



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”.

John 8:32

No. 3 (37)
July—August—
September, 2022
Distributed Free

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know”

Is it a little or a lot to remain in prison for twenty-eight years without a chance of getting out?! I suppose it's plenty of time to mentally relive and analyze my past sinful life many times over. Is it possible that sentences such as 5, 10, or 15 years are also enough to analyze your life and to repent from your mistakes? Yes of course. The length of the sentence does not in any way affect the changes in a person's life. Everything is dependent on the person, does he or she even want changes in his or her life? For some, a year spent in these filthy places is enough to realize who is who and what awaits them ahead. Yet for others, 5-7 stints in prison may not be enough to make the decision to get out of this miry pit. The only thing that can help in this situation is repentance and faith in God. It is not in vain that the Bible says: **“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)**. Knowing this truth comes exclusively through faith in God, because He is the path, truth, and life for all people. Once, Thomas, one of the disciples, told Jesus: **“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:5-6)**.

From my own personal experience I can say one thing: there is a way out to true light for every person if they themselves want to leave the dead end of their lost years, disappointments, and emptiness.

In these 28 years of my continuous incarceration, I have had the opportunity to meet different people of various social standings. Some of these people, at the time I met them, had already served a total of 35 or even over 40 years in prison. These people had served multiple stints in prison. Despite the fact that I am also imprisoned (this is my first conviction), I was curious as to what made them return to these terrible places. Was one time not enough to understand oneself and to change? Many of these people were on their 5th or 7th conviction. A large portion of their life was spent in jails and prisons and they practically didn't even see freedom. The answer to my question of why it was this way, was the same: “Who needs us on the outside especially if we don't have any friends, relatives, or social connections?” Everything repeated itself like in the movie *Gentlemen of Fortune*: steal, drink, end up in jail! And this unfortunately happened time after time. Society did not really want to accept these people back and these people didn't really want to go back either because they didn't want to change their lifestyles. Praise God that some of the people that I spent time with did decide to change their lives. Today, these are totally different people with human thinking and a new worldview.

I remember one instance when I suggested my cellmate to ask God for forgiveness. He replied that God will not forgive him because he has sinned too much already and that these sins were unforgivable. I then had to explain to him that God through His Word (The Bible) says that's not true. I opened The Bible and read what was said by God himself: **“But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” (Ezekiel 18:21-23)**. After I read to him what was said by God himself, this cell mate asked to borrow the Bible and he did not put it down until lights out. In the end, he asked God for forgiveness like many others. The explanation is very simple. **“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12)**.

It is possible that some might find it hard to understand how a word written in a book could be alive! However, The Bible is not just a book. It is The Book of books, through which God himself speaks to humanity with his living word which has an invisible power and it is alive because it touches all the strings of a person's heart and soul. All of the Bible is filled with God's Spirit which is why it has such an affect on people's hearts and souls. Of course, this only happens if a person reads this Holy Book with an open heart. The Bible says: **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)**.

Also, all of the prophecies in the Bible are true because all of it was written down under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The second letter of Apostle Peter says: **“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21)**.

Today I want to address all of the incarnated people who are consistent readers of “Prisoner” and also those



who have picked up this publication for the first time, with one question: who among you, like me, has grown tired of this “jail romance” and wants to completely change their life so that the rest of their life would not be lived for themselves but for the benefit of other people, doing good and bringing light into this world?!

Is it still not obvious that none of us can turn back the squandered years that we have spent in jails and prisons because of our recklessness? We cannot go back and comfort our fathers and mothers who have lost their loved ones before their time, many of us not being able to say farewell. We will never be able to hear the loud laughter of our young children who are now adults. We will never be able to fix or change what each one of us had done... That sin, which we have lived with and many continue to live with, has crippled our lives and the lives of our loved ones. Many of us are like the outcasts that are little interested in living free in society. We are counted as second-class citizens and many consider us as the garbage of society. People are afraid of us because we are convicts. Many of us end up in prison again because we cannot “find ourselves” when we are granted freedom and freedom (represented by society) does not really want to extend a hand of friendship. Many people are stuck in this closed loop. Society did not accept you, you stole, drank, and ended up back in prison! So what is the solution to this? Is there even a way out?

The fact of the matter is that a way out always exists if a person wants to get out of this garbage pit of sin. God performs miracles for His children who come to Him with repentance and faith. For the past 10 years and counting, on the pages of “Prisoner”, we have

published testimonies of born-again Christians who have found God behind bars and are now free and continue to serve Him. These are not made up stories — these are real facts of how God changes people. These people were in the same exact and even worse conditions and circumstances. They simply got tired of everything that surrounds us and made their choice. But first of all, they started to hate sin!

Today, unlike ever before, God is knocking on our door in order to extend to us His saving hand. He is calling us to prudence and repentance in order for none of us to perish. Through His living Word He speaks to us all: **“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live...” (Deuteronomy 30:19)**.

More than a quarter of a century ago, I came before God with repentance. Ever since, I have not once regretted that I had made this decision. All of these 28 years that I have spent behind bars have not made my heart hard, but on the contrary, it has made my heart compassionate and loving towards people. Today, I love all people but with all of my heart and soul, I hate sin in people, especially when there is no attempt to get rid of it.

This is why today, I call all who are tired because of sin, and who are burdened, to come to the Lord who can truly change our lives. This is what God says to us all: **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30)**.

The Bible contains an amazing parable of the prodigal son. When reading the parable, it is easy to see one's self in it. While we live in sin, all of us are the prodigal sons and daughters. Only the all-powerful God has the strength to break this sinful circle!

In conclusion, I would like to speak with words from the Bible to all of those who are still reflecting. God says to each one of us: **“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3)**. It is also said that **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13)**.

I. GORIK.

Many people wonder why there are so many different branches and denominations in Christianity. If this is the only truly saving religion, then why is there so much disunity? There is even hostility between Christians of different denominations. All this is bewildering. And even turns some people away from the search for the truth. Does every seeker of God have to deal with this?

Those who were born and raised in a Christian environment are not particularly bothered about this disunity, since more often than not they follow what they have heard and known since childhood. But for first generation Christians, this can serve as a stumbling block! And really, how do we reconcile with this? This article is devoted to this question.

this is where distortions and sometimes substitution of concepts can occur. The more talented by nature a non-spiritual person is, the greater the likelihood that they will convey their distorted truth to others. And if this person is also a preacher or minister, then he may even have his own followers with teachings that are far from the truth.

INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND GOD BY OUR HUMAN MINDS OR LOGIC

One of the first causes of disunity in Christianity is when humans try to put God in the framework of human understanding, instead of transforming themselves and their minds in accordance with God's truths. There is an amazing question in the Bible that you can answer for yourself.

Job 11:7-8 — *Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you*

honored to talk with God and know Him very closely! Moses asked God to reveal to him the way of God, that is because he wanted to know God better.

Ex. 33:13 — *...therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.*

Even the righteous individuals Job, King Solomon, and the prophet Jeremiah questioned God's justice.

Job 21:7 — *Why do the wicked live and become old, Yes, become mighty in power?*

Eccl. 8:14 — *There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous.*

1 Cor. 8:1-3 — *Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*

As the Christian is transformed in accordance with Christ's teaching and as this teaching is followed in practice, all questions that previously conflicted with common sense are surprisingly and harmoniously resolved.

OTHER REASONS FOR DIFFERENCES AND DIVISIONS IN CHRISTIANITY

1. God deliberately hid His wisdom from the wise of this world

Luke 10:21 — *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank*

Romans 10:3 — *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*

It is interesting how believers from different denominations and even countries who have a personal connection with God find unanimity among themselves on fundamental issues when meeting and communicating with one another. This shows that all those who sincerely seek God in their hearts have one Teacher — the Holy Spirit.

3. God's Truths Are Revealed Gradually as You Grow Spiritually

The truth of God is revealed to a believer gradually, in proportion to his spiritual growth and transformation in accordance with this revealed truth. When a Christian fulfills what God has revealed to him, then the process of spiritual growth and the subsequent discovery of His truths continue. This is how the spiritual growth of a person happens. This becomes another reason for disagreement in Christianity — when spiritual babies, not knowing the fullness of the truth, become divided for reasons that are visible to them alone. Those reasons are not at all serious for separation, but only seem to be so in their eyes.

So it was in the days of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, when the believers in the Corinthian church began to be divided due to the preferences of different ministers.

1 Cor. 3:1-5 — *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul", and another, "I am of Apollos", are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*

1 Cor. 2:10-12 — *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

Sorrow, suffering, and a personal encounter with God free a person from the layering of narrow denominational concepts. It opens his heart and makes him capable of accepting spiritual truths.

4. The devil is involved in the strife between Christians

Satan is interested and even asked God for Christians to be alone, in similarity to those who sow wheat. After all, alone, they are then much easier to overcome. But Christ, on the contrary, encourages His followers to communicate with each other and even sends them to work not one at a time, but two at a time. He promised to abide with his followers when they gathered to fellowship in His name. Local communities are an ideal condition for achieving and developing mutual respect, sacrifice and harmony between individual members of the church. Developing these skills is essential to eternal coexistence in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Luke 22:31 — *And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat."*

Matt. 18:20 — *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*

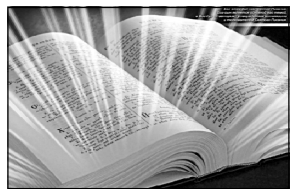
Heb. 10:25 — *...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...*

The enemy of human souls is trying to play on our differences by sowing mutual envy and inflicting a sense of superiority on individuals. It becomes a problem when someone is proud of his accomplishments in the area in which God has given to him, and begins to neglect other people, forgetting that they are no less important to him than he is to them. Therefore, Christ and His apostles directed people towards mutual love and respect for others above themselves.

(Continued on page 7)

PASTOR'S WORD

DIVISION IN CHRISTIANITY



OUR DIFFERENCES ARE THE CREATOR'S INTENT

I would like to immediately draw your attention to the fact that the Bible indicates a number of reasons why there may be misunderstandings and disagreements, and why people may not fully understand the Gospel. The Apostle Paul states that disagreement is a normal phenomenon, which confirms the peculiarities of each of our individualities. Disagreements can be the result of different perceptions of the world and available information, as well as the result of processing done by each individual.

1 Cor. 11:19 — *For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.*

Christianity is not a mass of gray personalities who should look exactly the same, but instead an environment for the development of individuals who have personal communion with the Lord and fulfill their exclusively assigned role in the Universe. Just as there are no two identical leaves on a tree, just as there are no two completely identical snowflakes in the world, so every person is unique. Therefore, the process of comprehension, and experiences are completely different between people. Just as a bouquet of flowers, when skillfully selected with different shades, pleases the eye, so the diversity of characters, tastes and views sometimes decorates the family and the church. The Apostle Paul explains this regularly, citing as an example the human body, consisting of many members, harmoniously serving each other with the abilities that the Creator endowed them with. He emphasizes that each individual member does not contain everything for an independent existence, but has immense value when it serves others (**1 Cor. 12:14-27**).

Local churches exist to spiritually uplift and perfect the children of God. In the church there have always been and will be people of different spiritual ages, called from different social strata, with different upbringings and with different backgrounds.

HOW HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS WORKS

Our comprehension of new topics builds and relies on images and topics that we have already seen, experienced, and understand. For example, how would we describe a plane flying in the sky to a native from a wild tribe? Of course, we will compare it with what is natural to him, in this example probably a bird. What do we compare the sound of an airplane to? Also, with something that he has already heard in his life. Similarly, spiritual truths, which have no analogues in our earthly lives, will be compared with earthly concepts. We could only guess at the effectiveness of these comparisons! These comparisons will vary from person to person depending on their creativity, mental development, and current emotional status.

When a non-spiritual person analyzes spiritual things, he will interpret them in accordance to his level, experience, and knowledge —

find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven — what can you do? Deeper than Sheol — what can you know?

And the implied answer to these questions is no.

Although people have been given the task of seeking God, we are completely incapable of actually knowing Him ourselves without His divine help. The human mind is not the instrument by which we can fully comprehend God. Our intellectual thinking works great in the realm of the material world, but simply cannot be used however, as an evaluative mechanism for measuring the truths of God and His will.

Acts 17:26-27 — *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us...*

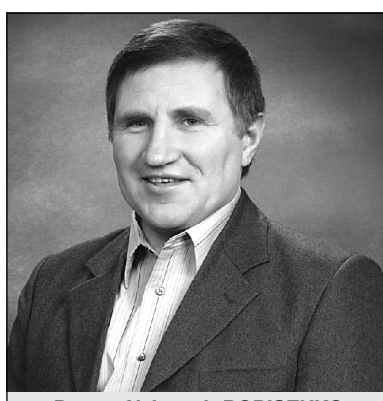
Prov. 3:5 — *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding...*

People who rely on their own reasoning cannot comprehend God and be fully obedient to Him, no matter how much they want to. That is why the Lord, who is ever loving and desires everyone to obtain salvation, may sometimes put people into helpless situations. Some fall ill with incurable diseases, some find themselves in a hopeless situation for various other reasons. And the result of this is that such a person loses hope in other people and/or in themselves. The usual interest and enthusiasm for the worldly lifestyle starts to be smothered, and the search for the meaning of life and the purpose of mankind on earth awakens. Thus, a person begins to look for a way out that does not include the material world, and his spiritual thirst awakens. With other people, God achieves the same results through inner illumination — revelations. This is very similar to the changes that occur in all people as they age. For example, when a growing child loses interest overnight in the toys that pleased and occupied his attention. This happens to purpose driven adults, too, especially when someone is praying for their salvation. Then intoxicating earthly goals lose their luster, and they awaken to God!

GOD IS NOT COMPLETELY UNDERSTOOD EVEN BY KNOWN BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

People of different nationalities who speak different languages gather and cannot understand each other because they have some differences. If all human beings, being similar in appearance, and having the same natural needs, but born in different countries, cannot understand each other, then is it surprising that a person cannot understand God?!

God was not understood and even His justice was doubted by such biblical characters as Moses, Job, Jeremiah (**Ex. 33:13; Job 21:6-15; Job 33:13; Jer. 12:1; Ps. 72:1-23**). These are people who have been



Pastor Aleksandr BORISENKO

Jer. 12:1 — *Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?*

Is. 55:8-9 — *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways", says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts..."*

For example, it is difficult for us to comprehend how two concepts which are mutually exclusive to each other such as God's predestination for human life and the presence of real free will, can coexist in a harmonious community? How is it to be understood that God knows in advance what will happen to a person and what decision he will make in a given situation? But at the same time, a person is completely free in his right to choose? What should we do if our mind is at a dead end when trying to comprehend and reconcile such things?

It is no surprise the Bible speaks on the problems of limited human consciousness.

Deut. 29:29 — *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

Ps. 131:1 — *Lord, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty.*

Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.

From the days of the fall, human thinking has been distorted, and this serves as an obstacle to obtain the knowledge of God. Only those who are born again are on the same wavelength with God have access to the perception and knowledge of Him.

Birth from above is a phenomenon of transformation of the human mind, when an individual recognizes by faith the existence of God as the Creator of the Universe, which, in fact, corresponds to the biblical teaching.

1 Cor. 2:14-16 — *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritually judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight".

If the knowledge of God depended only on human mental capacity, then all scientists, professors, and academics would be the first to enter the Kingdom of God. The people who are mentally undeveloped or simply not smart would be predestined for hell. But God is just! Interestingly, Christ did not select disciples on the basis of their intelligence or academic achievement. God is known not by the mind, but by the heart and by faith. It has always been so, and is still so. Even the wise sometimes do not understand the gospel message, but simple, suffering people believe with all their hearts and are saved. Even the apostle Paul spoke about this.

1 Cor. 1:26-29 — *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.*

1 Cor. 1:21 — *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

1 Cor. 1:18 — *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

2. The knowledge of God and His truth does not come about by the mind, but by the heart through faith

Saving faith originates in the heart (spirit) of a person, not in the head, and is the result of the work of God's Word through the Holy Spirit. Those who approach trying to understand the faith and teachings of Christ and the apostles with their own logic and common sense, often find themselves indoctrinated into an army of heretics and ultimately harming the movement of God.

Heb. 11:3 — *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

1 Cor. 2:10 — *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*

1 Cor. 2:13-15 — *These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*

I. DEFINITION OF THE TERM

What is confession?

1. Old Testament

The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word **yada** which has many meanings, one of which is to recognize, to confess. In the Old Testament this word is used in the following contexts.

A. Confessing sins (confessing one's sins): Leviticus 5:5-6 — *And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So, the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin.*

B. Recognize, agree: Job 40:9 — *Then I also acknowledge that your right hand can save you.*

C. Confessing the name of the Lord, that is, recognizing God and His authority: 1 Kings 8:33-36 — *When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance (same thing in 2 Chronicles 6:24-27).*

2. New Testament

A. The Greek word used in the New Testament is **homologeō**. It translates to say the same thing and, in most contexts means not to refuse but to plead guilty to what you are accused of, to agree with the charge.

One of the Greek words with the same root — **exomologeō** — means a confession that comes from the depths of the soul: **Matthew 3:5-6** — *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to Him and were baptized by Him in the Jordan, confessing their sins; Acts 19:18* — *Many of those who believed came, confessing and revealing their deeds.*

B. The second meaning of this word is to recognize: Revelation 3:5 — *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

C. It is also used in the sense of confession: 1 Timothy 6:12 — *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses; 1 Timothy 6:13* — *I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate.*

II. TYPES OF BIBLICAL CONFESSION

Biblical confession falls into two categories:

☉ confession as a confession of sins (admission of one's mistakes and sins),

☉ confession as a confession of faith (religion).

1. Confession of faith

The Bible uses the word confession to mean an openly proclaimed faith. Thus, the following words belong to the Apostle Paul: **Hebrews 3:1** — *Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus; Hebrews 4:14* — *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

An open confession of faith is an acknowledgment of God and His authority and a declaration of one's allegiance to God and His truth through which He has revealed Himself. This is a declaration of your boundless trust in Christ and submission to His Word: **Romans 10:9-10** — *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

The New Testament says that some of the Pharisees, because of fear of the Jews, did not openly confess Christ: **John 12:42-43** — *Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

However, Jesus warns those who will be ashamed of Him before people: **Matthew 10:32-33** — *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.*

The following two passages testify to the fact that, regardless of desire, every person and all of God's creation will soon have to recognize and confess Jesus Christ as King and God: **Philippians 2:9-11** — *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father; Romans 14:11* — *For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God".*

2. Confession of sins

The Bible talks about four ways of confessing sins.

A. Confession to the Lord

During repentance for sins, the repentant sinner confesses his sins to the One against whom he sinned in the first place, that is, to the Lord: **1 Corinthians 8:12** — *But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.*

Examples of such a confession: Psalms 51:4 — *Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight — That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge; Psalm 31:1-6* — *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions*

to the Lord", and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him; 1 John 1:9 — *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

B. Confession to a person

He who repents of his bad deeds confesses his sins not only before God, but also before the people against whom he has sinned: **Matthew 5:23** — *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift; James 5:16* — *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

C. Confession to a Spiritual Leader or Mentor

This kind of confession of sins is nothing more than a general admission of one's guilt, sins, mistakes without going into details.

☉ David confesses to the prophet Nathan in **2 Samuel 12:13**: *So, David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord".*

on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain. Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives". Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do".

D. David's confession after he sinned with Bathsheba: Psalm 51.

E. David's prayer: Psalm 38.

2. Examples of confession of sins in the New Testament

A. Confessions of a thief: Luke 23:39-43 — *Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us". But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong". Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom". And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise".*

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

CONFESSION ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE



☉ Crowds of people confess their sins to John the Baptist: **Matthew 3:1-6** — *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight!'. Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to Him, and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

Here we see that confession of sins is an important part of repentance. Confession is verbal repentance, a verbal expression of the state of the sinner's heart during repentance.

Repentance without confession is not repentance. And confession without repentance is an empty shaking of the air.

D. Confession to the whole church

This kind of confession is necessary only when a person's sin or misdeed is directed against the whole church or acquires the status of a scandal, that is, it becomes public knowledge. In this case, the church is guided by the following principle: secret or hidden sins need to be exposed one on one, and open (or public) sins require public exposure and repentance.

In the early apostolic church, true repentance for an anti-church and anti-social offense was always accompanied by open confession and repentance, acquiring a public character, like a crime committed by a person.

The following New Testament examples illustrate this rebuke:

☉ A sin made known to the whole church, which the apostle Paul rebukes publicly in **1 Corinthians 5**.

☉ The sin of Ananias and Sapphira, which became known not only in the church, but also outside of it (**Acts 5:1-11**). Because their transgression was public, Peter gave them the opportunity to repent publicly. But Ananias and Sapphira did not take advantage of this chance and did not confess their sin, for which they were punished by the Lord at the same time.

II. EXAMPLES OF CONFESSION IN THE BIBLE

1. Examples of confession of sins in the Old Testament

A. Achan's confession before Joshua: Joshua 7:19-21 — *Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me". And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it".*

B. Ezra's confession to God about the sins of Israel: Ezra 9:5-15.

C. Ezra's call to repent of the fact that the Jews married Gentiles: Ezra 10:6-12 — *Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month,*

B. Confessions of Peter: Luke 5:3-9 — *Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch". But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net". And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken...*

C. Confession of Judas before the Sanhedrin: Matthew 27:1-4 — *When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood". And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!"*

D. Confession of the prodigal son: Luke 15:18-19 — *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants; Luke 15:21* — *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.*

E. A tax collectors prayer: Luke 18:13 — *And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Someone may say: "What kind of confession is this? This is repentance. But, dear friends, we remind you once again that repentance is a state of the heart, soul, and confession is a verbal testimony of repentance.*

Why are there so few confessions in the New Testament, and why are they concise and short?

Firstly, it is necessary to understand that confession is not only the confession of sins, but also the proclamation of one's faith. The entire New Testament is a confession of faith: twenty-two of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament contain examples of the confession of faith of the apostles and early Christians. And not by accident.

Secondly, speaking of the confession of sins, it should be noted that confession is a deeply personal process, not intended for prying ears. Unregenerate people may be tempted to hear the confession of an outsider with a long list of his heinous sins. The Bible teaches that God does not tempt anyone. That is why, protecting us from the condemnation of others, the Lord did not include detailed confessions in the New Testament.

Thirdly, most of the New Testament is addressed not to unbelievers, but to Christians, that is, to people who have already repented and reconciled with Heavenly Father through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The main purpose of Christians is to proclaim faith in Jesus Christ. That is why there are many more detailed confessions of faith in the New Testament than confessions of sins.

Despite this, we need to remember that the daily life of a Christian should consist of two confessions: the confession of sins and the confession of faith.

Today it is extremely important to understand that all people are sinners: **Romans 3:23** — *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. If someone pretends or tries to convince himself and others that he does not have sin, then he not only lies to God, people and himself, but also presents God as lying: 1 John 1:8-10* — *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. And this is dumb, because the one who does not recognize his sins and does not confess them to God during his lifetime will pay dearly for his pride. And the price will be an eternity in hell. To avoid this, you need to confess your sins before God and turn to Him with a request for forgiveness.*

Remember that: *He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy (Proverbs 28:13).*

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" was kindly provided by Bible Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada <http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/122.htm>

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

If God could change me, God can change anyone... Ex-gang leader turned pastor shares God's transformation

Emptiness, pain, suffering and brokenness are four words the Rev. Terrell Scott, pastor of Passion-Life Church in McDonough, Georgia, uses to describe his memories of being the 15-year-old leader of a criminal gang.

Scott spent much of his teenage years and early 20s participating in gang-related violence, drug trafficking and committing armed robberies. During those years, he abused alcohol and used and sold marijuana, cocaine, Ecstasy and methamphetamines.

In an interview with *The Christian Post*, Scott recalled how he grew up in a dysfunctional and broken family during his childhood and early adolescence and lacked a close relationship with his father. He yearned to feel complete and sought brotherly relationships to fill the void left by the absence of a father figure in his life. All those factors, he said, made the idea of starting his own gang intriguing as a teenager.

"There were times I would halt the criminal activity that I was doing, but my mind wasn't right, so I would go back to the drugs, women, power, crime and money, and I would start getting high and go hitting the streets", the 39-year-old pastor told CP.

"I could go from being good to making bad decisions really fast. When you don't have a close relationship with your father or a godly figure in your life, you will go to the streets to be mentored and to find community".

According to a 2016 report released by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry on youth gang activity, many are seeking "a sense of connection or to define a new sense of who they are". Other teens, however, crack under peer pressure to join a gang or feel compelled to join in an effort to "protect themselves and their family". While others join as a way to get by financially or because their relatives are also part of a gang.

For Scott, growing up in McDonough, where gangs were prevalent, meant that many of his teenage peers were forming gangs by the time they reached middle



school. Youth in his neighborhood would often beat up other teens as part of gang-affiliated violence.

Scott hoped that by forming a gang, he would find brotherhood and wholeness. At 15, he gathered most of the boys from his high school football team and started his own gang. Thus he began a decadelong crime spree, which eventually led to him being arrested and sentenced to prison.

As a 21-year-old college student, Scott's bad choices in life had caught up with him. He told CP that he'll never forget the day he was arrested and subsequently sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to pay a fine of \$500,000.

It was during his stint in prison, however, where he would encounter Jesus for the first time.

While incarcerated, Scott continued to run his gang from inside the prison walls and trafficked drugs for a few years before he was caught. For that, he was moved to solitary confinement.

During six months in isolation, Scott said he found himself thinking about the existence of God. One night, he prayed by asking God to bring someone into his life to

help guide him toward the Christian faith. Within a month, Scott received a letter from a woman named Brandy, who he once robbed at gunpoint.

"In the letter, Brandy shared the Gospel with me, and she told me that God has a purpose and plan for me. The Holy Spirit convicted me. And I started repenting", he said. "It was God's timing, and I started witnessing and sharing Jesus with everyone".

Brandy began visiting Scott regularly to study the Bible with him over several months. After he surrendered his life to Jesus at 26, poison officials took notice of his transformation, change in behavior and ministry work among his fellow inmates. Later, a judge agreed to drop the \$500,000 fine was initially ordered to pay the state.

"I had a vision of two hands clasping together when my eyes were closed and I was praying, and it was very clear, in the most tranquil feeling, that God was calling me to make a difference through ministry when I got out of prison", Scott recalled of one of his final nights in prison. "Then, I heard the voice of God tell me that I was meant to be a preacher to help many".

When he was released from prison, Scott married Brandy. The couple now have five children together, and in 2013 they founded Passion-Life Church in the same community Scott was raised in. The church has just under 100 members attending services each Sunday.

The two also started their own Christian ministry called The River Refuge to help youth in McDonough, an area that continues to grapple with high rates of gang violence. The ministry is a community development corporation with a mission to meet the practical needs of those in low-income areas while showing them love.

"If God could change me, God can change anyone. And I want to prevent what I went through in others and give them purpose and destiny", Scott said. "In my own life story, I've made mistakes and hurt a lot of people, but seeing what God has done, I just want to share it with more and more kids to inspire them. God gave me a heart for kids. Ninety percent or more of our kids in McDonough have never met their dads, and so we want to step up and be godly figures for them".

As part of their ministry, they run the Malachi Project, which is a mentoring program for children and teens in elementary school to high school that provides academic tutoring in school subjects, as well as meals and a time to do devotionals to teach them about Jesus Christ.

"We saw a lot of needs. We help them work through gang involvement, sex and other issues youth face", Scott said.

Through The River Refuge ministry, they've distributed 200 donation bags a week and provide book bags and homeless care kits, along with Thanksgiving boxes with meals for families. During the holidays, they'll begin their "Christmas in the City" project that provides gifts for children from low-income families.

"It's the work of grace that saved me and rescued me from my past and freed me from drug addiction, because God can forgive and heal anyone", Scott said. "There's nothing like serving the Lord. The things that I found in the streets, in that lifestyle, was a counterfeit from what I needed, and I didn't find full satisfaction in that".

"When I gave my life to Christ, it's not like one day, I'm a thug and an addict and drug dealer, and then I wake up and everything is peaches and roses, but it was a process that God took me through and I had to trust God and His healing work", Scott added.

The Christian Post.

My name is Herman. I am one of hundreds of thousands of people who used to be enslaved by drugs and other addictions, but whom the Lord had mercy on and saved! My past is almost thirty years of drug addiction and a quarter century of prison. My path to God was difficult and long...

I was born in a small provincial town of Shostka, in the Sumy region, in an ordinary, then Soviet, family. Mother and father worked day and night at the factory and I was left to myself and the street where I received an unenviable upbringing. My father drank heavily, and together with my mother and my younger brother, we had to run away from a drunken parent. Often spending the night with our neighbors.

At the age of six I was already smoking, by the age of twelve I was drinking wine on the porch with friends, and a little later I was sniffing glue. I first tried drugs in 1985 when I was twenty-one years old.

At that time, almost no one in our town knew that drug addiction existed in the USSR, everyone was sure that we did not have drug addicts. But soon I became convinced that we did have drug addicts and I was one of them. Since then, life has been divided into two parts: the before and after.

At the time I had a wife and daughter, but drug addiction destroyed my family very quickly. In 1987 I received my first conviction — two years of low security prison.

The first day I got out I returned to my old ways. I came to my senses a year later in a high security prison with a three-year sentence.

Usually, people begin to believe in God after someone preaches to them. No one has ever preached to me about Christ. But in prison I finally realized that I myself could not break out of this vicious circle, and for the first time in my life I turned to God in whom I had never believed in. I asked for help, with a request to save me, to free me

It took me nineteen years to realize that the Lord was always near



from drugs and to release me from prison. I really did not want to go back. Unfortunately, the miracle did not happen then and I received a new term and went to the next prison.

In a new prison facility for me, everything was as usual. Unusual was the crowd I got mixed up in. They seemed to be the same guys addicted to drugs and alcohol, serving their sentences. Their unusualness lay in the fact that they did not want to shoot up or drink anymore. And they also did not speak obscenities with the prison language. They were not like the rest of the prisoners.

These amazing guys told me about Jesus who set them free. It turned out that God did hear my prayer in that prison cell, but not everything worked out right away.

Having received freedom from drug addiction, I thought that I could handle it on my own. It was a decision that had a profound effect on my entire life. As a result, I very quickly returned to where God led me out of.

After that, there were six more convictions and long years spent in prison, and between sentences there was a narcotic nightmare and an insatiable longing for God.

There were a lot of diagnoses and no chance for the future. It seemed that life was completely destroyed. The only thing left was hope... Hope in God, whom I knew that He never betrays. I hoped that He had not turned away from me, that He would one day save me.

In general, with such lawlessness, I ended up at my final stop — in a special regime colony number fifty-six, where on May 15, 2012 I reconciled with my Lord and dedicated my life to Him. It took me nineteen long years to realize that the Lord was always there, always kind to me, and always kept me.

Five years later, I left prison a completely different person. I was free and no longer afraid of the past. Since then, I have never returned to my past life and have never regretted my decision. God gave me back everything that I had lost over the years: the meaning of life, health, children, joy. But most importantly, Jesus gave me eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

For more than ten years now I have been free from any addictions and I am very grateful to the Lord for this. Today I live in the city of Bucha, I am a member of the Church of *Power of The Resurrection* and participate, by the grace of God, in some of its ministries. Here I was taught to live with God, to serve people which helped me become a full-fledged person. If it weren't for our ministers (to whom many thanks for changing my life), I would never have been able to rise up and become the person I am today.

Usually people say: *All glory to God!* And I agree with that. But I also have a huge gratitude to all those people who worked with me, putting faith and love to God and people! I am surrounded by wonderful people, and I am very satisfied with my life. And it's all thanks to Jesus Christ. God is good friends!

Herman SHULGA, Ukraine.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

I first saw the zone (prison) when I was five or six years old. My grandmother and I came to visit my mother. I remember very well the bars that were between us. When we were leaving the visit, I really wanted to stay with my mother, to cuddle up to her, to be close, but the bars... they were between us, they separated us. I saw my mother crying, bursting into tears. I wanted to run up to her, but the bars wouldn't let me.

My mother got a sentence for negligence at work, and my father died when I was three years old. My brother and I stayed with my grandmother. As an old woman, it was hard for her to cope with the two of us and so, first my brother was sent to a boarding school, and then I.

Mom was sentenced to seven years but she did not sit out the full term. Amnesty was given and my mother was released three years early. She got a job working for the railroad but it was very difficult for her. Mom took care of us in every possible way, trying to feed and clothe us, but one thing that lacked was any serious upbringing. This led to the fact that whenever we would stay at home alone, we would frequently spend time in the streets, which brought us up in its own way. This way of life led my brother to a juvenile detention center. My mother and I would visit him often. Although there were teenagers there, this place was no different from prison: the same prison bars, barbed wire, watch tower...

One time we came to visit my brother and while there, we saw an elderly woman. She stood at the fence but the guards drove her away. She was holding a loaf of bread in her hands.

Mom asked the guards: "Who is she?"

"We were told that this woman has been coming here for a long time and throwing bread over the fence. At first, we thought that someone close to her was locked up here, but then we found out that her only son went to prison but died there for some unknown reason".

I often remember this woman, I am reminded that for some, a loaf of bread is just a loaf of bread but for others, it is life.

After finishing school, I not only lied and stole, but also became heavily addicted to drugs. I would try to imitate my friends in everything just to survive. At first, I liked this life, it was very easy to get drugs. But after a while I realized that I could no longer live without a constant dose. As a result, I began to inject very often, and this became my main goal. Family, friends, feelings, conscience — everything was pierced. I was afraid to steal and deceive, but I could not live without doing so. Because

of this, fear pursued me constantly: I understood that I would have to answer for what I've done.

More and more I got in trouble with the law. As a result, at the age of sixteen, I was convicted of theft, but they gave me a reprieve. And yet six months later I was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison.

The term dragged on very slowly, and it seemed that there would be no end to it. I, so young, did not really live yet, but I was already crippled by drugs and prison. Thoughts began to visit me: *What will happen to me next? How can I, so ruined, be able to live among normal people? Who will help me?*

While I was in prison, my mother and brother constantly visited me. I looked forward to the day of freedom. I really wanted to go out and inject myself again, at least once... As a result, a year and a half after my release, I was in prison again. Then one day I received a telegram: my mother died...

You know, my mother never left me and always gave me the best. I couldn't imagine how I would live without her. I loved her very much. My mother was the closest person to me. But I caused her a lot of pain and suffering. You can say: *What kind of love is this?* But to be honest, I must say that I loved drugs more than life itself.

After prison, the same thing continued. I went into a vicious cycle: arrest, interrogations, court, prison... Such a life led me to falling ill with tuberculosis and I was sent to a place of recovery for patients with tuberculosis. That's it, I thought, to what has my life come to! I didn't know what to do next.

How lonely I was! There was no one to write to, and it was useless either way. But one day I sent a letter to a friend: I needed to know about the fate of my brother. I received an answer very quickly, very surprising! My friend spoke little about himself. The entire letter spoke of Jesus Christ, God, who died for our sins and rose again on the third day for our justification. My friend wrote that only in Christ can one find true freedom and meaning in life. A little time later, I received a message from another friend who had been addicted to drugs for more than ten years. And he also spoke about the same God, about the Son, about salvation.

They wrote to me often. But I was sure that I didn't need it: the term was short — only three years, and I had already served half. And then came the amnesty decree. Having a fourth conviction and a fourteenth citation, I understood that nothing was going to happen to me. But I really wanted to be free! And I began to turn to God, Whom I did not know at all. I told Him that I didn't want to sit anymore, that if He released me, I would never go back to my old life. I prayed however I could. He

deceived Him but there was nowhere to go. I started asking Him again. The prayer was very short. I said: "God, I deceived You. I know it was You who helped me last time. Help me now, please. I promise you that I will immediately go to the rehab center".

And a miracle happened: I was free! And of course, the first thing I did was take some drugs. Who cares about a rehab center?! I lived in a dump and as a result, I soon began to burn inside. I understood that it was progressing tuberculosis. I got worse and worse. Fluid accumulated in the lungs. I slept sitting up because I could not breathe lying down. I felt that I was dying and that no one cared...

But the Lord is merciful! He didn't leave me to die. I remembered that I never kept my promises. But the Lord, unlike me, remained faithful. He brought His children to me again. They literally took me to the rehab center. The next day I was in the hospital in critical condition. It turned out that, in addition to tuberculosis, I also had blood poisoning.

They didn't accept me in the intensive care unit, they left me to die in the corridor. Unfortunately, this is the fate of every drug addict. The doctor then declared that any help no longer made any sense, that he was not God, it was already too late and I had only a few hours to live. One of my friends said: "You do your job and God will do His! He will live as long as he is given". After that the doctor, cursing strongly, agreed.

Before this, I was talking to a believing friend. He told me that there are two eternities: hell and heaven. And if a person dies without repentance, then he goes to hell and loses the chance for eternal life in paradise. But I have a choice. And there, lying in the corridor and barely breathing, I said: "Lord, forgive me! God, I want to live so much! I deserve death, but I hope for Your mercy".

And the Lord had mercy on me and gave me hope for the future. I asked Him to enter my heart, and He gave me true freedom. He healed not only my body, but also my soul. God is good!

Soon after, I was called to court for an old case, and for the first time in my life I went there without fear. Before that, I was advised a lot on how to properly leave a good impression. But I knew that they would imprison me anyway, and therefore I said: "Forgive me,

please, I will never do this again". The judge started to smile and said it was hard to believe. Even I found it funny. But another miracle happened: the prosecutor asked for a two-year delay and I was not sent to prison.

After what happened, I decided that I would serve God, and I realized that for this I need to be faithful to Him. I loved God for His faithfulness and mercy. After a while I made a covenant with Him and promised Him to serve Him with a clear and good conscience. And I serve Him to this day.

Today I sometimes remember the bars that separated me from my mother. With all my desire, I wanted to hug her, feel her warmth and love, and I needed it so much. Exactly the same gate was between me and God. And this gate was sin. How bad it was to be without mom! But it is even worse to live without God!

Dear friend, God loved you and sent His Son to earth. Jesus came for you. He took away all sins — yours, mine... all people. And He, innocent and holy, was crucified on the cross treating Him as the worst of sinners. Dying, He said: It is finished. Your salvation and mine is complete. With His resurrection He destroyed the sinful barrier between you and God. You just need to believe in it. You have a choice. Invite Him into your heart right now and God will change your life. Have faith in Jesus Christ who died for you on the cross. The Lord will always keep you. He gave us His Word, the Bible. Read it and a living and saving faith will come to you. This Word is like bread for the soul. Whoever eats it will not die. Just as we need bread to live, so we need the Bible for the soul to live forever in heaven with God. Jesus says: I am the Bread of Life. And whoever eats this Bread will never die.

Remember the woman outside the prison, who threw the loaves over the fence. She brought bread there every day. It was someone's mother who didn't want her son to die. Heavenly Father also doesn't want you to die and He gives you His Bread from heaven.

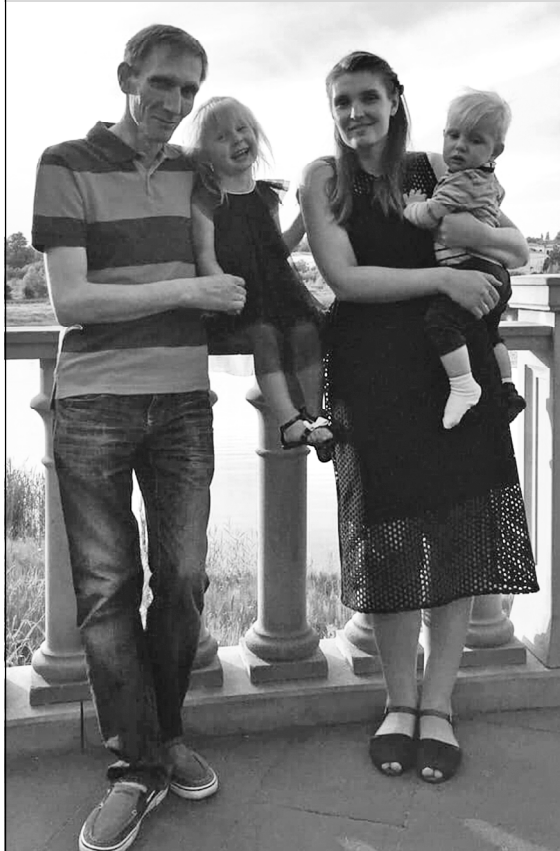
A person who lives without God is a living corpse, a dead man... He is blind and deaf. God, in order to resurrect you to a new life without sin, gives you this Bread. Don't reject Him. This is the life of your soul.

I know that you may have faith, but don't forget that Jesus gave His life for you. Now live only for Him. He who has the Son of God has eternal life.

I have been serving addicts for almost twenty years and I am ready to help you.

Sergey KUSNETSOV,
Ukraine,
<https://facebook.com/turemnyikapellan>

BEHIND BARS



heard me. A month later, I was summoned to court and amnestied. They didn't even remember that I was undergoing compulsory treatment.

Upon my release, I immediately forgot about God, forgot that it was He who helped me. I didn't even reach home before I had already injected myself. In general, life went on... But more and more often I met people who spoke about Jesus Christ. God didn't leave me.

Life without God led to a criminal case being opened against me again. But, to my surprise, I was not locked up, but sent to a rehabilitation center, which they promised would be able to help me. While my case was in court, someone robbed a pharmacy and I was detained for three days: they thought that I did it. In the cell, I remembered God, because He once helped me. I knew that I had

city, who is free and does not wear shackles. Only he knows how to get rid of them. He appears so rarely that many doubt whether this is true?"

"There is nothing to do", thought the merchant, "perhaps I will see this old man again and find out how I can free myself".

Since then, many years have passed, the merchant has already grown old and gray. And then one day he suddenly saw an old man walking freely along the street and not shackled.

"Grandfather", the prisoner exclaimed, "help me free myself from the bonds".

"Son", the old man replied, "say mentally to yourself: 'Let the guards immediately release me from the shackles' and you will be free".

The prisoner thought that this was an unsuccessful, bitter joke, but decided to try and uttered these cherished words to himself. The guards immediately appeared and freed him from the shackles.

The merchant hastened to leave this strange city, surprised at what had happened. Running out the gate, he again saw the same old man who had helped him free himself.

"Grandfather, tell me, what is the secret of this strange city?"

"This city is not simple", the old man replied, "because in it one becomes a prisoner and is freed from bonds just by thinking about it. You saved yourself because you believed my words. And those who do not believe me, remain prisoners of this city and I can no longer help them".

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

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CITY OF SHACKLES

Once a merchant went to another country and came to a strange city in which all the inhabitants were in shackles. The merchant thought: "And if they put shackles on me, what should I do then?"

Suddenly, at the same moment guards appeared and seeing a new free man immediately put him in shackles. Having lost the opportunity to return home, the merchant became discouraged. He turned with questions to the unfortunate



townspeople asking them why they are all in shackles. And they answered that such orders have long been in their city.

The merchant asked: "Are all the inhabitants of the city doomed to wear shackles all their lives?"

The people answered him: "According to rumors, sometimes an old man comes to the

I. ORIGIN OF DEATH

1. The commandment of God to Adam and Eve

God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to avoid dying (to die not from the fruit, but from disobedience to God!). **Genesis 2:16-17** — *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die".* Adam and Eve disobeyed.

2. The unfortunate result of breaking God's commandment

Disobedience is sin. The disobedience of Adam and Eve was manifested in the breaking of the commandment of God. Death accessed the world along with sin. **Romans 5:12** — *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*

The Bible teaches that death is the punishment for sin: **Romans 6:23** — *For the wages of sin is death...*

II. TYPES OF DEATH

1. Two types of death

- ☉ physical death: death of the body (separation of the soul from the body),
- ☉ spiritual death: death of the spirit (separation of the spirit from God).

God promised Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But we know that they did not physically die when they tasted the fruit. What happened? They died spiritually, and, in addition, they began to die physically (the body began to grow old, sick and die eventually).

To die spiritually means to die to God: to relationship with Him, to holiness and righteousness, to serve Him, and so on.

All people born afterwards did not carry the image of God, but, instead, carried the image of Adam, because the image of God was already distorted, because Adam died. Humankind began to be born physically alive, but spiritually dead.

2. The words of Jesus Christ

Matthew 8:21-22 — *Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father". But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead".*

Luke 9:59-60 — *Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father". But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God".*

A. Alive or dead?

- ☉ People can be physically dead.
 - ☉ People can be physically alive but spiritually dead.
 - ☉ People can be both physically and spiritually alive.
- Goals, interests and behavior of a person depend on the state of being alive or dead.

B. Various goals, interests and works...

- ☉ The works of the spiritually dead are to please themselves: *let the dead bury their dead* (**Luke 9:60**).
- ☉ The works and goals of the spiritually alive are to serve God: *come (follow) Me* (**Matthew 8:22**); *but you go and preach the Kingdom of God* (**Luke 9:60**).

III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SPIRITUAL DEAD AND THE SPIRITUAL LIVING

1. The spiritually dead:

☉ **People not having the Spirit:** **Jude 1:19** — *These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.*

☉ **Dead in trespasses and sins:** **Ephesians 2:1** — *And you who are dead in trespasses and sins; Ephesians 2:5* — *...and us who are dead in trespasses; Colossians 2:13* — *...and you who were dead in sins...*

☉ **Once alive** (or having the appearance of living): **Revelation 3:1** — *...I know your works; you have a name like you're alive, but you're dead.*

☉ **People with dead faith:** **James 2:14-20** — *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled", and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works". You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*

2. The spiritually living:

☉ **Died with Christ to the world:** **Colossians 2:20** — *...you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world...*

☉ **Lost life for Christ:** **Matthew 10:39** — *He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it; Matthew 16:25* — *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it; John 12:25* — *He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

☉ **Baptized into His death:** **Romans 6:4-7** — *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin; Colossians 2:12* — *...being buried with Him in baptism...*

☉ **Died to sin:** **Romans 6:2, 8-11** — *How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it. ...Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing*

that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

☉ **Alive for God in Christ:** **Romans 6:11** — *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

☉ **But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit:** **Romans 8:9** — *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*

☉ **Christ lives in man**, and because of this the body is dead to sin, but the spirit is alive to righteousness: **Romans 8:10** — *And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

☉ **Alive with Christ:** **Ephesians 2:4-5** — *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved); Colossians 2:13* — *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.*

☉ **Dead to law:** **Romans 7:4-6** — *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the*

suffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

Some believers mistakenly draw the following conclusion:

A. Since it is known that Jesus, after His death on the cross, descended into hell and preached there to the souls of people who died during the Flood, from this follows that He saved them from hell.

B. If Jesus did it once, then He can do it some other time, and perhaps He does it all the time.

C. The deceased people have nothing to fear, because they will have one more chance to choose between hell and heaven.

This reasoning, unfortunately, is false. Let's look at why. First of all, does it say here that Jesus, having descended to the underworld, to the dead, rescued the imprisoned spirits? It simply says that Jesus preached to them. *To preach* — the Greek word *kerusso* — means to speak, testify, proclaim the truth. Secondly, it says here that Jesus only did this once: He only testified to those souls who perished in the Flood. Finally, we know the truth about salvation because Jesus taught this truth during His time on earth. Therefore, there is simply no forgiveness of sins for those living now who reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and His precious sacrifice on the cross for our trespasses.

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

DEAD SOULS

3. Jesus is the intercessor and mediator between God and man

Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. We cannot be mediators between God and man: **1 Timothy 2:5** — *For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...*

But He only intercedes for those He knows. And He knows those who do His will: **Matthew 7:21** — *Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

If Jesus said that those who do not do the will of the Father will not enter the Kingdom of God, then they will not enter... no matter how much we pray for the dead.

Matthew 25:12 — *He answered and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you".*

Luke 13:25-28 — *When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside*

and knock at the door, saying, "Lord, Lord, open for us", and He will answer and say to you, "I do not know you, where you are from", then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets". But He will say, "I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity". There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

4. The Bible teaches that the unbeliever is already condemned

John 3:18 — *He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Mark 16:16 — *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

5. Purpose of the gospel

The purpose of preaching the good news is thwarted if the dead can go to heaven anyway

through someone's prayers. However, Jesus commanded His disciples to spread the gospel, that is, the good news of salvation, to the ends of the earth: **Matthew 28:19-20** — *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; Acts 1:8* — *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

6. Why does the Bible warn us not to fall away?

Hebrews 2:1 — *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

Hebrews 3:14 — *For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end...*

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

God warns us that, under certain circumstances, Christians may lose their salvation.

body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter; Galatians 2:19 — *For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God*

☉ **Crucified with Christ:** **Galatians 2:19-20** — *For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

☉ **Born again:** **John 3:3, 7** — *...Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born*

again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". ...Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again"; 1 Peter 1:23 — *...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.*

Conclusion: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (**1 Corinthians 15:50** — *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption*). The spiritually dead cannot enter the Heavenly Kingdom. Man needs to be born again (**John 3**). The Bible promises: **1 Corinthians 15:22** — *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

The parable of the prodigal son ends with the words of the Father: **Luke 15:31-32** — *And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found".* This parable clearly depicts how God's attitude towards a sinner who repents and comes to Him.

IV. WHAT ABOUT THE DEAD?

Some believe that if you pray for the dead, then their eternal destiny can change. A living person can ask God to forgive sins that the deceased have committed during their lifetime on earth so that they do not go to hell. Let's see what the Bible says about this.

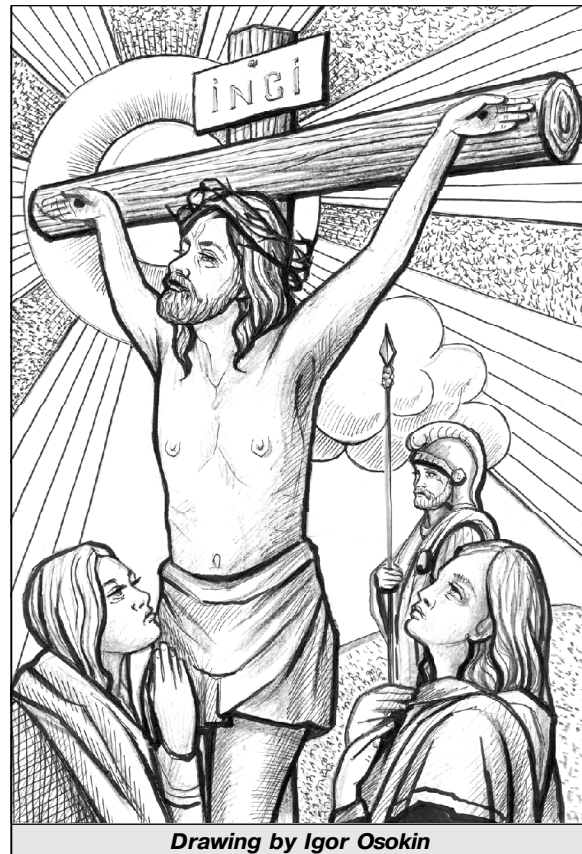
1. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

From this parable we learn the following:

- ☉ a person after death receives his just due (**Luke 16:25**);
- ☉ in hell people receive their fair share of suffering and affliction, but in paradise they are comforted (**Luke 16:24**);
- ☉ there is a great gulf between those in hell and those in paradise, so that from heaven no one can go to hell, and from hell no one can go to heaven (**Luke 16:26**).

2. Jesus preached to spirits in prison

1 Peter 3:18-20 — *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine long-*



Drawing by Igor Osokin

7. God gave man free will, so that he/she independently chooses where he/she wants to be in eternity: with God or without God. Therefore, no one but the person himself can make this important decision. Nobody can do it for him/her.

8. There is no purgatory!

If purgatory has such a vital part to play then purgatory is more important than the earth. And if this statement is correct, then Jesus would not have come to earth, but to purgatory. And since He came to earth, this indicates that what is happening on earth is more important than everything else and is directly related to what will happen to us after death.

9. If you loved those who died so much, then you should have witnessed and prayed for them when they were still alive. And now it's too late.

10. Praying for resurrection

There are several examples in the Bible of how God's people prayed for the dead and they were resurrected. In addition to the examples of the New Testament, when people were resurrected by Jesus Christ, the Old Testament also testifies to the prophets Elijah and Elisha, through whose prayer the dead returned to life.

Elijah: 1 Kings 17:17-23 — *Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" And he said to her, "Give me your son". So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. Then he cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him". Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!"*

Elisha: 2 Kings 4:30-37 — *And the mother of the child said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you". So he arose and followed her. Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, "The child has not awakened". When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite woman". So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Pick up your son". So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.*

In conclusion, if someone has a desire to pray for the dead, then pray for their resurrection from death so that they have another chance to repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

11. A ransom

Most likely, the idea of a ransom was borrowed by people from the Old Testament: people made sacrifices and concluded that in this way their sins are forgiven. And so gradually the sacrifice turned into a ransom, and the ransom replaced repentance...

But the New Testament clearly shows that man is not rich enough to pay God in any way: *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:27).

Stephen Long: *Without a ransom, forgiveness is too cheap. And cheap forgiveness is a sign of a frivolous attitude towards sin.* God takes sin very seriously, so our ransom was very costly — the death of Jesus Christ. But in return, He requires us to repent.

All we need is to recognize our sinfulness and petition our loving Heavenly Father for forgiveness. Don't wait too long. God is giving you a chance to repent today — right now. The Bible says that he who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and He will save you from your sins and give you eternal life.

God does not want anyone to go to hell. And who in the right mind wants to go there? If so, confess your sins to God right now. Trust your life to the Savior Jesus... And you will pass from death to life: *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life* (John 5:24).

Read the Bible and keep God's commandments. **John 14:21** — *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.* Obedience to God will be the greatest proof of your love for Him. Trust and believe in God, and He will never let you down or disappoint you.

Pray in the following way: *Dear Lord God, today I turn from all my sins (list them). From today on, I make a decision to trust Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. He is my only way of salvation. He is the "Way, Truth and Life". God, forgive me and change me, grant me eternal life. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" was kindly provided by Bible Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada <http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/059.htm>



(Continued from page 2)

John 15:12 — *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

Phil. 2:3 — *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*

The manifestation of such love and respect for others is possible only by humbling oneself. For a worldly person, humility is difficult, but with a change of heart (being born again), this happens easily and arbitrarily. With the practical application of these principles, man receives great advantages both before God and before people. Instead of losing the respect of others, a person, on the contrary, acquires not only God's blessing, but subsequently the favor and respect from people.

5. The old nature of Christians is a springboard for divisions

The first people in the Garden of Eden had God's nature before their transgression, which the Creator gave to them at creation. They had peace of heart, pure thinking, and harmony with God and with themselves (Gen. 2:7 and 5:1-2; Eccl. 3:11 and 7:29). Later, after the first people disobeyed God and obeyed the Satan, everything changed. Humanity has become enslaved to the enemy of humanity and has inherited the sinful selfish nature that is now manifested in all people from birth. This part in man that resists God is called the carnal (or Adam's) nature. In addition to his consciousness, man has become capable of all the evil that the devil is capable of. We have already said that The Satan is interested in the divisions between Christians and he uses the immaturity of Christians and the presence in them of an old, sinful nature that is still manifested in them.

Romans 6:16 — *Do you not know that to whom you give yourselves as slaves for obedience, you are slaves...*

2 Peter 2:19 — *...whoever is defeated by whom is a slave.*

With conversion to God and repentance, the human spirit is revived and the lost nature of God is restored. Being born again (or being reborn) is the act of resurrecting our spirit to new life with God, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. The revived man has two natures that are in enmity with each other: God's and the devil's (inherited from the progenitors). The regenerated human spirit desires to please God because in it dwells the seed of God, and the sinful nature, acting in the flesh, opposes it. The one who is dominated by the old, Adamic (or diabolical) nature is carnal and sensational, and the one who lives according to the Spirit is spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1-3). The spiritual age of the Christian is expressed in the ability to recognize the motives and sources of various impulses and in the ability to follow the Spirit by rejecting the carnal. Usually, Satan has access to man through carnal manifestations such as pride, resentment, inflated self-esteem, laziness, passions, lusts and the like.

To defeat ourselves, we have several important tools. One of them is the ability to see ourselves self-critically, which comes to us from close communication with God, when a person, seeing God's qualities, begins to feel worthless and unworthy. This promotes self-humility and shedding of pride, independence and narcissism.

The second tool is called self-trial. **1 Cor. 11:31-32** — *For if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned with the world.*

The trial of oneself, like any trial, is aimed at establishing justice in accordance with the established laws of God.

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

- to satisfy divine justice,
- for personal correction,
- to avoid God's judgment.

In general, the court is a process of establishing justice between the disputing parties. We all have two warring sides in ourselves: the flesh and the spirit.

Gal. 5:17 — *...for the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit desires the contrary of the flesh: they resist one another, so that you do not do what you would like.*

PASTOR'S WORD

DIVISION IN CHRISTIANITY

Judgment on oneself, on manifestations of one's old nature, is the work of God. At the same time, the spirit of a person who is a representative of God wins if we choose his side and condemn in ourselves the old man who, after the Fall, began to express the will of the devil with his independence from God and pride. Thus, the Christian who judges himself participates in the process of expelling from his flesh the remnants of the diabolical inheritance that we all received at birth.

Gal. 5:16-18 — *I say, Act in the spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, for the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh: they resist each other, so that you do not do what you would like.*

6. Infidelity of leaders in the Church

Deviation from the truth in a particular church or a movement can also occur due to the infidelity of leaders who seek at all costs to increase the ranks of their followers at the expense of the purity of the teaching.

Phil. 1:15-16 — *Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel...*

Acts 20:29-30 — *I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

During favorable times, in the absence of persecution of Christians, there is usually a spiritual cooling, which we see in our time. Local churches are replenished with semi-worldly people, and those who once burned for God are captured by earthly desires.

Church services, which during religious oppression were filled with fervent prayers and the manifestation of the power of God, turn mainly into theatrical performances. The emphasis is more on the harmony and coherence of singing, on the refinement of speaking and technical capabilities, such as equipment, microphones and the building. As a result, there is less active power of the Holy Spirit and church members are left with old vices. Because of this, often Christians who awaken within their churches find themselves in the minority and endure persecution.

Eph. 2:1-3 — *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

7. Christians do not personally examine the Scriptures

Another reason for the discord among Christians is that Christians do not personally examine the Scriptures and find themselves unconfirmed in the truth.

At all times, and especially in the latter, Satan has achieved and continues to achieve great success among Christians when they themselves do not read the Word of God. They, as unapproved, due to the lack of doctrinal knowledge, are easily carried away by false teachings. Today we can see it more and more. For some reason, in places or times when just the presence of a Bible could be a condemnation and imprisonment, people value Scriptures more. They read, rewrite, memorize... Both reading and studying Scripture changes believers and makes them firm, steadfast, and self-sacrificing heroes of the faith.

But along with our differences and peculiarities, Christians must be united in the fundamental questions of Christ's teaching. This applies to questions about the salvation of man, which is accomplished only through Jesus Christ. About being born again, forgiveness of sins, justification by faith, holy life, and others. How important it is that every Christian has a personal connection with God, gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to teach him and form the right worldview. By the way, it should be

noted that more spiritually mature Christians from different denominations understand each other very well and will always find a lot in common with each other.

The author of these lines had to work with people of different denominations for more than fifteen years. We had so much in common that we didn't even know. We prayed together, fasted, and participated in works of mercy. We have developed a very close, directly related relationship. How many blessed biblical themes have been dissected. All this is because we tried not to dwell on what divides us. Nor were we afraid of topics such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, revelation, and the confession of sins, which we understood in different ways. Each of us simply expressed his point of view with mutual respect, without trying to convince the other or exalt himself before the other. It has yielded its blessed results. Everyone grew spiritually, taking something of value for themselves!

Similarly, prison ministry unites people of different movements, directions and denominations. It is such a blessing when everyone seeks to preach Christ crucified to prisoners as the only way of salvation, without focusing on inter-denominational differences. For this reason, the apostle Paul was compelled to exhort those who believed by saying:

1 Cor. 1:10 — *Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Some Christians cannot find a perfect church that suits them. Local churches exist to spiritually give birth and bring to perfection the children of God. In every church there have always been and will always be people of different spiritual ages, called from different social backgrounds, with different upbringings. There is no church where the pastor and ministers in everything would meet your requirements. There is an expression that conveys the essence of this problem: **Do not look for the perfect church. You will not find it. And if you do, then you will be the only member.** To create the right church and the atmosphere within it, you need to work, starting with yourself. Unity is the result of brotherly and sisterly love in action. The apostle Paul said that the growth of the church occurs when each of its members acts to its measure (Eph. 4:16). Love is not just feelings or relationships, but action. Love must be supported by care and sacrifice towards those who you love.

WARNING

Along with the desire to have peace with all and to maintain mutual disposition, there are some dangers. There are warnings in the Bible that one should move away from a certain category of people with whom communication can be harmful. Who are these people?

2 John 1:10 — *Whoever comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house and do not welcome him.*

Tit. 3:10 — *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.*

This is not about spiritual babies or people who are seeking but have not yet found the way of salvation. No! We are talking about those who have come to know the truth and once established themselves in it, but then have become corrupt and consciously chosen a broad path, without restrictions and difficulties. These are people who ridicule Christians (who walk the narrow, Christlike path) and boast about themselves. The Apostle Paul describes these people as having previously stood upright, and now are seduced, and even self-condemned by the knowledge of the truth previously received. After one or two attempts to correct them, one must withdraw and beware of them — knowing that... *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals"* (1 Cor. 15:33).

Rom. 15:5-6 — *Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

DOES GOD EXIST?

Whether God exists is one of the most basic and important questions any person can consider. Opinions about God abound, but answering the question "Does God exist?" demands more than a few seconds of attention and involves a wide range of ideas and evidence. Ultimately, what we see in human experience, science, logic, and history leads to a confident answer: *yes, God exists.*

Often, this question is posed as "Can you *prove* God exists?". The problem is that, while truth itself is absolute, there are virtually zero instances of *absolute proof* outside of pure logic and mathematics. For that reason, courtrooms don't require absolute proof to reach a verdict; rather, they seek to dispel *reasonable doubt* and consider what's *most probable*.

Demanding *proof* of God that no one could ever reject is unreasonable. Neither evidence nor people function that way in the real world. *Encountering* facts and *accepting* them are profoundly different. Airtight, sound arguments will remain unconvincing to those determined to disbelieve. For the resolute skeptic, it's not *proof*, even if it would convince almost anyone else. A person's intent is more influential than any evidence encountered.

That means a certain amount of *faith* is necessary — and not just regarding God's existence. Perfect knowledge is beyond our ability. Bias and prejudice cloud our views. There will always be a gap between what we can *know* and what we *believe*. This applies equally to skeptics and believers. We cannot possibly know every detail involved every time we sit in a chair, eat food, or climb stairs. Such actions all express a measure of faith. We act, despite what we *don't* know, because of what we *do* know. That's the essence of biblical faith, including faith in the existence of God. We trust in what is known, leading us to action, despite a less-than-absolute understanding (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Whether or not one acknowledges God, the decision involves faith. Belief in God does not require blind faith (**John 20:29**), but neither can it overcome malicious resistance (**John 5:39–40**). Bolstering faith are human experience, logic, and empirical evidence, all of which help answer the question "Does God exist?".

Human Experience

Discussing the existence of God usually starts with logical arguments. That makes sense, but it's not how human beings normally operate. No one starts devoid of all perspective, waiting to follow a robotically rational path before forming an opinion. People interpret life based on the world around them. So, looking at the existence of God ought to start with experiences. Afterwards, we can use logic to assess those views.

Evidence of God exists in daily human experiences (**Romans 1:19–20; Psalm 19:1; Ecclesiastes 3:11**). This includes our innate sense of morality. It applies to the apparent design of the universe around us. Human life compels belief that truth, deception, love, hate, goodness, evil, etc., are real and meaningful. The overwhelming majority of people throughout history have been inclined to believe in a reality greater than the physical.

Our experiences are not conclusive evidence, of course. Instead, God uses general revelation as an invitation (**Revelation 3:20**). Common experiences are meant to emphasize that we ought to seek further answers (**Matthew 7:7–8**). Those who ignore or disdain God's invitation don't have the excuse of ignorance (**Romans 1:18; Psalm 14:1**).

Human Logic

Three of the more powerful logical suggestions of God's existence are the cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments.

The cosmological argument considers the principle of cause and effect. Each effect is the result of some cause, and each cause is the effect of a prior cause. However, that chain of causes cannot go on infinitely into the past, or else the chain would never actually start. Logic demands something eternally existent and that is not itself the effect of anything else. Our universe, clearly, is not eternal or uncaused. Logic points to God: the uncreated, eternal measure of all other things, the First Cause of our reality.

The teleological argument examines the structure of the universe. The largest galactic configurations, our solar system, our DNA, subatomic particles — everything gives the appearance of having been purposefully arranged. This trait is so strong that even hardened atheists have difficulty explaining away the appearance of design.

Nothing about subatomic particles or forces indicates they must be arranged as they are. Yet, if they were not *exactly* as they are, complex matter — and life — would be impossible. Dozens of universal constants coordinate with mind-boggling precision just to make life possible, let alone actual. Science has never observed or explained life arising from non-life,

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

yet it also shows a sudden onset of complex organisms. A team of archaeologists who saw the words *I am here* on a cave wall would universally assume intelligent action. Meanwhile, human DNA represents a coding structure beyond the ability of the best human engineers. The weight of this evidence, logically, favors the idea of an Intelligent Designer — God — as an explanation.

The moral argument points to concepts like good and evil, ethics, and so forth. It's notable that these are discussions of *what should be*, not merely *what is*. Moral principles are drastically disconnected from the ruthless, selfish reasoning that one would expect of a creature randomly evolved to survive at any cost. The very idea that human beings think in non-physical, moral terms is striking. Beyond that, the fundamental content of human morals remains constant throughout history and across cultures.

Further, discussion of moral ideas leads inevitably to a crossroads. Either moral ideas are completely subjective, and therefore meaningless, or they must be grounded in some unchanging standard. Human experience doesn't support the conclusion that morals mean nothing. The most reasonable explanation for why people think in moral terms and share moral ideals is a real moral law provided by a Moral Lawgiver, i.e., God.

Human Science

The logical arguments above are inspired by observations. Concepts such as the Big Bang Theory demonstrate, at the very least, the scientific validity of a created, non-eternal universe. Likewise for the structure of DNA. Empirical data lends credibility to the idea of a biblical Creator and contradicts alternative explanations, such as an eternal universe or abiogenesis.

Archaeology also lends support to the Bible. People, events, and places depicted in Scripture have repeatedly been confirmed by secular discoveries. Many of these discoveries came after skeptics implied the Bible's accounts were fictional.

History and literature, for their part, also support the existence of God. The preservation of the Bible is one example: our ability to trace the existing text of Scripture to a time so close to the original events supports the Bible's reliability. Judeo-Christian influence on culture, morality, human rights, and the birth of modern science also strongly indicates an approach aligned with truth.

God in Us

Each of the prior categories is an entire field of study and the subject of thousands of books. Yet the existence of God is demonstrated most profoundly, for most people, in personal experience. It may be impossible to *prove* to others that you're happy, for instance, but that doesn't change the fact that you are. That's not to say internal perspective outweighs objective truth, but complex truths are often powerfully supported by individual experiences. Changed lives, reformed attitudes, and answers to prayer are all part of our personal perception that God exists.

A personal sense of truth is a compelling way we know God exists, and it's God's intent for all people to experience that sense. God came to earth personally, as a human being (**2 Corinthians 4:6**), so we could have a personal relationship with Him (**John 14:6**). Those who sincerely seek God will find Him (**Matthew 7:7–8**), resulting in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit (**John 14:26–27**).

The question "Does God exist?", therefore, cannot be answered with absolute proof, but we can point to the weight of evidence that suggests He does exist. Accepting the existence of God is not a blind-faith leap into the dark. It's a trusting step out of the dark into a well-lit room where many things are made clear.

WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD?

The Bible, God's Word, tells us what God is like and what He is not like. Without the authority of the Bible, any attempt to explain God's attributes (inherent qualities) would be no better than an opinion, which by itself is often incorrect, especially in understanding God (**Job 42:7**). To say that it is important for us to try to understand what God is like is a huge understatement. Failure to do so can cause us to set up, chase after, and worship false gods contrary to His will (**Exodus 20:3–5**).

Only what God has chosen to reveal of Himself can be known. One of God's attributes or qualities is *light*, meaning that He is self-revealing in information of Himself (**Isaiah 60:19; James 1:17**). The fact that God has revealed knowledge of Himself should not be neglected (**Hebrews 4:1**). Creation, the Bible, and the Word made flesh (Jesus Christ) will help us to know what God is like.

Let's start by understanding that God is our Creator and that we are a part of His creation (**Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1**) and are created in His image. Man is above the rest of creation and was given dominion over it (**Genesis 1:26–28**). Creation is marred by the fall but still offers a glimpse of God's works (**Genesis 3:17–18; Romans 1:19–20**). By considering creation's vastness, complexity, beauty, and order, we can have a sense of the awesomeness of God.

Reading through some of the names of God can be helpful in our search of what God is like. They are as follows:

Elohim — strong One, divine (**Genesis 1:1**).

*But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
And the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you;
And the fish of the sea will explain to you.
Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the Lord has done this...*

Job 12:7–9

Adonai — Lord, indicating a Master-to-servant relationship (**Exodus 4:10, 13**).

Ei Elyon — Most High, the strongest One (**Genesis 14:20**).

Ei Roi — the strong One who sees (**Genesis 16:13**).

Ei Shaddai — Almighty God (**Genesis 17:1**).

Ei Olam — Everlasting God (**Isaiah 40:28**).

Yahweh — LORD I AM, meaning the eternal, self-existent God (**Exodus 3:13–14**).

God is eternal, meaning He had no beginning and His existence will never end. He is immortal and infinite (**Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17**). God is immutable, meaning He is unchanging; this in turn means that God is absolutely reliable and trustworthy (**Malachi 3:6; Numbers 23:19; Psalm 102:26–27**). God is incomparable; there is no one like Him in works or being. He is unequalled and perfect (**2 Samuel 7:22; Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 40:25; Matthew 5:48**). God is inscrutable, unfathomable, unsearchable, and past finding out as far as understanding Him completely (**Isaiah 40:28; Psalm 145:3; Romans 11:33–34**).

God is just; He is no respecter of persons in the sense of showing favoritism (**Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:30**). God is omnipotent; He is all-powerful and can do anything that pleases Him, but His actions will always be in accord with the rest of His character (**Revelation 19:6; Jeremiah 32:17, 27**). God is omnipresent, meaning He is present everywhere, but this does not mean that God is everything (**Psalm 139:7–13; Jeremiah 23:23**). God is omniscient, meaning He knows the past, present, and future, including what we are thinking at any given moment. Since He knows everything, His justice will always be administered fairly (**Psalm 139:1–5; Proverbs 5:21**).

God is one; not only is there no other, but He is alone in being able to meet the deepest needs and longings of our hearts. God alone is worthy of our worship and devotion (**Deuteronomy 6:4**). God is righteous, meaning that God cannot and will not pass over wrongdoing. It is because of God's righteousness and justice that, in order for our sins to be forgiven, Jesus had to experience God's wrath when our sins were placed upon Him (**Exodus 9:27; Matthew 27:45–46; Romans 3:21–26**).

God is sovereign, meaning He is supreme. All of His creation put together cannot thwart His purposes (**Psalm 93:1; 95:3; Jeremiah 23:20**). God is spirit, meaning He is invisible (**John 1:18; 4:24**). God is a Trinity. He is three in one, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. God is truth. He will remain incorruptible and cannot lie (**Psalm 117:2; 1 Samuel 15:29**).

God is holy, separated from all moral defilement and hostile toward it. God sees all evil and it angers Him. God is referred to as a consuming fire (**Isaiah 6:3; Habakkuk 1:13; Exodus 3:2, 4–5; Hebrews 12:29**). God is gracious, and His grace includes His goodness, kindness, mercy, and love. If it were not for God's grace, His holiness would exclude us from His presence. Thankfully, this is not the case, for He desires to know each of us personally (**Exodus 34:6; Psalm 31:19; 1 Peter 1:3; John 3:16; 17:3**).

Since God is an infinite Being, no human can fully answer this God-sized question, but through God's Word, we can understand much about who God is and what He is like. May we all wholeheartedly continue to seek after Him (**Jeremiah 29:13**).

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Unlike the question *Does God exist?* the question of whether Jesus Christ existed is asked by relatively few people. Most accept that Jesus was truly a man who lived in Israel 2,000 years ago. The debate begins with the discussion of Jesus' full identity. Almost every major religion teaches that Jesus was a prophet or a good teacher or a godly man. But the Bible tells us that Jesus was infinitely more than a prophet, a good teacher, or a godly man.

C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* writes the following: *I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [Jesus Christ]: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God". That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to* (Macmillan, 1952, p. 55–56).

So, who did Jesus claim to be? Who does the Bible say He is? First, He is God in the flesh. Jesus said in **John 10:30**, *I and the Father are one*. At first glance, this might not seem to be a claim to be God. However, look at the Jews' reaction to His statement. They tried to stone Him for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God (**John 10:33**). The Jews understood Jesus' statement as a claim to be God. In the following verses, Jesus never corrects the Jews or attempts to clarify His statement. He never says, *I did not claim to be God*. When Jesus said, *I and the Father are one* (**John 10:30**), He truly was claiming equality with God.

In **John 8:58** Jesus claims pre-existence, an attribute of God: *"I tell you the truth, Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"* In response to this statement, the Jews again took up stones to stone Jesus (**John 8:59**). In claiming pre-existence, Jesus applied a name for God to Himself — *I AM* (see **Exodus 3:14**). The Jews rejected Jesus' identity as God Incarnate, but they understood exactly what He was saying.

Other biblical clues that Jesus is God in the flesh include **John 1:1**, which says, *The Word was God*, coupled with **John 1:14**, which says, *The Word became flesh*. Thomas the disciple declared to Jesus, *My Lord and my God* (**John 20:28**). Jesus does not correct him. The apostle Paul describes Jesus as *our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ* (**Titus 2:13**). The apostle Peter says the same, calling Jesus *our God and Savior* (**2 Peter 1:1**).

God the Father bears witness of Jesus' identity as well: *But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8; cf. Psalm 45:6)*. Old Testament prophecies such as **Isaiah 9:6** announce the deity of Christ: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (emphasis added).

Why is the question of Jesus' identity so important? Why does it matter whether Jesus is God? Several reasons:

☉ As C. S. Lewis pointed out, if Jesus is not God, then Jesus is the worst of liars and untrustworthy in every way.

☉ If Jesus is not God, then the apostles would likewise have been liars.

☉ Jesus had to be God because the Messiah was promised to be the *Holy One* (**Psalm 16:5, NASB**). Since no one on earth is righteous before God (**Psalm 53:1; 143:2**), God Himself had to enter the world as a human.

☉ If Jesus is not God, His death would have been insufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2:2**). Only God Himself could provide an infinite, eternally valuable sacrifice (**Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21**).

☉ God is the *only* Savior (**Hosea 13:4; cf. 1 Timothy 2:3**). If Jesus is to be the Savior, then He must be God.

Jesus had to be both God and man. As God, Jesus could satisfy God's wrath. As a man, Jesus had the capability of dying. As the God-man, Jesus is the perfect Mediator between heaven and earth (**1 Timothy 2:5**). Salvation is available only through faith in Jesus Christ. As He proclaimed, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (**John 14:6**).

<http://www.gotquestions.org>



Question: *Why doesn't God talk to us directly and act as if He does not exist?*

Answer: *Maybe we're acting like there's no God, have you thought about that?*

When I was sixteen years old, I was able to spend a summer in America. After that, I had a stronger desire to enter the Faculty of Foreign Languages, which I did the next summer. And a year later (I was already a student) I was again invited to the States. A great opportunity to improve my English! Even my mom doesn't mind. But... In America, they will do without me, but here my help is needed in conducting camps and ministry. I'm more needed here, I feel it. But I want to go to America. How would I answer this question with God?

The first time I went to America I was not alone, but with a girl who I fell in love with, which I got married to later. At first, we often wrote each other letters. At the time of my thinking (going to the U.S. or staying home), my overseas friend hadn't written to me in about a year. And I told God this: *Lord, if I received a letter from Julia during this week, it would be a sign that I needed to stay here.* I gave God almost no chance. But in the middle of the week, my grandmother came home saying, *Dance!* A letter came in the mail. So, I took the letter, looked at it, and I start roaring. Guess what? From Julia! I didn't write to her for a year! I certainly wouldn't dare say that God behaves as if He doesn't exist.

AS IF GOD DOES NOT EXIST



Yes, God's actions or His silence are sometimes incomprehensible to us. And what exactly do we want to hear from Him? Can I steal shoes in the store? God did say that you can't. Is it possible to enter into a premarital relationship with a loved one? Long ago, everything was said and written. God has a great book of answers to so many questions in the book called the Bible. Sometimes you read and

understand that it is today that God speaks from the pages of the Bible. Verify for yourself!

Did you know that the Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve were expelled, was on earth until the Flood? Moreover, it was guarded by beautiful cherubs that were visible! But this did not prevent the antediluvian world from rejecting God and wallowing in sins. Do you think it would be different these days?

I don't have all the answers. Perhaps God has already said everything, and you are still waiting for something else? Perhaps your faith is being tested right now. And faith is what? It's confidence in the invisible! Faith is when you know that God loves you, even when everything seems to suggest otherwise. That's who it is.

I believe that the day will come when I will see Jesus with my own eyes. He will return to take to Himself those who walked *by faith, not by vision*, and then I can ask Him why I thought He was silent then and then, and I know that His answers will further convince me of His love!

But, friends, *God is silent* far less often than he answers us. Just make time for God. Pray in silence. Now do you hear Him?

Aleksandra TRETYAKOVA, <https://proekt7d.ru>

Not just a voice of conscience

Who is the Holy Spirit? Does He affect my life in any way? And if I don't believe in Him, will anything change in my life?

The Holy Spirit is one of the three forms of God. The main thing is not to confuse, not one of the three gods. We do not have three gods, but one triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Maybe it's a bit complicated for us to understand, but it's very important. The Holy Spirit is not some substance or faceless force, but a Being, and this Being is God in the same measure and in the same sense as the Father and the Son.

If we look at the history of ancient Israel, we will see how the Spirit of God led the Jews through the desert when they came out of Egypt, how he helped in different situations. In many texts of the Bible, we can find the mention of the Spirit of God.

But what about what happened two, three, four thousand years ago? What does this Holy Spirit mean to me, and what does He even do? While on earth, Jesus Christ said before His ascension to heaven that He would send in His place the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would guide us to all truth.

The question arises: *Why do we need to know the truth?* The Bible has an answer to

this question: *And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:32).*

But I'm already free! What should I be freed from? But to be honest with myself, I am not free from selfishness, pride, irritability, from the emptiness in the soul, which sometimes depresses me. And I know that my loved ones are suffering because of these sins of mine. But I want them to be happy, and for my part, I want to do everything possible for this.

And this is where I need the Holy Spirit, who shows what is good and what is bad. In our world, everything is very impermanent and shaky, but our God is unchanging, and His Word is unchanging. The truth also does not change, and therefore the principles and moral values that the Holy Spirit reveals to us are unchanging. Perhaps without realizing it, we feel the influence of the Holy Spirit, who shows us our wrongness when we are tormented by remorse.

As a child, when I still did not go to school, but I knew how to count, chewing gum cost fifty kopecks. I had no money. I knew where my mom kept the little things, I remember that treasured drawer. Although I was small,

I had already learned how to cheat, even though did not have enough intelligence to do it unnoticed.

I took a little bit: then fifty kopecks, then a ruble, then one and a half rubles. I thought that if I took a little bit, but often, and not once, but a lot, then my mother would not notice. And so I could climb into that box five times a day. At first it was very embarrassing and scary. And I thought I'd do that once and I wouldn't do it again. But I couldn't stop, especially while I got away with it. Then each time I was more and more bold in stealing money from my mother. Until she asked me about the missing money. And I felt so ashamed! I don't remember whether I confessed then or not, but I never took money from my mother again without asking.

I believe that both then and now, the Holy Spirit influences me and reveals in me what hurts my loved ones. And some actions hurt me myself. But I have a choice: admit I'm wrong and try not to do it anymore or keep sinning. And over time, choosing the wrong path, we become people with a buried conscience. We become callous, and the voice of the Holy Spirit is heard less and less each time. Over time, we do things that we



couldn't even think of before because we thought they were immoral.

You and I are free to make decisions. No one can force us to live one way or another. And we may or may not believe what we are told. But the truth remains the same whether I believe in it or not. I am not saying that I claim to be full of truth. I just want to share with you the experience that I have experienced in my life, and what conclusions I came to while studying the Bible. For me, it is the benchmark I look up to. Since I fell in love with studying it, my life has changed for the better, which I wish to you from the bottom of my heart!

Maksim SAMOSHKIN, <https://proekt7d.ru>

A Terrific Story of a Businessman whose Son Became Homeless

The other day, my sister from Tacoma Washington, invited us to visit her over the weekend. I did not worry too much because I understood that, firstly, I would be able to communicate there with my relatives and secondly, I would have the opportunity to visit the local church and adopt some new spiritual experience for myself. When visiting new churches, I always like to learn something new for myself. So, when I was there, I visited a church called *Life Center*, and one example from the pastors sermon touched me to the depths of my soul.

After twenty-five minutes of glorification, Pastor Dean Curry took the stage. Before the sermon began, he put a sleeping bag on the pulpit and began to preach on the topic of unconditional love, agape.

"I recently met an old friend of mine, a deeply religious man and a big businessman", the pastor began. "During our meeting, he happily said to me:

'Dean, can imagine, my son has been found!'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'Have you forgotten? Fourteen years ago, my son left home and became homeless on the streets of Seattle. We lost contact with him, and despite my intense search for fourteen years, I had never seen him or known where he was or where he lived. Every time I traveled from Tacoma to Seattle for business, I always prayed the same prayer: *Lord, help me find my son!* And so last week my mom turned ninety, so our whole family got together and went to celebrate her anniversary in Seattle. Just before leaving, I prayed again: *Lord, help me find my lost son!* And suddenly, during prayer, I heard a clear voice of God: *Today you will not find him, today he will find you!* I was shocked!

So, on Sunday morning we drove to Seattle and the first thing I did was drive through the area where the largest number of homeless people are, but I never met him. All that day I couldn't help thinking: *Today you won't find him, today he will find you!*

That Sunday, my family and I went to a restaurant, walked along the famous market and



the beautiful promenade, but neither he nor I ever found each other. At the end of the day, as I was getting in the car to drive home, doubt crept into my heart... I never met my son! I sadly closed the car door, pressed the gas pedal and started driving down the road towards Tacoma. But when I stopped at the last traffic light before leaving the highway, I suddenly heard

someone shouting: *Daddy! Daddy!* When I looked around, I saw my son leaning against the wall of a nearby house. I got out of the car and ran to him. All my relatives who were returning from the holiday ran out after me. Hugging my son, I asked him: *How did you recognize me? Fourteen years have passed, I have another car, I have aged a little, and in*

general everything has changed... His answer was brief: *I know my father well...*

After a few minutes of talking and hugging, I told him, *I'm so glad to see you! Pack your bags and let's go home!*

I can't, the son replied, *I'm not ready for this...*

A little embarrassed by his answer, I said, *It's okay! If you're not ready to go with me, I'll stay with you!* Without thinking for a minute, I went to the nearest store and bought a sleeping bag. The next night I spent in a sleeping bag in a troubled area of Seattle with my son!"

After his story, I burst into tears and thought: *This is true unconditional love, agape!* Instead of reproaching your son: *How dare you?! You are shaming our family! And what were you missing at home?* the father decided to go down to his level and bought a sleeping bag. This example shows us very well the love of God the Father, who sent His Son to us when we refused to go to Him.

<http://www.romansavochka.com>

A MATURE UNIVERSE

When God finished creating the heavens and earth, everything was fully formed. The stars burned brightly, the trees were laden with fruit, and animals were ready to bear young. The earth and its inhabitants were designed to last forever, without aging or dying. The first animals and humans were ageless — you couldn't even tell whether they were alive only one day or alive for one thousand years. In short, God created a mature universe.

As I have spoken at conferences over the years, people have often come up to me and said: *When I am talking to someone who believes in an old earth, one of the things I say to them, as a young-earth creationist, is that God didn't make Adam a baby — He made him an adult. And when He created the universe, He created it fully functional, with the appearance of age — even though it wasn't old.*

DOES THE CREATION LOOK OLD?

My response often shocks these speakers: *By saying the universe looks old, you are trusting that dating methods can give us an apparent old age for the universe — but they can't.*

Let me explain. When people say the universe has *apparent age*, usually they are assuming, for whatever reason, that the universe *looks old*. I have often found that, unconsciously, such people have already accepted that the fallible dating methods of scientists can give great ages for the earth. So if they believe what the Scripture says about a young universe, they have to explain away this apparent great age.

Does the universe really look old, or have we simply been indoctrinated to believe it looks old? Would the Creator God of the Bible, who does not lie, really deceive us into thinking that the universe looks old — when according to the Bible's account of history, He created it only about 6,000 years ago? What would a *young universe* look like, anyway?

Creation scientists have written many articles to clearly show that all dating methods (other than the record of history given in the Bible) are based on fallible assumptions and can't be trusted to give absolute dates about the past. Also, dozens and dozens of dating methods contradict an old universe and actually support a young age. (For example, the oceans would be much saltier if salts had been accumulating in them for hundreds of millions of years, and many short-lived comets circling the sun should have broken up if they were more than a few thousand years old.)

MATURE — NOT APPARENT AGE

When God created the stars, He obviously created them mature and fully functional and for a specific purpose — to be for signs and for seasons. When God created Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply, He gave them mature bodies that were ready to produce children.

Some people conclude that God would have created them with the appearance of age, say 20 or 30 years old. But would *age* have any effect on Adam's body before he sinned? If the first people — and the universe — were originally designed to last forever, would you expect to see any difference between a man at age 30 or at age 3,000?

When doctors look at the human body today, they can estimate



age from various evidences in the body. But before sin, nothing aged — everything was created *very good*. The human body did not experience the effects of sin or aging.

What would a doctor from today's fallen world say if he looked at Adam and Eve's bodies just after they were created? This doctor would be very confused. Such perfect bodies would show no degenerative aging, and he would be shocked to learn that these adults were less than a day old.

Now it is true that when God created the earth the first day of Creation Week, it wasn't fully functional. God deliberately prepared the earth and created the various kinds of living things over six days. However, at every stage of creation, everything God did was *good*, and all was functional for His created purposes. The creation was then finished — mature, but not with so-called *apparent age*. When Adam and his first descendants looked at the earth, they did not assume apparent age because they knew, based on God's word, that creation had taken place recently.

WHAT WOULD A YOUNG CREATION LOOK LIKE?

The sun, moon, and stars would be in place fully formed and functioning perfectly.

The dry land would have soil ready for plants. The various original plants, including trees, would have mature fruit to nourish Adam and Eve and the animals. Perhaps trees even had tree rings, as a regular part of the tree's structure. Adam and Eve and the animals were created mature and fully functional so they could reproduce. But none of these things were *old* or *looked old*.

GOD DOES NOT DECEIVE

God is not a man that He should lie (Numbers 23:19). God did not deceive us by making a universe that looks old. No, He gave mankind the truth about creation. Only later did the devil deceive Eve about the accuracy of God's word. Her husband, Adam, then rebelled against God, bringing a curse upon the whole universe. This curse radically changed the appearance and function of the universe. *The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now (Romans 8:22).*

The world is now an aging, fallen creation — not a creation with great age.

Ken HAM, www.answersingenesis.org

CHRISTIAN NEWS



Embroidered Folio of Rivne Craftswoman Became a World Record

The embroidered Gospel of Matthew, created by the Rivne craftswoman Elena Medvedeva, was recognized as a world achievement. The author of man-made artbooks got into the book *National Register of Records of Ukraine 2022*. Two of its records were added to the publication at once, one of which is the world record. The Gospel of Matthew was recognized as the world's largest book embroidered by hand.

Elena Medvedeva worked on the creation of a unique folio for two years. The man-made book has sixty pages and weighs

nine kilograms four hundred grams.

The gospel is embroidered in a special way. The artist uses the author's letters, made in the stem technique. This font was patented by her. During the work, the woman used red and black colors. And the first letter was made with a pattern, a floral ornament. By the way, the first printer Ivan Fedorov also had a similar design of the Bible.

Elena Medvedeva is known as the author of original books, including lace, carved, embroidered, straw, leather, amber. Also, her collection includes dozens of embroidered

artbooks. These are the four Gospels, and the works of Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, Adam Mickiewicz, Ivan Franko, Lina Kostenko and other famous authors. The craftswoman creates both folios and miniatures.

"We are proud that there are such talented masters in the region. Thanks to their creativity, Rivne region is known in the world. The works of Elena Medvedeva are truly unique. By the way, in 2020, she was a scholarship holder of the head of the Rivne Regional State Administration", commented Lyubov Romanyuk, head of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the Rivne Regional State Administration. "Elena Medvedeva has a lot of ideas. What is her *Rivne primer*, her cartoons, her fairy tales and creative artbooks! That is, the master's work manifests itself in a variety of versions. As a result, such extraordinary forms will interest a wide audience. Everything that Elena Medvedeva does is done with passion, that's why she has been successful. And she does it not for the sake of records. It's certainly inspiring".

The record Gospel is in the Literary Museum of Ulas Samchuk, in fact, like all the creative books of the master Elena Medvedeva.

www.rv.gov.ua

Iran's Supreme Court Affirms Christian Right to Freedom of Religion

Iran's Supreme Court has ruled that being a part of a house church does not make Christians *enemies of the state*, a decision made on appeal by nine Christian converts serving a five-year sentence for home worship, *Christian Today* reported.

They were jailed on charges of *undermining national security*, a standard formulation used to arrest and prosecute Christians in Iran. In a ruling late last year, Iran's Supreme Court indicated that converts should not have been charged for lack of corpus delicti because their prayers in house churches and preaching activities (so-called Christian propaganda) could not be qualified as undermining national security.

"The mere preaching of Christianity and the propaganda of the Evangelical Zionist sect cannot be qualified as secret gatherings and conspiracies to undermine the security of the country, whether at home or on the street", the Supreme Court ruled. The decision also states

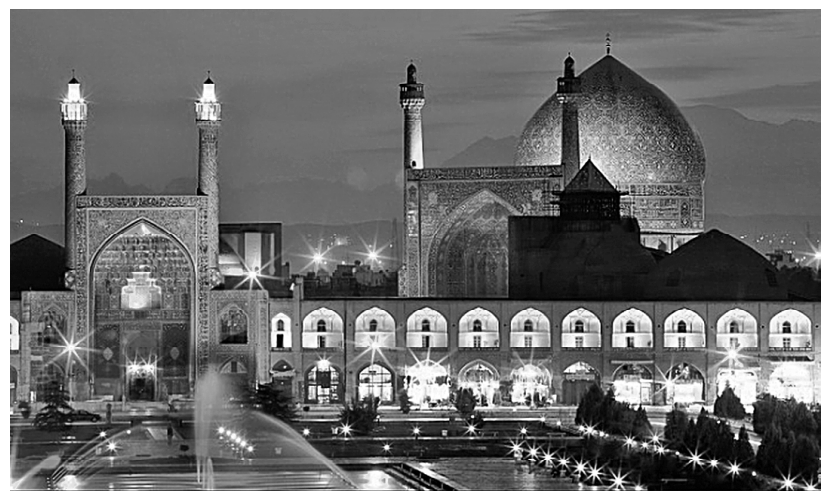
that the establishment and attendance of house churches does not constitute a violation of Articles 498 and 499 of the Iranian Penal Code, which provide penalties for participation in *anti-state groups*.

The human rights organization *Open Doors* points out that these two articles *have been actively used* for a long time, since they have convicted more than twenty Christians currently serving sentences in Iranian prisons for praying in home churches. Iranian human rights activist and lawyer Mansour Borji, partner at *Open Doors* and communications director of *Article 18*, believes that the

supreme court's decision can be a turning point and will help in the fight against the persecution of Iranian Christians.

"We welcome this decision by the country's Supreme Court", Borji said. "It should pave the way for the release of nine Christians after a retrial by the Islamic Revolutionary Court. More importantly, it gives thousands of other Christians across Iran hope that they can now pray together in their homes without fear of arrest and imprisonment. We also call for Christians to be given a special place to practise their religion, which is their right under the Iranian Constitution and under the international covenants that Iran has signed without reservations".

<http://sedmitza.ru>



END DAYS OF THE WORLD

Once upon a time there was a holy elder. And they said of him that he had a magic book in which the day of the end of the world was recorded, where the Lord Jesus Christ would return. And people came to the Elder with questions: "Will the Lord not return tomorrow? Isn't it a month from now? Not in a year?" Everyone wanted to know so that there soul

would be prepared to meet the Lord.

But to all questions, the elder invariably answered:



"Tomorrow". And people stopped believing him. It was thought that he was hiding the secret knowledge contained in the book.

The elder died, and the neighbors immediately rushed to look for his magic book. They found her lying on the table, the elder did not hide her. They opened it and read: "Live every day as if the Lord were to come tomorrow, and you will not be mistaken".

<http://pritchi.ru>

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

I love God and wish for everyone to meet Him!

Hello, my name is Evgeny, I am forty-three years old. I want to tell the story of my life.

Everything started very well: kindergarten, school, college, army, and all this period of my life was connected by one component, the street. For as long as I can remember as a child and young adult, I spent all my free time outside with friends.

First there was the first lie to my parents, then the first cigarette, the first glass of wine. Then there was the first theft and the first call to the police, after which I was registered in the children's room of the police. Then, thank God, I did not go to prison, but to the army, in which two years in kirz boots were supposed to make me a man. Indeed, the army more or less taught me discipline, but also how to avoid physical labor without loss. After the dembele, when I returned home, old friends were waiting for me. And that's when a life full of adventures began.

One day, on my way home from work, I saw a multi-colored poster on a pole. It said that there would be an event at the Spartak Stadium on such and such date and that some Peter Jungren would be very happy to see me there. I don't know why, but I went there.

The stadium was full to capacity, people were standing in the stands and all over the football field. Some guy was running around the stage, shouting something, waving his hands. People were brought to him on crutches, he touched them with his hands, and they throwing crutches jumped with him. *That's a set-up*, I thought, but for some reason I was in no hurry to leave. At the end of the whole event, everyone in attendance was asked to repeat the phrases, and I, oddly enough, repeated it with everyone. At that moment, I did not become different. Moreover, the next day we again smoked to the fullest, but now I understand that this was the first meeting I had with Jesus.

Days, weeks, months passed. We drank, we walked all night long and smoked weed while thinking we had a great time. However, the crazy money of the dashing nineties brought only a drunken frenzy and a



hangover headache, which we tried to quench with marijuana. And one morning the weed did not help to overcome the hangover, the headache did not go away, and one of my comrades expressed this thought: if the jamb did not help, then you need something stronger! That evening I tried opium (*hanka*) for the first time. To be honest, I liked it. There was a feeling of nirvana and complete bliss, but, most importantly, it did not pull on adventures and feats. My buddy's parents, who I was living with at the time, couldn't get enough of watching us spend almost every night at home, but that was for the time being!

Soon, jewelry, household appliances and all the valuable things that had been accumulated and earned by backbreaking labor, began to disappear in the house. Conversations, screams and threats did not bring results, because we did not consider ourselves drug addicts and thought that we could just quit all this at any time, that we are not like everyone else and that our willpower is enough to tie up. But as time went on, we lost the trust of loved ones, friends, relatives, neighbors. Our appearance didn't speak, he just screamed and sounded the alarm. We were like the living dead.

The Department of Internal Affairs became a frequent place of our stay, the operatives knew us by sight. And here is the first conviction (thank God, conditional). It was probably only after then that I realized I had slipped, and slipped in a big way. I won't say that I immediately quit drugs, no, but I began to look for a way out. In the evenings and nights, I meditated and prayed to God in my own way, and when morning came, everything went as before. One day, when I was walking in the park, a guy came up to me and asked if I was in a hurry, if it was possible to talk to me. I waved my head and we sat down on the bench.

"Have you heard of Jesus Christ?" He asked me.

"No", I replied, and inside I was thinking: *Sectarian*.

He talked and talked, testified about how many there are and that it's mostly one young person, that the church is growing and that people are starting to succeed, and a plan was starting to mature in my head for how I could breed these saints for money. To gain trust, I repeated prayers after him, and even stood in a circle with them, and, holding hands, opened my mouth supposedly in singing. There were a lot of them, and, oddly enough, they took me for their own.

When we were alone with this guy again, I tried to tell an incredibly touching and heartbreaking story about how some money could help me, that if she and his siblings could help me, then my gratitude would have no boundaries and I would definitely be with them forever. To this, he replied that just recently they had helped one of the same needy with the whole church, and he just left, and no one saw him again. That was the end of our conversation, and I said goodbye and left. I didn't realize at the time that it was the seed he was sowing in my heart and that it was my second encounter with Jesus.

As time went on, my life got worse and worse. Our mother was working at the Rest Club, where on Sundays there was a church that had a rehabilitation center. And suddenly she met a friend there whom she had known

for a long time. Alekseich (that was the name of that acquaintance) advised her to go to the leader of the rehabilitation center and talk about me and my brother, because at that time my middle brother was also not in a good place in his life. And so, with the approval of the pastor, we decided to organize a meeting in our house. We came, listened to the testimonies that concerned us. True, when the prayer began, it seemed to me that people were going crazy, but, oddly enough, there was peace and tranquility inside. At first, my brother was taken to the center, after which I was left all alone. The days seemed endless, and the nights even more so.

On one of those nights, I yelled: "God! If you are alive, please help me!"

In the morning, to my surprise, they came for me. The most memorable thing to me at the beginning of my rehab was the lack of withdrawal. Every night after reviewing the Bible, my brothers and sisters prayed for me, and I felt like I was getting better and better. After a short period of time, God touched my heart so much that I still live with Him, serve Him, and have never regretted for a second in all the time I have lived with Him. After rehab, I went to a Bible school that helped me get to know my Savior even more and more deeply, and it was the third (and last) encounter with Jesus that grew into a friendship.

During Bible school, I found my other half, who later became my wife and the mother of my daughter and son. At the moment, my wife and I are the leaders of the worship team, we live a full life and do not regret anything. And the Bible teaches that if you are saved, your whole house will be saved. And now I really see that my mother and my brothers and their families are also serving the Lord. God is a faithful God. He is alive, and He has an excellent sense of humor, because to a person with a past like mine, He gave a former employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs as his wife. I love God and wish everyone to meet Him!

Evgeny NEKRASOV, Russia,
<https://golosboga.ru>

Hello, dear readers!

I want to share a narrative about myself before and after drugs. It is addressed to all: and to very young readers, to warn them against the most serious consequences of drug addiction, which they may face because of their inexperience; and to those who have been for many years or are still in the drug system, no longer hoping to change anything; to the young and the old, in general, to all...

I'll start the story long before I first encountered drugs. As a child, I was no different from my peers. My childhood was quite cloudless: a roof over my head, food on the table, parents, school — in general, everything is like most children. In kindergarten, he dreamed of being an archaeologist, then already at school, a veterinarian. I was attracted to distant countries, which I read from books. At that time, there was little that foreshadowed future trouble.

Everything changed dramatically when my father left the family. When I lost my father figure, I was drawn outside. My mother, in order to feed me and my sisters, had to work tirelessly from morning to evening. Instead of helping her, I ignored most of her instructions. A blank wall of misunderstanding was beginning to be erected between me and my family. I continued to meet my father, but our meetings became more and more rare, and after a while they were none.

In fifth grade, I tried wine and cigarettes for the first time with guys who were a few years older than me. When a girl I was in love with seen me drunk, I was disgusted of myself; but at the same time I liked it when I smelled of tobacco smoke. True, with all this, I could not be called a petulant bully. I was a good guy, close to distinguished, who, by virtue of his indiscipline, was digging a hole for himself.

The neighborhood where I was born and raised is notorious in the city. There they say, there are only bandits and drug addicts. And indeed, the residents themselves, or rather

"...I have to follow God"

their criminal background made a considerable contribution to this opinion. Any kind of drugs could be found in abundance here, so drug addicts of all types flocked here like bees to honey, from *dandelions*, just beginning to inject, to hardened criminals who reeled far from one term behind barbed wire, from very young and naive beauties to downtrodden prostitutes. In this environment we were brought up. Here there were semi-prison orders. There were also those who had fallen, from whom everyone turned away, and their *own*, and also ones who allowed themselves more than the rest.

Naturally, during adolescence, we couldn't ignore the ubiquitous *weed*. At first, I didn't understand what the point was. Well, I smoked, and what? But the further into the woods, the more firewood. Soon I realized that you could laugh like crazy from weed, and that it took me somewhere where there are no problems. In short, the euphoria is complete. Soon people came into my life. With whom I have never communicated before. We had a common interest in weed. Our old company broke up: someone began to inject, someone to study, someone to smoke.

Then I went to college to get a profession that didn't tell me anything: an electrical technician. Here at the college, I started smoking even more weed. Very quickly there were like-minded people all around me.

When you often smoke weed, over time it ceases to *catch* and you need something more. This need is filled by various derivatives from hemp: *porridge*, *managa* (hemp milk) and so on. Naturally, such things do not add to health — neither physical nor spiritual. You feel like a squeezed lemon.

Gloomy without grass, deliberately cheerful under it, I did not notice how everything changed in life, how the joys and



values of life disappeared without a trace along with the narcotic smoke. Stretched like a string on a guitar, I began to look for a way out. But where to find it when all the friends are always high and the relationship with parents, to put it mildly, is not ideal? I went into teen narcology. They told me that there was a charity, *Transfiguration*, where they help people in difficult life situations. I went there and only lasted three days, but there was a very important event that turned my whole life upside down.

In the *Transfiguration*, I met a pastor from Tashtagol with whom I recited a prayer of repentance before Christ. I remember when he called people to repentance, no one came out, but later I approached him myself. During the prayer, I remembered how much trouble I had caused my mother. That's when forgiveness came into my life, and I sobbed loudly.

When I got home and found myself among my buddies again, I was faced with a choice. Something inside told me to stick to God's morality, which I didn't really know anything about. On the other hand, it was impossible

to rotate in the former circle of acquaintances and not use anything, and then there would be no need to hangout.

I chose the old way of life. Honestly, the feeling was disgusting. As I later learned, it was the Holy Spirit who rebuked me then. It is clear that I have never heard of any Holy Spirit. But my buddies noticed my change. They told me that I had become different, that I was with them, but at the same time not with them. They asked what happened to me.

It is not for nothing that the Bible says that demons are instilled in people who have accepted Christ, but have not begun to live according to His Word. The same thing happened to me. Drowning out the voice of conscience and the Holy Spirit, I began to use all means that change consciousness in one way or another. Plus, slot machines were added to this. I can't say I was a gambler, but I always didn't mind dropping a hundred or two with the guys.

Injecting with *hanka* (a drug that usually contains opium compounds) among our peers was considered unworthy. But the devil is not without reason called the father of deception — heroin appeared, which we began to smoke. I remember how, drawing in the first portion of pernicious smoke, I remembered the words of my friend.

"Yes it's burnt sugar!" He told me, hinting that you don't have to kill yourself with a drug.

But I ignored the warning. Although, to be honest, even earlier, half-alive experienced drug addicts almost begged us not to repeat their fates, because about half of the guys and girls ten years older than us were already dead. But we were too confident to admit this fact.

Since then, I have recognized myself as a drug addict. However, smoking requires large doses, and accordingly, large investments. And then we started injecting. The first time I wasn't scared, I was even curious. I didn't understand anything.

(Continued on page 12)

“...I have to follow God”

(Continued from page 11)

I only remember that one of us left, the other fell asleep in the stairwell, and I had to wander the streets. Then there were three more days under heroin, and then all life in anticipation of a new intake of the drug. The intervals between taking the drug became shorter and shorter: once every two weeks, once a week, and then every day.

Naturally, my degradation did not go unnoticed by my family or neighbors, who began to avoid me. There was an unofficial Cold War between me and my sister at home. My mother did not live with us, but every time she came to our house, she told me that you could not live like this. Of course, I agreed with her, but I could not do anything. There were two monologues instead of one dialogue.

Over time, my social circle narrowed down to a whitelist of friends with whom we switched to commercial relations: if there is money, we will communicate, otherwise no! Gradually, not a single thought remained in my head, except for heroin. With her, as if with his wife, he fell asleep, dreaming not to wake up. With her, he woke up, as if with a drill buzzing in his head. There were far from bright prospects ahead: a prison or a grave.

I looked with envy at my peers who loved, created families, gave birth to children. I had nothing to say about family with my addictions. I did not really want to breed poverty like myself and condemn them to a worthless existence. Gradually, a depressive state was developed, there was a desire to sit alone in a curtained room and not see anyone. Life turned into an endless black and white movie without any emotions. I lived as if in a dream. Thoughts of suicide began to come more and more often. That's how every day without God went.

The interesting thing is that all this time God was pushing me towards Himself. First, through the film *The Passion of Christ*, which left two questions in my head: *What is the Truth? And how much is in us from ourselves?* A little later, I started watching the Copelands' televised sermons. From everything they said, all I knew was that a miracle could happen in life, and the word *hallelujah* that seemed ridiculous to me at the time. The last straw was my conversation with a woman who told me that I should go to church, that I should follow God.

Young on the outside, old on the inside, tired of endless attempts to run away from myself, lonely, not trusting anyone, looking at people solely as a source of money, I finally came to Christ. I decided to go to a drug rehab center. There were no obstacles from my family. After a six-month rehabilitation course, I stayed to help in the center: I had to find myself in a sober life.

Now, five years later, when I look back, it seems to me that none of this was with me. Everything was left behind: drugs, friends, and the old me. Now I serve in the church, I enjoy every day I live, I went to university, I have good friends, relations with relatives have improved. There are still a lot of interesting things ahead!

God has given everyone the right to choose, on which our whole lives depend on. As we overcome difficulties, we can either go up and hoist the banners of our goals on the Everests of life, or looking for an easy way, pleasures, succumbing to all temptations, go into the valley of death, into a swamp from which it is practically impossible to get out on our own. After many life vicissitudes I still chose the path of God, which in fact, I do not regret.

Now I try to talk to every drug addict, as there is always hope! These are the same people who want to be free, live and love!

Remember those in chains as if you were around them (John Brown).

Aleksey KOVALYONOK, Russia,
<https://goloboga.ru>

Bible vs. science was the headline in a recent Canadian newspaper featuring a report about the creation/evolution controversy in public schools in America. As you read the plethora of articles that have recently appeared in newspapers, on webpages and in magazines, and as you listen to the numerous interviews on various secular radio and television programs, the creation/evolution debate is portrayed over and over again as *science vs. faith* (or *religion vs. science*). Secular reporters and evolutionists (and even evolutionist clergy) have emphasized that creation has no place in science classes, because religion has nothing to do with science.

I believe much of the church has been responsible



BIBLE VS. SCIENCE?

(sometimes unwittingly) for fostering this view within the church and the public. Sadly, most church leaders in America have compromised with millions of years and evolutionary ideas in geology, astronomy, and biology, and thus have allowed generations of churchgoers to accept such beliefs and reject the literal history of **Genesis 1–11**.

Not only this, but even many theologically conservative churches have avoided dealing with the millions of years/evolutionary ideas (even though they, by and large, have accepted a literal Genesis and a six-day creation). Instead, they have mainly taught the Gospel, Christian doctrine, relationships, Christian morality, etc. Now, this is all great, of course, but too many churches have been ignoring an attack on the foundational book of the Bible, Genesis, upon which our Christian doctrine is based.

Even though the Genesis accounts of Adam and Eve and Noah's Flood have been taught in Sunday school lessons and other places, churches have not dealt with areas like geology, biology, anthropology and so on. For instance, though the pastors and their congregations basically believe Genesis to be true, the Genesis accounts are presented as just *stories* that are not related at all to fossils, the age of the earth, dinosaurs, etc. As a result, if you asked the average churchgoer (or even Christian leader) today, *Is geology, biology, astronomy, anthropology and so on taught in your church?* the answer is usually, *no*. If you then ask, *Where do we go, then, to learn about geology, biology, astronomy, and anthropology?* the answer is typically *school*.

The account of origins in Genesis has been relegated to *religion*, but what has been taught at school concerning origins has been labeled as *science*. What has happened is that the church has handed over the teaching of geology, biology, astronomy, anthropology, etc., to the secular public-school systems. Now, keep in mind that many students from church homes go to public schools, where by and large they are taught that *science* has *proved* a history of the world that is millions of years old and full of evolutionary progress.

Because church leaders don't know how to deal with millions of years and evolutionary issues (or compromise with them), they teach topics that mostly relate just to spiritual things. No wonder the world (and sadly many Christians) thinks the creation/evolution battle is the *Bible (or religion) vs. science*.

The Bible gives the foundation for the right approach in geology, astronomy, biology, anthropology — in fact for **all** areas of reality. The church needs to take this all back (*to rebuild foundations*, as our 2005 theme declares) and teach people the true foundation of science based on the Bible. And if this is done, perhaps the public will begin to see that the battle is not the *Bible vs. science*, but the *Bible vs. secular beliefs*.

Ken HAM, creation.com

ATTENTION!

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

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

Hope of Freedom
 P.O. Box 4053
 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).

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You may also donate online through PayPal at our website
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We are now a federally-recognized 501(c)3 organization, so you can deduct your donations to us from your taxes!

Dear readers of "Prisoner"!

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

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

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



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

Certificate of State registration of the print media series KV № 20170-9970PR from 15.08.2013

Dear readers!

"Prisoner" is distributed free of charge in America (USA, Canada), Germany, Iceland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Moldova, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Publication of this newspaper depends on donations. Send your material and financially support the publication of this important newspaper for society.

God bless you all!

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Editor Trubitsin Igor Evgenyevich (pseudonym Igor Gorik)

Responsible for the issue Irina Dolgushina.

Design and Desktop Publishing Pavel Vladimirov.

Translation services

Translation of the articles was provided by: Oksana Kravchun, Inessa Berdnik, Anne Yermolov, Anna Krasniy, Igor German, Alex Rybin, Tim Borisenko, Natasha Andrushchenko, and edited by Timofey Borisenko.

Circulation 10000 cop. Order # 9999.

Correspondence with readers only in the newspaper. Authors' thoughts do not always coincide with the point of view of the editorial staff. Creative works published in source language. The accuracy of the material is provided by the author. The editors reserve the right to edit and shorten the texts. Manuscripts and photographs will not be returned.