His will? Why is it only in the most extreme circumstances that people suddenly begin to seek God and cry out to Him? The Bible says on this subject: «**...for all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ**» (Phil 2:21). Indeed, it is so. People do not want to recognize the truths of the Bible and follow Jesus, because the path unto which the LORD has called, is quite narrow and uncomfortable for those who are accustomed to rely solely on their mind. Man is accustomed to rely mainly on themselves, especially if nature has endowed him with high intelligence. As a result, some people think that it is of their merit or achievement of their parents, that into this world they came with such unique personalities.

In human society, thoughts of great scientists and philosophers are often used

forever. *The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, «Look! This is something new»? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them» (Ecclesiastes 1:2-11).*

Perhaps many do not pay attention to the fact that most of the great scientists, philosophers and writers were believers. Each of them knew that the gift that they have, is given to them from above, that is from God. They all understand that only through Him they can do what we today call genius and talent. And certainly, every one of them knew what it says in scripture: «**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your income...**» (Proverbs 3:5-9).

To dismay, many people today do not want to hear it, and deny the existence of God. However, for many it's easier to live this way, because they do not need to take responsibility to live only a righteous life, to which the Lord calls. Going through life by the wide path is by far more convenient and comfortable, although the end of this



life the greatness of His presence and power and strength. God showed such people that He really is real, and that all of His words left to us in the Scriptures, are nothing else but the truth. It is not for nothing that it is said: «**...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free**» (John 8:32). First of all, it should be noted that we are first set free from ourselves, that is, from our corrupt nature that often dictates and teaches us to live contrary to our conscience and all that is good; that goodness which is inherited in us from the creation. But the Bible clearly says that «**For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them**» (Ephesians 2:10).

God gave us His word in the Bible, by which learning and studying we can clearly see how worthless we are in this world without His presence. Believing in God, man acquires priceless treasure — peace and tranquility in the soul. The Word of God reveals to man a storehouse of wisdom and love, through which life is filled with light and grace of God. For those who have not yet felt this priceless gift, God through His Word says: «**Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know**» (Jeremiah 33:3).

There is a huge difference between the sincere believers and unbelievers. First — they know what awaits them beyond the threshold of death. While the latter — with

ancient prophet said: «**Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing**» (Isaiah 40:26).

You can quote the Bible a lot and give various examples, but it is unlikely that the unbeliever will ever understand, until he will bow his knees before God in repentance and cry out to Him. The fool has said in his heart, — «There is no God» — and this cannot be true, since every new day shows us the opposite. His creation and His works can be seen all over, it is only necessary to only open the eyes and see. Earthly life — a transit and a trampoline to eternity through suffering and testing of loyalty and love. In the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* there are wonderful and inspiring words: «**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal**» (2 Cor 4:17-18). Perhaps above all, this is worth considering, and stop arguing about what is obvious.

*Abandon pointless disputes,
The empty fountain of babble
As if we appeared like a «chorus» —
From a herd of earthly monkeys...
The truth? Yes, we are alike!
There are many things we have*

in common:

*Ugly face when envious,
Redness when angry...
And even walk like a chimp,
All the «charm» is depicted in «Playboy».
Skipping... yes, truly a gorilla,
banana — replaced by the basketball
Leave unnecessary disputes,
they say we are the evidence*

of evolution;

*that the tail fell off not too soon,
and everything took eons of years...
Enough! To everything there is*

beginning,

*There is a God who created our kind.
And he who may reject this —
Well then, let him be of animals.*

I. GORIK.

Parable of Anger and the Fence with Nails

Once lived a very irritable and short-tempered young man.

One day his father gave him a bag of nails and told him to drive a nail into the fence post every time he did not keep his anger.

On the first day, several dozen nails were in the fence post. A week later, the young man learned to restrain himself, and with each passing day the number of nails hammered into the fence post began to decrease. The young man realized that to control his temper was easier than to drive-in nails. Finally, the day came when he did not lose his composure. He told this to his father, who said that from that day on, every time he will be able to restrain himself, he can pull out a nail from the post.



As time passed, and the day came when the boy could tell his father that in the post there was not a single nail.

Then the father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence:

«You did a fine job, but you can see how many holes are in the post? It will never be the same again. When you lose your temper and tell a man something evil in anger, you leave scars on his soul, like these holes in the fence post».

The Parable of the Lies and the Task of the Priest

One day, ending the service, the priest said:

«Next Sunday I'll talk to you on the subject of lies. To help you understand what will be discussed, read the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark at home».

The following Sunday the priest before his sermon, announced:

«I ask those who have done the



job and read the seventeenth chapter, raise your hands».

Nearly all the congregation raised their hands.

«Especially with you, I want to talk about lies», said the priest, «The Gospel of Mark does not have a seventeenth chapter».

The Parable of the Frogs and the High Tower

Once upon a time, the frogs decided to organize a competition: who will get first to the top of the tower.

This gathered a lot of spectators. Everyone wanted to see how the frogs will jump and get a good laugh out of it. Of course, none of the spectators could believe that even a single frog will be able to climb up. The competition began, and from all sides were heard cries: «It won't work! It's too complicated».

«Not a chance! The tower is too high!»

Frogs, one after another fell down, but some were still climbing. The crowd screamed louder: «Too hard! Neither can do it!»

Soon all the frogs got tired and fell. But there was one that rose higher and higher... only he managed to climb to the top of the tower.



All began to ask the winner how did he find in himself so much strength? He could not respond, for it turned out the winner was deaf.

We should be deaf to others' doubts and discouragement.

<http://www.smisl-zhizni.ru/pritchi>



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does the Bible says about premarital sex?

ANSWER: There are numerous Scriptures that declare sex before marriage to be a sin (Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Jude 7). The Bible promotes complete abstinence before marriage. Sex between a husband and his wife is the only form of sexual relations of which God approves (Hebrews 13:4).

Far too often we focus on the «recreation» aspect of sex without recognizing that there is another aspect — procreation. Sex within marriage is pleasurable, and God designed it that way. God wants men and women to enjoy sexual activity within the confines of marriage. Song of Solomon and several other Bible passages (such as Proverbs 5:19) clearly describe the pleasure of sex. However, the couple must understand that God's intent for sex includes producing children. Thus, for a couple to engage in sex before marriage is doubly wrong — they are enjoying pleasures not intended for them, and they are taking a chance of creating a human life outside of the family structure God intended for every child. While practicality does not determine right from wrong, if the Bible's message on sex before marriage were obeyed, there would be far fewer sexually transmitted diseases, far fewer abortions, far fewer unwed mothers and unwanted pregnancies, and far fewer children growing up without both parents in their lives.

Abstinence is God's only policy when it comes to sex before marriage. Abstinence saves lives, protects babies, gives sexual relations the proper value, and, most importantly, honors God.

<http://www.gotquestions.org>

The 10th Commandment

Exodus 20:17 — *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.*

UNDERSTANDING THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

1. Definition of the words «You shalt not covet»

In this case, the Bible uses the Hebrew verb *hamad* (to crave, lust, or covet something). The definition of this word in this context is a passionate desire to have what others have.

2. The state of the heart

The prohibition of the tenth commandment primarily refers to our minds and hearts. The tenth commandment is fundamentally different from all the other commandments which are concerning relations with neighbors.

It's aim is not against any actions, such as murder, theft, adultery, or perjury but against a certain condition of the heart, soul and mind.

The tenth commandment is the culmination of God's law as expressed in the ten commandments.

3. What does the tenth commandment say about the «condition of the heart»?

Yes we can be people who do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery, and do not commit perjury but still have the desire to do bad things in our heart. But what God wants is for us to be the kind of people who do not want to neither kill nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor commit perjury, that is, so that even such an idea would be repulsive.

It is much easier to obey prohibitions and regulations that tell us directly how to behave and act rather than to obey to the laws of a conscience. This is because only God knows whether we have broken the law or not. This is known only to God because only He knows the desires of our heart.

If you look to the Ten Commandments, it becomes clear that this commandment actually describes our internal state. In other words, this commandment is for our identity — who we are and what we are. In this situation, you can re-phrase the famous saying, «Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are,» to

«Tell me your most secret desires and I will tell you who you are».

UNDERSTANDING WHAT BAD DESIRES ARE

We are all human, and we have different desires. The tenth commandment is not directed against all desires, but against improperly directed desires and aspirations. More specifically, this commandment is directed against the desire to have something that belongs to another person.

This can be:

- a desire to seize the property of another person;
- the desire to have the same things that another person has;
- the desire to have a life such as that of others;
- the desire to be another man (not myself).

In addition, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that we live in a society that encourages this kind of «desire of other's goods», a consumerism, which consists of the acquisition and accumulation of a lot of things. Advertising on television and by roads strongly reinforce these desires in people.

This all pulls a person into a vicious circle: work — shopping — work. The more we earn, the more we spend. The more we spend, the more we work to earn even more and to buy even more things. Thus, this worry and vanity are a direct violation of the fourth commandment of rest (!).

What can you say about a man desires what others have?

- He is dissatisfied, and not content with his own life.
- He is not grateful for what he has.
- He's a proud man.
- He's selfish.
- He is envious.
- He thinks material things can make him happy.

The condition of our heart and its desires should be in the right direction such that not just the action but even the thought of doing anything bad would become repulsive.



1 John 2:15-17 — *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life — is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

UNDERSTANDING WHAT GOOD DESIRES ARE

As we have already mentioned, the tenth commandment speaks concerning our hearts, that is, our innermost thoughts and desires.

We are Christians, and our deepest desires must be:

- **Love of God** (the desire to get to know the Creator). **Matthew 6:33** — *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*
- **Love for one's neighbor.** **1 John 4:20-21** — *Who says, «I love God», and hates 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? And we have this commandment from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

How can we change the desires of the heart?

The process of change and transformation in the image of Christ — is a lifelong process. First of all, we need to:

1. Learn to be grateful for what we have.
2. Teach our heart to be humble and to accept what is ours and that what is not ours and cannot or should not be ours (including not only material things, but also skills and talents).
3. Do not make yourself an idol. We must turn our hearts and minds to the Lord God. Keep in mind that the breaking of the tenth commandment is derived from violating of the first commandment.

GENERALIZATION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Aim and purpose of the Law
The Lord God gave people His law, and formulated in the Ten Commandments, so that people realize that they are sinners.

Romans 3:19-20 — *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being[a] will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

2. Jesus and the Ten Commandments — Jesus fulfilled the Law

Matthew 5:17-20 — *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

3. The most important commandment

When Jesus was asked which commandment in the law is the most important, he said,

Mark 12:29-31 — *...The most important is, «Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.» The second is this: «You shall love your neighbor as yourself.» There is no other commandment greater than these.*

Romans 13:9-10 — *For the commandments, «You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,» and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: «You shall love your neighbor as yourself.» Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

The material for the newspaper «Prisoner» was kindly provided by Bible discussion club, Montreal, Canada
<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/054.htm>

CONTINUATION OF THE PROJECT

The Christian periodical «Prisoner» was created by me in 2006. However, it took six years of unremitting prayer, so that part of this project could be developed and publicized. Many difficulties and problems arose on the way to achieving this goal. But in spite of all,

behind the threshold of a colony or prison, a large percentage of former prisoners are faced with real problems and difficulties that often force these people from desperation to commit new crimes and come back again into prison.

Much to our regret, our

normally and society despises and repels us? We cannot find a job, because we are not taken on permanent work, and at best we have to accept interrupted temporary earnings. We do not have housing and we are pressured from the very beginning by the police. We are humiliated, despised and at the same time afraid... Tell us, what should we do?»

For many years studying the psychology of prisoners and analyzing the reasons for them returning back to prison, I came to the conclusion that while in prisons and correctional centers the attitude towards prisoners do not change. At the same time the real mechanism that would fully allow former convicted prisoners to undergo a period of rehabilitation and adaptation doesn't exist. Society, because of its bias towards this category of people, believes it serves them right when ex-prisoners produce new and more sophisticated crimes and are convicted.



Guys working

turned around. Work, nature, and spiritual and pastoral work will only have a beneficial effect on such rehabilitants.

This center will be open to every ex-prisoner who in place of imprisonment has reassessed his life and unambiguously decided to take the clean path of truth and love. To such people, the center will provide all-round support and assistance upon entering into freedom: registration,

we could directly coordinate with the probation centers from our rehabilitation center, and also register former prisoners and look for work for them while they are in our center. To do this it is necessary to coordinate the mechanism of these actions with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All who arrive to our center will be included in a database where both the Ministry of Justice



The first renovated house with all domestic utilities connected: electricity, water, sewerage

by spring of 2012 I managed to launch this project with a group of like-minded people. The first stage in the implementation of this project was the independent Christian periodical «Prisoner». Today five years later it is safe to say that the first stage of the project «Prisoner» was successful. This is evident by the thousands of letters that came to the editorial office from different countries, as well as feedback from free citizens and from the heads of institutions of the penitentiary system of Ukraine. The reports say that the newspaper «Prisoner» positively helps in spiritual and educational work with the special contingent, as well as in the process of resocialization of convicted people. The prisoners themselves called the publication «Prisoner» a door to God.

Thanks to this publication some former prisoners to this day already carry missionary service in prisons and zones preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ the same as they once were. However, unfortunately there is not always a complete result from the implementation of this project.

«Prisoner» helps rethink and allows you to reassess your life in places of detention, but

society in the present day is not yet ready to accept into its ranks former prisoners and provide them with any kind of support and assistance so that they can adapt and join the society. In general, such a fate — misunderstanding and contempt — concerns those prisoners who do not have relatives or any social ties left at large. Difficulties and problems in these people arise literally from the first days of their freedom. There is no housing and even if there is then someone needs to be necessarily employed to sustain it. No one wants to hire them. From the first days these people are considered outcasts for society. The result of their actions after such a «warm» greeting from society is quite obvious: at best it's just stealing, at worst — violence and murder.

No crime can be justified, but who pushes these people to re-commit atrocities, and in some cases even the most horrible? In fact, not all people who are freed desire to go back to a criminal life and go back to prison, but as is known many former prisoners unfortunately return back anyway.

Today we receive letters to the editorial office in which people ask us: «How can we go on if we want to live



Final repairs near the first renovated house

Realizing all this, I initially set into the «Prisoner» project several stages of its implementation. Thank God, the first stage has already taken place and the publication «Prisoner» really does wonders, changing people for the better. The next stage in the implementation of the «Prisoner» project is the creation of a Christian rehabilitation center in Ukraine for those prisoners who have already rethought their life and wish with all their hearts to serve God and their fellow-beings upon their release. Also, those people who undergo a probation period will be able to undergo rehabilitation in this Christian rehabilitation center. For such people it will be extremely useful to undergo rehabilitation in such a center and get acquainted with those people who already served their punishment and thanks to God's grace had their lives

employment, and will provide necessary things and allow full adaptation and rehabilitation. Also, probation centers will be able to send their prisoners to our center, based on whom, in their opinion, really want to start a new life. Now with everything being computerized

and the Ministry of Internal Affairs will clearly know who is registered in our center.

Any prisoner who is still in prison can call the rehabilitation center and pass an interview so that once released they will have a clear route and a guaranteed spot in our center.



Multipurpose huts near the renovated house were also renovated



Our forest lake, which will be expanded and deepened for use as a fishery (only a part of the lake shown)



«PRISONER»: TO BE OR NOT TO BE?!



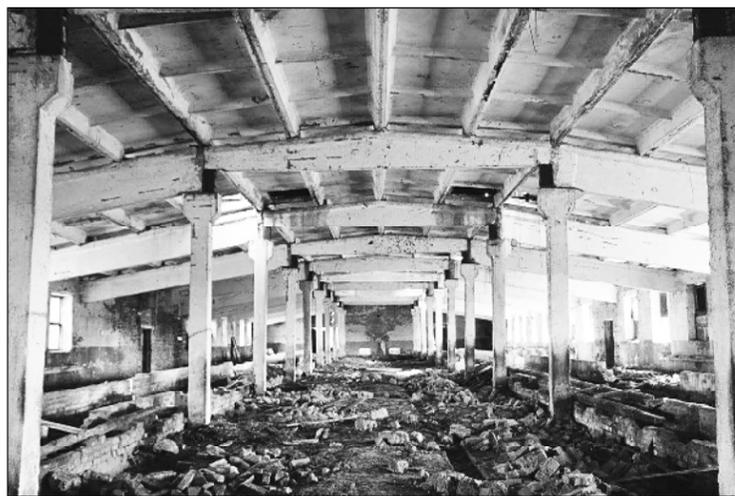
One of our forest gardens being prepared for sowing

This year starting in May, the creation of this Christian rehabilitation center was started. Its location is among the picturesque nature. In the future it will occupy several dozen acres of land among the forest and lakes. The center will include integrated farming: fish farming, geese, crop farms, as well as sewing production, sawmill and other production units of the food industry.

The center will include accommodation for rehabilitants, a dining room, church, etc. A whole complex will be created so that a person can not only have some sort of work



Purchased a building marked for demolition



All these plates, poles and beams will be dismantled and transported to the territory of the future rehab center for construction. As it turned out, it's much cheaper to dismantle rather than buying all this new

a lot of land for the establishment of the center, prepared houses, electricity and necessary communications, purchased a mini-line for the production of aerated concrete blocks, a band sawmill, a huge former farm for the dismantling and use of its building material on the territory of the center (slabs, Brick, concrete beams, poles, gates, etc.). All this is already available, and the work does not stand still. However, there are still a lot of material costs for the further development of works on the creation of this center. It is necessary to buy at least some used equipment (a tractor, a lorry and an excavator), to restore the destroyed premises in the

to do but also to grow spiritually preparing themselves for a further normal life.

Through the periodical «Prisoner» readers will be able to receive information about this center. Today we create this center solely on our own. We do not have sponsors and investors to create this center.

Therefore for the first time I would like to appeal to the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, as well as to charitable foundations and organizations, with a request to provide us with material and legal assistance for the further creation of this important and necessary center.

We also purchased and leased



Another abandoned house is being prepared for repairs



Ramshackle house, for now...

abandoned farm area for a sawmill and a line for the production of aerated concrete blocks, to dig a channel for connecting the lakes for fish farming, to make a small dam, to build a vegetable storehouse, a sewing workshop, to purchase necessary living creatures and restore access roads. And now we need, as never before, concrete assistance so that the work that has already begun does not stop. Of course money is still needed very much. But with the creation of such a

to create this rehab center after all. It seems to me that the time has come now to do something at last, so that people from other countries can come to learn from us, and not just us going to them. But for this we urgently need the help of those people who have the opportunity and the desire to help us in this, especially since today much has been started and done by ourselves.

All requisites for the provision of material assistance, as well as contact infor-



This structure will be restored as a production line of aerated concrete blocks



This structure will be restored as a sawmill

center in three years' time we would be able to get independent support and pay back all the costs.

For today, with God's help the impossible was possible: the first stage of the «Prisoner» project was completed, that is, the independent Christian publication «Prisoner» now exists for the sixth year. With Gods help the creation of this center will also be possible.

It is very difficult for me to lead the creation of this large-scale center from where I'm at. However, I have a great desire

mation are indicated on the last page of the publication «Prisoner». We will be immensely grateful to every person who wishes to render their feasible assistance for this center.

I have shared with you, dear readers of «Prisoner» all that has already been done and continues to be done for the glory of God and for the good of all people. I am sure that only the one who knows how to sacrifice for the sake of others always achieves their goals in life!

I. GORIK.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Aleksandr SHCHUROV: «GOD CHANGES LIVES!»

«From an early age I felt emptiness in my heart. It seemed to me that my mother did not notice me. Everyone I knew just used me to achieve their goals. I did not have a person with whom I could just sit down and share the troubles that filled my heart» says Aleksandr Shchurov from Severodonetsk, Lugansk region. «I had many acquaintances, many telephone numbers in my phone book, but when I flipped through it, I did not know with whom to share my pain and anxiety».

Once, standing on the balcony of the fourth floor, the man was already getting ready to jump, but suddenly he came across the telephone number of a Christian friend. He dialed his number and said: «I'm ready to do anything to change my life». A voice on the other side said to him: «We must meet and talk. I know the One who can change your life. God».

What made Aleksandr decide to commit suicide? Why did the young man not see the meaning of life? Here's what he says «In the 1990s, crime was on the rise. And it was cool to be among the tough guys. We were seventeen years old, and we tried everything that completely changed my life and devalued it. In the end, I came to the conclusion that I do not want to live».

Aleksandr grew up in an intelligent family. He had everything he needed. It seemed that nothing could prevent him from having a successful, happy future. However, as his parents worked hard his dad was rarely home. Mom did not have time to pay enough attention to children. Since he was thirteen year old, he was brought up by the street. «We gradually joined the criminal ranks. Dad, of course, tried to fight it, but it was too late. We were engaged in sports. We believed that strength and endurance is the most important thing, that it will give us the opportunity to earn money now and in the future. Of course we earned everything by criminal means. At the same



time, we started smoking early, using alcohol, then drugs. All this was readily available for us». It was the drugs that impacted the life of Aleksandr significantly. He was repeatedly imprisoned. Even relatives turned away from him. What young people consider fashionable and cool brings pain and destruction. Soon the young man, who should have been a consolation for his parents and relatives, became a hostage to alcohol, drugs and depression

The use of alcohol is considered more acceptable than other dangerous habits. Most people think that alcohol is no big deal, but unfortunately the facts show that it destroys the life of a person, leads to incurable diseases, divorce, suffering and premature deaths.

Were people created by God for such a life? After falling into the trap of alcohol and drugs, Aleksandr began to fight with these bad habits. He believed that for this struggle he had enough willpower. However, this turned out to be not enough. «I thought that I could do everything myself, that the main thing is willpower», he remembers. «However, after just six months, I again found myself under investigation. I had to run. I was hiding in Crimea, in Yalta, where I lived for nine years. It would seem that I have changed everything in my life: my environment, my friends, my place of

residence, and stopped using strong narcotics. But at some point I realized that I still depend on them in one way or another. Again, I would turn to my bad habits and be under criminal investigation; I had to return to Severodonetsk.

In 2013, I ended up with two problems. At that time I lived with a girl and we were not married. She became pregnant; gave birth to our daughter, but after learning about my life, she said that even in the birth certificate of my child she did not want to mention my name. My dad died by that time. Mom, who until now showed me love and care, trying to save me, also was in despair... I was waiting for my sixth trial. I expected six years of imprisonment, and I was already thirty-three years old».

This was a turning point in Aleksandr's life. He realized that if he does not change his life, he will simply perish. He had no money to pay off his bills. There were no opportunities to change something. And for the first time in his life, he turned to God and asked for salvation. In the depths of his heart, the man trusted in the miracle. For a full month he waited on the verdict. The final verdict was shocking — four years on probation.

Free from jail, he realized that he had another chance. However, after a month of fruitless efforts and attempts to change something on his own, Aleksandr came to the conclusion: there was no sense in living through this hell any longer. He believed that suicide was the best way to solve the problem. Standing on the balcony and preparing to jump down, he remembered the recent meeting with his friend, his name was also Aleksandr. «Literally a month ago I met with Alexandre Rudenko, a missionary. When he spoke with me I listened, but I could not understand what he was saying».

What the missionary Aleksandr recalls, «We knew each other from childhood. We went to the same school, grew up in one

neighborhood, were friends, and were part of the same crowd. After graduating from school, everyone went his own way, but we all were involved with crime. Jesus knocked on the door of my heart and changed me. And I could not help sharing this joy with my friends. I returned to my city after I had rehabilitated and turned to God, and I began to meet my friends and tell them about God. Unfortunately, not everyone listened. Two of five close friends died...»

Preparing to end his life, Aleksandr Shchurov was at his wits end, ready to try anything just to find the true meaning of life. «God showed me his mercy, recalls Aleksandr Shchurov. Listening to my Christian friend's advice, I went to the rehabilitation center where I spent a year and a half. There patients were taught to pray, read and understand the Holy Scripture. I began to receive my first personal revelations of God's existence. And in my mind, something began to happen. I stopped rebelling. Anger and resentment were gone. I was learning to look at the world, at people and at myself in a new way».

Eventually, a moment comes when a person realizes his own sinfulness and his own powerlessness to change something and sincerely repents before God. And then he feels the true meaning of life, true happiness. «I'm happy with what I have», says Aleksandr. Who is a happy person? It is not the person who has everything, but the one who is satisfied with what he has. I'm satisfied with my life, so I'm happy. I'm happy because God lives in my heart. I have fellowship with Him, I have a large family of Christians, I have a wonderful relationship with family and friends. With God, I can do everything! If you are in similar circumstances in which I once was; you have addictions, your family abandoned you and you do not see the way out — turn to God! No one could help me. Only God changed my heart, gave me freedom, joy, peace, which I never experienced before in my life.

On the materials of the telecast «Step Towards», Ukraine.

I often thought before «What is needed in order to be lucky?» Maybe to be born in lucky piece of clothing or under a lucky star? I now understand that no, definitely not this or anything. But here's what is important: it isn't about starting well, it's about finishing well and happy. In good old famous stories, good always prevails over evil and truth triumphs over lies. Those who say that this happens only in movies or in fairy tales are wrong. This here is a story about me.

Everything in this story began very well: a happy family, nice upbringing, fine life goals... It seemed that the home was built by the rules, but the foundation failed... And everything collapsed all in one moment. At the same time when all my friends were figuring out «Who to become?» I was thinking, «How can I do what I should not, without consequences?» And soon, at the age of thirteen, my rebellious attitude took on a rather obvious form: instead of studying-truancy, instead of developmental activities — I adopted harmful destructive habits. By age 15 these harmful habits became an integral part of me. Without them life seemed simply impossible.

Everything but drugs and crime automatically became irrelevant — the hellish machine of addiction put me on the path of destruction.

I was sentenced to five years in a correctional facility. But this was really the start of the second part of my story. While I was in prison, my mother, who by that time became a Christian, prayed fervently for me. And one day her prayers got answered —

BORN TWICE

my soul opened to receive God and the good news brought to our prison by believers from one Christian church. The news that God loves me and wants me to be saved has become alive and understandable for me.

My heart has finally opened to God and from this moment in my life, amazing supernatural changes began to occur since God Himself, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, was making the work. Spiritual revival, freedom from drug addiction, then release from prison, love, marriage, and a full and happy life! What the Lord accomplished and what He does for me, it is simply impossible to describe. I cannot begin to describe it in words. I received a new beginning, new thoughts and desires, a new bright life full of His glory!

And yet I got an irresistible desire to dream and create! Now my friend Tanya Mironenko and I, write songs and sing them, glorifying our Lord. Tanya went through what I did. She even told me «Your story and my story are almost the same. The differences are not big. But living in the present is glorious». And she is absolutely right: two different but such identical «unlucky» people began to develop into «lucky» people... Our story continues in each new song, in which we glorify our main hero — the amazing Savior Jesus Christ! Yes, by the way our group is called «Twice Born» because we were lucky to be born for the second time, by God's grace.

Irina GUSENITSA,
Ukraine
(photo on the right).

«If someone had told me what my life was going to be like, I would have never believed them» says Larisa Gerasimenko as she shares her testimony. Now she is a beautiful, blooming woman, a mother of a fourteen-year-old son. But at some point in her life she was admitted into hospital with sepsis caused by drug abuse, she looked like a seventy-year old woman.

ONLY GOD CAN DO IT

Larisa Gerasimenko was born in Kirovograd and grew up in a loving and caring family. But then a disaster came into her life and her relatives died, she and her little child were left alone without help. In order to survive, she started selling drugs, and then got addicted herself. Shortly after, she was imprisoned.

When Larisa was released, she tried to start over with a clean slate, but was unable to break the cycle. Due to drug use she ended up with numerous life-threatening conditions: sepsis, pneumonia, meningitis, and chronic hepatitis are only a few of them. Her doctors were saying «even if you recover from such a «combo», you will never become normal again».

Larisa had been bedridden for two months, weighed 30 kilograms (66 pounds) and had no hope for healing. But help arrived completely unexpectedly. Christians from the church started visiting her in the hospital. They talked about Jesus and prayed over her. Gradually the patient's condition improved and the surprised doctors stated: «Only God could do it».

A little later, Larisa went to a rehabilitation center. Here her life completely changed, it became filled with meaning and joy. She overcame her addictions and all her emotional struggles. She decided to devote herself to serving Jesus. But there were some serious consequences from her past life: Larisa was diagnosed with HIV. She stands strong despite being diagnosed with this terminal disease because the Lord never leaves her alone. Larisa continues to serve courageously; the woman is now helping those who need support. She also leads a women's rehabilitation center in the Zhytomyr region.



Larisa GERASIMENKO, Ukraine, <http://www.vihod.com>



TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

TESTIMONY OF OLEG HAYDAROV



The robbers who were crucified on the cross next to Jesus Christ seemed to have no chance to repent. One of them gloated over Christ, imitating the brutal crowd of elders, and the other — stood up for Jesus, realizing that He was innocently punished. The one who cursed the Lord had a cruel heart, and even on the cross he did not repent for all the evil that he committed. Jesus was near his reach, but he made the decision to not repent. He missed his last chance.

Oleg Haydarov, now responsible for the missionary service in the mission «Good Samaritan», also once was, as he calls himself, a robber, but, Glory to God, he did not miss his chance to repent. As a robber on the cross, Oleg too met with the Lord, serving his sentence, not on the cross, but in prison. While in the world he believed that God exists, but it did not stop him from sinning, and doing evil to others. It was then in prison that the Lord gave him a chance, speaking to him through the Bible, which, as it seemed at the time, happened to fall into the hands of the occult.

One person who came from a high security prison, brought with him some kind of book. «Where did you get this book?» I asked. I used to think that the Gospel is preserved either in museums or in priests in temples. I never even thought that this book might get into my hands. «People came to the prison where I was. They brought the Gospel», he replied. «Would I be able to read it», I asked. And he said: «I can give it to you: I have one more». Taking the Gospel, I immediately began to read it. As I began to read I realized that this is not an ordinary book. This is God's Word and it has power!

To think, the Holy book in my sin-stained hands! From this thought I was somehow uncomfortable, but I still continued to read it. But I could not understand anything. Then I again met with the person who gave me the Bible: «Do you understand what is written in the Gospel?» — «I understand». — «Why don't I understand?» He explained to me that the Bible is God's wisdom, which only those to

whom the Lord will open the mind and eyes can understand.

From this explanation, I realized that before reading the Word of God, you should always pray, something I never did and could not do. Then I asked my friend to write on the sheet the words of prayer. He suddenly asked me: «Did you have a bicycle in your childhood?» I thought, what does the bicycle have to do with God, but answered meekly: «Yes, I did». And he: «Where did you get it, who bought it for you?» — «Father». — «And how was it? did you come to your mom and say that you want your father to buy you a bicycle? And, not knowing how to express your desire to your father, did you have to write it out, to then tell him?»

Not fully understanding the point he was trying to make I answered: «No, it was not like that. I approached my father. I pulled him by the sleeve and asked him to buy me a bicycle. I was still young, and he bought it for me». Then my interlocutor says: «Well, God does not need to be pulled by the sleeve. And if you want to ask for something from Him — bend your knees. If you want to eat, say that you are hungry. If you feel cold, say that there is nothing to wear. And if you do not understand anything in this book, then say: «Lord, this is your wisdom, open it to me, open all that You want to tell me».

The friend's advice was a discovery for Oleg. Before that, he did not know that the Lord could be so easily told about everything and simply asked for something. Now, before reading the Gospel, he prayed — and it really worked. The first biblical story that caught his attention was the story of a rich young man. «In this young man, I recognized myself», confesses Oleg.

«The difference was that he was rich, and I was poor. Everyone gave up on me: friends and family. Only my mother remembered me». «Lord, what shall I do to have eternal life?» — the question that the young man asked Jesus. This young man became consonant with what Oleg was going through. He, too, did not know what to do. Then the Lord began responding with lines of biblical history: «Do the commandments». Oleg did not immediately understand what the commandments were. Then Christ began to call: «Do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery, honor your parents». Oleg listened to these lines and understood that he did not fulfill any of them. «No, this book is not for me», he thought, «because my life does not quite correspond to what I've read». He put down the book and did not read it again. But it was almost like a miracle! Every time he opened the nightstand, his gaze constantly fell on the gospel. It seemed to attract to itself. Some inner voice seemed to say: «Take it and read it».

To prevent the book from interfering with the way he lived before, Oleg hid it in a dump of newspapers and magazines. But in some wonderful way it ended up in a box. Then Oleg again tried to throw the book in the mountain of magazines, but it did not work out. It was again in sight. «There's something in it», he thought. «This is definitely not an ordinary book. Hence, God is waiting for something from me». Oleg decided to conduct the last experiment: he placed the Bible under a jar with jam. «If this book crawls out and finds itself elsewhere, then God wants to say something about it. I look, again the book lies on top. Then I felt like shivers ran down my back. I finally understood: it's all for a reason».

God does not really happen by chance. The fact is that to the bedside table in which the book was lying, only Oleg's friend had access. He was interested in the book.

He read it secretly when Oleg wasn't around. He would read a little and put it back in place. No one could have guessed this, but the Lord foresaw everything. At the time Oleg saw this as a sign, while his fellow countryman became more and more interested in reading the Word of God.

Faced with a mysterious appearance, the book again caught Oleg's attention. As in the beginning, when he read God's commandments and decrees for a Holy life, he could not believe that they could be fulfilled. Looking back, Oleg understood that living according to the Word on this earth is simply unrealistic. He once read in the Gospel: «... Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on... Instead, seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you» (Luke 12:22-31).

God still spoke a lot through the Bible, and Oleg realized that he needed to change his life, we must repent, but it was so hard to do.

«I was ready to give up all sin, but something had a strong possession of me, a drug, that did not let me go. I started to pray and ask God for help. I did not know how the Lord would answer me, but I thought that the next dose of the drug would become my help. And then, in the middle of the night, I heard the door of the cell quietly open. All my friends were asleep. My heart began beating. The attendant handed me the packet and closed the door behind him. With trembling hands, I began to unpack it. In the package there were many newspapers, among was the gospel. A thought ran through my head: «Who could have brought this to me?» Putting the book aside, I began to open the next packet, looking for the drug. After reviewing all the papers, I found a pack of tea. There was nothing else there. Offended, I turned to God: «Lord, I asked you for help. How can this gospel help me?» But God spoke to my heart and I heard His voice inside: «Take and read!» I opened the Gospel and read the words from the Acts of the Holy Apostles: «In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent...» (Acts. 17:30). These words touched me. I fell to my knees and began to ask God for forgiveness. I cried and repented... My life flashed in front of me, like on a film, frame by frame. I saw how I brought grief to people. I asked: «Lord, forgive me. I was a rascal, I'm not worthy of living». I ask for One more shot. Before me stood my mother, who had already departed into eternity, without saying goodbye to me. She was waiting for the meeting, but the illness cut her life short. One of the reasons for her illness and pain was our unsuccessful family. My father often drank and beat my mother. I remember how much she would cry when she would come to visit me. I tried to calm her saying that everything will be okay. And that I will be released and start a new life. But when I would get out of jail I would always go back to my old habits and there was nothing that I could do to help myself.

This prayer was a turning point in my life. The first miracle was that I had no withdrawals. I became free and never in my life touched drugs, did not smoke and did not drink alcohol. Freedom came. My soul sang: «I am free, I am free from sin. Jesus found me, tore all the bonds of evil. I am now full of heavenly joy».

Since 1993, Oleg lives with God, and He dominates his heart. Oleg together with his wife work as missionaries in the village of Golovin, Rovno region. They visit their mission friends in other regions, communicate with people, help those who have spiritual problems. From observing the life story of this minister you can see an interesting pattern: first, the Lord changes your heart, then your life, and then through you, the regenerated person, changes the life of those who live and communicate with you.

The material was prepared by Irina NAUMETS, <http://blog.org.ua>

Parable of the fact that everything has a purpose and deep meaning

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Two brothers lived all their lives behind a high city wall, they had never seen fields or meadows. So one day they decided to go to the village. The brothers walked along the road, they saw the arable land on which the farmer worked, and were surprised:

«What's he doing?» He Digs up the earth and leaves deep strips on it! Why spoil the flat land, covered with tender green grass?

Then they saw him throwing seeds into the furrows.

— He so strange! They cried. — Takes good wheat and throws it into the mud!

«I do not like the village»,

one of the brothers said irritably, «strange people live here».

And one brother returned to the city. And the second brother stayed in the village. In just a few weeks he began to notice dramatic changes. The sown field was covered with young greenery, even more beautiful and tender than the old one. This discovery impressed him so much that he wrote to his brother that he should come and do not hesitate, and he himself saw what miracles took place in the



village. The brother immediately came and was also impressed.

Time passed, and the green shoots turned into golden ears. When the wheat was completely ripe, the farmer brought the scythe and began mowing. Then the impatient brother shouted: «He's still crazy, this man! He worked so hard all these months, growing wonderful ears, and now with their own hands cuts them under the root? What nonsense! I'm going back to the city».

The patient brother, however, continued to live in the village. He watched the farmer harvest the crop in the barn, as he deftly separates the grain from the chaff, and was delighted to see that he collected wheat a hundred times more than he sowed.

Now it became clear to him: in everything that the farmer did, there was a purpose and a profound meaning. They just didn't lay out in the open.

Parable about a rural sage and «good hearing»

One person went with his friend, who came from the village, along a crowded city street. Suddenly the provincial exclaimed:

— I hear a grasshopper!

— You're crazy, — the metropolitan answered, surveying the central street of the city crowded with people during the rush hour.

— But I still hear a grasshopper, — the friend insisted.

He approached the flowerbed, broken in front of the multi-storey building of some institution, bent down, spread the leaves of the plants. There really sat and chirped a small grasshopper.

— You must have a phenomenal hearing! — the townsan replied with surprise.



— No, it's the most ordinary one.

— This it is impossible to believe! Then look, — replied the friend and poured a handful of coins on the pavement.

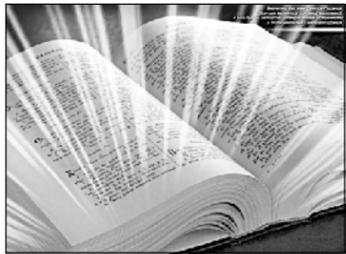
Immediately passers-by turned their heads and climbed into their pockets to check whether their money was falling out.

— You see, — said the village sage, it all depends on what your mind is set on.

<http://www.smisl-zhizni.ru/pritchi>

PASTOR'S WORD

SWEET AND BITTER WATER FROM ONE SOURCE?



In one of the previous issues of the newspaper «Prisoner» (No. 1 (20), 2017), a question from brother Roman Kostyshyn was published, to which Aleksandr Borisenko wished to reply.

Question:

Can a Christian live minute by minute without sinning before God in his thoughts, or in his words, or in his actions? Why do many Christians believe that having a new heart, they will still sin? But how can that be, how can bitter and sweet water flow from one source? Why does the new creation (the Christian) have something unclean in itself? After all, any sin is a consequence of the uncleanness of the heart, is it not? I will be grateful to you when I can read your answer. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you!

With love to you, brother Roman Kostyshyn, Vinnitsa, Ukraine.

Answer:

Let's start the answer by quoting the complete biblical text, to which you, brother Roman, were referring to, when asking the question:

James 3:6-12 — *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

So back to the question:**Can born again Christians still sin?**

In this text, the apostle James touches only one area of our life — control over our own tongue. He gives us an example taken from life, that from a single spring in nature there is never a water of two distinct varieties and even each tree produces a fruit corresponding to its name. But with people, it is not like what we see in nature. For example, Jacob says that we as people bless God and with the same mouth curse people created in the likeness of God; from the same mouth can come a blessing and a curse. He is saying that «it should not be so,» the apostle James means that although it happens, it should not be so. And the words said by him «because we all sin a lot» (James 3:2) at the beginning of this chapter exclude any doubts that a Christian can sin. Other quotes from the Bible say even more clearly:

Ecclesiastes 7:20 — *Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins...*

1 John 1:8 — *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

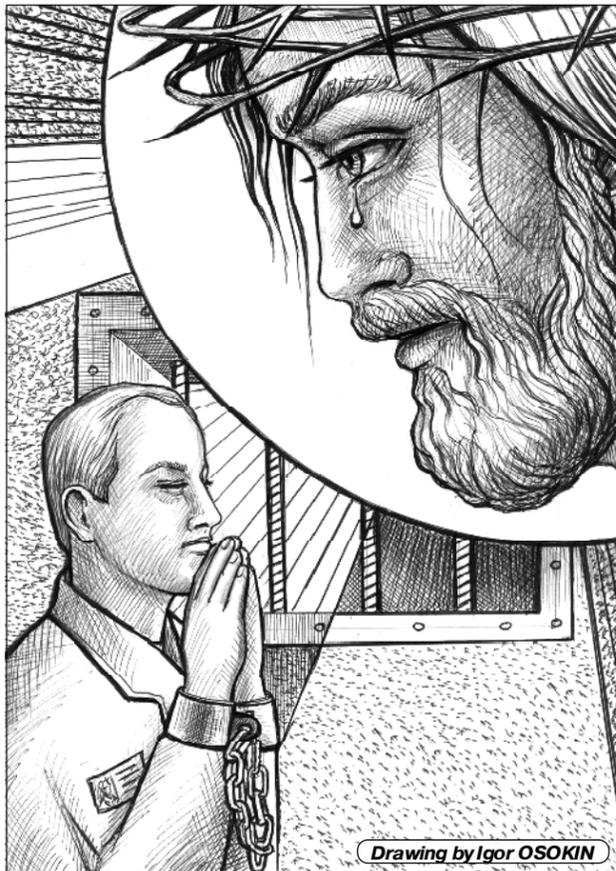
These texts from the Holy Scripture convincingly prove that ability to sin still stays with every Christian.

But why do born again Christians still sin after their conversion to God?

Let's start from the very beginning. In the beginning, God created man sinless on the Earth, with qualities that are very much inherent of Himself. Man in that state had inner peace, inner harmony and could directly communicate with his Creator. It was a life without disappointments, illnesses, inner heart emptiness and without remorse.

Ecclesiastes 7:2 — *God created man upright (righteous,) but they have gone in search of many schemes.*

But after the Fall, death entered the world, with it law of aging, sickness and suffering. Through obedience to the devil,



in the soulful and carnal part of man, his image was reflected with wickedness, pride and inclinations to everything bad. We see this flaw in our nature, now transmitted genetically, even into small children who have not yet learned something bad from others (Romans 5:12, 17). When a person turns to God and is born again, the human spirit revives, but the flesh remains the same.

James 1:18 — *He (God) chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.*

John 3:6 — *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*

An alcoholic who repented recently, although he will have a peaceful, happy look, but his appearance for some time will still testify of his former vice.

The same thing happens with the character of a person: not everything changes overnight. It takes time to secure the victories that you receive over old habits, and for the spirit to triumph over the flesh.

Once born again, the new believer, the Christian clearly discovers in himself two natures that are at enmity with each other. On one side — the revived spirit with renewed conscience, on the other — the old, dilapidated nature, with its pride, lusts and all sinful inclinations.

Galatians 5:17 — *...For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*

Romans 7:22-23 — *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

This confrontation is so real and sometimes painful, which often causes much suffering for the Christian. When he was worldly, his conscience was muffled, and there were no such

attacks from the demonic world so there was no such struggle. Regardless of whether he was morally and socially educated or scum at the bottom of a social society, before coming to God, the Christian was spiritually dead and belonged to the devil. After all, all people without God are slaves: either low-lying lusts, or slaves of their image — an idol for which they behave accordingly. Therefore, even the most socially correct and gentle person has a sinful motive in himself — pride.

When a person comes to God with repentance, then all hell starts moving! The devil loses a soul that could potentially go to hell to be with Satan. That's why a whole horde of demons attack that person, to bring him back to the jurisdiction of the old master — the devil. Sometimes a Christian may even be defeated in some aspects of his life, but in him there is already a new life, and he cannot remain in this state for long. He repents, he rises, and if he does not walk, he crawls, but still to the light, to God. Such a Christian can suffer from the discovery of his helplessness, but it is this particular pain that is very useful to him. With it goes human arrogance and self-confidence, and he learns to rely not on his own strength, but on the Lord. Passing through the pain of struggle and even to some extent defeat, the believer becomes more humble, more compassionate to others and dependent on God and His power. And even pain and suffering lead a Christian to victory. Thus, we see that the devil fulfills his role in preparing the children of God for eternity.

For sure correctly the Bible says: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*

Now, brother Roman, you ask the question: «Any sin is a consequence of the uncleanness of the heart, is it not?» Not necessarily. For example, thoughtless, unconscious sins or sins committed by recklessness may not be so. So, we answered two questions:

Can a Christian sin?

The answer is yes. Why? Because a believing person has two natures fighting with each other and he has free will, freedom of choice.

Can a Christian NOT sin?

Roman, this was your very first question: «Can a Christian live minute by minute, not sinning before God, either in his thoughts, or in his words, or in his actions?» It is possible, but only in one case, if he stays in Christ and Christ in him. As it is written in the Bible:

1 John 2:28 — *And now, children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

Galatians 2:19-20 — *...I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*

Galatians 5:16 — *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Being in Christ or being driven by the Holy Spirit is a blissful state in which all consciousness is filled with the presence of the Lord and the knowledge of His will, His desires. This is a state of purity and full openness to the Lord, accompanied by a two-way conversation with Christ. Entry into this state can be through simple faith of a child and personal sanctification. The deeper the Christian sanctifies himself, the closer he is to the Lord and the Lord to him, the more power his words have in prayers and in the spiritual world.

To summarize, let's say: on his own, it is impossible for a person to live holy without sinning; but, with God's help and with the help of the person himself — it is quite possible.

Matthew 19:25-26 — *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, «Who then can be saved?» Jesus looked at them and said, «With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible».*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE

Thomas HUXLEY,
an English zoologist,
popularizer of science
and defender of the
evolutionary theory
of Charles Darwin



«The Bible is a great charter for the poor and the enslaved. Mankind cannot do without it».

ROOSEVELT,
President
of the United States

«The teaching of the Bible is so intertwined with our civil and social life that it is impossible to imagine human life if this teaching is removed from it. With the removal of the Bible we will lose all foundation».



Wilhelm HUMBOLDT,
philosopher



«Reading the Bible always gives the most effective comfort. I do not know anything to compare it with. The Old and New Testaments equally strengthen the soul...»

D. DAWSON,
geologist, American
scientist

«Whenever and by whomsoever an attempt was made to depict the history of the universe, this attempt cannot present anything higher and more worthy than the biblical narrative of creation».



Charles DICKENS,
English writer



«The New Testament is the greatest book now and in the future for the whole world».

<http://blago.dp.ua/aphorisms/101-podborka-citat-stihov-fraz-izvestnyh-lyudey-o-boge-vere-biblii.html>

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

I. DEFINITION

Indifference is a state of a person in which he does not show the slightest interest in anything. Synonyms: apathy, indifference, stiffness, insensitivity, callousness, indifference, impassivity, indifference, passivity, callousness.

Small encyclopedic dictionary of Brockhaus and Efron: *Indifference is indifference to questions of knowledge, morality, social life.*

Great Soviet Encyclopedia: *Indifference (from Latin **indifferens**), indifference, indifference, indifference.*

Dictionary of Dal: *Indifferentism — of Latin origin: indifference, indifference, especially about faith.*

Often people call indifference neutrality, to sound more decent. However, the meaning of indifference does not change from this. Indifference remains indifference.

II. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF INDIFFERENCE

1. Parable of the Good Samaritan: Luke 10:30-35 — *Jesus said: A man came from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers who removed his clothes from him, wounded him and left him, leaving him hardly alive. On occasion, one priest walked*



INDIFFERENCE

by that road and, seeing him, passed by. Also the Levite, when he was at that place, went up, looked and passed. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, found him and, seeing him, took pity and went over and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; And, having put him on his donkey, brought him to the hotel and took care of him; And the next day, departing, took out two pennies, gave the innkeeper a hotel and told him: take care of him; And if you do more than that, I, when I return, will give you more money. Which of these three, do you think, was the neighbor of the robbers who were caught? He said: he who showed mercy to him. Then Jesus said to him: «Go, and do the same». This story illustrates the indifference shown by the priest and the Levite in relation to the robbed and wounded person.

2. Appeal to the Laodicean Church: Revelation 3:14-18 — *And to the Angel of the Lao-Dica Church write: So says Amen, a faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know your works; You are neither cold nor hot; Oh, if you were cold, or hot! But, as you are warm, and not hot and not cold, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say: «I am rich, I have become rich and do not need anything»; But you do not know that you are unhappy, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I advise you to buy from Me gold, purified by fire, so that you may be enriched, and white clothes to dress and that the shame of your nakedness is not visible, and anoint your eyes with eye ointment to see.*

Indifference is described here as a state of «warmth»: «neither cold nor hot».

How does God treat indifference? Both passages examined by us show the Lord's negative attitude toward indifference. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus teaches people to act as graciously as the good Samaritan did to the injured. As for the second passage, the attitude of the Lord to indifference is emphasized in verse 16: *But, as you are warm, and not hot and not cold, I will spew you out of my mouth.*

III. INDIFFERENCE UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

1. Varieties of indifference:

☉ Indifference to what is happening (to the events).

☉ Indifference to the neighbor (to surrounding people): the parable of the good Samaritan is an illustration of indifference to the neighbor (Luke 10:30-35).

☉ Indifference to God (and to God's Word): an appeal to the Laodicean church illustrates indifference to God (Revelation 3:14-18).

☉ Indifferent people are indifferent to the Word of God. The sermon does not touch him, but on the contrary, he gets bored listening to it. It should also be noted that if a person says that he believes in the existence of God, but does not live by God's laws, then this is a product of indifference to God. This is the same if such a person

said: «There is no God.» Such people the Lord calls fools: Psalms 13:1 — *Said the madman in his heart: «There is no God.»*

☉ The Lord gives such a man a few chances: Job 33:14 — *God speaks once and, if they do not notice, another time...* The Lord sends such a man disease, and people who could testify to him about the truth. For what purpose does He do this? The answer is given in Job 33:29-30: *Behold, all this God does two or three times with a man to take his soul from the grave and enlighten him with the light of the living.*

☉ Indifference to one's spiritual state (to oneself).

☉ This subsection refers to indifference to one's sins and indifference to the question of salvation of one's soul. Here is what the Bible says about indifference to one's spiritual state: Proverbs 19:16 — *He that keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who does not care about his ways will perish.*

☉ A special kind of indifference is indifference to material goods.

☉ There are different types of indifference. If a person does not care about a person or God — this is one thing, but if a person with indifference treats earthly goods and riches, then this is quite another. It is interesting in this connection to recall the words of King Solomon: *Vanity of vanities, Ecclesiastes said, all is vanity! (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:8).*

☉ A positive example for us is the words of the apostle Paul: *...I learned to be content with what I have. I know how to live and in poverty, I know how to live and in abundance; Learned everything and everything, saturate and suffer hunger, be abundant and in want (Philippians 4:11-12).*

2. Indifference to salvation

A. Indifference to the preaching of Noah before the Flood

If you remember the time of Noah, then for 120 years, while the ark was being built, Noah testified to those around him about the judgment of God coming to earth in the form of rain. The reaction of the people who lived before the Flood is known to us: indifference. Of course, we can assume that many mocked Noah and his words. However, in the hearts of scoffers there was indifference to God's Word, which Noah preached. This indifference led to the fact that only the members of Noah's family survived during the Flood: 8 people who listened to God's words and did everything as He directed them.

B. Indifference to the Gospel Today

Today the same thing is happening. Our world today is very reminiscent of the world before the Flood: the spiritual condition of our contemporaries is akin to the spiritual condition of Noah's contemporaries. Today, as then, many are indifferent to the warnings of the Lord about the coming end of the world and punishment. Our contemporaries, like the contemporaries of Noah, are indifferent to the gospel of salvation, which today God offers them without a price!

Such an amazing coincidence of our antediluvian world is not accidental. Jesus Christ compared the coming of the end of

the world to the Flood: Matthew 24:37-39 — *...as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man: for as in the days before the flood were eating, drinking, marrying and leaving Married, until the day Noah entered the ark, and did not think until the flood came and destroyed all, — so will the coming of the Son of Man...*

C. Indifference to the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

The indifference of people to the gospel of salvation is due to their indifference to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How insensate should be the heart of a man who is indifferent to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died a terrible death on the cross for the sins of the whole world. The Book of Isaiah says: *But He took our infirmities upon Himself and carried our diseases... He was wounded for our sins and tormented for our iniquities; The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we were healed (Isaiah 53:4-5).*

How can you be indifferent to Him who endured such torments for you with the purpose of granting you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life?

Indifference rejects the gift of salvation and neglects it! There is no doubt that such indifference will not go unpunished.

3. Growth of indifference in people is a sign of the last time

Once Jesus Christ asked disciples about the signs of the end of the world: Matthew 24:3 — *When He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately and asked: Tell us, when will it be? And what is the sign of your coming and the end of the age?* The answer of Jesus is given in Matthew 24:4-13. Pay attention to verse 12: *...because of the multiplication of iniquity, in many will grow cold love...* Cooling love is indifference.

4. The roots of indifference

Indifference is indifference. In which case is the person indifferent to anything? In the event that it is not important to him or worthy of his attention. What can be the roots of indifference?

- Pride.
- Selfishness.
- Ambitiousness.
- Careerism.

5. What man cannot do until he gets rid of indifference?

☉ An indifferent person cannot be a seeker of truth, because he is indifferent to the truth.

☉ An indifferent person cannot receive salvation, because he is indifferent to his spiritual state, and to the gospel of salvation.

☉ An indifferent person cannot serve people, because he is indifferent to his neighbor.

☉ An indifferent person cannot serve God, because he is indifferent to God.

☉ An indifferent person is not able to truly believe, love, compassion and sacrifice himself, because these traits are opposite to indifference.

☉ An indifferent person cannot avoid the hell unless he gives up his indifference.

6. Indifference — the paralysis of the soul
A.P. Chekhov gave a remarkable definition of indifference: «Indifference is paralysis of the soul, premature death». Indeed, indifference is a sign of a spiritually dead person — a man with a dead spirit, an unregenerate person. Jesus called such people «dead» (Luke 9:60).

The Bible teaches us that indifference is part of the character of the wicked, and the absence of indifference, and conversely, the presence of opposites of indifference such as love, compassion, caring and participation, is a sign of righteousness.

Matthew 25:31-46 — *When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he sits on the throne of his glory, and all nations will be gathered before him; And he will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; And he will set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right: «Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I hungered, and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; Was a stranger, and you received me; Was naked, and you clothed me; Was sick, and you visited Me; In prison was, and you came to Me». Then the righteous will say to Him: «Lord! When did we see You hungry and fed? Or thirsty, and drink? When we saw You a stranger, and accepted? Or naked, and dressed? When we saw You sick, or in prison, and came to You?» And the King will answer them: «Verily I say unto you, Since you did this to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me». Then he will say to those on the left: «Depart from me, you cursed, into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and you did not give Me anything to eat; I was thirsty, and you did not give me drink; He was a stranger, and they did not receive me; Was naked, and did not clothe me; And in prison, and did not visit me». Then they will answer Him: «Lord! When we saw You hungry or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not serve You?» Then he will answer them: «Truly I say to you: since you did not do this to one of these smaller ones, you did not do it to Me». And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal».*

In this passage, these are indifferent people whom the Lord calls damned. They are waiting for eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. The righteous, according to this passage, are not indifferent people. The Lord prepared for them eternal life.

IV. APHORISMS OF INDIFFERENCE

1. It is easy to conceal hatred, it is difficult to hide love, but it is more difficult to hide indifference (K.L. Berne).

2. Indifference is paralysis of the soul, premature death (A.P. Chekhov).

3. The greatest sin of man is not hatred, but indifference to his brothers (Mother Teresa).

4. If you are indifferent to the suffering of others, you do not deserve the title of a person (M. Saadi).

5. Science invented a cure for most of our diseases, but never found the means from the most terrible of them — indifference (Helen Keller).

6. Do not be afraid of enemies — in the worst case, they can kill you. Do not be afraid of friends — in the worst case, they can betray you. Be afraid of the indifferent — they do not kill and do not betray, but only with their tacit consent there is treachery and murder on earth (Bruno Jasensky).

7. Do not be indifferent, for indifference is deadly for the human soul (M. Gorky).

8. Moral ugliness is indifference to bad deeds and words (Theofast).

9. Indifference has always been the greatest enemy of morality (Albert Schweitzer).

10. Tolerance has a fine line, behind which indifference reigns (Georgy Aleksandrov).

11. The worst crime that we can commit towards people is not to hate them, but to treat them with indifference; in this — the essence of inhumanity (Bernard Shaw).

Material for the newspaper «Prisoner» was kindly provided by Biblical discussion club, Montreal, Canada
<http://cogmtl.net/Articles/108.htm>

QUESTION – ANSWER



Why Does the Bible Not Say Anything about the Seventeen Years of Jesus' Wandering?

This is the segment of Jesus Christ's life from twelve years old, when He was at the Jerusalem temple with His parents, until He was thirty years old, when He was baptized by John and started to serve. It's strange why so many people confidently declare that the Bible does not say anything about this segment of Jesus Christ's life. The Evangelist Luke wrote about Him very clearly and definitely: *And He went down with them (with His parents) and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:51-52).*

Luke, whose works are distinguished by special historical accuracy and carefulness, could not miss this period of the life of Jesus Christ. He indicated that Jesus never wandered anywhere, as many believe, but quietly and peacefully lived in Nazareth with His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, as well as with His brothers and sisters, developing mentally, physically, spiritually and socially, like all His contemporaries.

Satan, whose goal is to «steal and kill and destroy» (John 10:10), from time to time tosses people «ideas», saying that Jesus travelled to India and Tibet in those years, where He allegedly studied yoga and eastern wisdom. The purpose of this satanic lie is obvious – to show the superiority of eastern wisdom over Christianity, and through this lead unsure souls into perdition.

Jesus lived in His family, and being the oldest son, He fulfilled the duties of His father, taking care of the family: His mother, brothers and sisters. He was well known in His country, in His city, and in the city synagogue. «Isn't He a carpenter's son?» wondered others, hearing His wise teaching: **Matthew 13:54-57** – *He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, «Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?» And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, «A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.»* If Jesus had been walking through other countries seventeen years, then it's very doubtful that anyone would have recognized Him in Nazareth, the city He grew up and matured in.

Israel had always been and remained the fatherland for Jesus Christ, of which He said: «There is no prophet in his own country» (Matthew 13:57). Jesus grew up in Israel, was brought up and instructed in the Law of God, so at the age of twelve He already surprised the elders with His wisdom and depth of

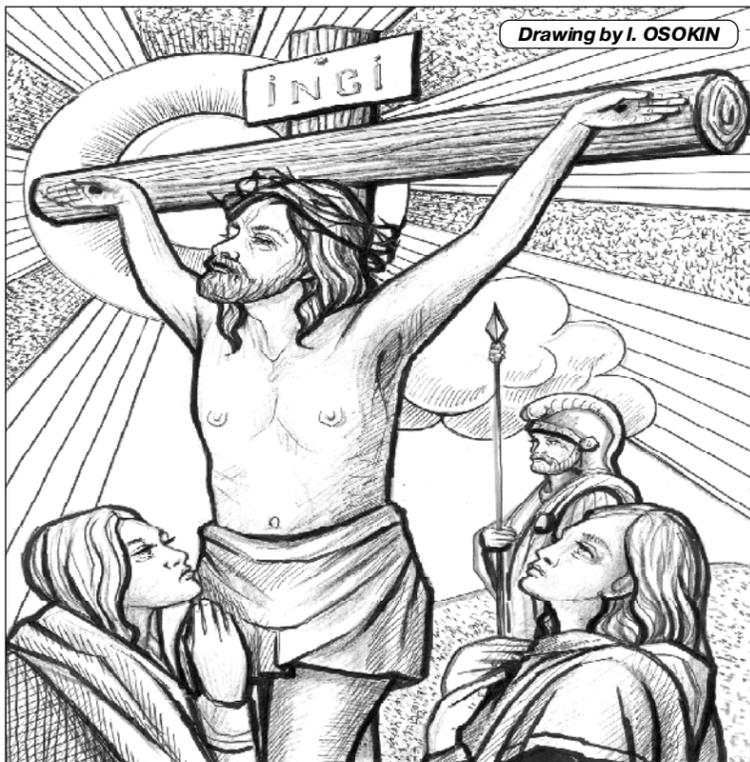
thought, for *all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers (Luke 2:47).*

The Bible does not give details about these years of the life of Jesus because they do not play any role in our salvation. The apostle John said that all the miracles of Jesus, created by Him during his earthly ministry, cannot be written down on paper: *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25).* In other words, the Bible describes only a small part of the miracles of Jesus Christ. What is surprising in that it does not describe the everyday life of Jesus Christ's childhood and teen years? After all, His life before the first miracle, created in Cannes Galilee, was a normal family life, not a service.

In addition, answering this question, it is necessary to make it clear that in the Jewish culture, a man did not leave his home until he got married. And as we know, Jesus was not married, so He lived all these years with His family.

And why would Jesus Christ need to go to Tibet to study and teach yoga? Can the pagan yoga teachings be compared with the depth, wisdom and sacredness of the sound Biblical teaching? Even assuming that Jesus was a yoga teacher with seventeen years of practice, why did He teach other things during His ministry in Israel? Where is the logic?

Finally, Jesus said about Himself that His mission was first of all to proclaim the truth not to the Gentiles, but to the Jews: *...I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24).* With such a mission, would Jesus have gone to Tibet and spent seventeen years of His life on the Tibetan pagans, leaving only three years to fulfill His direct purpose and ministry? Of course not! If Jesus told the Samaritan woman (the Samaritans were a mixture of Jews with pagans) that He was sent to serve the Israelites, wouldn't He have said the same to thing to the Tibetan monks? He would certainly have said that at the meeting if He would have had the opportunity. But we learn from the Holy Scriptures that nothing like this happened, and it could not have happened.



How Should We Understand Jesus' Words in Luke 14:26?

Luke 14:26 – *If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*

Some argue that the Gospel preaches hatred. But that is a profound error. The teaching of Jesus Christ is the teaching of love. The following passages from the Holy Scriptures are evidence:

Matthew 5:43-44 – *You have heard that it was said, «You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.» But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*

Matthew 22:37-39 – *And He said to him, «You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.» This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, «You shall love your neighbor as yourself.»*

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

John 15:17 – *This I command you, that you love one another.*

The Bible is full of such verses. How, then, should we understand the words of Jesus in **Luke 14:26**? Do they mean that Jesus preaches hatred?

Definitely not! And let's find out why.

God cannot contradict Himself and His laws. Jesus could not preach hatred towards parents, because that would contradict the fifth commandment, which reads: *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in*

the land which the Lord your God gives you (Exodus 20:12).

Jesus Himself quoted this commandment in response to a question from one of the Jewish leaders who asked Him: *«What shall I do to inherit eternal life?» And Jesus said to him, «...You know the commandments, «Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother» (Luke 18:18-20).*

But if Jesus did not mean that we should hate our relatives, then what did He mean?

Let's read Jesus' words again: *If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*

The Lord speaks of who can be His true disciples. And the solution is not to hate the members of your family and your own life, but to put Jesus first in your life. Jesus makes it clear that if a person does not put Him first in his life, then he cannot be His disciple. If someone does not have Christ in the first place, but his parents, or his wife/husband, or children, or his own interests and aspirations, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Remember the first and second commandments from the Law: «Honor God and serve only Him» and «Do not make an idol for yourself». In them, God speaks of the same thing. The Lord wants to be the first in everything in our life.

If we call ourselves His disciples, but when it comes to making some decisions we first think about ourselves, or about our family or friends, instead of giving Jesus a place in the situation, we do not act as His disciples.

<http://cogmtl.net/g.htm>

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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!»



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