



PRISONER

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

(John 8:32)

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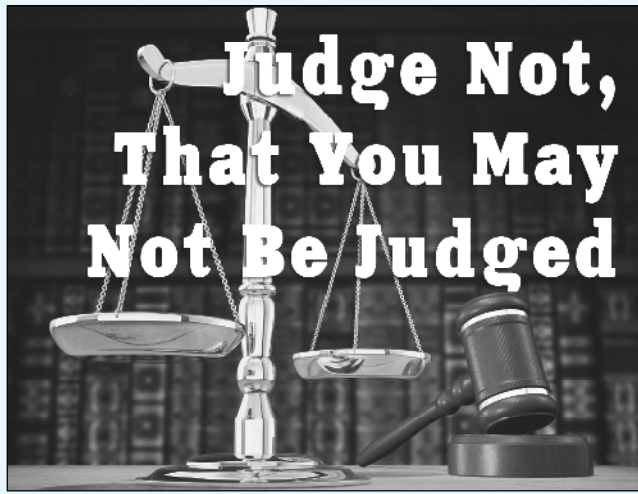
As I read over the Sermon of the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, I stop at the same spot and reflect upon the words spoken by Jesus Christ, «Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with whatever judgment you judge, you shall be judged» (Modern King James Version, Matthew 7:1-2).

The Lord strongly instructs believers to have a unambiguous attitude and to never judge others. From this instruction it becomes evident that the Lord does not accept our judgments. The Apostle James elaborates on this fact in his letter, «There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you who judges another?» (James 4:12). The New Testament reminds us of the Lord's words several times: «do not judge» (Matthew 7:1, Luke 6:37; 12:57, John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 4:5).

Why does the Bible speak so strongly about this? Who authorized people to judge others? I tried to analyze how often judging occurs in our society, including believers and unbelievers. What can one say here? People judge each other practically every step of the way. Often one judges others without even realizing it. For example, who of us hasn't judged — even once — believers from other denominations because we thought that they were doing something wrong? Who hasn't judged their unfortunate neighbor because they didn't agree with our ideas? Indeed, judging occurs not only in words, but also in thoughts. With good reason the Apostle John says, «If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us» (1 John 1:8). Surely, the Apostle John included the sin of judging when he left us such a statement. It is a given that the sin of judging occurs not only in the congregation, but also amongst spiritual leaders. Knowing human weakness, Jesus Christ says these words, «Do not judge according to sight, but judge righteous judgment» (John 7:24). In other words, if a person judges another, then at least he should judge not by looks, but by the truth.

The habit of judging others prevails in our society. The answer seems to be in ourselves. Firstly, people are not perfect and therefore they do not see anything negative in their habit of judging others. Secondly, when people judge others, they strive to exonerate themselves, saying that they are better than the person judged. Thirdly, when a person is selfish and proud, they are more prone to judge another. Knowing human tendencies to easily judge others, the Lord warns us, «For with whatever judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with whatever measure you measure out, it shall be measured to you again» (Matthew 7:2).

Today, there is an epidemic of judging, starting with simple gossipers and ending with Christians in the church. As is well-known, in this «court» there are three main branches: Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Moreover, these branches not only judge one another other, but also judge amongst themselves since they have countless other branches. Of course, not everyone is a participant, but often members of one church throw a little rock at the members of another church. This is witnessed when



we read publications, listen to radio, or watch TV. Often churches openly criticize other churches and advertise their own. Many say that our church is the true church and the other ones just carry the name of «church». Why is this happening and who is trying to set Christians against one another? The answer is, of course, Satan. Indeed, originally no one thought that the people in the church would start to divide and judge one another. Today, such judgment is a common practice even though all churches talk about God's love and its ability to miraculously change a person. While talking about the beauty of God's love, people still judge one another and they seem to forget that judgment passed on another will return to them like a boomerang.

About seventeen years ago, one church declared in its academic program that their church is the only true church and that no one else is going to be accepted into the Kingdom of God. I remembered the words of Jesus Christ, «Judge not, that you may not be judged» (Matthew 7:1).

If we say that we love God and our neighbor, then let us strive to restrain ourselves from judging others. The Bible clearly instructs, «There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you who judges another?» (James 4:12).

So, which church is going to inherit the Kingdom of God and which church won't? The answer is very simple. Everything depends on the ability of a Christian to hear and abide by the word of the Lord. Let us not forget that the Lord does not only want us to talk of our love towards God and each other, but to live it. If we truly love God, we will never judge another. For the Lord says, «Judge not, that you may not be judged» (Matthew 7:1).

I.GORIK.

The man named Mosab Hassan Yousef has become a hero of many press reports in recent years. This is because he, the son of one of the founders of the terrorist movement HAMAS in Palestine, converted to Christianity. In this paper, we present the story of his life in the cradle of HAMAS and how his life changed as a result of his conversion to faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ found Mosab right in the middle of the Arab-Israeli conflict, rescued him and transformed him into his disciple. It is unlikely there is anyone better to bring the gospel to those who are «good inside», but deceived by the god of the Qur'an. Mosab begins his autobiography with the story of his family.

My Father's Story

My father, Hassan, was the favorite son. Even as a young boy, before it was required of him, my father went regularly with my grandfather to the mosque. None of his brothers cared anything about Islam like he did.

At his father's side, Hassan learned to chant the adhan. And like his father, he had a voice and a passion that people responded to. My grandfather was very proud of him. When my father was twelve years old, my grandfather said, «Hassan, you have shown that you are very interested in God and Islam. So I am going to send you to Jerusalem to learn sharia». Sharia

is Islamic religious law that deals with daily life, from family and hygiene to politics and economics.

My father was not sent to Jerusalem simply to study religion; his father was preparing him to rule. So for the next few years, my father lived and studied in the Old City of Jerusalem near the Dome of the Rock — the iconic golden-domed structure that visually defines the profile of Jerusalem in the eyes of most of the world's people. At the age of eighteen, he completed his studies and moved to Ramallah, where he was immediately employed as

Son of HAMAS

imam of the mosque in Old Town. Filled with passion to serve both Allah and his people, my father was eager to begin his work in that community, just as his father had done in Al-Janiya.

The first time my father entered the mosque, he was shocked to find only five old men waiting for him. Everyone else, it seemed, was in the coffeehouses and pornographic theaters, getting drunk and gambling. Even the man who chanted the adhan for the mosque next door had run a microphone and cord from the minaret so he could continue the Islamic tradition without interrupting his card game.

My father's heart was broken for these people, though he wasn't sure how he would ever reach



them. Even his five old men admitted they only came to the mosque because they knew they were going to die soon and wanted to go to heaven, but at least they were willing to listen. So he worked with what he had. He led these fellows in prayer, and he taught them the Qur'an. In a very short amount of time, they grew to love him as if he were an angel sent from heaven.

My grandfather quickly realized that my father had even greater zeal and potential than he had originally thought. My grandfather sent him to Jordan for advanced Islamic study.

By the time my father arrived in Jordan in the mid-1970s to continue his studies, the Muslim

Brotherhood there was well established and beloved by the people. Its members were doing everything that was on my father's heart — encouraging renewed faith among those who had strayed from the Islamic way of life, healing those who were hurt, and trying to save people from the corrupting influences in society. He believed these men only wanted to save people and improve their lives, not to kill and destroy. And when my father met some of the early leaders of the Brotherhood, he said, «Yes, this is what I have been looking for».

What is Islam

What my father saw in those early days was the part of Islam that reflects love and mercy. What he didn't see, what he perhaps has never yet allowed himself to see, is the other side of Islam.

Islamic life is like a ladder, with prayer and praising Allah as the bottom rung. The higher rungs represent helping the poor and needy, establishing schools, and supporting charities. The highest rung is jihad.

The ladder is tall. Few look up to see what is at the top. And progress is usually gradual, almost

imperceptible — like a barn cat stalking a swallow. The swallow never takes its eyes off the cat. But the swallow does not judge depth. It does not see that the cat is getting a little bit closer with every pass until, in the blink of an eye, the cat's claws are stained with the swallow's blood.

Traditional Muslims stand at the foot of the ladder, living in guilt for not really practicing Islam. At the top are fundamentalists, the ones you see in the news killing women and children for the glory of the god of the Qur'an. Moderates are somewhere in between.

A moderate Muslim is actually more dangerous than a fundamentalist, however, because he appears to be harmless, and you can never tell when he has taken that next step toward the top. Most suicide bombers began as moderates.

The day my father first put his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder, he could never have imagined how far from his original ideals he would eventually climb. And thirty-five years later, I would want to ask him: «Do you remember where you started? You saw all those lost people, your heart broke for them, and you wanted them to come to Allah and be safe. Now suicide bombers and innocent blood? Is this what you set out to do?» But speaking to one's father about such things is not done in our culture. And so he continued on that dangerous path.

(Continued on pg. 5)

THE CULT OF THE GOLDEN CALF

The love of money and the cult of materialism are the scourges of our time. Our society is a society of consumption: consumption of material goods, pleasure, and entertainment. But every such thing costs money. The cult of money has so pervaded our everyday life that the exchange rate is now obligatory news, to be mentioned every hour on the radio along with the weather forecast, as if it is so important and one needs to know it. People are convinced that without a lot of money it is impossible to be happy. Everything can only be purchased for money, and if you have none then you are a loser. There is a book you can buy called «How To Raise A Future Millionaire», which says that millionaires can be raised from childhood and be led on the path to wealth. To raise the next generation to be true, kind, and honest is not a concern any longer, as long as wealth is growing.

The person who has been raised with a sole focus on success, career, and wealth will never be happy. He will never find true friendship, love, or faith, because these things cannot be bought with money.

The love of money is the pure worship and service of material goods — the «golden calf» (although any passion could become an idol). «**You cannot serve God and mammon**» (Matthew 6:24), which is wealth.

WHY IS IT HARD FOR A RICH MAN TO BE SAVED?

The desire to get rich especially discourages people from spiritual values. Their soul is overcome by the strong desire to get rich. Thoughts of earthly goods and values do not leave room for spiritual thoughts. That is why it is written, «**It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven**» (Matthew 19:23).

God needs a place in our hearts in order to hold onto something in the human soul; only then can a person be helped. But if the heart and soul is occupied only with material success, it is closed to God. This does not mean that the poor can be saved easily. Poverty can also give rise to many sins such as envy, pride, sadness, complaining, etc. Nevertheless, the Gospel talks about the difficulties of salvation for the rich. And as we know from history, it is clear that Christ and the apostles were very poor. Jesus had nowhere to lay his head. There have been more poor Christians than rich, although we know that there have been some very rich people including Abraham, King David, Solomon, emperors, and princes. Wealth itself is not a sin, but our attitude towards it. Everything that the Lord gives us — talents and wealth — is not ours. We are stewards but the owner is God. We must not only give back what is given to us, but return it with interest, multiplying God's gifts to help others and for the salvation of souls. But often this is not the case, the gifts occupy a dominant position in the minds of men so that they barely remember God, their soul, and others. It is very difficult for a believer to communicate with someone worldly. He speaks only of what is earthly and of wealth.

In the Gospel we find many parables and short stories about riches and wealth. Some of them talk about the right attitude to wealth, and some very clearly, vividly show the madness of people living only for earthly, perishable things.

In the Gospel of Luke there is a story: «**The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall**

THE LOVE OF MONEY

those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God» (Luke 12:16-21). Saint John Kronshtadski interprets this parable by asking the rich man: «**What! Are you such a fool to say, There is no place to store my crops? What do you mean nowhere? Here's a breadbasket and the hands of the poor. Give gifts of God's goodness, given for many, many poor, and receive forgiveness and great mercy from the Lord. By doing so, you will do according to the will of God, for the Lord gives us plenty so we might help the poor, for the merciful shall obtain mercy**» (Matthew 5:7).

This parable does not condemn riches, but the attitude of the rich man towards his wealth. He lived all his life in carousing and fun, and even when he stood on the verge of death, he still did not understand why God gave him wealth. Wealth is given to a person only for one thing: to convert the wealth into spiritual treasure by helping the needy, doing good deeds, decorating temples and saving souls. But for this rich man it was way too difficult to use his wealth for others. A carefree life of contentment makes people insensitive to the pain of others. The problems and pain of the needy and the disadvantaged become infinitely far removed. For a man who has not experienced poverty and deprivation, it is difficult to understand the poor. A proverb says, «**The fed cannot understand the hungry**».

There is another parable in the Gospel: «**There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, «Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame». But Abraham said, «Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented**» (Luke 16:19-25).

Why did the rich man go to hell? After all, the Gospel does not say that he killed someone or robbed someone to get their wealth. Well, big deal, he just really liked the daily feasts. He was also a believer, knew Abraham and probably even read the Bible. But apparently, there was no value in this, he could not be justified; all that was given to him as a means for saving souls was spent only on himself. «You've got what you wanted!» Abraham tells him. All of those years there was Lazarus, lying sick, a hungry beggar at the rich man's gates. The rich man didn't even know his name. He took no part in his life. Lazarus didn't receive even the crumbs from the rich man's table. Wealth spoiled that rich man's heart and he failed to notice the suffering of one who was near him. «**Where your treasure is, that is where your heart is,**» Christ says. The rich man's heart was attached to the earthly treasure. His soul was filled with the desire for the pleasures of life; there was no place in it for the love of God and his creation, man. He made his choice to live life on Earth without caring for his soul. After death, people are not about to change. If he did not need God here on earth, then he will not be able to be with Him in heaven. It is not the Lord who punishes the person, but a man dooms himself to eternal suffering.

Life in heaven with the saints would be worse for the sinner than the fire of hell.

Let me give you an example which partly explains the idea. For a believer, prayer, Sunday service, and communion with the brothers and sisters in faith is pure joy. Try to make an unbeliever stand for three hours at a Sunday service — he could not stand for half an hour because it is not his thing.

Once I was invited to conduct a memorial service at a cemetery. But when I wanted to begin the service, suddenly almost all the family and friends, with the exception of three old ladies, moved away several meters, turned their backs on me and started smoking. I asked them not to smoke near the grave and to take part in the funeral prayer, but they just went further away and continued smoking. By the grave I noticed a few bottles of liquor and snacks. Apparently, the young people were interested in that part of the event. God does not save a

family increased rather than diminished. God sends support to many large families in many different ways. The Gospel says, «**Therefore do not worry, saying, «What shall we eat?» or «What shall we drink?» or «What shall we wear?» For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you**» (Matthew 6:31-33). Christian families with many children are not looking for comfort in this idle life but mainly the Kingdom of God. They live not for themselves, but for their children. They raise and nurture them with tireless effort. Only then «**all these things shall be added to you**».

It is constantly drilled into our minds that money can buy everything. You're nobody without money, and if you're rich, your options are limited only by the size of your bank account. But even the

publishing houses, and TV stations want to generate a big profit, but to do that they must gain a massive audience and capture their interest. \$40 million dollars may be invested into producing a film, so the profit needs to be at least \$70 million. It is very difficult to fill the movie theaters by showing good movies. «The Island» by Pavel Lungin Pleasant is a very rare exception; it is a movie about repentance and rebirth of the human soul.

In the time of ancient Rome, the crowds shouted, «Bread and circuses!» What were the circuses in that era? The theatre, bloody gladiator fights and the torture of Christians at the Coliseum were the circuses and entertainment of ancient Rome. Now, as in ancient times, the «favorite» circuses are the same.

Writers, journalists, filmmakers, and other influencers of the human soul bear great accountability. After all, filmed or written art becomes the possession of millions of people. And if a person makes this art for the sake of money and vanity, his soul is filthy and he is able to seduce a lot of people. And the most terrible thing is that if he's really talented, his devastating effects continue after his death.

Gambling is another disease that is spreading widely. At its root also is the love of money. At the casino, people sometimes lose everything they own at the slot machine, which destroys their lives and sometimes leads to suicide. The gambler is driven by two passions: greed, and the thirst for excitement, or the thrill of risk. The second passion usually prevails. A person cannot stop in time and finds himself addicted.

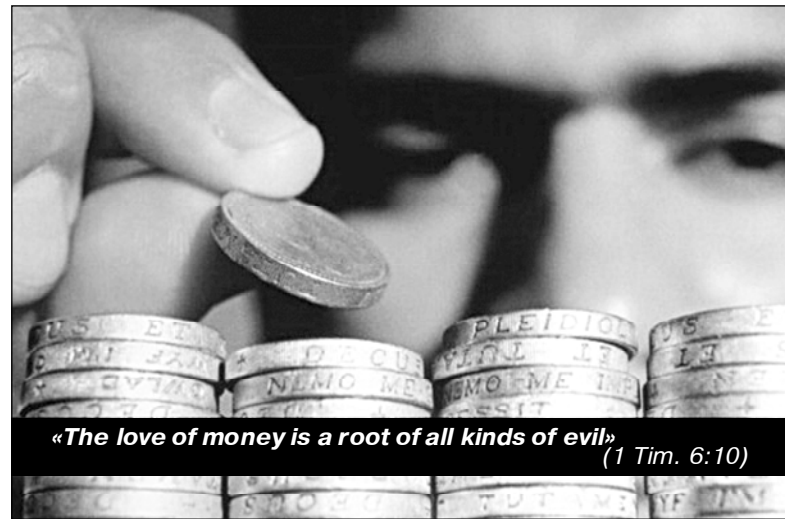
It has been found that compulsive gambling is as addictive as drugs and alcoholism, and is very difficult to treat.

In today's world, we can see many examples of the love of money on a large scale. One such example is the construction in Moscow. A few years ago, Moscow authorities said that all of the old apartments would be torn down by 2010, and in their place, large, and comfortable homes would be built. The construction began. In the area where I live, Izmilovo, the construction was successful, especially since the area is green and near a park. Three-story and five-story buildings were destroyed and replaced with 18 to 30-story homes. But apparently no one realized that the area is simply not designed for such a huge population. The number of clinics, schools, kindergartens, public transportation lines and other amenities remain the same. All yards, all the streets adjacent to the new buildings were covered with vehicles. On the streets, cars are parked along the buildings in two rows, and a narrow passage is left where cars go through one at a time. Major traffic! The subway is impossible to enter and it is impossible to find a seat on buses. And this is only one side of the problem. To live in 30-story skyscrapers is very insecure. What would happen if there was a fire on the 30th floor? We have no fire stairs that high. The housing problem, of course, has not been resolved. Residents of the demolished buildings were relocated to the new buildings, and only a small percentage of housing is given to those who wished to live there. The rest of the housing stock is sold at a price of several thousand dollars per square meter. For many years, people are on a waiting list for housing while living in awful conditions. What's the problem? The problem is the love of money. Real estate in Moscow is a gold mine. In general, life in downtown Moscow has become impossible due to the horrendous traffic jams, overcrowding, and bad ecology. And human greed is to blame.

THE LOVE OF MONEY AND OTHER SINS

The love of money is the same thing as serving a «golden calf». It leads to many sins and much evil. Murder, robbery, and deception are very often the foundation of wealth. To become wealthy in an honest way is very difficult. A man obsessed with money can do many things for the sake of money.

We all wonder what happened to good, kind, well-written movies and TV shows. Why are there so few talented writers who awaken in people noble sentiments? Why are movies, books, and TV shows a solid stream of sex, violence, aggression and foul language? One of the main reasons is that art has become commercial and a money-making business. Film studios,



«The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil» (1 Tim. 6:10)

person without the will of the person. Everyone chooses either to be with God or without.

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEART

There are few people like the rich man in the Gospel, because most people are not rich. If these proverbs were only for the rich, they would not have been recorded in the Gospels, because in the parables the Lord refers to all people including us.

Living for earthly interests, while not thinking of death and forgetting about one's neighbors does not require great wealth. When a person has only modest means, he may not help those in need because, he says, his family needs to be fed. When everybody is talking about the economic crisis, many live in fear of the future and anxiety for the future overtakes them. It is very important for all of us not to harden our hearts like that rich man in the parable. We must remember about Lazarus who was in a worse situation than most of us. Our compassionate, generous Lord will never leave anyone without food. There is a wonderful spiritual principle and it could even be called a law: «The hand that gives, flourishes». A person who helps others is always rewarded abundantly by God, even while living here on earth. But for that, of course, you have to have faith and determination.

The Psalms of David say, «**I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed**» (Psalm 37:25-26). Of course, there are no promises of great wealth and well-being, but one thing is clear: a merciful person will not be left without funds for food and necessities of life.

If a couple want to have lots of children (that is, they make their choice for spiritual riches), they will never be left without God's help. There is a proverb saying, «**If God gave the child, He will also provide for that child**». A father of many children once told me that with each new child, the well-being of their

TYPES OF THE LOVE OF MONEY

There are two types of the love of money: extravagance and over-spending, and, vice versa,

stinginess and greed. In the first case, a man with wealth spends his money on entertainment and the satisfaction of his every want; he lives a luxurious life. In the second case, a man lives as though he were a very poor man, denying himself entertainments and luxuries, but he worships money by saving and amassing it without sharing with the poor.

An American millionaire, John D. Rockefeller, lived like a poor man. He became a nervous wreck because he was afraid that his business would fail and he would lose some of his wealth. He became very ill and had to be on a strict diet because he was unable to eat anything. However, in fairness it must be said that in the second half of his life, Rockefeller completely changed his outlook and began to give large sums of money to charity.

A passion for wealth is unhealthy not only for the rich but also for the poor. Quite often people ask the question: «What is hoarding?» Hoarding is the accumulation of unnecessary things that are hung onto and eventually become covered with filth. Even poor people can suffer with this SIN — buying and stacking up the dishes, clothes, and other things, filling up all their cabinets, shelves and pantry, often forgetting where they have placed things.

FIGHTING WITH COVETOUSNESS

How should you deal with the lust for money? Train the opposite within yourself:

— show mercy to the poor and needy

— stop caring about earthly values, but value spiritual gifts

— think about spiritual things, not earthly or business interests

Virtue does not come by itself.

A man inclined to covetousness and greed should make himself do works of charity and use his wealth for the benefit of his soul. For example, when we give to charity, we should not give God whatever we don't need anymore, but let our giving be from our hearts without formality. Sometimes we give a beggar some coins just because they are heavy in our pockets, and yet somehow we expect the beggar to be grateful to us. «*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*» (2 Cor. 9:6).

We will be able to get rid of our love of money if we encourage ourselves to share, give, and help others. We must understand that «*it is more blessed to give than to receive*» (Acts 20:35). By giving, we can receive greater joy and satisfaction than by storing up and collecting things that we ourselves benefit very little from.

Many people wonder whom they should help out with charity. They doubt the integrity of the beggar that he will use their assistance for a good cause. There is no agreement of the holy fathers. Some believe that we should help all seekers, for the Lord knows whether the man is sincere or dishonest, and we are not sinning because we serve as unto Christ himself. Others say that charity should be given with great caution. It seems to me that the truth is somewhere in between. Of course, we will not sin in any case, even if we serve a dishonest person. There have always been «professional beggars», even in the days of Jesus Christ. And yet the Lord and the Apostles handed out alms to the poor. But if you don't have confidence in a person, you may give a small amount, and to the sincere needy person you may give greater assistance. There is enough grief in this world that likely some of our friends or family are in this position. The righteous Filaret the Merciful left us a good example. This saint is known for helping the beggars and showing mercy to people. He had three drawers filled with gold, silver and copper coins. Those who owned nothing in this world received alms from the first drawer, those who were short of money from the second drawer, and from the third drawer, those who falsely begged for money.

Priest Paul GUMEROV, Russia.

What does the Bible mean by «you are gods»/«ye are gods» in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34?

ANSWER: Let's start with a look at *Psalm 82*, the psalm that Jesus quotes in *John 10:34*. The Hebrew word translated «gods» in *Psalm 82:6* is *Elohim*. It usually refers to the one true God, but it does have other uses. *Psalm 82:1* says, «*God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the gods*». It is clear from the next three verses that the word «gods» refers to magistrates, judges, and other people who hold positions of authority and rule. Calling a human magistrate a «god» indicates three things: 1) he has authority over other human beings, 2) the power he wields as a civil authority is to be feared, and 3) he derives his power and authority from God Himself, who is pictured as judging the whole earth in *verse 8*.

This use of the word «gods» to refer to humans is rare, but it is found elsewhere in the Old Testament. For example, when God sent Moses to Pharaoh, He said, «*See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh*» (*Exodus 7:1*). This simply means that Moses, as the messenger of God, was speaking God's words and would therefore be God's representative to the king. The Hebrew word *Elohim* is translated «judges» in *Exodus 21:6* and *22:8, 9, and 28*.

The whole point of *Psalm 82* is that earthly judges must act with impartiality and true justice, because even judges must stand someday before the Judge. Verses 6 and 7 warn human magistrates that they, too, must be judged: «*I said, «You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High». But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other*

ANSWER: Our answer to this question will not only determine how we view the Bible and its importance to our lives, but also it will ultimately have an eternal impact on us. If the Bible is truly God's Word, then we should cherish it, study it, obey it, and fully trust it. If the Bible is the Word of God, then to dismiss it is to dismiss God Himself.

The fact that God gave us the Bible is an evidence and illustration of His love for us. The term «revelation» simply means that God communicated to mankind what He is like and how we can have a right relationship with Him. These are things that we could not have known had God not divinely revealed them to us in the Bible. Although God's revelation of Himself in the Bible was given progressively over approximately 1500

years. This passage is saying that God has appointed men to positions of authority in which they are considered as gods among the people. They are to remember that, even though they are representing God in this world, they are mortal and must eventually give an account to God for how they used that authority.

Now, let's look at how Jesus uses this passage. Jesus had just claimed to be the Son of God (*John 10:25-30*). The unbelieving Jews respond by charging Jesus with blasphemy, since He claimed to be God (*verse 33*). Jesus then quotes *Psalm 82:6*, reminding the Jews that the Law refers to mere men — albeit men of authority and prestige — as «gods». Jesus' point is this: you charge me with blasphemy based on my use of the title «Son of God»; yet your own Scriptures apply the same term to magistrates in general. If those who hold a divinely appointed office can be considered

«gods,» how much more can the One whom God has chosen and sent (*verses 34-36*)?

In contrast, we have the serpent's lie to Eve in the Garden. His statement, «your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil» (*Genesis 3:5*), was a half-truth. Their eyes were opened (*verse 7*), but they did not become like God. In fact, they lost authority, rather than gaining it. Satan deceived Eve about her ability to become like the one true God, and so led her into a lie. Jesus defended His claim to be the Son of God on biblical and semantic grounds — there is a sense in which influential men can be thought of as gods; therefore, the Messiah can rightly apply the term to Himself. Human beings are not «gods» or «little gods». We are not God. God is God, and we who know Christ are His children.

<http://www.gotquestions.org/you-are-gods.html>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Another of the internal evidences that indicates the Bible is truly God's Word is the prophecies contained within its pages. The Bible contains hundreds of detailed prophecies relating to the future of individual nations including Israel, certain cities, and mankind. Other prophecies concern the coming of One who would be the Messiah, the Savior of all who would believe in Him. Unlike the prophecies found in other religious books or those by men such as Nostradamus, biblical prophecies are extremely detailed. There are over three hundred prophecies concerning Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Not only was it foretold where He would be born and His lineage, but also how He would die and that He would rise again. There simply is no

used men from many walks of life to record His words. In studying the lives of these men, we find them to be honest and sincere. The fact that they were willing to die often excruciating deaths for what they believed testifies that these ordinary yet honest men truly believed God had spoken to them. The men who wrote the New Testament and many hundreds of other believers (*1 Corinthians 15:6*) knew the truth of their message because they had seen and spent time with Jesus Christ after He had risen from the dead. Seeing the risen Christ had a tremendous impact on them. They went from hiding in fear to being willing to die for the message God had revealed to them. Their lives and deaths testify to the fact that the Bible truly is God's Word.

Is the Bible truly God's Word?

years, it has always contained everything man needs to know about God in order to have a right relationship with Him. If the Bible is truly the Word of God, then it is the final authority for all matters of faith, religious practice, and morals.

The question we must ask ourselves is how can we know that the Bible is the Word of God and not just a good book? What is unique about the Bible that sets it apart from all other religious books ever written? Is there any evidence that the Bible is truly God's Word? These types of questions must be seriously examined if we are to determine the validity of the Bible's claim to be the very Word of God, divinely inspired, and totally sufficient for all matters of faith and practice. There can be no doubt that the Bible does claim to be the very Word of God. This is clearly seen in Paul's commendation to Timothy: «*... from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*» (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

There are both internal and external evidences that the Bible is truly God's Word. The internal evidences are those things within the Bible that testify of its divine origin. One of the first internal evidences that the Bible is truly God's Word is seen in its unity. Even though it is really sixty-six individual books, written on three continents, in three different languages, over a period of approximately 1500 years, by more than 40 authors who came from many walks of life, the Bible remains one unified book from beginning to end without contradiction. This unity is unique from all other books and is evidence of the divine origin of the words which God moved men to record.

logical way to explain the fulfilled prophecies in the Bible other than by divine origin. There is no other religious book with the extent or type of predictive prophecy that the Bible contains.

A third internal evidence of the divine origin of the Bible is its unique authority and power. While this evidence is more subjective than the first two, it is no less a powerful testimony of the divine origin of the Bible. The Bible's authority is unlike any other book ever written. This authority and power are best seen in the way countless lives have been transformed by the supernatural power of God's Word. Drug addicts have been cured by it, homosexuals set free by it, derelicts and deadbeats transformed by it, hardened criminals reformed by it, sinners rebuked by it, and hate turned to love by it. The Bible does possess a dynamic and transforming power that is only possible because it is truly God's Word.

There are also external evidences that indicate the Bible is truly the Word of God. One is the historicity of the Bible. Because the Bible details historical events, its truthfulness and accuracy are subject to verification like any other historical document. Through both archaeological evidences and other writings, the historical accounts of the Bible have been proven time and time again to be accurate and true. In fact, all the archaeological and manuscript evidence supporting the Bible makes it the best-documented book from the ancient world. The fact that the Bible accurately and truthfully records historically verifiable events is a great indication of its truthfulness when dealing with religious subjects and doctrines and helps substantiate its claim to be the very Word of God.

Another external evidence that the Bible is truly God's Word is the integrity of its human authors. As mentioned earlier, God

A final external evidence that the Bible is truly God's Word is the indestructibility of the Bible. Because of its importance and its claim to be the very Word of God, the Bible has suffered more vicious attacks and attempts to destroy it than any other book in history. From early Roman Emperors like Diocletian, through communist dictators and on to modern-day atheists and agnostics, the Bible has withstood and outlasted all of its attackers and is still today the most widely published book in the world.

Throughout time, skeptics have regarded the Bible as mythological, but archeology has confirmed it as historical. Opponents have attacked its teaching as primitive and outdated, but its moral and legal concepts and teachings have had a positive influence on societies and cultures throughout the world. It continues to be attacked by pseudo-science, psychology, and political movements, yet it remains just as true and relevant today as it was when it was first written. It is a book that has transformed countless lives and cultures throughout the last 2000 years. No matter how its opponents try to attack, destroy, or discredit it, the Bible remains; its veracity and impact on lives is unmistakable. The accuracy which has been preserved despite every attempt to corrupt, attack, or destroy it is clear testimony to the fact that the Bible is truly God's Word and is supernaturally protected by Him. It should not surprise us that, no matter how the Bible is attacked, it always comes out unchanged and unscathed. After all, Jesus said, «*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*» (*Mark 13:31*). After looking at the evidence, one can say without a doubt that, yes, the Bible is truly God's Word.

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Russian/Russian-Bible-Word.html>

It is easy to offend a person. You do not need to be a psychologist or a philosopher to comprehend this bitter truth. Everyone without exception has had the sad experience of being offended. Everyone knows how a single mean word can hurt someone's soul. Being offended haunts a person from their early childhood. A little munchkin makes another youngster cry in the sandbox by taking away his toy or by destroying a sandcastle built by the other boy. Students bully and laugh at their peers who are suffering from obesity, poor eyesight, or some physical defect. It hardly needs to be said how terrible it is when adults offend one another with sophistication and ruthlessness. So when a fragile and vulnerable person becomes hurt and they cannot stand up to the insult, treachery or meanness that comes their way, they turn to their last means of self-righteous defense: resentment. So why is Christianity encroaching on the last bastion of human dignity? Why does it call us to

This is what happened with the character in Shushkin's tale. Sashka Yermolayev was absolutely innocent of causing the troubles that the saleswoman associated him with. Yet, an unjust charge brutally hit his vanity and pride and they in return awoke anger. As a result, a handsome and kind man almost became a murderer.

The foolish saleswoman and insensitive customers who supported her unjust charges against an innocent man were not right. It goes without saying that it is not right to offend people. Offenses can be perceived very differently. You can reach for the hammer or you can look inside your heart and become horrified with the filth that resentment stirred up. This is when it is easiest to see your spiritual state and understand how deep this passion has taken root in you. This is when our offenders are doing us a favor by revealing our spiritual flaws to us with their evil words and deeds.

THE RIGHT TO BE OFFENDED?

A few decades ago there arose in Soviet culture the positive image of an offended hero (though his resentment was euphemistically called «vulnerability»). This type of character cropped up in various works of art, where he quietly resented the injustice and oppression that fell like rain upon him from the generous hands of the authors. In this way writers and filmmakers protested against human callousness, drawing the audience's attention to the suffering and alienation of man from society. The goal was certainly noble, and the image of the vulnerable hero worked well and could not be better. But, unfortunately, every stick has two ends. The downside of this artistic method was the romanticizing of the oppressed. After all, if the one who offends is bad, then the one who is offended is good. Therefore: the offender is bad, and the offended is good.

As a result of this characterization of the



Resentment – Who Needs To Forgive, and Why

voluntarily give up our inalienable right not to forgive those who caused us pain and tears by ruthlessly breaking into our life and crushing our hearts? What is this paradox that we come across in the Gospel: «**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you**» (Luke 6:27-28)? Perhaps this is Christ's most incomprehensible law. Indeed, why should we love those who hate us, hurt us and persecute us? Of all the people on earth, they probably least need our love and forgiveness. So why force ourselves into such a difficult and non-rewarding act? Why can't we avenge our oppressors? Well, not avenging our oppressors is somewhat understandable, since if everyone paid evil for evil, there wouldn't be any less evil. Accepting an offense you deserve is also comprehensible under the simple principle: you earned it, so deal with it and don't complain. However, what should you do when someone offends you without any reason? What should you do when your soul gets spit upon, and you are stepped on and brought down just because the offender felt like it? Are you really supposed to forgive that person also?

WHEN YOU REACH FOR THE HAMMER

One of Vasily Shushkin's best tales is called «Resentment» It starts off with a simple enough situation where a man is treated poorly. He comes into a store with his little daughter to buy some milk. The saleswoman mistakingly takes him for a troublemaker who stopped in the prior day and started a drunken brawl. No matter how much the poor Sashka Yermolayev justifies himself and explains to the people around him that he is innocent and had nothing to do with it, they don't believe him. He is put to shame in front of his daughter. For no reason, he is cursed at like there is no tomorrow. The tale ends with a tragic scene: Sashka runs home to get a hammer in order to crack open the head of one of the people who insulted him. A mere coincidence prevents him from committing murder. Of course, this is simply fiction. Yet Shushkin was able to pinpoint a strange human tendency to respond to unjust charges in a sharp and unhealthy manner. In reality, what is so bad about having nasty things said to you, when they have no true connection to you? After all, your conscience is clear, and it seems like it would only make sense to laugh at such remarks and feel sorry for the people that are misinterpreting you.

That's not how it usually works, though. All it takes is for someone to say something bad about us and we automatically feel a wave of hostility toward that person. And if the offender persists with their ridiculous charges, this hostility can grow into real hatred that blinds our eyes and blocks all reason while demanding one thing — to repay the offender no matter the cost. In this state, it won't take us long to grab hold of the hammer...

What is this frightening power that is capable of pushing an honest and well-mannered person into a crime just because someone told them a whole lot of nonsense? In the language of Christian asceticism, this power is called passion; though not in the sense of the authors of romantic poems and novels. In the Christian understanding, passion is a part of human nature that was good and healthy at first, but became disfigured with sin until it was unrecognizable and a dangerous illness. The patristic literature speaks of eight major sinful passions that to some extent are inherent in every human being: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, depression, vanity, pride. All of these ill-passions hide in us to an extent, unnoticed, though they can determine how we live our life. All it takes is for someone to barely touch one of these passions when suddenly they reveal themselves in a direct manner.

This is how St. John Kronshtadtskiy spoke of this, «...do not be irritated by mockery and do not hate those who hate you and speak evil of you. Love them like doctors whom God sent to enlighten you and teach you humility. Pray to God for them... say, «They do not speak evil about me but my passion. They do not hit me, but this snake that is creating a nest in my heart. Their harsh words hurt this snake's nest». I find comfort in the thought that maybe kind people will beat the passion out with their barbs and it will no longer hurt».

FROM EMBERS TO A RAGING FIRE

Often times people get offended by what seems to be completely harmless. All it can take is not been a word but one glance, gesture, or tone in order for a person to see something offensive for themselves.

It is a strange thing: nobody even thought to offend anyone and here resentment comes dagging at the heart with a sharp shovel and not letting you live in peace. The paradox lies in the fact that every offense that remains unforgiven is a composition of the offended and does not rely on any outside efforts or their absence. Even Russian grammatical interpretations of the wording break down «obidelsa» to the last portion «sa» which comes from «sebya» (self). It comes down to hurting oneself. You gave the way to your thoughts acknowledging your humiliation and the feel of superiority over your offender. Although people do not like to confess in this, everyone knows the fulfillment in feeling offended. There is an unhealthy pleasure in it where you start looking for offense where there was none. Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote in The Brothers Karamazov, «You know it is sometimes very pleasant to take offense, isn't it? A man may know that nobody has insulted him, but that he has invented the insult for himself, has lied and exaggerated to make it picturesque, has caught at a word and made a mountain out of a molehill — he knows that himself, yet he will be the first to take offense, and will revel in his resentment till he feels great pleasure in it, and so pass to genuine vindictiveness».

In this familiar, unhealthy «pleasure» of taking offense, we can find the answer to the question: Why does Christianity consider it a grave sin not to forgive? In a word, the Church calls «sin» everything which is contrary to God's plan for man. In other words, sin is anything that is contrary to our nature, anything that destroys or harms our mental and physical health. Sin promises short-term pleasure and therefore it is desirable and enjoyable. Even the desire to commit suicide as a sinful «pleasure» was rather precisely expressed in the famous Pushkin line: «...Everything, everything that threatens death, / for the mortal heart conceals / inexplicable delight...» St. Isaac the Syrian defined the sweetness of destructive sin even more emphatically, saying that the sinner is like a dog who licks a saw and gets drunk on the taste of his own blood.

It is easy to see how much it resembles the image of the tragic, self-intoxicating resentment described by Dostoyevsky. And even if the offense is not contrived and appears to not be true, it absolutely does not change anything.

One can gradually inflame the embers of resentment in the heart by dwelling on the injustice of what happened, by carrying out an endless mental dialogue with the offender, by justifying one's self and by many other methods. As a result of all these inner thoughts, resentment may grow from embers into a raging fire which blazes in the heart for many months or even years. And if a man ignites such a fire in his own soul on account of another's offense against him, that man has actually offended himself.

hero's moral superiority and his mental state in the beautiful, poignant and good stories of Vasily Shushkin, a whole generation has grown up of «vulnerable» — really just resentful — people. The right to take offense, they felt, is quite normal for a person with refined sensibilities, and so they reacted severely to the slightest appearance of rudeness or insensitivity. This moral attitude is very clearly reflected in the lyric poem of Eduard Asadov:

*How easy it is to offend a man:
Drop a word, angrier than pepper,
A century will not be enough
To regain that heart, lost forever.*

At first glance, everything is correct and understandable: You should never offend another person, and you need to be careful with your words in public. This is all true. But in this short poem another very important issue is subtly introduced. The offended hero lurks, as they say, behind the scenes. He is so wounded that because of one evil word he is ready to close his heart forever to another person — a person who was close to him, for you can lose only what was yours. The hero's categorical intolerance of other people's weaknesses and shortcomings is troubling, especially for him. After all, with such a sensitive nature one can end up in proud isolation, offended at the whole world. And this is a state more terrible and destructive than the most evil words and insults. The offended person buries himself alive in a grave of grievances, and not even the Lord can release him from this terrible confinement. The only way to break out of this grave is from within, by sincerely forgiving those who committed the offense. Even if the offenders do not need our forgiveness, we desperately need it ourselves.

The martyr Arseny (Zhadanovsky), who was killed by the Bolsheviks in 1937, wrote: «The virtue of forgiveness is all the more attractive because it immediately yields a reward in the heart. At first glance you would think that forgiveness humiliates, disgraces, and raises your foe above you. But not so in reality. You don't make peace, and it appears you are on top — but look, you have laid an oppressive, heavy stone upon your heart which will produce spiritual suffering. Conversely, you forgive, and seemingly humiliate yourself — but as a result, you have eased your heart and brought it joy and consolation».

TWO TESTIMONIES

It may seem as if forgiveness is an easy matter for Christians, since they know its meaning so well. However, it is not so. The forgiveness of offenses is a feat whereby in the midst of your pain and humiliation, you recognize the offender to be the same kind of person as you yourself. In his malice and cruelty you see the same spiritual diseases that are in you, too. This can be very difficult, especially in cases where the offense has taken up deep roots in the soul, and even a conscious effort of the will does not always help in the fight against this scourge.

For example, a person may forgive the offender, but when he gets hurt again, his abruptly disturbed soul remembers the former evil. At times, the offense is forgotten and forgiven, but if something bad happens to the offender, we take some secret satisfaction. And even if we have overcome this stage, sometimes we cannot help feeling bewilderment and frustration when we learn about the success of the one who offended us. While outwardly forgiving our offender, in our heart we continue to regard him as our debtor and subconsciously hope that God will give him his due. But hoping for his future retribution is not what the Lord expects of us.

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh worked as a doctor after the war and had a lot of contact with former victims of Nazi

concentration camps. These were people so terribly mistreated every day for years that they could not recall their experience without shuddering. But what had they learned from their long-term experience of insults and humiliation? How did they treat their oppressors? Archbishop Anthony includes in his book two unique documents: a prayer written on a scrap of wrapping paper by a prisoner who perished in the death camp of Dachau; and the story of his old friend, who himself spent four years behind barbed wire. Probably, it is possible to theorize indefinitely about Christian forgiveness, to agree with or challenge him. But before the unanimous testimony of two people who underwent untold suffering, I want only to bow my head in reverent silence:

«Peace to all people of ill will! Let revenge cease, and every call for punishment and retribution. The cup of crimes has overflowed, and man's mind is no longer capable of comprehending them. The number of victims is incalculable.

Therefore, do not place their sufferings on the scales of your justice, O Lord. Do not make their sufferings to serve as a fearful accusation against these torturers, to exact from them a terrible retribution. Repay them another way! Place on your scales — in defense of the executioners, informers, traitors and all men of ill will — the courage and spiritual strength of those tortured, their humility, their noble character, their constant internal struggles and invincible hope, smiles, dried tears, their love, their tortured and broken hearts which remained steadfast and loyal in the face of death, even in moments of the utmost weakness. Put all this, O Lord, before your eyes for the forgiveness of sins, as a ransom, and for the triumph of righteousness, acknowledge good and not evil! And may we abide in the memory of our enemies not as their victims, not as a nightmare, not as haunting spirits, but as helpers in their struggle to eradicate the outbreak of their criminal passions...»

The second example is a man whom I knew very well. He was much older than me, a combatant in the First World War, where he lost his hand. He and his mother Maria Skobtsova saved people during the German occupation. His name was Fyodor Timofeyevich Pyanov. The Germans put him in a camp where he stayed four years and survived. When he returned, I met him by chance in the street and said, «Fyodor Timofeyevich, what did you bring back from camp, what did you return with?»

«I came back with horror and dismay in my heart.»

«What, have you lost your faith?»

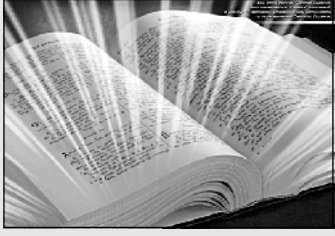
«No,» he said, «but while I was in camp — a victim of cruelty and in danger of death and torture — every minute I could pray, «Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do!» And I knew that God had to listen to my prayer, because I had the right to ask. Now I am free, and our tormentors perhaps have not understood or repented. But now when I say, «Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do», suddenly God replies: «And how can you prove the sincerity of your forgiveness? You are not suffering now, so it easy for you to say...»

And I am deeply convinced that in the end, when we all stand before the judgment seat of God, there will not be a single victim who will not rise in defense of his tormentor. Because before the Last Judgment, everyone dying will look at himself in the mirror of God, to see himself in relation to Christ, to see what he was meant to be and was not. And after that he will not be able to take offense or condemn anyone (from the book by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, «Man Before God»).

Alexander TKACHENKO, Ukraine.

The Pastor's Word**Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not***(Lk. 12:7)*

As long as I've lived, I've never met a man who knew how many hairs were on his head. And I cannot imagine that it is possible to know. Even nearly bald people have so many hairs on the sides of their head that it seems impossible to count them. What did Jesus Christ mean by such a strange statement? Was it not to convince his hearers that the Heavenly Father's care for each of his children far exceeds human ability? (Not that I doubt that God knows the number of hairs on each one of us.) But in saying this, Christ wants to help free believers from instinctive and natural worry about themselves and their families, and worry about tomorrow.



The Lord does not want to see his children enslaved by fear and worry, but living in His freedom and victory. He knows that those who fear for their well-being cannot display Christ in their lives. Spiritual joy and freedom are incompatible with human fear, which is the result of not trusting one's life to God. Consider some reasons why Christians who should have complete peace of mind about the future are anxious and worried.

1. A lack of faith that all things are under God's control.

But the Bible says:

Lamentations 3:37-38 — *Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?*

Rom. 8:28 — *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Heb. 11:6 — *And without faith it is impossible to please God...*

2. The presence of sin which separates man from God.

One of the most common reasons for anxiety is unconfessed sin. After all, our Lord is the God of peace, and people united to Him will be filled with peace in their hearts. In order to restore a right relationship with God, it is necessary to confess sin and repent.

Isa. 59:1-2 — *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

John 9:31 — *We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.*

3. Lack of dedication.

When a man is dominated by a desire to direct his own life, he cannot be at peace about his future, since in his case it is not in the Lord's hands but his own. The carnal man can be calm when everything is seemingly under control. But when once his mind is troubled, he has to reconsider his future and try to reassure himself that everything will turn out the way he has planned. When he fails to reassure himself, he loses his composure.

Rejecting himself and his own will, the Christian possesses an incomparable advantage. If he is seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, God's will certainly be fulfilled in his life (**Matt. 6:33**). And His will is certainly the best! Truly he who denies himself has a foundation for peace. So let us leave it to God to take care of us and solve our problems; our task is to do His will. If we abide in such a relationship with God, then our lives will be much easier and more peaceful.

Luke 12:6-7 — *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

Mark 8:34-35 — *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, «If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it».*

4. The lack of control in the mind and feelings.

A Christian whose heart is not filled with biblical thoughts and who does not seek to retain God in his knowledge will be a puppet in the hands of the devil, ruled by his thoughts and feelings. Feelings, as a natural reaction to thoughts, will raise him to the heights and then drop him into the depths of hopeless depression.

Luke 21:36 — *But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

1 Peter 5:8 — *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

Ps. 118:11 — *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

Therefore, we use the opportunity given to us — to control your thoughts.

Prov. 2:1-5 — *My son, if you receive my words...then you will...find the knowledge of God.*

Prov. 23:19 — *Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way.*

And to finish the argument on this subject would be desirable words of Scripture.

Phil. 4: 6-7 — *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Alexander BORISENKO.

*(Continued from page 1)***The birth HAMAS**

Gradually the Muslim Brotherhood transformed itself from a community of poor people and refugees into an organization of educated men and women, businessmen, and professionals, who generously opened their pockets to build schools, hospitals and charities. As the development progressed, representatives of the Islamic movements decided that the Brotherhood should take a stand against the Israeli occupation. My father at that time was already one of the main leaders in the Brotherhood. In 1986 there was a secret and historic meeting in Hebron, where the protesters agreed to start with simple civil disobedience: throwing stones and burning tires. Their purpose was to wake up, unite and mobilize the Palestinians, as well as tell them that they needed independence under the banner of Allah and Islam. Thus, HAMAS was born, and my father climbed a few more steps to the summit of Islam.

began to develop friendly relations with Israelis. And sometime later, I met with Christians.

My path to the real God

One day my best friend Jamal and I were walking through the gates of Damascus into Jerusalem, when suddenly I heard a voice speaking to me:

«What's your name?»



but filled with healing power and somehow giving hope to my soul.

Then I read: *«You have heard that it was said, «Love your neighbor and hate your enemy» But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven» (Matt. 5:43-45).*

That's it! I was struck by these words as if by lightning. I have never heard anything like it, but deep down knew it was the message that I was looking for all my life.

Over the years I have tried to figure out who actually is my enemy. Now I realized that my enemies are not Israelis nor HAMAS, and not the kid who beat me on the head with his M16 in prison, and not the executioner who tortured me in the detention cell. I saw that the enemy is not determined by nationality, religion or skin color. I realized that we are all prone to the attacks of the same enemy: greed, pride, and other devilish darkness that lives within

Son of HAMAS

HAMAS needed any excuse that could serve as a justification for an uprising. And one appeared in December, 1987. In Gaza, an Israeli salesman named Shlomo Sakal was stabbed to death. A few days later, four people from Gaza were killed in a car accident. Rumors were spread that the four were killed by Israelis in retaliation for the murder of Sakala. Riots broke out. A teenager threw a Molotov cocktail and was shot by an Israeli soldier. People flooded the streets, and HAMAS took over the helm, becoming a new fighting force.

The guy who was asking me was about thirty, and even though he spoke in Arabic, it was obvious that he was not an Arab.

«My name is Musab,» I said.

«Where are you going, Musab?»

«We are going home, we're from Ramallah.»

«I'm from England,» he said, speaking in English.

He went on to say something in Arabic, but his accent was so heavy that I could barely make out what he was saying. I finally realized that he was telling us something about Christianity and a Bible group that

us. This means that I can love all people and that the only real enemies are the enemies within me.

Jesus said, *«Judge not, that ye be not judged» (Matt. 7:1)*. What a great difference between Him and Allah! The Islamic god is very judgmental, and Arab society follows him in it.

Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, and I immediately thought about my uncle Ibrahim. I remembered how he once received an invitation to an event and became angry when he did not get a place of honor. It was as if

Jesus was talking to Ibrahim and to every Sheikh and Imam of Islam.

Absolutely everything that Jesus said in the pages of this book made sense to me. Unable to hold back, I began to cry. God put all the answers to my questions directly into my hands in the form of a small New Testament.

I continued to read this New Testament and attend Bible studies. I began to

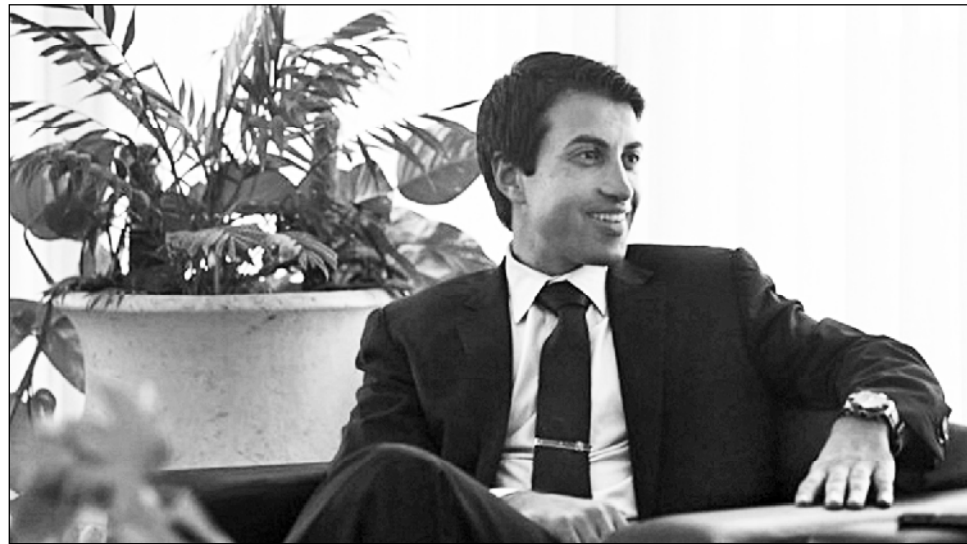
spend more time with the guys from the church and realized that I enjoyed our friendship. We had a great time, talking about our lives, traditions and faith. They were always very respectful of my culture and my Muslim heritage, and I found that I can truly be myself while I am in their company.

I began to think about how to bring everything I learned into my culture. I realized that the occupation can not be blamed for our suffering. Our problem is much more than the army and politics.

One day I asked myself, what would the Palestinians do if Israel were to disappear, if all the Jews were to leave the Holy Land and again be scattered? And for the first time in my life I knew the answer. We would continue to fight. Over nothing. We would fight with the girls without head coverings, over who is stronger and more important, over who defines the rules of the game and who has the best seat in the meeting.

It was the end of 1999. I was twenty-one. Since then, my life has changed.

MOSAB HASSAN YOUSEF
<http://www.golosboga.ru/media/thx/287/2913/>

**What prison teaches**

I grew up in the ideology of HAMAS according to my father's plan, which was consistent with my own desires: in the future, I also had to reach the summit. Probably everything would have been so, if it were not for God's providence. In the winter of 1996, I was arrested for illegal possession of weapons. For several weeks I was tortured in prison on an Israeli military base. Then there was the trial and sentence of sixteen months in prison, where my attitude towards HAMAS began to change. I saw spite, religious blindness, favoritism, and fuss over minor things, raised to the rank of special spirituality. I saw how HAMAS' internal security service snatched from its own ranks those who had no family or connections, and made them out to be traitors, torturing and killing them on trumped up charges.

I got out of prison completely confused, not knowing who was actually the enemy of my people — HAMAS or Israel. Wanting to resolve this inner conflict, I enrolled in a university, and after a while I

met in a YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) building in West Jerusalem.

I knew this place. I had nothing to do at this time, and I thought it might be interesting to learn something about Christianity. I figured that if I had learned a lot from the Israelis, it might be that the other «infidels» would bring into my life something worthwhile. Besides, these guys looked sincere and were inviting me to their fellowship, not to vote for the Israelis in the next election.

There were about fifty people that evening, mostly students my age, from different ethnic and religious groups. They gave me a New Testament in Arabic and English. New people, new culture. That was great. This New Testament was a gift, and in Arab culture, gifts are valued and respected, so I decided to read it.

I started to read, and when I came to the Sermon on the Mount, I thought: «Wow! This Jesus was really impressive. All that he said — amazing!» I could not tear myself away from the book. It felt as if every verse touched the deep wound in my soul. It was a very simple message,

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN

I come from a broken family. My younger brother, sister and I grew up without a dad. Like many teenagers at that time, our view of the world was formed by Western films where the main characters are usually cool guys, living easy and beautiful lives. At first I began to smoke and drink, then gradually I started taking drugs and snorting heroin with my fellow boxers. To get money, I began to steal.

An incident occurred in Zhitomir: one afternoon I took some antique paintings from a woman's apartment. No one noticed, and no fingerprints were left. If they hadn't followed me for 15 days a half-year later, and if I hadn't confessed, the crime would have remained unsolved. I wrote a confession of theft, and suddenly I'm

On the street I was met by friends and my common-law wife, with whom I had a daughter, Maria. Svetlana had also been a drug addict and a troublemaker, but now she was barely recognizable. She modestly stood aside. I asked her, «Sveta, what's with you?» And she answered, «I don't take drugs anymore. I've repented of my sins and I serve the Lord». These changes struck me deeply; therefore, I decided to go with my wife to

IN PRISON I FOUND FREEDOM



facing another accusation: Article 93 of the criminal code — premeditated murder for financial gain. And this means at least 12 years in prison. I told them that I didn't kill anyone. Yes, I stole, but I didn't kill! But they said that I had killed the previous time I stole, as well.

Around the time when I stole the paintings, on a nearby street an elderly woman was killed. She also had antique paintings in her home. The victims were friends. And worst of all, while planning the theft, I was at the home of the victim also.

They put me in an isolation chamber in Zhitomir, on «all fours,» and promised to show me what a real prison is like. It was very tight: the other prisoners beat me severely. I had to always be alert, and I was scared to fall asleep even for 5 minutes...

I finally broke down and wrote a confession of murder. After writing the confession of murder, for the first time I asked God, «God, I don't know how to talk to you. However, I want to say that even though I did evil to so many people, you see and know that I did not murder! If you can, make them set me free, and then I will certainly change my life» Incredibly, two weeks after my prayer, I was told that the charge of murder against me had been dropped, despite the fact that the real killer was never found. However, I was still charged with theft, which carries a term of imprisonment from 3 to 8 years. My lawyers warned: «You will have to serve time, at least the minimum». Then there was a trial and my last word. Of course, I had the opportunity to make a sentimental speech in front of the prison officials, but I refused. At trial, I just sincerely apologized to the victim. The judge's sentence was a surprise to all: «Release from custody in the courtroom». I was given a term of probation and released.

church. The bright faces of the faithful people, who were sincerely happy to see me, were a huge contrast with the faces in jail that I had seen. During church I sincerely repeated the pastor's prayer of repentance and the Lord showed another miracle. He cleansed me. On the way home from church I threw out my last pack of cigarettes and never touched drugs again.

Since then 10 years have passed. Svetlana and I had another child, a boy named Denka. Today we live in Kiev and are expecting an addition to the family.

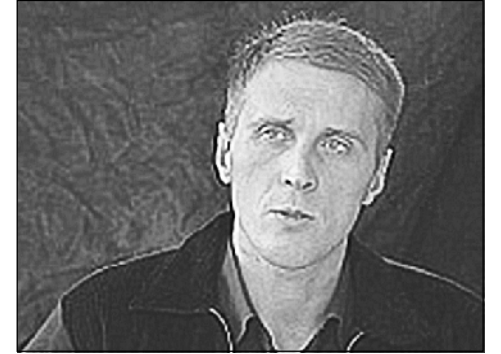
I want to appeal to those Christians who are going through some difficulties. The last two years my wife and I have experienced a lot of problems. A crisis hit our business (we have a small company selling household appliances). There came a moment when I thanked God for it all. In our difficulties, we imagine our own way out. We pray that God will solve things the way we imagine. And if there is no answer, then it seems as if God does not hear us. I want to tell you guys: pray that God will help you see the reason why He placed you in these circumstances. Probably by this He wants to change something in you. I think that it's important to God how we react to difficulties in life: will we start looking for help from people, or will we depend on His will, solving any problem on our knees in prayer? This is a chance to prove that God is God of our lives. «The Lord is God» — I repeated these words many times. But when I heard them during a difficult time in life from a preacher, my heart was opened and all my problems became nothing. I trusted the Lord and saw that He is close, and He loves me the way I am.

Denis RYDENKO, Ukraine.
<http://skinia.org.ua/svidetelstva>

THE BIBLE TURNED MY MIND AROUND

I grew up among thieves. My father spent most of his life in prison. All of his friends had a criminal record. So I wasn't surprised to be sentenced to 8 years in prison for stealing. I did not go to prison just to serve my term. I went there to live, because I lived like they do at prison when I was free.

In prison, I quickly gained prestige among the prisoners because I honored the thieves' law and lived «by their principles». One day I was approached by a prisoner. He asked me, «Do you read the Bible?» And I told him no. He says: «And you are motivated by thieves' principles?» I told him, Yes, from my childhood on the street. Then he said to me: «Read the Bible, for there all the way of man is described». And I told him in surprise: «Come on, how is that?» He says, «Seriously!» We opened the Bible, and he showed me: «**You shall not steal**», «**Do not bear false witness**», and so on. That is, all the thieves' principles by which people in prison live. And it occurred to me suddenly: Do people in prison actually live according to Biblical principles?!



After this meeting, I began to think seriously of all that I read in the Bible. One day I saw one of the prisoners reading a Christian book. He would read the book then compare it to the Bible. I could not understand what he was doing. In this book I read the name of Jesus for the first time. The book said that you may be doing well outwardly, but your soul is suffering. Everything I read seemed to have been written about me. The author advised readers to come to Jesus, who can help anyone who comes to him. Somehow, involuntarily I said, «Jesus, come into my heart!» I do not even remember all of this, but something started happening to me. I was filled with the Spirit. I realized that all this was connected with the name of Jesus Christ; this was also connected to God. Because I read the Bible I quickly realized that God is alive!

I became a believer, but the criminal world did not want to let me go. I should have told my friends that God is alive, and that I am leaving my past behind. But I could not take that step then because I was really scared. However, when I took this step, my knees buckled. And they gave way at every step. If I came in this state to the authorities — to my former friends, who in a second would turn into my enemies — they would tear me and destroy me for sure. My spirit was still very weak. I met a man who was already a believer. I quickly told him everything that had happened to me. And he began to laugh, happily. I asked him: «Why are you laughing?» And he said, «All is well! And now let us pray, and you'll go and everything will be fine!» I said to him: «How do I pray? I do not know how to pray». He said, «Just listen and agree with me». He prayed that God would be with me and make all things well. And indeed, after that my spirit came alive! When I went to my friends, I preached to them about Jesus Christ. I told them that God is alive. I told them what I had learned. But they just looked at me with confusion.

And there were some who planned to come and beat and cut me, probably even to kill me because I had betrayed them and left them. They planned and planned, and when they finally came to me, I asked them: «Who is ready? Know now that God is alive! The Bible is true from beginning to end! God speaks to us through His Word; God tells us that He loves us all». The Spirit of God spoke through me to these people. I told them things that I myself did not know. All of them sat there like children. And I told them: «We have lived so many years in harmony, but when I came to God, you have risen up against me. If you believed me before, why are you all against me now?» I looked at them and saw that they were not the same people that were my friends, with whom I lived so many years. And I said then: «Devil, come out of these people in the name of Jesus Christ! I forbid you to use these people, leave them alone they do not belong to your kingdom». And then they sat like little children, with clear eyes. The evil slowly moved away from them.

Something uncharacteristic in these places began to happen. A church formed and the prisoners began to come to God through me. We began to raise up the church and start a new life. We began to do something. People began to pay attention to us. We started to communicate with the administration. Police were my enemy my entire life. All my life I believed that cops were my enemies. All my feelings were against them. But when I, now a believer, got to know these people, I saw that they were completely normal people. That's how God radically changed my outlook completely. No wonder the Lord left us the commandment: «**Love your enemies**».

Dmitry SAPRONOV, Ukraine, <https://bogoblog.ru>

I REPENTED AND ACCEPTED THE LORD

My childhood took place in Tyumen, where my parents brought me from Ukraine. They went to Tyumen for work. There was the beginning of my life on the negative side: my first cigarette, my first taste of wine, etc. When our family went back to Kiev, I was fifteen years old and I was already a drug addict.

By this time I had taken so many drugs that I had strong withdrawals. I was diagnosed with hepatitis B and C. My liver and stomach were in a lot of pain. I would vomit bile and soon I was placed in the hospital. Despite my pitiful condition, for some reason I had always thought that I was different and couldn't live like other drug addicts. So I decided to quit drugs.

I began boxing. The physical exercise not only quickly restored my health, it helped me achieve fantastic results in the sport. Within two years I was the winner of the Ukrainian championship.



At this time I was encouraged to fill out an application for a lottery in which the winner receives a Green Card. I didn't believe that I would win, but I filled out a small piece of paper, sent it to Washington and forgot about it. Sometime later, my mother told me that a large envelope arrived in my name; it said that I had won a Green Card.

When I was twenty, I left for America by myself. I believed that in

CHRISTIANS

America all my dreams would come true. I got a job as a loader in a furniture store, and outside of work I started training at the famous boxing gym of Mike Tyson. I even went to college.

Around me were boys and girls my age who had parents. All of them drove their parent's cars. We studied together in college. But after school I went to work to earn money and pay for boxing and rent. But they would go relax, or go to the club. They had no such problems as I had. I realized that I could not legally earn enough money for the life I dreamed of in America. In the house where I lived, there were Georgians through whom I got into the Nigerian mafia.

The Nigerian mafia controlled the forgery of credit cards in United States. In a short time, I learned not only to steal credit cards from mailboxes, but also break codes, cashing out huge sums of money. I quickly learned how to open them, and how to take money from them and how to forge checks. One day I came to one Nigerian boss and told him that I would no longer work for him, but now he was going to be my partner. By that time I already had a team of eight people, so I started to earn big money. However, the scam which I did brought with it huge psychological stress, and to somehow cope I started to take drugs again.

After a while I began to think that it was time to stop, because I needed a very high dose. My professional instinct told me that I could be arrested at any time. My photo already hung at all the post offices in Brooklyn, on it was written: New York's Department of FBI is searching for Vasily Ivanov. This was the name I used on the forged documents in America.

Finally the moment came when the police managed to detain me. Under the name Vasya Ivanov I was convicted in America's federal court for fourth-degree crime. I was convicted to two and a half years in US prison. What I once saw on TV about American prisons, I got to experience myself. I went through four prisons. There were sharpened toothbrushes, razor blades, gangs, and constant clashes. After one of the skirmishes I was sent to solitary confinement and it was there that for the first time, God started knocking on my heart.

I realized that I was on a path to somehow change my life. In solitary confinement, I spent fifteen days with a serial killer sentenced for life. I remember that I looked into his eyes and thought about the fact that he will never be released from prison forever, and I only had to sit out a few years, and then would get out of jail and go home. This realization that I, unlike him, had hope was worth more than any money.

I began reading the prison Bible and completed Bible courses in jail. I began to cry out to God, to pray to Him every day.

After Sept. 11, 2001, the United States began to deport criminals in large numbers. I realized that this was my only chance to return home. But in the embassies of Ukraine and Russia there were no documents for Vasya Ivanov.

My lawyer wrote a petition to the US Attorney General stating that I am Taras Mekeda and I want to go home. I began to pray to God. As a result of my prayers, God heard me!

Accompanied by two federal agents, I was deported to Ukraine. The first thing I did when I came off the plane was kneel, kiss my native ground and thank God that He brought me back home. Great thanks to Him for everything!

Taras MEKEDA, Ukraine.
<https://bogoblog.ru>

**Denis DIDEROT (1713-1784),
French writer & philosopher**

Let me honestly tell you that there is no one in France or elsewhere in the world who could



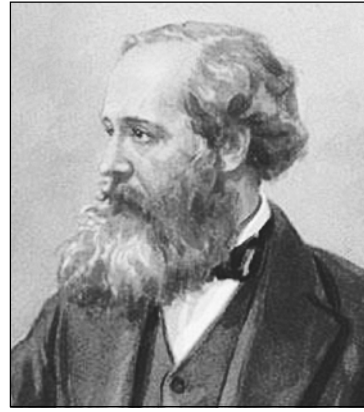
speak with such an artistic talent as the fishermen and tax-collectors who wrote the Gospels. I thereby boldly claim that

friend saw Faraday holding his head and fearfully asked, «What's the matter? Are you feeling bad?» Faraday replied, «Oh no, it's not that! I am amazed why people prefer to wander in the dark on many important issues, when God gave them such a wonderful Book of revelation?!»

**James Prescott JOULE (1818-1889),
English physicist**

He is famous for his work on thermal physics. The unit of energy is named after him: joule. He also became one of the founders of thermodynamics. His experimental work led to the formulation of the first law of thermodynamics — the law of the conservation of energy. Joule was a Christian and his faith was well-known. He saw a delightful harmony between his work and the truths of the Bible.

**James Clerk MAXWELL (1831-1879),
British physicist,
mathematician and engineer**



His electromagnetic theory and the equations associated with it paved the way for the physics of the twentieth century. Maxwell was a devout Christian; he studied the Bible and was an elder in the

absorbed the wisdom of the Gospel: encouragement, consolation, and the belief that, despite death and suffering, a person can gain confidence and hope. Bach became a preacher for many who still live on the side of unbelief. And although they may not realize it, he plays and sings to them of the joy of the Gospel.

**Fernando BOURBON,
Ambassador of Costa Rica**

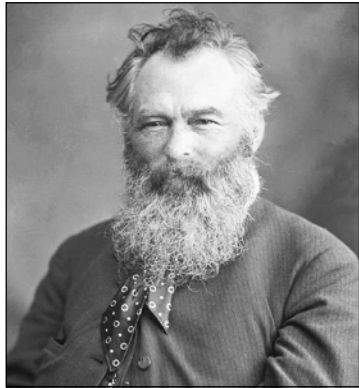
«I am the ambassador of Costa Rica and the ambassador of Jesus Christ by His grace» says Fernando. «Many years ago, we were at a press conference which brought together politicians and representatives of the press. Suddenly one of the journalists said, «Mr. President, did you know that Fernando Bourbon is not really your ambassador?» The president looked at me and asked: «What does he mean?» The journalist continued:

FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR FAITH

nobody would ever be able to write a story similar to that of the Gospels, one which would be so simple and yet inspirational, so fresh and heart touching, impacting our souls with a never fading power to transform throughout the generations. This is all about the Gospel proclamation of Jesus Christ's sufferings and death.

**Ivan Ivanovich SHISHKIN (1832-1898),
Russian artist, landscape painter, draftsman, and engraver**

Prior to his May departure to Lisy Nos, Shishkin wrote to his parents: «But why is God

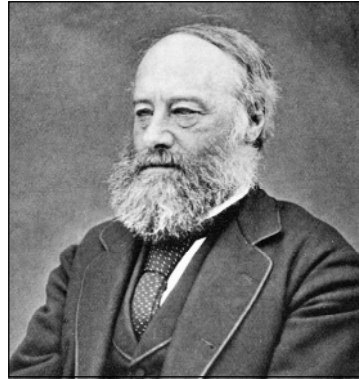


needed? He put me on my feet. He pointed out to me the way in which I am now, He leads me through it, and as God, He unexpectedly leads me to my goal. Firm hope in God is comforting in such cases, and I am able to break free of dark thoughts».

**Michael FARADAY (1791-1867),
English physicist and chemist**



Michael Faraday was sitting at his desk reading the Bible. A



church. His deep, sincere faith and commitment to Christ were known to all his friends and colleagues in the scientific community. Among his papers was found a prayer that says: «Almighty God, who created man in His own image and likeness, revived his soul so that he could seek thee and thy rule over creation, teach us to know the work of Thy hands, so that we can cultivate the land for our benefit, to strengthen our mind to serve you and thus receive Thy blessed Word; so that we can believe in Him whom you have sent to give us salvation and know the forgiveness of our sins. All this we ask in His name, Jesus Christ our Lord».

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750), the great composer of a huge number of musical works, created on the bases of images of the Bible



He signed his scores SDG (Soli Dei Gloria), «To God alone by the glory»; JJ (Jesu Juva), «Jesus, help»; or INJ (In Nomini Jesu) «In the name of Jesus».

Famous works of Bach include the «Christmas Oratorio», «St. Matthew's Passion», «St. John's Passion», «Mass in B Minor», «Easter Oratorio», «Brandenburg Concertos», «Goldberg Variations» and many motets and cantatas. All these are about Christ. According to the composer, even instrumental works must contain an indication of the wisdom of God the Creator. Bach did not gloss over the darker sides of life — sin, death, fear, the abyss of hell — but his music tells the story of how God strengthens the life of man. Here Bach showed himself to be a good missionary, who knows how to bring people to the gospel in their own language. His music is moving; it



«Fernando said that he is an ambassador of Jesus Christ». The President turned to the reporter and said, «All right, Fernando knows who is in charge».

Fernando Bourbon belongs to the same Bourbon royal family that is one of the oldest and most numerous of the European royal houses. Fernando, who is an ambassador of Costa Rica, does not like to talk about it, although it is recognized that belonging to the ancient royal dynasty opens a lot of doors. But what this person really likes to tell about is Jesus Christ, about His mercy and how he happened to preach Christ to the people of royal blood and presidents.

**Napoleon I BONAPARTE (1758-1821),
Emperor of the French from 1804-1815,
great commander and statesman**



This military genius often read the Bible during his imprisonment on the island of St. Helena. He expressed these thoughts about God's Word: «The Gospel is a mysterious force, something surprisingly powerful; warmth, which acts on the mind and charms the heart. When this book is on my desk... I never tire of reading it and always read it with much pleasure».

Recently we received a letter to the editor in which the writer (who requested to remain anonymous), emotionally argued that he would happily come to God, but does not because he is completely convinced that God will not forgive him, since he has committed a vast number of sins. Reading this letter, I immediately remembered a similar occurrence which happened 17 years ago where someone told me the same thing (he is now a brother in Christ). I was sharing with him the joy of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but he kept on repeating that God will not forgive him because of the greatness of his sins.

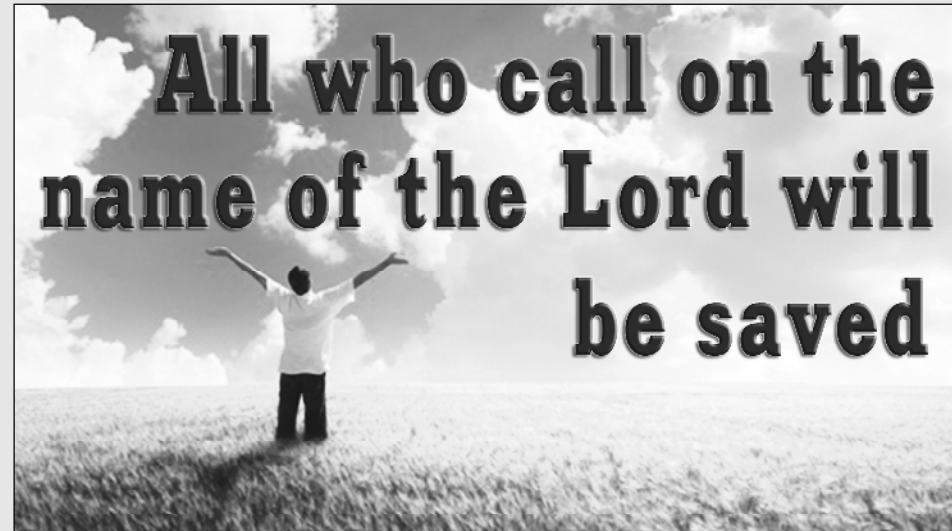
To prove or even argue something in such situations is simply hopeless. However, the words from the Living Scripture are always successful. God, with an unseen power through His word, touches the hearts of people. Everyone who seriously wishes to change their lives and come to God with an open heart, is heard by God and forgiven. *In the epistle to the Romans*, it clearly says that, **«For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved»** (Rom. 10:13). This passage states absolutely clearly that any person can turn with repentance to God, no matter how sinful he was in the past.

God speaks even more clearly and openly to sinners through the prophet Ezekiel, saying the following: **«But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live»** (Ez. 18:21-22).

How great is the mercy of God that He is ready to forgive all who come to Him with repentance. God Himself, through His prophet, poses this question to all the people: **«Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and**

not that he should return from his ways, and live?» (Ez. 18:23).

When you first come into contact with the Word of God and you begin to search for answers to certain questions, the Lord miraculously shows and reveals things that are inaccessible even to your consciousness. It is not in vain that the Lord said: **«Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty**



things, which thou knowest not» (Jer. 33:3). God does not leave anyone out, and there isn't a sinner that He wouldn't forgive, if that sinner comes to Him with repentance. It is for this exact reason that the Lord came to this earth in the form of Jesus Christ, in order to save through faith and repentance all those who are perishing: **«For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life»** (John 3:16). Can we, after all that He's done for us, neglect the chance of salvation? Moreover, God does not require a monetary compensation for the sacrifice of His Son. Every person receives salvation solely through his sincere

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

If someone today has any doubt of his own salvation, considering himself too great a sinner, whom God would not want to forgive, that is an erroneous opinion. For God Himself said: **«I say unto you,**

full of helplessness and inner chaos if they live without God.

Regardless of a person's age, real light is lit in a person's soul only when the soul is inhabited by God. He is the only one who gives genuine joy in tomorrow and hope for the future. A life that was once lived in vain begins to have meaning. The Lord completely changes people: once criminals and social outcasts, they now live in loving families and work for the Lord. The fallen have become blessed brothers and sisters in God's family. And this is only the beginning of a new and bright life! Man discovers real happiness only when he begins to think of himself least of all, but gives all his care and attention to others. The good life does not consist in the size of our wallet or credit card accounts. It is when, thanks to you, the world changes at least a little bit. For we have all come into this world to do good deeds. As it is written: **«For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them»** (Eph. 2:10).

To one who is now reflecting on these things, I want to mention these words from the *Book of Sirach* (5:8): **«Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day»**, because every day only adds to the emptiness of the soul. How well it was said to the ancient people: **«I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live»** (Deut. 30:19).

There is no doubt that in the present day as well, God expects from each of us a choice. The main thing is to not procrastinate and to listen to what was said by the apostle Paul to the Romans: **«For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved»**.

I. GORIK.

Nicky Cruz: A Story of Salvation From Hell

— I was born into a family which was steeped in witchcraft. My father was a priest of Satan and my mother was a witch. My parents were deeply immersed in voodoo and black magic. When I was born, I was dedicated to Satan... my head was anointed with blood. I became an heir of my father's mantle. So my life was hanging under a curse. When I was a child, my mother never kissed me, and I never kissed her. She never told me soft or sweet words. When I was three or four years old, my mother used to beat me severely. Many times I lay unconscious in a pool of blood.

It is hard to believe that this all happened. Love should come to a child through his mother and father, but when I was four years old, I already wanted to kill myself. I saw that my mother and father worshiped Satan. Wizards came to our house, and when they would fall into a trance, they would ask Satan to be their god and perform miracles. Many times my father would lie on the couch immobile for three or four days while his soul and his spirit were charging. I was brutally beaten until I was eight years old. Do you understand that when your mother calls you ugly, or a bastard, it hurts? I hated her because I saw that she did not love me. I screamed from the pain in my soul and heart. I wanted to be a miscarriage rather than her son.

— Did your gang later make up for what your family did not give you?

— Yes, but what would you expect when you have no family? Gangs are the family of losers and bullies. They gain strength from each other, and care about each other. I could not take care of myself. New York — I remember it well — is a city in which you need to have eyes in the back of your head. It was all about survival. And so you have to act according to the law of the jungle. An animal does not know the difference between good and bad. An animal must kill to survive. I knew I was going to die very young. I remembered my mother's voice when she grabbed my hair and started banging my head against the wall... I was bleeding... I tried to look into her eyes, which were like balls of fire, to see in them something humane, and saw only the cold and hatred. And I heard: «You are not my son, I do not love you... Get out of my life, I do not want to see you...»

The gangs invite you into a family which provides security and power. You know that you will die young, but I was already dead at eight years old when my mother said that she did not love me. So what else could I expect? I was dead while being alive. Here was a family that offered me protection in the middle of evil surroundings. And this family, believe it or not, had tough moral principles. The

principles were tougher than Christians sometimes have, because the gangs believe with all their heart that they must take care of each other, no matter what. And this code of ethics does not permit betrayal. It demands fidelity, loyalty and honor. Therefore, you are ready to die for any of your own, and they for you. If someone is killed, you feel a great loss. That's why it's called your family. It's



understandable why you literally give away your life to the gang. It is a family of savages, but with its own rules. This is something you strongly believe, and you have no regrets about your decision. It's a way of survival.

— But while surviving, you were still dying, deteriorating?

— Yes, but I didn't realize it. I was indifferent to physical pain. Someone could cut me or shoot me. I could take a cigarette and extinguish it with my hand or lips — it was easy because my mother taught me one thing — to live with the physical pain. Therefore, I had to kill my feelings

and thoughts in order to kill. You're stone cold, you do not feel anything, absolutely nothing. Psychiatrists call people like this sociopaths.

— Your gang was not an innocent group of losers loitering at the corner of a pub with cigarettes in their mouths — you were dangerous?

— We committed many crimes. Sometimes, from the roof of a house you stalk your victim like a beast in the jungle. He walks in the open. From the roof, you aim at his head, pull the trigger and watch him fall. You shoot again to make sure. Our hatred for the other gangs was so strong that at night we went to the morgue, stole the body, cut it into pieces and left it on the street. We tried to spare innocent people, but once the guys got very drunk and went to hunt for «foxes» (girls). It was late and very dark. The guys had a blanket with them. They saw a woman and followed her. They did not know who she was. They attacked her, put the blanket on her head and hit her so that she lost consciousness. They dragged her to the roof of the house and took turns raping her. Then one of the guys wanted to see who she was. It turned out it was his mother. He threw himself from the roof head first and died. We're talking now about things so terrible that they cannot be forgotten.

— You were bottoming out...

— I descended into the depths of hell. Many times I had thoughts of suicide, especially when I was arrested by the police. I was isolated from all the other inmates because I was dangerous. I lay around and smoked. I began to philosophize: if I am a human being, why I do look like an animal and behave like one? If I'm an animal, why I am trapped in human form? I could not find an answer. The court appointed me a psychiatrist for treatment. It was then I met Dr. Goodman. He fussed with me for six months. He took me many places. He took me to the zoo where he showed me smelly animals for three hours. Then he asked me to draw pictures of these animals. He took me to one of the worst hospitals — a very well-known hospital where crazy people are kept. There the medical staff examined me for twenty-four hours. There I saw teenagers crazy like me. He took me to other psychiatrists in a clinic in Manhattan. Six months later, as we were walking on the street, he told me bluntly: «You're cold. I was trying to get to you, hit you in the chest to see some emotional reaction, but you're absolutely dead. You are very dangerous». Finally, he said: «I cannot do anything for you, Nicky! You are headed straight for prison, to the electric chair and hell. There is no hope for you. You're dead». These were the most terrible words that a professional doctor could tell a human being.

(Continued on page 9)

Nicky Cruz: A Story of Salvation From Hell

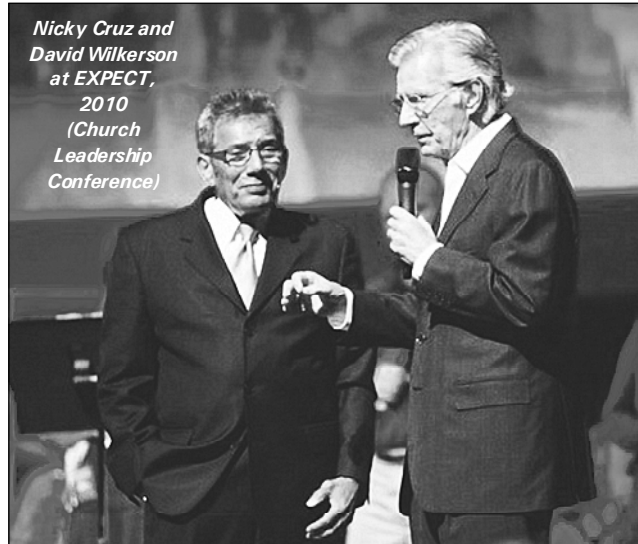
— But by the grace of God, these words did not come true!

— God became my last hope, but I was never interested in Him. I had never, even for a second, thought about Him or respected Him. So I was confused, confused! Then suddenly, as though he had fallen from the sky, Pastor Wilkerson showed up in our area. The police warned him: «They will kill you. This jungle is a battlefield. The only thing that's left for us is to come and pick up your dead body». With great conviction Wilkerson said to them: «God will be with me!» The police said: «We hope that He will go with you, because we will not!»

This man was all askew. But God used him. God Himself guided him. When I was indifferent to all, God took an interest in me. He put into the heart of this man great love, which made him come to the largest city in the country, New York, with a message of hope. Just two weeks before, my psychiatrist said, «Nicky, you are heading to the electric chair, and hell!» But Wilkerson said, «No, that's not true! Heaven is real, God is real. There is Jesus Christ, who died for your sins, who gave His life for you just as you are willing to give your life for your friends, for the members of your gang, boys and girls. There is a God who is really a living God. We are speaking about Him. When you die — no one remembers you, you no longer exist. But Jesus always lives. He does not die!» This was the most important message that David Wilkerson told me. I went up to him and started beating him. I would not let him go. He was not going to escape me easily. I lunged at him like a savage.

I kicked him, spat on him and called him names — the dirtiest, most disgusting, and vilest obscenities. I cursed him, his God and everything in the world. Like a wild beast, I jumped at him, grabbed his hair and began to beat his head against the wall. Just like my mother did. But this idiot, ignoring the pain and blood, with a broken voice said in the midst of the noise on the street, in the presence of three hundred witnesses, «Nicky, I'm not afraid. I came here to give you a message from heaven. I have come to tell you: Nicky, Jesus loves you!» And when he told me this, I retreated. I looked at him and he said: «If you want, you can kill me. I know that you're capable of it. But even though you kill me and cut me up into a thousand pieces and scatter them on the street, remember: each piece will shout: Nicky, Jesus loves you!» These words struck me like lightning. It was like a blow between the eyes, like a punch in the heart. I said, «This idiot is stubborn!»

Two weeks later, I went to listen to this man. I did not go alone. I took 70 guys with me for protection to hear this skinny idiot. Much to my surprise, there were already two thousand people there — 12 gangs. We came prepared. I came with a loaded .22-caliber pistol. That night, in seven minutes — although I was very disturbed, quite beside myself, nerve-wracked because I took drugs — that night in seven minutes something happened to me. Wilkerson told why Jesus came to earth. What really touched me was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.



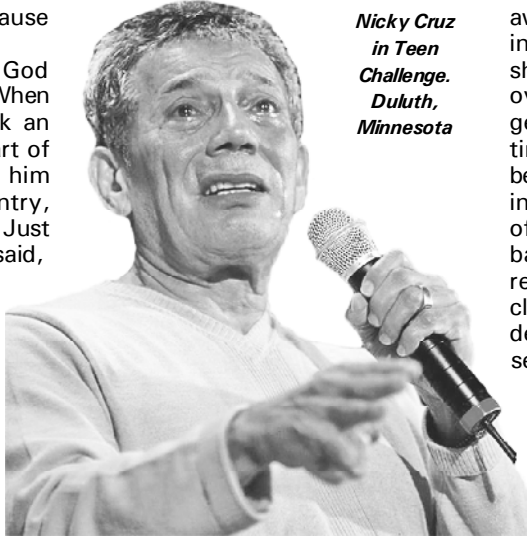
The first minutes seemed boring to me. Then before my eyes appeared the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It came so vividly that it seemed to me that I was there and saw how He died. It touched me deeply. I was struck by the steadfastness of Jesus. By his loyalty to his friends. This Jesus is a friend — the best friend you could ever have. He is not a politician — a deceiver who promises a lot, but does not deliver. He promises you eternal life. He promised to die for you, and He did it. I had respect for this Jesus. It was the first time in my life when I felt respect for someone and this respect made me kneel in front of my Savior Jesus Christ. Praise be to Jesus!

In 1958, the gang of Nicky Cruz ruled the streets of New York. Today, the Wall Street Journal calls him a street-preaching Billy Graham. A peacemaker and evangelist who has reached the hearts of people with the power of his amazing testimony, the story of which was the basis of the film «The Cross and The Switchblade».

— Nicky, when and how did you start to dream of becoming an evangelist?

— Never before I did know what the word «evangelist» meant. Before accepting Christ into my life, I did not think about the future or imagine what was awaiting me. But when I went to study in the Bible school, God began to show this to me. The realization came over me that first of all, I needed to get my life in order. I worked, and as time went on, the words of the Bible became more apparent to me. The stay in the Bible School for me was a time of healing of my soul. I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and my relationship with God became very close. I surrendered to His will and decided to follow Him wherever He sends me.

**Nicky Cruz
in Teen
Challenge.
Duluth,
Minnesota**



God has put in my heart compassion for people who have lost hope in this life. I felt that I could help them — good and bad, well-doers and gangsters, drug addicts and diligent citizens. In every heart there is pain which is

not visible at first glance. In my heart it also once had a place. But Jesus has set me free and I became an instrument in His hands to help others gain freedom from sin. My ministry began on the streets of New York. Like David Wilkerson, I went from house to house and told people about the power of the love of Jesus Christ. At the time, no one knew me, because the film «The Cross and The Switchblade» was released many years after my repentance. I just did what God told me to and felt that I was in my place.

— You brought to Christ some of your gang of «Mau Maus?»

— On the day when I repented, another 25 people from my gang accepted Jesus into their hearts.

— Are you are a pastor of a local church in your city?

— No, I'm an evangelist. The requirements of my ministry include constant travel. A pastor cannot afford such a luxury, his ministry is to pastor the sheep. But when I return home, I always attend the worship service of the Assembly of God church, of which I am a member.

— What are the difficulties that an evangelist often faces?

— First, there is the clash of different cultures. It is not always easy to immediately make good contact with new people. And as soon as it is established, it's time to leave. Then you are flying in an airplane, and frame by frame, memories of the country that you are leaving are going through your head. Every time it is emotionally difficult to survive the separation from new friends. But the most important thing is that God really works in human hearts through the ministry of evangelism. In this case, the power of the testimony of my life helps to bring Jesus into the hearts of men, specifically. They listen to my story and understand that all of what I say is not just words. I know exactly how they feel, after all, I lived through the same. Although every time I go on stage, and I know that I must share my testimony, it again and again rips open my wounds. But the knowledge that victory over myself will help thousands of people find true life and the bliss of abiding in Christ, helps me to do what I do. This is the spiritual beauty of my ministry.

— You have repeatedly mentioned that you will soon be finishing your evangelistic activities. Do you not plan to become a pastor in your church?

— No, I'm not planning to. I have a calling as an evangelist, not a pastor. I do not want to be where God did not put me, taking someone else's place.

— Nicky, you have a beautiful wife and kids! It seems that you are a real family man. Tell me, how hard it is to combine family and ministry?

— Yes, I really am a family man! Moreover, I can safely say that the greatest success of my life is my family. I have always tried to do everything to build a family home. But to boast that this success is the result of my efforts only, I cannot. After all, a huge and invaluable contribution to building our relationship is the sacrifice which my wife, Gloria, has made. She knew that to be a minister's wife is also a ministry. Very often, when our children were sick, she was there by their bedside. Picking up the children from school, checking their homework — many of these troubles lay on her fragile shoulders. But she worthily endured all these trials. I love her so much!

— How much time do you manage to spend with your family?

— When I'm home, I try to spend all my free time with my family. Right now, for example, my wife came with me, and also one of my four daughters, Alicia, came with her husband and two children.

— Given that you have four children, one can assume that you have a good experience in their upbringing. Do you have certain principles worked out that have always guided you in dealing with your children?

— Of course, first of all, I set a goal to give my kids what I never had — a father. I prayed that God would bless me with a perfect father's love towards my children. But now, analyzing the time I nurtured them, I can say that the children themselves teach us to love. I remember every one of them growing up from infancy. Their childlike simplicity brings a smile to my face.

For example, I'll tell you a funny story that happened to me one day when I had to stay home with my daughter, Nicole. Her weakness since childhood was sweets, and my wife and I had to limit her consumption of sweets and cookies. That evening I went to the kitchen. Nicole had already eaten her share of cookies, but that did not stop her. I told her, «That's enough for today», put the cookie jar on the top shelf of a kitchen cabinet, and ordered the little sweetie to go to sleep. I then pretended to go to my room, and crouched, watching what she would do in my absence. A few minutes later, Nicole climbed on a chair, then on the table, opened the top shelf and took out the cookiejar. At this moment, I jumped up and sharply blurted out: «What are you doing?!» to which her answer was immediate: «Dad, I wanted to bring you some cookies».

Such moments experienced in the process of dealing with children are an incredible joy in my life! They are priceless!

— Yes, one can see that you really cherish every member of your family. Please allow us to ask a difficult question: We have information that in early 2009, your brother was killed. What happened? Was he a Christian?

— It was the same brother with whom I lived in New York, when I left home in my youth. He always took care of me and often pulled me out of various scrapes. Once, after I was already an evangelist, I preached on the streets of New York. My words carried the gospel. Then I suggested that people gathered around me pray with their eyes closed. It was very dangerous, because in New York you cannot let your guard down. The enemy can strike at any moment. When I began to pray — I felt like someone suddenly jumped me. I thought it was an attack of bandits. But when I opened my eyes, I saw my brother tearfully hugging me. His heart was opened to Jesus that day. Over time, he became a



minister — a doctor of theology. My brother was very kind, his heart always longed to help his neighbor.

His killer, a 23-year-old man, was an acquaintance of his. The wily attacker said that he had run out of gas and asked my brother for a lift. Rather than sit next to the driver, he climbed into the back seat, and as soon as the car drove off, strangled the kind driver.

— Did the killer have something against your brother's christian ministry?

— No, it's much more primitive than that. He just wanted to steal the car. He was caught and is serving time in prison.

— Did you forgive the murderer?

— It was difficult, but God gave me the strength. I understand that I have a huge responsibility to the people who have believed in God through my testimony. If I did not forgive this man, this could have caused a wave of disappointment around the world. This test was very difficult. I cried for a long time about my brother, since spiritually we were very close. His death was a severe blow for me. But God was with me, and He gave strength to me and to all my family to forgive that person.

— Based on the experience of your life, would you like to write a book about forgiveness?

— The fact is, in each of my books is raised the burning question of forgiveness. In my book «The devil has no mother», I'll add a chapter in which I will tell the story of the murder of my brother. Perhaps this will help many readers to overcome the barriers to forgiveness in their hearts.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

I. FORMULATION

OF THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

1. The Second Commandment is formulated in Exodus and in Deuteronomy.

Exodus 20:4-6 — *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Deuteronomy 5:8-10 — *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

2. Two aspects of the Second Commandment.

A. You shall not make for yourself an idol.

Exodus 20:4-6 — *Do not make yourself an idol.*
The Hebrew word translated in the Russian Bible as «idol» is *pesel*, meaning idol or statue. This word comes from another Hebrew word *pesal* which means «to cut or cut down» or «sculpt» from wood or stone.

In this way the law of God forbids man to create sculptures, whether carved or cast idols.

B. Do not make any images and do not bow down to them.

Exodus 20:4-5a — *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.*

The Hebrew word translated in the Russian Bible as «image» is *temuna*, meaning likeness, shape or image, the embodiment or personification of something.

In this way God's law forbids any person to create any image of deity, whether a man-made representation of God Himself or God's creation, which man would worship.

This is also seen in another passage from Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 4:15-19 — *You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars — all the heavenly array — do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.*

This passage is a reminder that people should not make any statues or images of God and His creation, nor worship these statues and images. Notice how the Lord speaks about this by listing:

- Statues and images of men or women,
- Images of animals,
- Images of birds,
- Images of reptiles,
- Images of waterfowl,
- Images of celestial lights (sun, moon and stars).

The Lord warns that none of these images is or ever will be the embodiment or personification of the Creator of heaven and earth. This is what God tell us about himself:

Isaiah 42:8 — *I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.*

For the same reason the Lord commanded the Israelites to destroy the places of worship of the Gentiles, and their idols:

Deuteronomy 12:1-3 — *These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess — as long as you live in the land. Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.*

II. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE WORSHIP OF IDOLS

1. Biblical examples of violations of the second commandment.

A. The violation of the Second Commandment by the people of Israel.

— The creation of a molten calf when the Hebrew people came out of Egypt: **Exodus 32**.

— King Jeroboam made Israel to sin in idolatry: **3 Kings 12:25-33**.

— The idolatry of the people of Israel and its consequences: **4 Kings 17:7-23**.

B. The violation of the Second Commandment by pagan nations.

— King Nebuchadnezzar makes a golden idol to be worshiped: **Daniel 3:1-7**.

— Immigrants in Samaria worshiped God and idols: **4 Kings 17:24-41**. In verse 41, we see that even while these people were worshipping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did.

2. The Bible calls idolatry corruption.

Exodus 32:7-8 — *Then the Lord said to Moses, «Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, «These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt».*

Deuteronomy 4:16 — *...so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman...*

Deuteronomy 4:25 — *After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time — if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God and arousing his anger.*

3. Biblical sarcasm against idols.

A. The Word of God makes fun of idols:

Psalms 135:15-18 — *The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

Psalms 115:2-8 — *Why do the nations say, «Where is their God?» Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them...*

Isaiah 46:5-7 — *With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Even though someone cries out to it, it cannot answer; it cannot save them from their troubles.*

Habakkuk 2:18-19 — *Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, «Come to life!» Or to lifeless stone, «Wake up!» Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.*

Jeremiah 10:2-5 — *This is what the Lord says: «Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the heavens, though the nations are terrified by them. For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good».*

B. God's Word also makes fun of people who worship idols:

Isaiah 44:9-20 — *All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit nothing? People who do that will be put to shame; such craftsmen are only human beings. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and shame. The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in human form, human form in all its glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is used as fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also*

warms himself and says, «Ah! I am warm; I see the fire» From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, «Save me! You are my god!» They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, «Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?» Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, «Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?»

III. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

1. We can see the seriousness of this commandment by how many times the Lord repeats in the Old and New Testaments.

A. Old Testament.

Exodus 34:17 — *Do not make any idols.*
Leviticus 19:4 — *Do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God.*
Leviticus 26:1 — *Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God.*

B. New Testament.

1 John 5:21 — *Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*

Acts 17:29 — *Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by human design and skill.*

1 Corinthians 10:14 — *Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*

2. The seriousness of the Lord about the Second Commandment is clear from His warning of the punishment for violating this commandment.

A. The Lord warns His people that if they violated the Second Commandment, He would scatter them among all nations:

Deuteronomy 4:23-28 — *Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time — if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God and arousing his anger, I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the Lord will drive you. There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.*

B. The Lord puts a curse on those who make idols, and those who worship them:

Deuteronomy 27:15 — *«Cursed is anyone who makes an idol — a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands — and sets it up in secret.*

C. God punishes violators of the Second Commandment unto the third and fourth generation:

Exodus 20:4-6 — *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

D. The Lord leaves violators of the Second Commandment to top off the measure of their sins:

Romans 1:18-26 — *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts...*

(Continued on page 11)

ATTENTION!

Dear Readers, «Prisoner» is currently distributed in two languages: Russian and English. «Prisoner» is published in Ukraine and USA. However, the newspaper is published and distributed solely by means of free-will donations. For all who wish to contribute to the publishing of «Prisoner», you will find information included in the last column of the newspaper. For American Christians who would like to donate and render assistance in prison ministry, we have printed a section you can cut out, list your donations and specify where you want us to direct your donations. May Lord bless you!

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

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



Hope of Freedom

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

MY DONATION:

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

Amount: _____

Name: _____

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Questions:

Peter: (425) 346-4945, petyawa@gmail.com

Dasha: (206) 604-4594, dasha1@uw.edu

You may also donate online through PayPal at our website

www.hopeoffreedom.org

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

PARABLES

How well is the Earth established?

After a long day of work, a gardener lay down under a walnut tree to rest. Lying down, he looked up. He saw a huge walnut tree, all covered with tiny walnuts.

— Yes... — he said to himself, — the Lord established this Earth rather



poorly: such a big tree and such small fruit, while huge pumpkins grow on such little stems. It would be better if big trees would produce big fruit and small stems would produce small fruit.

At that moment a nut broke off a tree and hit him right on

the forehead. The poor fellow felt the lump on his head and said, — How well the Lord established the Earth and made sure that pumpkins do not grow on the trees! Otherwise, I would have a flapjack instead of a head.

A Cup of Self-Will

People became violent and lustful. Everyone started to live by their own understanding. So much so, that rumors spread about the end of the world:

— Soon God will pour out His wrath in a flood.

— No, the sun will fall to the Earth and God will pour out His wrath in a fiery storm.

— No, armies of locusts will destroy all the crops and hunger will walk the Earth.

They decided to ask an ancient man, who had seen everything in his long life. The old man wistfully shook his head:

— Everyone pours out God's wrath upon their own head, and God simply does not block our self-will.

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

DISCUSSION CLUB

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

(Continued from page 10)

3. The serious punishment for disobeying this commandment shows how serious this commandment is.

At the end of this world, antichrist will force all people to bow before the image of the beast:

Revelation 13:14-18 (NKJV) — *And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.*

Those who will obey antichrist and disobey the Second Commandment will reap consequences:

A. While alive:

Revelation 16:1-2 (NKJV) — *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, «Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth» So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.*

B. After death:

Revelation 14:9-12 (NKJV) — *Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, «If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name». Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*

The Bible says that idolaters will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NKJV) — *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV) — *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Revelation 21:8 (NKJV) — *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*

It is not by chance that God forbids man to create images of God. Only God — our Creator — has the right to express His own image. The Lord

did this when He came into this world as a man. The Lord Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. The New Testament says:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NKJV) — *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

Philippians 2:6 (NKJV) — *...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.* Also see **Hebrews 1:3** and **Colossians 1:15**.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand that Jesus Christ was not a fleshly image of God the Father. Being an image of the invisible God, Jesus showed the world the essence and nature of the Heavenly Father, the Creator of all things visible and invisible. Consequently, those who make images of Jesus Christ and who worship those images are breakers of the Second Commandment and are equal to those who worship other kinds of idols.

IV. THE BROADER MEANING OF THE WORD «IDOL»

Many people mistakenly believe that idolatry is limited to the worshiping of statues and images. However, the notion of idolatry is a lot broader than the literal worship of a statue. Anything can become an idol: a job, sports, gambling. For some people, it is their lover, wife, family, a favorite pop singer or actor, a political leader, ideology, money, car, television, computer. Anything! An idol is whatever takes the first and most important place in a person's life, the place which rightly belongs only to the Lord God. Whatever takes God's place in a person's heart becomes an idol, whether the person realizes it or not.

V.P. Vihliantsev says, «*The present time is distinguished by its idolatry. People worship science, medicine, and political teachings (ideologies). They sacrifice their talents, efforts, and themselves for these idols. Modern idolatry has all the aspects of ancient idolatry, but it has progressed beyond it. In their foolishness, men worship themselves, considering their success to be due to themselves and their genius, thus placing themselves higher than God*» (Biblical Dictionary).

God's Word reveals that idolatry is a lot more than the worship of statues:

1. Material obsession is idolatry.

Ephesians 5:5 (NKJV) — *For this you know that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

Colossians 3:5-8 (NKJV) — *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.*

Why? Because an idol is an object of adoration. The covetous man loves wealth and makes it his god; he serves, preserves and multiplies it by any means. The Lord warns that a person cannot serve two masters:

Matthew 6:24 (NKJV) — *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

2. Resisting God is idolatry.

1 Samuel 15:23 (NKJV) — *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*

Why? Because when a person resists God, he relies upon his own intellect alone, and his ego becomes his idol.

3. Worshiping idols is the same as worshiping demons.

1 Corinthians 10:14-21 (NKJV) — *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. In other words, demonic powers are behind all idols and receive the worship of people who believe in idols.*

CONCLUSION

Why do people create idols for themselves?

1. Religious instinct.

The Lord created man with the need for God. Deprived of healthy interaction with the Creator, a sinful person finds a way out in worshipping idols, be it things, people, ideas, etc.

2. A desire to manipulate God.

A person strives to find a god that is convenient to manage and who:

— Will not require them to abandon sins and pernicious habits.

— Will always be close at hand.

— Will carry out all of their wishes and requests.

— Will not convict and criticize them under any circumstances.

— Will always be willing to gratify their desires.

— Will flatter their ego.

— Will be a medium to attain their ambitions, etc.

3. A desire to see and feel God.

Carnal man cannot worship God, who is a Spirit. It is a lot easier to worship a god that one can see and feel. That is why there are so many figurines and other images of God.

The Second Commandment warns us to not create any god, be it a physical creation or creation of god in our imagination.

Take a closer look at your god. Is it the Lord God, who revealed Himself in His Word?

— If your god is silent and does not judge you when you lie, if he turns the blind eye on your doing, or if he vanishes altogether in particular circumstances to please you, it is not God, it is an idol.

— If your god has a visible form or image that you can see and/or touch, it is an idol.

— If your god does not possess all of the qualities inherent to the Lord God, described in the Holy Word, you are worshipping an idol.

That means that you are violating the Second Commandment of God's Law: **Do not make any idols.**

This article for the newspaper «Prisoner» was kindly provided by the Bible Discussion Club Montreal, Canada
<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/132.htm>

Love. A great number of verses and poems have been written about love. Many songs and ballads are devoted to love. Many of the greatest heroic deeds were committed for love, and for love people are still willing to go through fire and water, and endure suffering and death. Stressing the importance and necessity of love in our lives, Vladimir Vysotsky sang in his famous ballad about love: «I love, therefore I breathe. I breathe, therefore I live».

Our lives would indeed be dull and worthless without love. A person is nothing without love. How wonderful it is written in the Bible: **«Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.**

1. For example, storge best describes love for pets (dogs, cats or parrots).

2. It can also be the love of a particular environment in which you grew up and which you are used to.

3. It can be attachment to an old apartment or job.

4. You can also say that you love ice cream. In this case, the word «love» is storge.

5. Some parents feel this kind of love or attachment towards their children.

LOVE-EROS

This is a physical or sexual attraction. Some colloquially call it «chemistry». If the relationship between people is based only on love-eros, then after some time

little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth» (1 John 3:18).

«To love truly and in deed» means to be long-suffering and merciful towards the ones you love; not to envy, but rejoice in their success; not to boast, not to be proud of your achievements in comparison to theirs. True love means not seeking your own advantage in your relationship with loved ones. It means not becoming irritated with them, not disrespecting them, not crushing them with your egotism. To truly love someone means to trust them, to cover with love and patience his or her shortcomings and mistakes, and to do so consistently.

DO YOU POSSESS TRUE LOVE?

To determine what kind of love you feel in relation to a loved one, you should refer to the Word of God. Read again the biblical passage describing true love: «Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away» (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Try in this passage

to substitute the word «love» by your name or pronoun «I».

Compare your relationship with your closest loved one to the standard of true love, and you will see if you really love him or her, or only think that you do. If your relationship with your loved one meets the Bible standard of true love, we congratulate you. You can rightfully claim to have true love.

If your relationship does not entirely correspond to this standard but, conversely, is contrary to the Bible's description of true love, please admit with courage that this relationship cannot be called love. Perhaps between you and your loved one is phileo love, storge love or eros love, but not agape love!

HOW TO FIND AGAPE LOVE?

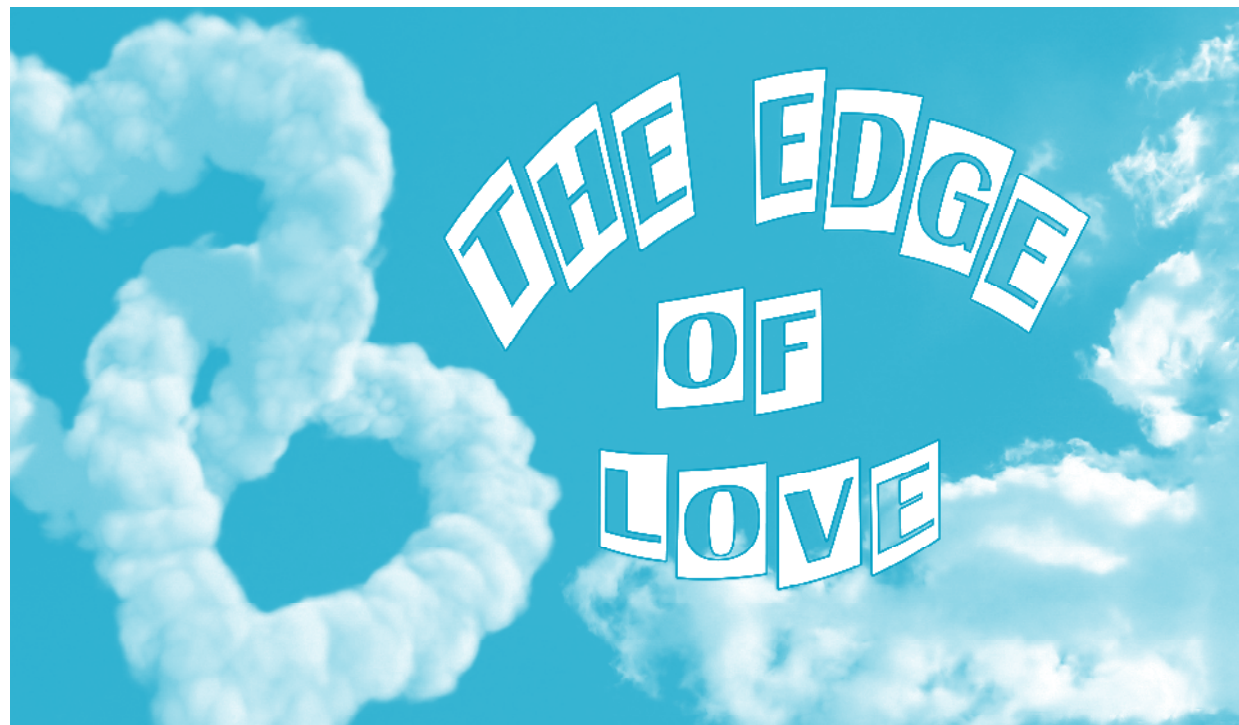
The truth is that since we are slaves of our sinful selfish nature, we are not able to have agape love. This love is unique to the Lord God alone. God shows His love toward us every day, but the culmination of God's love for us was His death on the cross for the sins of all mankind: **«But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us» (Romans 5:8).**

God is love – agape love. If we let Him live in our hearts, He will be a source of this imperishable and infinite love in us. Jesus Christ said: **«Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me» (Revelation 3:20).**

All that a person needs is to open the door of his or her heart to Jesus and invite Him to come in. He will come and give you a new heart, full of agape love. This spiritual transformation is described in the Bible as follows: **«A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh» (Ezekiel 36:26).**

Do not hesitate to entrust your life to Jesus Christ, and He will fill you with enduring value. He will give you His peace and joy, faith, hope and love.

This article for the newspaper «Prisoner» was kindly provided by the Bible Discussion Club Montreal, Canada <http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles028.htm>



And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing» (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

However, we should not forget that there are different types of love. The English and Russian languages have only one word to describe love. Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language) has 96 words that define love, and ancient Persian has 80 different meanings. The Greek language has several words that can be translated by the word «love». They are: eros, storge, phileo, mania and agape. Five different words with five different meanings. Let's talk about this in greater detail.

LOVE-MANIA

Mania can hardly be called love in the fullest sense of the word. This is a manic desire for someone or something. From a biblical point of view, this love is idolatry, inasmuch as a person obsessed with love-mania idolizes the person or thing with which he is obsessed. The Greeks regarded this kind of love as the whimsical touch of Greek gods because after this touch a person began to behave irrationally. The Bible calls these pagan gods, demons.

The modern word «maniac» is derived from the Greek word «mania» and describes the man possessed by love-mania.

LOVE-PHILEO

Phileo is a love based on mutual interests and sympathies. This is a kind of conditional love because it is based on some certain conditions. If the conditions are met, then there is love. If they are not met, then love ceases. Most marriages are based precisely on this love and as a result, end in divorce. The common interests of the husband and wife come to an end, feelings and sympathy grow cold, and nothing more can keep the family together.

LOVE-STORGE

This kind of love is more like attachment. The attachment can be to a person, a thing or an animal.

when the physical feeling passes or weakens, the couple splits. It can be compared to a similar effect that occurs when a child receives a new toy. While it is new, the child will not let go of it for a minute. Over time (and with children, this occurs within a few days) the new toy gets old and boring. When a new toy appears, the old one completely disappears from the memory.

LOVE-AGAPE

This is the kind of love which describes the nature and character of God. The Bible declares: **«God is love» (1 John 4:8).** In the original, the Greek word «agape» is used; it means a dedicated, selfless, and unconditional love.

The Lord Jesus Christ describes this love as follows: **«Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends» (John 15:13).** That's the kind of love God has shown by His death on the cross for our sins.

WHAT IS TRUE LOVE?

The Bible gives the following definition of true love: **«Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away» (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).** This verse gives a description of true love as agape love. As you can see, it is not based on mere feelings and emotions. On the contrary, this kind of love involves great responsibility. Our problem is that when we look for love, we often look for the wrong thing: thrills, physical attraction, common interests, visual attractiveness, popularity or wealth. At the same time, we are totally unprepared to make the least sacrifice, forgetting that true love is distinguished by sacrifice and altruism.

True love certainly manifests itself in action. That's why the apostle John, referring to all Christians, said: **«My**

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«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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