



# PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

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

John 8:32

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Recently, our editors received a letter (the author wished to remain anonymous), in which a person quite emotionally stated that he would gladly come to God but does not do this because he is sure that God will not forgive him, since there are too many sins he committed. Reading this letter, I immediately remembered a similar incident, when twenty-five years ago a man told me the same thing

*keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live” (Ezekiel 18:21–22).*

How great is God’s mercy that He is ready to forgive anyone who turns to Him with repentance. God Himself,

*show you great and inaccessible things that you do not know” (Jer. 33:3). God does not forsake anyone, and there is no sinner whom He would not forgive if this sinner turns to Him with repentance. That is why the Lord came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ, in order to save through faith: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him should not*

If someone today has doubts about their salvation, considering themselves the biggest sinner whom God will not want to forgive, then this is an erroneous opinion. For the Lord Himself said: *“I tell you that in this way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance” (Luke 15:7).* Therefore, let no one ever doubt that God is merciful to all.

and sisters in the family of God’s children. And this is only the beginning of a new and bright life! A person finds true happiness only when he begins to think about himself less and switches all attention and care to others. The blessing of life does not lie in the size of our wallet or credit card accounts. Good is when, thanks to you, the world is changing at least a little. For we all came to this world in

## EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED

(now my brother is already with the Lord). I shared with him the joy of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and he repeated over and over again that God would not forgive him, for his sins were great.

Trying to argue and prove something with just our words is simply hopeless. However, speaking with the words of the living Word of Scripture has always been successful. God by invisible power through His Word touched the human heart. Anyone who has wanted to seriously change their life and has turned to God with an open heart was certainly heard by Him and forgiven. The Letter to the Romans clearly states that *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13)*. It is clear here that in repentance literally any person can turn to the Lord, regardless of how sinful their former life was. Even more openly God addresses sinners through the prophet Ezekiel, saying these words: *“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed,*



through the prophet, raises the question for people: *“Do I want the death of the lawless one? says the Lord God. Is it not that he turns from his ways and lives?” (Ezekiel 18:23).*

When you come into contact with the Word of God for the first time and start looking for answers to certain questions, the Lord miraculously answers and reveals in the most unfathomable way. After all, it was not in vain that the Lord said: *“Call to Me, and I will answer and*

*perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Is it possible, after what God has done for us, to neglect the chance for salvation? In addition, God does not require any monetary compensation for the sacrifice of His Son. Every person obtains salvation solely through his sincere and undivided faith. As it is said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God: not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).*

Everyone who is now in places of deprivation of liberty can be firmly convinced that every person is given a chance for forgiveness and eternal life. Everything in this life depends on our own choice, which we make ourselves. Many people have been longing to change their lives for a long time, but a certain self-confidence and pride prevent them from taking their first step towards the Light. Many people rely on their own spirit and strength, but in any case, at a certain stage, each person feels his complete helplessness and inner devastation if he lives without God. Regardless of age, the real light in a person’s soul lights up only when the Lord takes place in your life. He is the only one who gives genuine joy in tomorrow and hope for the future. A wasted life begins to take on meaning. The Lord completely changes people: once criminals and people rejected by society, today living with full-fledged families working for the Lord. The fallen of the fallen become blessed brothers

order to do good deeds. As Scripture says, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).*

For those who are in thought today, I want to say with the words from the *Book of Sirach (5:8): “Do not hesitate to turn to the Lord, and do not put off from day to day”,* for every day only increases the emptiness of the soul. How well it was said to the ancient people: *“Today I call heaven and earth as witnesses before you: I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut. 30:19).*

Of course, there is no doubt that even in today’s day God expects every person to make their own decision. The main thing is not to hesitate and listen to what the Apostle Paul said to the Romans: *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”.*

I. GORIK.

### Pope Francis stated that the requirement of celibacy for priests can be reconsidered

In an interview published March 10, Pope Francis called celibacy in the priesthood a gift from God, and again questioned the need for celibacy for priests in the Catholic Church, reports *Christian Today*.

An interviewer with the Argentine news agency *Infobae* asked the pontiff whether the abolition of the obligation of celibacy in the Catholic Church would increase the number of priestly candidates.

*I don’t think so,* said the Pope, adding that there were already married priests among Eastern Rite Catholics. *Here in the [Roman] Curia we have one — I just met him today — who has a wife and a son. Nevertheless, there is nothing contradictory in the marriage of a priest,* Francis noted. *Celibacy in the Western Church is a temporary prescription.*

Contrasting it with the status of priestly ordination, which is perpetual, Francis called celibacy not perpetual.



*Whether you leave or not is another matter,* he added. On the other hand, celibacy is a discipline.

*So it can be reviewed?* asked Argentine journalist Daniel Hadad.

*Yes, yes,* Francis replied. *In fact, in the Eastern Church everyone is married or those who want to. There they make a choice. Before ordination, they have a choice: get married or be celibate.*

Francis has challenged the practice of priestly celibacy before, most recently in a big speech he gave at the Vatican a year ago, when he again called priestly celibacy a gift, but warned that without friends and without prayer, celibacy could become an unbearable burden and contradictory. the very beauty of the priesthood.

### Omsk Pastor of the Church of Evangelical Christians sent to prison

In Omsk, a second guilty verdict was issued against a pastor of an Evangelical Christian church. The minister was accused of using technologies of psychological influence that affected the mental health of citizens...

The Kirovsky District Court of Omsk issued a verdict in a criminal case against a fifty-five-year-old minister of the Evangelical Church Stanislav Moskvitin’s New Creation, lawyer Sergey Chugunov said on his Telegram channel.

The pastor was found guilty of committing a crime under Part 1 of Art. 239 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (creation and management of a religious association whose activities involve violence against citizens).

He was accused of having created the New Creation Church of Evangelical Christians in Omsk in 2016, after which he began to conduct worship services, during which he used psychological impact technologies that affected the mental health of the victims.



Here is what pastor Stanislav Moskvitin said in July 2021 after the policemen appeared in the church right during the service:

*On July 18, representatives of law enforcement agencies, unexpectedly for everyone, without warning, right during the service, broke into our premises.*

*Without waiting for the end of the service, disregarding the feelings of the believers, them being in a special atmosphere of worship to God, they demanded to immediately interrupt the service, banned the broadcast and turned off all the equipment, and took me away.*

*All this was done in a rude and unceremonious manner, despite the presence of a large number of believers, as well as children.*

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CHRISTIAN NEWS

What is a lie? A deliberate distortion of the truth. But it doesn't have to be just words. A lie can be a pretense, self-deception, a life lived and much more. From the beginning of time, the devil has been considered the father of lies. It was he who in the garden of Eden and said to Eve: *...did God truly say: do not eat from any tree in paradise?* And after Eve succumbed to this lie, this vice entered our world and became part of our nature.

Today, lying is perhaps the most common sin. All lie without exception. Moreover, a person begins to lie from a very young age without anyone even teaching it. At first, it may be some kind of childhood fantasy, but over time, a person begins to deliberately manipulate the truth. This is done for different purposes: some defend themselves from reproaches, others try to avoid punishment, others earn their authority, others try to get rich or move up the career ladder with the help of lies, and some, by manipulating the truth, even manage to do supposedly good deeds.

Today, lies are heard from everywhere: from newspapers, TV, on the street, at school, university, and even in kindergarten, you can hear them. We are so used to it that sometimes we simply do not pay attention to it. In the modern world, telling the truth is already considered bad manners. There are

even such concepts as ethics, tolerance, political correctness and many others. But how should Christians relate to all this when there is only falsehood around? Christians must rely on what the Bible says. And it unequivocally says that one cannot lie.

*Do not steal, do not lie, and do not deceive one another (Lev. 19:11).*

*The law is not made for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient... liars, perjurers, and everything that is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:9-10).*

*Therefore, putting aside falsehood, speak the truth each one to his neighbor, for we are members of one another (Eph. 4:25).*

*Do not tell lies to one another, putting off the old man with his deeds (Col. 3:9).*

Our Lord is the God of truth. He hates lies in all its manifestations. When the church first appeared, the Lord reacted very harshly to the lies of the first Christians so that this sin would not spread among believers. We are told the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who fell dead after being convicted of lying (Acts 5:1-11). This shows how seriously we need to take what we say, because our eternal fate directly depends on whether we tell the truth or distort it.

*The timid and the unfaithful, and the vile, and the murderers, and the fornicators, and the sorcerers, and the idolaters, and all the liars — the fate of the lake burning with fire and*

# LIES

*brimstone; it is the second death (Rev. 21:8).*

Yes, truly, words have great power. It is material and has power in our world. It was with the word that our world was created in six days. And our Lord is compared with the word.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It was in the beginning with God. Everything came into being through Him, and without Him nothing came into being that came into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:1-5).*

This proves once again how important it is to watch your words. After all, a word can heal or, conversely, hurt and sometimes, it can kill. Wars have been started with some words, and wars have ended with words. This danger lurking in words was very vividly described by the apostle James.

*So, ships, no matter how big they are and no matter how strong winds rush about, with a small rudder they go where the helmsman wants; so the tongue is a small member, but it does much. Look, a small fire*

*ignites a lot of matter! And the tongue is fire, an embellishment of untruth; the tongue is in such a position between our members that it defiles the whole body and inflames the circle of life, being itself inflamed from hell. For every nature of animals and birds, reptiles and marine animals is tamed and tamed by human nature, but no one from people can tame the tongue: this is an irresistible evil; he is full of deadly poison (James 3:4-8).*

Penetrating a person's life, a lie first causes discomfort. But if you don't fight it, then later, to hide the old lie you need to tell a new lie, and so on. As a result, a person simply drowns in lies. Relationships with people start to fall apart. Such a person constantly experiences doubt and resentment. And the most ardent liars generally begin to deform the perception of the world around them, as they coat everything in the delusion in which they live.

We must also remember that when a person tells a lie, he becomes an instrument of the devil.

*He (the devil) was a murderer from the beginning and did not stand in the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks his own, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).*

By allowing lies into our lives, whether we like it or not, we begin to help the enemy of human souls in his struggle against God for the souls of people. To people, lies

seem insignificant. Well, think about it, he exaggerated a little there, he didn't say a little there, he said nothing there. It would seem a trifle, but out of all these trifles bigger sins are born. Lies in this case act as catalysts. That's what the devil is counting on. But Christians are called to be the light of God in the dark kingdom of sin around.

*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its potency, how will you make it salty? She is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out to be trampled by people. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a mountain cannot hide. And having lighted a candle, they do not put it under a vessel, but on a candlestick, and it gives light to all in the house. So let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).*

And in order not to lie, we should, if possible, avoid such situations that push us to this, that is, not do something for which we will be ashamed before God and other people. In those cases, when we have nothing to say, we just need to tell the truth. If it is not you who is lying, but another person, then it is necessary to ask God for wisdom in how to tell a person about it. And it is important to do everything with love, because reproof without love does not bear fruit.

A. BURTSEV.

## CHRISTIAN NEWS

### *She Was Dead Before the Prayer, and Alive After. ER Doctor Reports Clinically Dead Woman Revived in True Miracle*

A medical doctor is testifying that a woman was raised from the dead by the power of prayer hours after emergency room staff had done everything they could to revive her.

Dr. Landon D. Vinson, M.D., an emergency room doctor at the Coffeyville Regional Medical Center in Coffeyville, Kansas, recently told members of the First Assembly of God about the miracle he witnessed along with their pastor, Rev. Randy DePriest.

In a video posted to YouTube, Vinson gives his testimony to the congregation. It was during the spring of 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when an unnamed woman was taken to the emergency room in Coffeyville. She was receiving CPR when she was brought into the emergency room and was given CPR for an entire hour after arriving. But she had died.

*We did get her heart beating again, but essentially the only thing keeping her heart going were shots of adrenalin in her bloodstream and putting her on a ventilator,* Vinson said. *From a medical standpoint, she wasn't alive. She was what we call "brain dead".*

He described to the congregation the numerous ways medical officials determine a person has died. In this instance, they found no signs of life. The woman's eyes were fixed and dilated; she showed no gag reflex, and her limbs showed signs of mottling, all of which precede the onset of rigor mortis. So, Dr. Vinson, his staff, and the woman's husband decided to remove her from life support.

According to Vinson, the woman's husband had asked someone to call DePriest to come and pray.

Vinson said he told the man, *Sure. We'll wait for the pastor to get here.* He thought that he and the nurses would simply wait for the pastor out of respect for the woman and her husband.

After a few minutes, DePriest arrived at the hospital. The staff had not told him about the woman's condition so he placed his hand on her shoulder and began to pray.

*We began to pray over her,* the doctor recalled. *My head was bowed. There was a nurse in the room. Maybe just a couple minutes into the prayer, a machine began sounding an alarm. I thought I would just turn it off so it would not be distracting.*

*When I looked up, spontaneous breath began coming back. I saw a hand moving on this woman.*

As the pastor prayed over her, he began to ask her questions. She started nodding her head and responding.

He called her by name, and said, *This is Pastor Randy, and I've come to pray for you.* Her eyes opened, and he asked, *Can you hear me okay?* She nodded, Yes.

Then DePriest said, *Do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior?* Again, she nodded Yes. He



continued, *That's great news. Today we're going to do what scripture says. Where two or three agree, touching anything, and believing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, asking Him, it shall be done. So I'm asking God to restore your health and to heal you. Does that sound alright?* Again, her reply was, Yes.

*This made no sense to me because she did not have any sign of life,* Dr. Vinson said. He continued, *We had taken her off all medications. We had given her four medications to keep her heart going. Those were all turned off. But now her blood pressure was strong. It was going through the roof.*

She was blinking her eyes. I leaned down and asked, *"Can you hear me?"* She nodded her head "Yes". I asked, *"Do you want us to keep going and fight?"* She aggressively shook her head "Yes".

*That was the first true miracle that I've ever seen. It was a very humbling moment. I kept hearing God saying, "That is my child. I decide who lives".*

As the woman began responding, DePriest described to the congregation how two nurses

quickly left the room to prepare her for sedation since she was becoming agitated from her intense pain. He noted when the medical professionals returned to transfer her from Coffeyville to another hospital for possible surgery, observation, and recovery, that she was fighting to remove herself from the gurney on which they had placed her.

As Dr. Vinson wrapped up his testimony, he described how he told a nurse, *This was a miracle.*

Vinson said he attempted to find reasons for the event in his medical books. He couldn't find anything. It was then he heard a voice in his head, saying *It's me. There is nothing else. It's me,* the doctor told the congregation.

As an emergency room doctor, Vinson is very familiar with death. He told CBN News in an email that the event from his viewpoint was fairly simple. The woman was braindead.

*She was on multiple medications we call vasopressors, or pressors for short. These IV infusions keep the heart beating, increase the heart squeeze, and constrict blood vessels, all in an attempt to keep blood pressure high enough to perfuse the brain and vital organs. Other than these infusions keeping her heart beating and generating a blood pressure, and the ventilator giving oxygen and ventilating the lungs, there were no clinical signs of life. Her neurologic exam would classify her as braindead, and therefore justifiable to remove her from artificial life support,* he said.

*As Pastor DePriest came in we had just turned all her vasopressors off, and were preparing to extubate (take the patient off the ventilator) and anticipated rapid progression to the pronouncement of death,* the doctor explained.

*In summary, she was clinically dead and we were preparing to pronounce her so. She began moving and responding to the pastor's questions during his prayer. She was not just generating her own heartbeat and blood pressure now, she was fighting the ventilator by her own breathing. She needed sedation medication to keep her on the cot and to facilitate transportation,* he noted.

*I see no other explanation than a miracle for this phenomenon. I am not claiming that a pastor raised a woman from the dead. I am saying his steadfast faith and prayer triggered or released something spiritual that transcended realms. I don't know that I'll ever understand the mechanism, but I know she was dead before the prayer, and alive after.*

Vinson told CBN News he could not remember the woman's name or had no follow-up on her condition, but said it may have been a lesson about humility — not to put God in a box.

*I do know she was alive and responsive when she left in the ambulance taking her to another hospital. I don't pretend to know the intent of God's will, but I can't help thinking her living or dying was not the point. I think it may have been a lesson in humility, and a warning not to limit God in your faith,* the doctor wrote.

CBN NEWS.

## PROVERBS

### THE LAST DAY



There lived a holy old man. And they said about him that he had a magic book in which the day of the end of the world was written, at which the Lord Jesus Christ would return. And people came to the elder with questions: will the Lord return tomorrow? in a month? in a year? Everyone wanted to know in order to prepare their souls for a meeting with the Lord.

But the elder invariably answered all questions: *Tomorrow.* And people stopped believing in him. They thought that he was hiding the secret knowledge contained in the book.

The old man died, and the neighbors immediately rushed to look for his magic book. Found — it lay on the table, the elder did not hide it. They opened it and read: *Live every day as if the Lord were to come tomorrow, and you will not be mistaken.*

### A SHORT WISE PARABLE



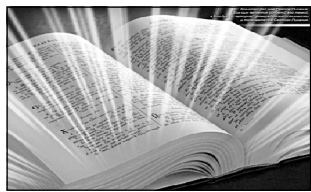
One day a disciple came to his elder and asked:

*How can I learn to forgive, teacher?*

*Never judge others and you will never have to forgive.*

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

## PASTOR'S WORD



# SALVATION THROUGH FAITH REGARDLESS OF WORKS

In the last days, it has become common to hear the wrong interpretation of the question of man's salvation through faith. The Bible states that salvation without Christ, without God's grace is impossible regardless of how good and righteous the person appears to be in other people's eyes or in their own. Christ said this same thing: *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)*. Similar words were spoken by Apostle Peter when he was filled with the Holy Spirit: *...and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12)*.

However, there are certain people today that state that Christian piety is unnecessary because it cancels out the salvation granted by Christ which is complete and does not require human additions. They ask: *In the question of our salvation, did Christ not finish it? Or does He require human help? Or can our human efforts change the status of our salvation in Christ which we received exclusively through faith?* Further on, these people point to the following texts in the Bible: *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (Romans 4:5); ...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16); For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)*.

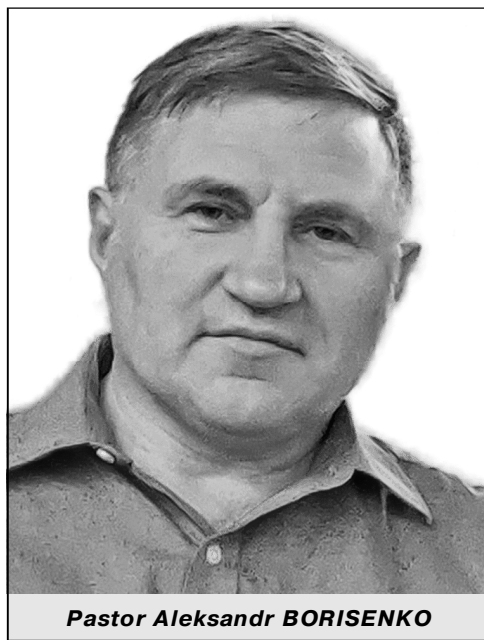
Many of these people have the best of motives. They desire to caution the Christians to not lean from the position of faith onto the side of those that try to attain salvation through works which is what happened to the Christians living in Galatia whom Apostle Paul was chastising, saying: *You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness (Galatians 5:4-5)*.

And yet what is wrong? What is the error of this understanding, even though it is rooted in the Bible? Let us examine this.

Practically all texts that speak about the impossibility of salvation through works do not mean the seeking of holiness in the spirit of the New Testament but in following the Law of Moses with all of its requirements of the flesh (ceremonies, cleansing), or the so called ceremonial parts of the law which truly do not free the person from the power of sin and do not give him a new heart. Since the apostles had to work with people who understood that

salvation depends exclusively on the following of this law, they had to speak, repeat, and insist that the following of rituals does not save but the faith in Christ does. This is why Apostle Paul repeats in his letters: *...because by works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16); For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)*.

In speaking this, the apostles did not want to decrease the longing towards a pure, holy, and godly life in Christians as it is done by modern preachers who appeal to the flesh. They spoke this to



Pastor Aleksandr BORISENKO

people who were turning to Christ and to those who were still followers of the law. This was the category of believers that for insurance purposes (just in case something is not right in Christianity) kept their faith in the Old Testament and in this showed that to them the path of Christ was not fully revealed. These half-Jews and half-Christians posed a grave danger for the church of new converts, bringing in turmoil and division.

Some western theologians, taking as their foundation these Scriptures that were addressed to the believers of this transitional period, state that the expansion of human efforts in reaching practical holiness is contradicting the teaching of salvation through faith. They deny the necessity of having to humble and subjugate our flesh. As a result of this, we have had the birth of easy Christianity which does not look like Christ neither in appearance nor in spirit. These are people which are difficult to consider Christians but it is also hard to call them unbelievers. These people don't have any struggles because their life has mostly stayed the same, without major changes. Their appearance, mannerisms, speech and interests are all worldly. But what is worse, there is no longing towards something better because the condition

that they remain in today appears to them to be wonderful.

The meaning of the Biblical word salvation is very broad and the problem lays in its incorrect interpretation. The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament speak about three phases or stages of the salvation of a human soul.

## I. FIRST STAGE: SAVED

**Ephesians 2:8-9** — *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

The calling, salvation, forgiveness of sins, adoption, or in one word, regeneration, is the first and an important stage of God's salvation. It mostly depends on God's calling but also on the willingness of a person to walk on God's path. Without this initial great miracle of salvation everything else does not have a meaning. But all of this is just the beginning. This first stage of salvation is experienced by many people but not all of them follow Christ further. The example of this first stage is the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. When they passed through the Red Sea and saw their former captors dead, they received true freedom from slavery. But if they did not journey on further, their salvation would have ended in death in the waterless desert.

**Romans 8:24** — *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?*

## II. SECOND STAGE: BEING SAVED

The second stage of salvation is lengthier and includes in itself the process of sanctification and spiritual growth. This is why we see in the Scriptures the call to work out our salvation. If, apart from the calling and repentance, which are a witness of a person's salvation, nothing else was necessary, then it would not have been necessary to call those that have been once saved to complete their salvation (a continuous action). The example of this second stage is the journey of the people of Israel from the Red Sea to the Promised Land. In this section of the journey, the people amongst them who were lustful and grumblers were revealed and destroyed. The texts that are below from the Gospel speak of this important section of the Christian path and the personal responsibility of a person to remain in salvation or to reject it.

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

**Luke 21:19** — *By your endurance you will gain your lives.*

**1 Corinthians 15:2** — *...by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you — unless you believed in vain.*

**Luke 16:16** — *...since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.*

**1 Timothy 4:16** — *Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

## III. THIRD STAGE: WILL BE SAVED

The third, last, and final stage of salvation is portrayed by the entrance of the Israelites into the Promised Land and for New Testament Christians entering the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why Apostle Paul is recommending for us to look at the end of the lives of our elders and to emulate their faith. The ending determines everything. The Jews that went out of Egypt went through two phases of salvation but the third, the entrance into the Promised Land, only two Jews who left Egypt as adults were worthy of: Joshua and Caleb.

**Matthew 24:13** — *...but the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

**1 Peter 1:9** — *...obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

**Romans 5:9-10** — *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

Taking into consideration everything said above, let us imagine the new believer who is being told: *Everything that is necessary for your final salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven was completed by Christ. Because you have believed, this is enough and you don't have to do anything; you don't need to humble and subjugate your body, you don't have to examine yourself, for all of these are human actions by which a person cannot be saved.* What a severe and irreversible damage that will be done to this new believer! Spiritual growth of a person happens only due to the above listed principles.

Once, I had to speak to a Christian of this new generation and in the conversation point to the importance of examining oneself and to *purify himself as He is pure (1 John 3:3)* which the other person called the *works of the devil*. This person ended up being a follower of modern western theology, the falsehood of which many do not realize. Truly, how difficult is it for a person who is filled with the euphoria of a false salvation to think that something is wrong with them. How sad that the tragedy of this false teaching many find out at the end when they cannot fix anything. Today they don't want to listen to anything... Even the voice of their consciousness that is judging them they call the lies of the devil and they seek to suppress and to silence it. What a dangerous mindset to have in the most important question, the salvation of one's own soul!

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

## CHRISTIAN NEWS Malaysian state issues fatwa banning Muslims from entering churches

A Malaysian state has issued a fatwa banning Muslims from entering churches and other non-Muslim places of worship.

The fatwa was passed on March 15 in the state of Selangor in western Malaysia and is believed to be a reaction to an event staged by Malaysia's Sports Minister for citizens to learn more about Christianity, Open Doors reports.

Selangor is the most populous state in Malaysia, which is a Muslim-majority country — 63.5 percent of the country in 2020.

According to the country's

constitution, Islam is Malaysia's state religion. The constitution also allows some restrictions on the proselytization of Muslims.

Not all Muslims support the fatwa.

Muslim politician Syed Saddiq said in a video posted on social media:

*How do we want our children to live in a harmonious society when they cannot understand the religion and culture of their own peers?*

*What is the need to gatekeep Muslims in Selangor? Don't tell me that if you entered a church your faith would waver. Every other person of a different*

*religion here hears the [Islamic] call to prayer five times a day.*

Malaysia is ranked 43 on Open Doors' annual World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution.

Open Doors highlighted some of the consequences of the fatwa, which will prevent Muslims from attending weddings or other events held in

churches, and negatively affect the income of event coordinators and wedding photographers.



A spokesperson for an Open Doors partner charity in Malaysia is concerned about the fatwa.

*It is alarming to see the rise in incidents like this, giving more and more control to the Islamic authority and restricting the rights of the minorities, she said.*

*However, I do feel that there has been a shift of mentality among the minorities and even those within the Islamic community. People are getting sick of being controlled and they are speaking out.*

Christianity Today.

## TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

## A THORNY PATH TO GOD

The foundation upon which a person's life is based is undoubtedly laid during their childhood. Despite all the problems I had to go through, I was lucky in this regard. My parents, despite being educated, successful, and quite influential, adhered to conservative principles of upbringing. Obedience, politeness, and respect for elders were valued in the family. But among my peers, such behavior only elicited mockery and contempt. The lack of acceptance among my peers humiliated and hurt me deeply. I really wanted to have friends, so I started adapting to the rules of the street, where completely different values were respected. Time passed in revelry and questionable activities. The result did not take long. I was sentenced to seven years. But even there, I didn't find myself; I continued to seek authority among the prison brotherhood for a long time. Only another vile betrayal put an end to my futile hopes for loyalty and support from companions. I hid myself in books for a long time. I wanted to understand the essence of human actions, to grasp the psychology of friends, to protect myself from intrigue and treachery in the future. This is how I came across Nietzsche's book about Jesus Christ, in which He is characterized as a false prophet. Feeling a lack of information about this historical figure, I decided to read the Bible. Although I had deliberately avoided this book until then because I had a negative attitude towards Christianity. Once in the early nineties, something happened that gave me a bad taste of Christianity — I was driving a drunk priest to his lover. And to prevent his wife from seeing him — I hid him in the car trunk.

I had no plans to become a believer. But the more I delved into the Holy Scripture, the more I realized that it was true and real. In the history of the Israelite people and their actions, I saw a reflection of my own sinful behavior. I began to understand the connection between the causes and consequences of everything that happened in my life. Reading the Old Testament, I felt the fear of God almost for the first time. I realized that for all my wrongdoings, I deserved eternal punishment. The desire to repent emerged. My heart ached from the realization of many of my transgressions. I cried, asked God for forgiveness, justified myself by ignorance. But my conscience reminded me of many moments when I categorically rejected the news of God's salvation, seeking something else, when my conscience reproached me for wicked deeds, but I didn't pay attention. Despair

gripped me — there were no justifications for me!

Life became uninteresting. Various dark thoughts obsessively invaded my mind. I wanted, breaking all my principles, to plunge into the abyss: to get drunk, smoke marijuana, and even end my own life. But suddenly I remembered that I hadn't finished reading the Bible yet. I picked up that significant book again. And not in vain. The New Testament revived my spirit, kindled a spark of hope for God's forgiveness in my heart. I decided to change my earthly, temporary life so as not to lose the eternal.

I left prison with a firm intention to live honestly and seek God. Obedience, instilled by my parents in childhood, was very useful on this journey. I spent the first week of my freedom in a monastery. I confessed and repented of my sins to the priest, obeyed everything they ordered: read prayer books, attended the entire service from beginning to end, even though I didn't understand anything about it. Then, following the advice of an acquaintance of a monk, I went to an Orthodox church. Life began to improve. I found a job, new friends appeared. I began to plan my future and was confident that with God, everything would work out for me.

I regularly attended church, not missing a single service. Even the icons, which, as written in the Bible, should not be worshipped, didn't stop me. I simply ignored them. I confessed regularly, but my sins before God somehow didn't decrease. This troubled me a lot because I wanted to stop sinning altogether, but I felt powerless to resist sin. I was also troubled that when reciting the prescribed prayers to God and the saints, my thoughts were always far away. Therefore, these prayers were lifeless, false, and did not bring comfort.

Moreover, problems of a domestic nature began to arise. Everything around me suddenly began to fall apart. I lost my job, my wife left, all my friends disappeared somewhere. I was left alone with depression and despair. My condition triggered a worsening of tuberculosis, which I had contracted during my imprisonment. But I saw no point in treatment, so I didn't even consult a doctor. I just lay there and withered away. I fully realized that my fate was worthless,

that I couldn't understand or hear God. Yet I still thanked the Lord for His wisdom and grace. About ten days later, I felt like I would die tomorrow. I wasn't afraid of death; I prayed to God to take me to judgment and tell me how I should have lived.

And the loving Father had compassion and answered me. In one of the moments when I was praying, an old acquaintance



of my late parents entered. Later, this woman told me that as she was passing by my house, she felt an inexplicable sense of alarm in her heart, and she felt as if someone was pushing her to my apartment door. She was scared when she saw me and started crying. She said she saw death. I looked so bad: thin, pale, with sunken eyes, almost like a corpse. The woman began to implore me to call an ambulance. And then my heart trembled: *You wanted to know how to live right? Stay, and I will teach you...* I went to the hospital.

This was a time of spiritual enrichment. I lay completely and read the Bible, through prayer and His Word, I came to know the truth. Despite intensive therapy, my physical condition did not improve, even worsened. Tests showed that tuberculosis, despite all the efforts of doctors, was progressing. I began to lose my hearing and vision, and due to deformed joints, I could no longer walk. After several months, effective medications were prescribed to me, which provided some relief. With renewed strength, I began to appeal to the Almighty. I no longer wanted to live as before, according to my own desires, so I fervently asked God for strength to be guided only by His will, because He knows the tomorrow and knows what is good for me. I asked for the Lord to bring me to a gathering where I would feel the full presence of God.

And He heard me again. One day, my neighbor unexpectedly came in. She brought freshly baked pastries. Seeing the Bible on the table, she timidly invited me to her church service. It was awkward to refuse, so I went. At first, I didn't take in what was happening in the hall, but everything changed dramatically during the sermon. The pastor spoke exactly about what was troubling me, and I received answers to questions that had been bothering me for many years. I cried with joy because I heard the voice of God. I felt good, and I didn't want the service to end.

Two years have passed since that day. The Almighty Heavenly Father completely healed me from open form tuberculosis. This happened during a joint prayer of pastors at a conference dedicated to celebrating the birthday of our church. Four days later, I found myself in a remarkable state. I experienced an extraordinary spiritual uplift and a lightness throughout my body, which filled me with strength and inexhaustible energy. In the morning, I woke up to songs of praise to the Lord, resonating in my heart. I prayed a lot and cried with the joy that God's presence brought. I felt an incredible love for everything I saw around me: people, birds, trees, streets.

After a while, I suddenly remembered that I had stopped taking the tablets, without which, according to doctors, irreversible processes in the lungs would begin in two weeks, potentially leading to a fatal outcome. But at that very moment, it was as if someone told me: *By the wounds of Jesus, you are healed.* And I consciously forgot about the medication. But each planned examination showed only improvement. The doctors praised, saying that everything was healing, amazed by my rapid recovery.

Today I feel great. The large church family of brothers and sisters has become dear to me. The Lord has given me faithful friends, like-minded people, with whom I share interesting trips, hikes in the mountains, friendly conversations, mutual support, joint prayers, and service in the adaptation center and hospitals. But the main thing is that I found God, an inexhaustible source of life, from which I am filled with faith, joy, and confidence in tomorrow. Every day, I thank the Creator for His tender touch on my heart, which restores me, strengthens me, inspires me for good deeds, sanctifies me, and leads me to eternity.

**Aleksandr KOTVINSKY,**  
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## Testimony of Oleg Gaidarov

The thieves crucified alongside Jesus Christ seemed to have no chance for repentance. One of them mocked Jesus, imitating the cruel crowd of elders, while the other defended Jesus, realizing His innocence. The one who insulted the Lord had a hardened heart and didn't repent for the evil he had done, even on the cross. Jesus was so close, but he rejected Him. He missed his last chance.

Oleg Gaidarov, currently responsible for missionary service in the Good Samaritan Mission, was also, as he calls himself, a thief once, but thankfully, he didn't miss his chance.

Just as the thief on the cross met the Lord while undergoing punishment, not on a cross but in prison, Oleg met the Lord. Even before, he believed that God existed, but it didn't stop him from sinning and doing harm to others. It was in prison that the Lord gave him a chance, speaking to him through the Bible, which, at the time, seemed to have accidentally fallen into the hands of a prisoner.

"One person who came from a high-security prison brought a book with him. *Listen, where did you get this book?* I asked. Previously, I thought that the Gospel was preserved either in museums or with priests in churches. I never even thought that this book could end up in my hands. *People came to the prison where I was. They brought the Gospel,* he replied. *Let me read it,* I asked. And he said: *I can even give it to you as a gift; I have another one.* Taking the Gospel, I immediately started reading it. It burned my hands so much that I realized: this is not an ordinary book; it is truly sacred.

Imagine, a sacred book in my sin-stained hands! I felt somewhat uncomfortable with this thought, but I continued to read it anyway. But I couldn't understand anything. Then I met the person who



gave me the Bible again: *Do you understand what is written in the Gospel?* He said: *I understand.* I answered: *Then why don't I understand?* He explained to me that the Bible is God's wisdom, which can be understood and comprehended only

by the one to whom the Lord opens his mind and eyes.

From this explanation, I understood that before reading the Word of God, one should always pray, something I had never done and didn't know how to do. So, I asked my friend to write down a prayer for me on a sheet of paper. Unexpectedly, he asked me: *Did you have a bicycle in your childhood?* I thought, what does a bicycle have to do with God, but humbly answered: *Yes, I did.* And he continued: *Where did you get it? Who bought it for you?* I answered: *My father.* He asked: *How did it happen? Did you go to your mother and say you wanted your father to buy you a bicycle? And not knowing how to express your request to your dad, did you ask your mom to write it down on a piece of paper for your father to read later?* Not fully understanding where he was leading, I replied: *No, it wasn't like that. I went up to my dad. Tugging at his sleeve, I asked him to buy me a bicycle. I was still young, and he bought it for me.* Then my friend said: *Well, you don't need to tug at God's sleeve. And if you want to ask Him for something, kneel. If you're hungry, say you're hungry. If you're cold, say you don't have enough clothes. And if you don't understand anything in this book, say, 'Lord, this is your wisdom, open it up to me, reveal everything you want to tell me'.*

This advice from his friend became an eye-opener for Oleg. Before, he didn't know that he could just talk to God about everything and ask for anything so simply. Now, before reading the Gospel, he prayed — and it really worked. The first biblical story that caught his attention was the story of the rich young man.

*In that young man, I recognized myself,* Oleg admits. *The only difference was that he was rich, and I was poor. Everyone abandoned me: friends and family. Only my mother remembered me.*

(Continued on page 5)

## TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

## Testimony of Oleg Gaidarov

(Continued from page 4)

Lord, what must I do to have eternal life? This was the question a young man asked Jesus, echoing the inner struggle of Oleg. He, too, didn't know what to do. Then the Lord began to answer with lines from the biblical narrative: *Obey the commandments*. The young man didn't immediately grasp which commandments were meant. Then Christ started listing them: *Do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery, honor your parents*. Oleg paid attention to these lines and realized he hadn't followed any of them. *No, this book isn't for me*, he thought. *My life doesn't align with what's written*. He put the book aside and stopped reading.

But something extraordinary happened! Every time he opened his bedside table, his gaze kept falling on the Gospel. It was as though it was drawing him in. An inner voice seemed to say, *Take it and read*. To keep the book from interfering with his life as it had been, Oleg hid it under a pile of newspapers and magazines. Yet, it kept reappearing in his sight. Oleg attempted to bury the Book under a mound of magazines again, but it didn't work. It was back on top. He sensed there was something more to this. *This is definitely not an ordinary book*, he thought. *It means that God expects something from me*.

Oleg decided to conduct a final experiment: he placed the Gospel under a jar of jam. If the book managed to come out from there and end up in a different place, it would mean that God wanted to convey something through it. And there it was again, lying on top of the jam jar. A shiver ran down his spine. He finally understood — all of this wasn't happening by chance.

Indeed, there are no coincidences with God. The bedside table, where the book rested, was only accessible to Oleg's friend and comrade. It was he

who became interested in the book. He read it secretly from Oleg. He would read a bit and then put it back. Nobody could have suspected it, but the Lord had foreseen everything. During the same time when Oleg considered it a sign, his friend from the same region got more and more engrossed in reading the Word of God.

Enveloped in this mysterious occurrence, the book once again captured Oleg's attention. Just as before, while re-reading God's commandments and instructions for holy living, he couldn't believe they could be fulfilled. Looking back, Oleg understood that living according to the Word on this Earth was nearly impossible. One day he read in the Gospel: *...do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on: life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing... Seek the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you (Luke 12:22-31)*. These words became the answer, showing how to live on Earth while following the commandments. God had more to say through the Bible, and Oleg realized he needed to change his life, to repent, but it was so hard to do.

"I was ready to leave all sins behind, but one that had a strong hold on me — drugs — wouldn't let go. I started praying and asking God for help. I didn't know how the Lord would answer me, but I thought that the next dose of drugs would be my solution. Then, in the middle of the night, I heard the door of my cell open quietly. All my friends were asleep. My heart raced. The guard handed me a package and closed the door behind him. Trembling, I started unpacking it. There were many newspapers in the package, and among them was the Gospel. A thought crossed my mind: *Who could have brought it here?* Setting the book aside, I began opening the next package, searching for drugs. After going through all the papers, I found a pack of

tea. There was nothing else there. Disappointed, I turned to God: *Lord, I asked you for help. How can this Gospel assist me?* But at that moment, God spoke to my heart, and I heard His voice inside me: *Take it and read!* I opened the Gospel and read the words from the Acts of the Apostles: *Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent... (Acts 17:30)*. These words hit me deeply. I fell to my knees and began to ask God for forgiveness. I wept and repented... My life played before me like a film, frame by frame. I saw how I brought suffering to people. I pleaded, *Lord, forgive me. I was a sinner, unworthy of life*. Another frame. Before me stood there. She had eagerly anticipated our meeting, but illness cut short her life. One of the reasons for her illness was our troubled family. My father often drank and mistreated my mother. I remembered how she cried when she came to visit me. I tried to reassure her that everything would be fine, that I would be free and start a new life. However, upon leaving prison, I repeatedly found myself returning to the past, unable to change anything about myself.

This prayer became a turning point in my life. The first miracle was that there were no withdrawal symptoms. I became free, and I never touched drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol again in my life. Freedom arrived. My soul sings: *I am free, I am free from sin*. Jesus found me, broke all the chains of evil. Now, I am filled with heavenly joy.

Since 1993, Oleg has been living with God; He now reigns in his heart. Oleg and his wife work as missionaries in the village of Golovin, in the Rivne region. They visit their missionary friends in other regions, connect with people, and assist those facing spiritual problems. Through the life of this servant, an interesting pattern emerges: first, the Lord changes your heart, then your life, and then through you, a reborn person, He changes the lives of those who live and interact with you.

Irina NAUMETS, <http://blag.org.ua>

In the past, I often wondered: *What does it take to be lucky?* Maybe being born under a lucky star or in fortunate circumstances? Now I understand: no, definitely not that. Furthermore, life doesn't necessarily have to start with luck. What matters is not starting well but ending with a happy ending. In old folk tales, good always triumphs over evil, and truth overcomes lies. And for those who claim that this only happens in movies or fairy tales, I'll share a story of my own where I am the heroine.

Everything in this story started off quite well: a well-off family, seemingly proper upbringing, relatively correct life goals... The house seemed to be built by the rules, but the foundation was weak. Then, in an instant, everything collapsed. While my peers were contemplating their future careers, I pondered how to do things I shouldn't do discreetly and without consequences. Soon, around the age of thirteen, my internal rebellion took a visible form: instead of diligent studying, there were casual skipping of classes; instead of constructive hobbies, there were harmful and destructive habits... By my fifteenth birthday, these harmful habits had become an integral part of me. Life seemed impossible without them. Now, anything unrelated to drugs and crime

became automatically irrelevant to me — a hellish cycle of slavery was firmly taking hold of my life.

Of course, when events unfold at such a pace, the climax doesn't wait. My climax came with a sentence: five years of imprisonment and serving the sentence in a correctional colony. However, this seeming end simultaneously marked the beginning of the second part of my story.

While I was in the colony, my mother, who was a believer by that time, fervently prayed for me. And one day, her prayers were answered — my soul, previously closed to anything divine, opened up. The Good News brought by believers from a Christian church to our colony — the news that God loves me and wants to save me — became alive and understandable. My

heart finally opened to God, and from that moment on, incredible and supernatural changes started happening in my life. The spiritual rebirth,

## TWICE BORN



liberation from drug addiction, amnesty, love, marriage, a fulfilling and happy life! Describing what the Lord has done and continues to do for me is nearly impossible: there's not enough time or paper. A new beginning, new thoughts and desires, a new bright life, filled with His glory! And an irresistible urge to dream and create!

Now, my friend Tanya Mironenko and I write songs together and sing them, glorifying our Lord. By the way, when asked to share her story, Tanya responded: *But you've already told it. Your story and mine are almost the same. The nuances of the past are nothing. But the continuation in the present — that's where the strength lies.*

And she's absolutely right: two different yet strikingly similar unlucky beginnings converged into one massive stroke of luck... And became a unified story with no end. Its continuation is found in every new song where we glorify our main hero — the amazing Savior, Jesus Christ!

Oh, by the way, our group is called *Twice Born*. Because we were fortunate enough to be born again the second time.

Irina GUSENITSA, Ukraine  
(in the photo on the right)  
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## Proverb of the Pure Soul

There was once a monk who lived with his brothers in a monastery. Like everyone else, he praised the Almighty, observed fasts, and kept his monastic vows. Moreover, he was extraordinarily kind to people and had a pure soul.

When he happened to enter his brother's cell and found it untidy, he would say: *Truly blessed is this brother! He has set aside worldly cares and is so devoted to heavenly matters that he has no time to tidy his cell!*

If he saw cleanliness and



order in his brother's cell, he would say: *Indeed, just as this brother's soul is pure, so is his cell.*

## Notebook Entries

There lived a man who incessantly complained about his misfortunes. He could list them day and night, remem-

bering every unpleasant occurrence.

I know, he thought, that when I stand before the Lord, He will ask me: *"Tell me about your suffering so that I can assign you heavenly joys in proportion to your suffering"*.

Therefore, he wrote down all his troubles, both major and minor, in a separate notebook, so as not to inadvertently forget anything while reporting to God and avoid losing heavenly joy.

When the man died and appeared before the Lord, God said to him: *Tell Me*



dered his joys, focusing solely on his misfortunes.

## The Cup of Self-Will

People became unruly and indulgent. Each one started living according to their own understanding. A rumor began to circulate that the end of the world was near:

*about the joys you experienced in life. I cannot determine the measure of heavenly joy you deserve without this information.*

The man could not respond, for he never con-

God will soon unleash His wrath upon the earth with a great flood.

*No, the sun will fall to the earth — God will pour out His wrath with a fiery tempest.*

*No, hordes of locusts will devour all the crops — famine will sweep the land.*

They decided to consult the oldest elder, who had witnessed much during his long life. The elder sadly shook his head and answered:

*Each person pours the cup of God's wrath upon their own head, and God merely doesn't obstruct our self-will.*

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

## TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

## WHY DOES A LOVING GOD ALLOW SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?

## I. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS THAT THE CHRISTIAN WORLD FACES TODAY

The issue of pain and suffering has been named as one of the most effective weapons of atheism against the Christian faith. Science and history support the fact of God's existence. Their testimonies are so strong that they align perfectly with the biblical verse: The fool says in his heart, *There is no God* (Psalm 14:1, NIV).

However, most atheists build their faith in the absence of God not on scientific facts, but on arguments similar to today's question of our discussion: *Why does a loving God allow evil and suffering in the world?* In other words, if God exists and if He is loving, how does He permit things like wars, diseases, death (especially if they involve innocent people)? Either He is not a loving God and is indifferent to human suffering, or He is not an Almighty God and therefore is either powerless or incapable of intervening. In both cases, the biblical God, who should be all-powerful and infinitely loving, becomes an anachronism — these are the conclusions of some unbelievers.

Nevertheless, we must pay attention to the fact that, as much evil and lawlessness as there may be in the world, goodness still prevails. And this is confirmed by two facts: 1) human behavior: however difficult life may be, we still cling to hope for the better; 2) each of us instinctively knows that good is greater and more powerful than evil, which is why we believe in the triumph of good and beautiful beginnings. We must also remember that, although we were created in the image and likeness of God, our mind is not equal to His mind — our mind is much more limited than God's, so we often cannot understand the thoughts and motives by which He is guided.

**Genesis 18:25** — *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

**Romans 9:20** — *But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"*

The standard of good and evil was not established by us but by the Creator. We must accept the fact (whether we understand it or not) that whatever God does, it is all for the good. By embracing this belief, we can understand how it's possible to derive spiritual benefit in life not only from blessings but also from suffering. Try not to let go of this truth as we delve deeper into our topic.

## II. IT IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND THE FOLLOWING

## 1. Innocent suffering doesn't truly exist

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (**Romans 3:23, NIV**), no one can escape God's wrath based on their own innocence before God. Speaking of innocent infants or the so-called *fools for Christ*, who due to their age or mental deficiency cannot distinguish between good and evil, it must be noted that Scripture unequivocally asserts that even they are sinners by nature and therefore sin when presented with the opportunity.

## 2. The world is under a curse due to disobedience to God's Word (Genesis 3:17)

The web of this curse — the bondage to decay (**Romans 8:21**) — causes all creation to groan and suffer until today (**Romans 8:22**). This curse extends to all people worldwide: men, women, and their children. God did not create the world as it is today. This is as true as the promise that one day everything will be rectified and restored. In that day, God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (**Revelation 21:4, NIV**).

## 3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Righteous and Holy One in the history of mankind — suffered more than anyone else on Earth

He suffered for us!

**1 Corinthians 15:3** — *Christ died for our sins.*

He suffered knowing that His suffering would free the world from the curse and sin. Today, He can free those who accept Him as their personal Lord and Savior from sin and the bondage of sin. This is a great deliverance, not only from the inherited sin of ancestors but also from the chains of one's own sin. Additionally (this is theory), there is hope for the salvation of those who died before reaching the age where they could consciously choose between good and evil (and accept Jesus as Lord).

## 4. By believing in God's goodness and Christ's deliverance from the curse of sin, we can understand how our present sufferings can be turned to the glory of God and our benefit

A. Sufferings experienced by the unsaved are often used by the Holy Spirit to make people think about God and the necessity of salvation, leading them to turn to Christ in faith and repentance.

B. Sufferings experienced by Christians contribute to strengthening their relationship with God and shaping their character to be more like Christ.

**Romans 8:29** — *For those God foreknew he also prede-*



*stined to be conformed to the image of his Son...*

**2 Corinthians 3:18** — *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Thus, even when God allows suffering and disease into our lives, He remains loving and merciful. We, His beloved children, need to remember the words from **Romans 8:28 (NIV)**: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

## III. SO WHY DOES GOD STILL ALLOW EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?

## 1. To warn us about the following:

## A. Something is wrong with the world we live in:

1) the world (earth and people) is cursed by God due to Adam's disobedience (**Genesis 3**),

2) every subsequent generation inherits sin (**Romans 1:18-32, 5:12, 15, 18**).

## B. Something is wrong with God's creation:

1) people inflict pain and suffering on us:

☉ Cain killed Abel (**Genesis 4:7-8**),

☉ Lamech boasted of his violence (**Genesis 4:23-24**),

☉ Sarah mistreated Hagar (**Genesis 16:1-6**),

☉ Laban exploited his nephew Jacob (**Genesis 29:15-30**),

☉ Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (**Genesis 37:12-36**),

☉ King Herod killed children under two years old (**Matthew 2:16-18**),

☉ Saul persecuted and killed early Christians (**Acts 7:54** — **8:3**),

☉ apostle Paul suffered from people (**2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 6:1-10**),

2) Satan inflicts pain and suffering on us:

☉ Job's suffering (**Job 1, 2**),

☉ apostle Paul's thorn in the flesh (**2 Corinthians 12:17**),

☉ the mute and demon-possessed (**Matthew 12:22**),

☉ the paralyzed man (**Matthew 17:14-18**).

## C. Something is wrong with me:

1) God uses suffering as discipline (**Hebrews 12:5, 6, 9, 10**),

2) suffering can be God's judgment and punishment:

☉ Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 18, 19**),

☉ Egyptian plagues (**Exodus 7:12**),

3) nevertheless, God is patient: **2 Peter 3:9** — *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

## 2. To correct us and lead us on the right path

A. Suffering shows us how weak and vulnerable we are and how much we need God.

**2 Corinthians 1:8-9** — *We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** — *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I*

*delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

B. Suffering prompts us to reevaluate our scale of life values. In suffering, we have a choice: either to be disillusioned with life or to find hope by trusting God and His divine plan of redemption (**Romans 5:5; Romans 8:18, 28; Hebrews 11**). Suffering directs us toward God!

3. To discipline (perfect) us  
**Romans 5:3-4** — *Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope...*

**James 1:2-4** — *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

## 4. To unite us

A. Pain and suffering make us sensitive to the pain of others (**1 Corinthians 12:26-27** — analogy with the body, **Ephesians 4:16**).

B. Through God's help in our suffering, we are able to comfort others in their sicknesses and sufferings.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4** — *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God!*

**Galatians 6:2** — *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

**Romans 12:15** — *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

In conclusion, let's turn to the words of the apostle James:

**James 1:2-4** — *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

**James 1:13-15** — *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me". For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Bible Discussion Club,  
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<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/039.htm>



When Christians deny biblical creation, we often point them to the words of Jesus and the New Testament authors which clearly affirm belief in biblical creation. Because Christians are, by definition, people who believe what Jesus believed, this should be the end of the discussion, right?

Not quite. While they may concede that Jesus and Paul referred to Genesis, they often come back arguing that they did not do so in *certain contexts*; such as evangelism, or that certain details aren't mentioned. And this is somehow taken as an argument against taking a historical view of Genesis as important for the Gospel and the Christian worldview.

Therefore, does the New Testament *not* support the biblical viewpoint of the creation?

#### AN INCOMPLETE RECORD?

Of course there are details in the first 11 chapters of Genesis that aren't referenced in the New Testament. If you only stuck to the first-century revelation of God's Word, you wouldn't know that there were animals on Noah's Ark or that God confused the world's language at Babel. The NT authors were entirely silent about most of the names and all of the numbers in the genealogies. So does that mean that these *omitted* details are unimportant for the Christian's faith?

To give an answer to this, first we have to look at what sort of documents the New Testament is made up of, and whether we would *expect* to find these sorts of details. And then we have to look at how the New Testament uses the details of Genesis it *does* specifically cite.

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A GROUP OF OCCASIONAL WRITINGS

The New Testament documents are *occasional* — meaning, they were written for a specific audience and a specific purpose. The Gospels are each in their own way arguing that Jesus is the Messiah. *The Acts of the Apostles* is recording the spread of the Gospel after Jesus' ascension, and the epistles of Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude are addressed to specific people or congregations answering specific problems. All of great benefit to all readers throughout time, of course.

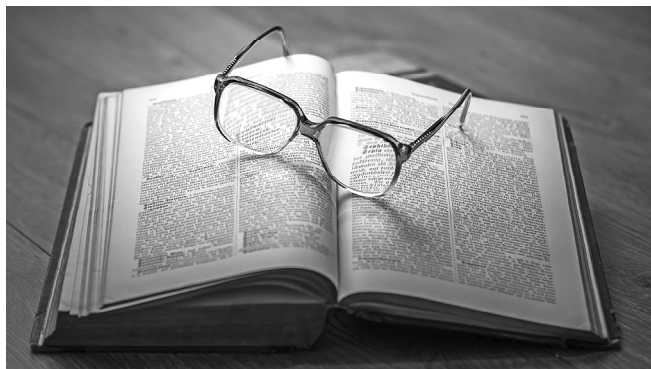
Considering the nature of these writings, we wouldn't expect to find a lot of long treatises about Genesis — particularly if the audience was already presumed to have that as part of their background (but more on that below). What we *would* expect to find (and do find) are references to events in Genesis which establish the precedents the authors need for the particular arguments they're trying to make. For instance, when Paul wants to tell the Roman Church how salvation *works* (Romans 5:12–21), he essentially points back to Adam and says: *You know how sin spread to everyone when Adam sinned? Well, it's sort of like that, but a lot better (because Adam's sin spreading to everyone was bad, but Christ's righteousness spreading to us is good!)* When Jesus wanted to tell His disciples what would happen before His return (Matthew 24:36), He points back to the global Flood and basically says, *You know how people*

## WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT DOESN'T SAY

*were going about everyday life with no clue that anything was coming, until the moment that they were swept away? That's what it will be like!*

#### GENESIS AND JEWS

When Jesus is talking to the Jews of His day, there's obviously no need for Him to tell them all about Adam, the Fall, and the rest of the history leading up to Abraham, because they had a common foundation of belief that Genesis is an accurate historical record. So, no wonder we don't see specific references to Genesis. That He is able to cite Genesis in debates with His detractors (Matthew 19:3) as absolutely authoritative without having to demonstrate that it's authoritative shows not only that He took it as authoritative, but that they did, too.



In a similar way, when the apostles converted Jews, they would already have this pre-existing belief in Genesis and the rest of the Scriptures. So in many ways, creation was a *non-issue* in this environment, because everyone accepted it. To somehow claim that an absence of details is support for now saying Genesis doesn't mean what it says, is to really clutch at straws.

#### GENESIS AND GREEKS

When the Gospel began to spread to Gentiles, however, this wasn't the case — they may have been raised to believe in the Greek pantheon, or various schools of pagan philosophy. This doesn't stop Paul from going back to Genesis for his foundation when he gives his speech at the Areopagus (or Mars Hill): *People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship — and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out*

*their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands... (Acts 17:22–26).*

This is a fascinating use of Genesis by Paul, because he's simultaneously establishing a common ground via the *unknown god* inscription and correcting their errors about the nature of God (He does not live in their temples, He does not need their offerings) while proclaiming the truth about Him.

#### GENESIS AND CHRISTIANS

Of course, the goal of evangelism was to make Christians out of both Jews and Greeks. And all the letters in the New Testament were written to Christians, both individuals and congregations. Once a person was converted, the apostles weren't content to leave them there, but they proceeded to teach the convert an entirely new worldview and way of thinking. They would have been taught to believe in the entirety of God's Word including the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:16). And we see evidence of this in the New Testament letters.

For instance, the Corinthian church was largely Gentile — most of the church probably had very little exposure if any to Genesis before conversion. Yet in his letters to the Corinthians, Paul cites Genesis no fewer than 8 times! This indicates that at least a basic knowledge of the Old Testament history was part of the instruction of the new believer — otherwise Paul would have to go into detailed explanations about what all this means. This was especially important in establishing Christian doctrines, many of which were founded on this historicity of Genesis.

#### THE GENESIS FOUNDATION OF THE GOSPEL

The New Testament authors considered the Old Testament to be inspired by God himself, and they frequently cite it, with the obvious expectation that their audience will know what they're talking about. This means that especially Gentiles would have needed instruction in what they were supposed to believe in order to even begin to find Paul's letters, for instance, intelligible. Of course, if we abandon Genesis then increasingly we also have to doubt the authority of the New Testament.

So many of the references to Genesis are able to be *passing* references or references without much context given beyond what's necessary for the argument it's actually evidence that the early church taught believers about Genesis, and to take it as authoritative. Paul doesn't argue with the Corinthians about whether they should believe Genesis — he *assumes* that they do. For him, that's just part of being a Christian. So in a sense, what the New Testament *doesn't* say is powerful affirmation of the importance of Genesis in the earliest church. As we've said before, if believing Genesis was good enough for Jesus and the Apostles then it should be good enough for us.

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## The ninety-eight-year-old preacher jumped with a parachute to tell people about Jesus in his life

At ninety-eight, North Carolina preacher Roy Jernigan continues to preach the gospel. His eyes can hardly see, he has lost his wife, left the pastoral ministry due to health problems, but continues to preach and uses every opportunity to do so.

Roy Jernigan devoted fifty-two years of his life to pastoral and missionary service on Indian reservations.

Since retiring as pastor in Texas just over a year ago, Jernigan continues to preach to hundreds of people weekly through his social media ministry, *Preacher Roy Ministries*. And he remains energetic to remain available to serve the Lord, taking care of his body physically and spiritually.

In January of this year, he decided to jump with a parachute, which attracted the attention of reporters, to whom he was happy to talk about his life and about the Lord.

*The Lord saved me when I was twenty-eight years old, Jernigan said in an interview. I gave my life to the Lord. And since then, I've been trying to eat right. I've been training, I've kept my body in good condition, and I'm living right.*

If it weren't for age-related macular degeneration (an eye disease that impairs central vision), Roy could still lead a church in Texas.

*My eyesight and my hearing are two of my biggest problems. I've been giving*

*injections in every eye for the last eleven years, he said. That's one of the reasons I left the mission. As a pastor in Texas, I couldn't see people anymore. I could see, but I couldn't identify them.*

*When I went to the funeral, I couldn't read the Bible. Now I quote the passages of Scripture that I have memorized over the years.*

*I don't have a doctor, I don't take any medication, and I do body exercises or push-ups every day. And I usually walk about a mile or two. I've been doing this for years, and it keeps my physical body in good shape, Jernigan said when asked how he manages to stay so healthy in his old age. All my life, people have been saying: "Why don't you retire?" Honestly, my whole life is a ministry.*

In January, Jernigan made national headlines after deciding, with the support of his family, to skydive just two years before his centenary.

In an interview with reporters, he explained that he did this to tell more people about God, and he has already had the opportunity to do this in several media interviews.

*Sometime in September-October 2022, I started praying about it. And I said, "Lord, if you can make glory out of it, I will do it. But it's not for*

*me. I'm not a thrill seeker. I have nothing to prove. I was up the mountain, at the bottom of the mountain, passing through the valleys. I'm not trying to prove anything. But, if I can give you glory for it and you will give us good weather conditions on January 24, I'll jump if you don't say no to me", Jernigan said. If it's*



*going to be a bad day, I'll know it's not. So I gave it to the Lord and prayed about it every day.*

On the day of the jump, January 24, the sun was shining brightly over North Carolina. Jernigan made the jump with the *Skydive Coastal Carolinas* and survived, as he did during World War II and later the Korean and Vietnam Wars, as a Marine.

Jernigan also said that during his fifty-two years of ministry, he faced many difficulties, but the most difficult

of them was the loss of his wife Lizzie in January 2011.

She had a heart attack, and despite the fact that doctors managed to resuscitate her, her brain was damaged, and a slow process of brain degeneration began, which took six years.

*When she was going through great difficulties, it was very hard, but prayer and trust in the Lord helped me get through it, he said of his wife's passing. I really didn't see any goal.*

*But then I realized that I had a lot of people who loved me, prayed for me, and wanted me to keep going. So I picked up the pieces and, by the grace and grace of God, continued on my way. There is no doubt about it. When my wife died, a part of me died.*

Speaking to Christian journalists, Jernigan also criticized preachers who treat their ministry like a business.

*I think this is the wrong approach. Don't commercialize God. It is a grave mistake that people — and there are many of them today — are trying to commercialize the ministry instead of teaching what the Bible says.*

An old preacher called the ministry of such shepherds *cotton candy preaching* and meaningless nonsense that does not allow the world to change.

*My heart sympathizes with so many people, it really does, he said. There are many people who are hungry and thirsty for the Word of God, but they have no one to share it.*

*The Christian Post.*

## Is it necessary to have a funeral service for the dead?

First, let's figure out what does the funeral service of the dead means. A funeral service is an appeal to God to forgive the sins of the deceased. Through this, the dead sinner is expected to appear righteous before God. Of course, the funeral service implies that God will listen to this request and fulfill it. Therefore, let's see if the priest's request for forgiveness of the sins of the deceased is in accordance with the will of God, expressed in the Holy Scriptures.

The Lord in His Word calls everyone to repentance: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)*. Without repentance we cannot be saved, but we will perish: *I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3)*; *Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19)*. Notice that nowhere in the Bible does it say that anyone else can ask for forgiveness instead of me and confess for me. And even the high priest in the Old Testament could intercede only for those who had cleansed themselves and humbled themselves before God: *For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people... (Leviticus 23:29)*. Nor is there anywhere in the Bible an example of praying for the forgiveness of the dead. Yes, we find two cases in Scripture where someone interceded with God for the sins of others, but the result was not at all what we expect from the funeral of the dead: these people were not saved anyway, except that they themselves repented. In the first case, Jesus prayed for His tormentors: *And Jesus said, "Father! forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34)*. In the second case, Stephen prayed for those who stoned him: *Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin". And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:60)*. So the funeral service does not have any meaning for a person when he has already died. The funeral service is only important for the living, so that they think about their lives, which can be interrupted at any moment. Are you ready to face death and stand before the Lord as you are today? The Lord says to each one personally: *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2)*, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)*. *Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31)*. We should not hope that someone will somehow reconcile us to God after we die. It's just not possible. Therefore, we must be reconciled to God today while we live, so that we do not *mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced (2 Corinthians 12:21)*.

Vasyi YUNAK, [www.biblestudy.ru](http://www.biblestudy.ru)

## Do the souls of the dead turn into angels in heaven?

Scripture not only testifies to the existence of both good and evil angels, but also indisputably proves that they are not disembodied spirits of dead people. Scripture says that angels are *...ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14)*.

Angels existed before the creation of man. The Bible describes that when the foundation of the earth was laid, *all the sons of God cried out for joy (Job 38:7)*. **Genesis 3** says that after the fall of the people, angels were sent to guard the tree of life, at that time not a single person died. Angels are by nature more powerful than men, for it is said of man: *For You have made him a little lower than the angels... (Psalm 8:5)*

From the Scriptures we learn about the number, power, and glory of celestial beings. The prophet Daniel saw thousands, tens of thousands of heavenly messengers. Apostle Paul speaks of the *darkness of angels* (see **Daniel 7:10**; **Hebrews 12:22**). *His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men (Matthew 28:3-4)*. When Sennacherib, a haughty Assyrian, mocked and blasphemed God, threatening Israel with destruction, an angel of the Lord went and smote one hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army in the camp of Assyria (**1 Samuel 19:35**).

Angels bring mercy and compassion to God's children. Thus, they came to the prophet Elijah at a time when he, exhausted, was dying of hunger in the wilderness; Elisha's chariots of fire and horsemen were sent to the city, where he was surrounded by enemies; Daniel was helped when he was thrown to be torn to pieces by lions; angels appeared to the apostle Peter, who was waiting for death in the prison of Herod, and to the prisoners in Philippi; apostle Paul and his companions were helped to survive the storm. Thus, the holy angels have served God's people at all times.

Angels protect Believers. These heavenly guards protect the righteous from the wiles of the evil one. The Lord protects His people in this way: *The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them (Psalm 34:7)*. The Savior cares for those who believe in Him: *Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 18:10)*. Angels appointed to minister to God's children always have access to Heavenly Father.

The answer is based on the book by Ellen WHITE *The Great Controversy*, <https://sokrsokr.net>

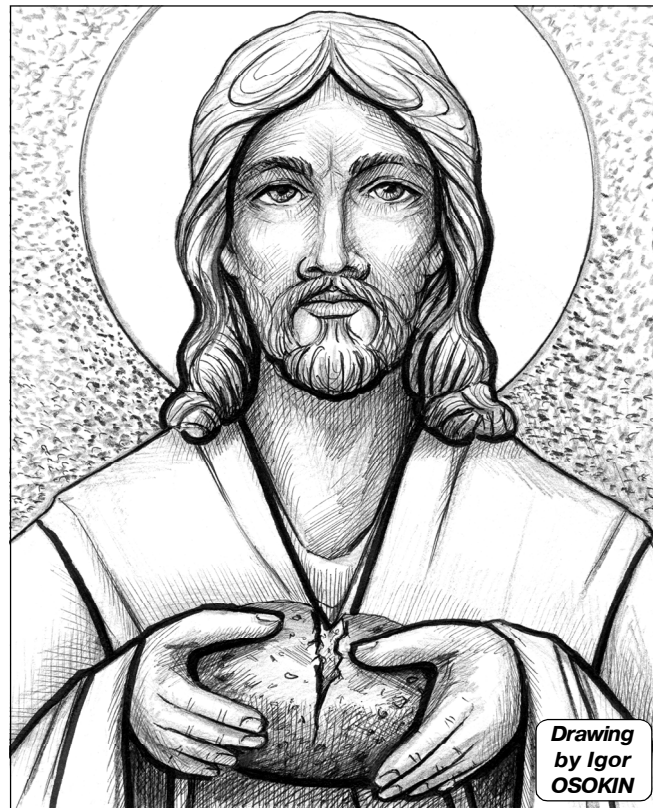
## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



### Fasting and diet: what's the difference?

In the Book of Isaiah, God, when rebuking people, says that their understanding of fasting is different from what God wants. The Lord rebukes the people: *In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure... (Isaiah 58:3)*. God says that people torment their souls so that that their will may be done, but they do not think of the will of God: *Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high (Isaiah 58:4)*.

Fasting today is different from what it was in the time of the prophet Isaiah. But the Lord does not pay attention to the external manifestations of fasting, but to the goals that a person pursues when he fasts. God says that these goals are not always right. Often people ask what you can eat during fasting and what you can't. But the really important question is: why is fasting observed?



There are many examples in the Bible of people doing true fasting to overcome life's difficulties. In this case, true fasting helps a person to focus on spiritual matters and find God, His will, the right path.

In the Old and New Testaments, fasting is the complete rejection of all food for a relatively short period (from one to seven days or even part of a day). Only Jesus endured the longest fast, forty days. Physical fasting must be combined with spiritual fasting. This means sincerely repenting, removing from life all that is sinful and vain, devoting especially much time to prayer and reading the Word of God. For example, in **Matthew 17:21**, Jesus suggested a combination of fasting and prayer.

Keeping a formal fast as a tribute to following tradition will not be beneficial, but even one day spent in true fasting can enrich you spiritually. The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit that humbles our minds, our hearts, and our wills before God. Fasting is pleasing to God. its a relationship based on love for one's neighbor, and not an external form.

The Lord wants man to have a purpose in his life, so that this goal is connected with God and the will of God and the will of man are one. The Lord wants to be reunited with man, wants to endow him with faith, with the help of which he will be able to discern in this visible world the invisible God, His power, His love, so that man becomes the image of God.

*Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard (Isaiah 58:6-8)*.

Stanislav LAPSHIN, <https://sokrsokr.net>

### How can I honor my father and mother?

Before children who have gained faith, life often raises the question: how to fulfill the commandment of reverence, if the parents are drunkards or drug addicts, if they have degraded morally and physically? What behavior would be correct in this situation? God's commandments are always binding. If we admit the possibility of disrespecting parents who do not fulfill their parental duty, it turns out that it is possible to justify

theft, murder, adultery, lies and slander against those who are guilty of something. How, then, will God's people differ from the wicked? Children from disadvantaged families have reason to despise their parents, but they, as believers, have much more reason to love them! In this case, we should remember God's attitude towards us. *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6)*. *In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 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) (Ephesians 2:2-5)*. Having shown such love for us, God tells us: *Love your enemies, and even more so the parents who gave us life. After all, having received life from them, we have the opportunity to know the love of God, who says: Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you (Isaiah 49:15)*. If we have accepted God's grace and appreciated what God has done for us, then we will love our parents as Christ did, who suffered for every future believer when he was still an abomination in the eyes of God because of his sins and vices. Love your parents, trying to free the beautiful image of God languishing in the bonds of sin. Another question arises: how to show respect for parents if their requirements are not in accordance with God's? Apostle Paul sheds light on this question: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Ephesians 6:1)*. Godly parents will never prevent their children from doing what God requires of them. But when parents stand in the way of their children to God and interfere with them, the Savior says, *And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:37)*. And Peter sums it up on this point: *We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)*. It is important to protect yourself from the influence of false values of parents. But at the same time, honoring the image of God in them, it is necessary to take care of them and promote their well-being. Nothing frees us from the obligation to show respect and care for the people who gave birth and raised us. If that's what we do, then we do not break the commandments, for we honor our Heavenly Father above our earthly parents, which is in full harmony with the Word of God. Believing children become witnesses of the truth for their parents. Loving parents, you can find forms of honoring them without compromising on matters of faith. There would be a desire, but the Lord will guide you and show you how to do it.

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## Where did people come from on other continents and how did animals from other continents reach Noah's ark, To be saved in the flood?

Indeed, the Bible tells us that all mankind descended from a married couple created by God: Adam and Eve. When European navigators discovered new lands, they already found aborigines there. Involuntarily, questions arise: *How did people get here, if the habitat of the first people according to the Bible is Asia? How in ancient times did people settle on different continents, Overcoming the water obstacles of the oceans? And how could such specific animals as kangaroos and other marsupials, inhabiting only the Australian continent, get to Noah's Ark?*

Many scientists today support the theory put forward in 1910 by the Austrian geophysicist A. Wegener, that *all the current continents constituted one gigantic block of land*. Interestingly, this theory is completely consistent with the Bible. In the beginning, the land was a single continent surrounded by water: *Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so (Genesis 1:9)*.

The Holy Scriptures then speak of the division of the earth: *...the name of one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided... (Genesis 10:25)*. The same event is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible: *To Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided... (1 Chronicles 1:19)*.

The Bible also gives us some idea of the time when this division of the earth into continents took place. Before the flood, there was a single continent on earth, so representatives of all kinds of animals could freely get into Noah's ark. Noah's warning about the impending flood could also be heard by all the people who inhabited the earth. Further, the construction of the Tower of Babel, the separation of peoples, the emergence of different language groups, their dispersal took place in the second or third generation after the flood (**Genesis 10:1-20**). And the division of the earth occurred in the fourth generation, in the time of Peleg, a descendant of Shem, born in the year 101 after the flood (**Genesis 11:16**).

Today it is difficult to say for what reasons a cataclysm occurred in the history of our planet, which led to the split of a single continent and the drift of the resulting continents. It can be assumed, however, that for a long time after that there were bridges between continents (ridges covered with water today), for example, in the region of Alaska, in the north between Asia and America, in the region of Oceania, between Asia and Australia, along which both animals and people could migrate (move).

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## TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

## THEY BOUGHT ME A DRESS THAT I WOULD WEAR IN MY COFFIN

It is written that *you will receive* power and be witnesses of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). I am thankful to the Lord that I have received this power and that I am a witness to God's love and mercy.

I was born into a cultured, intelligent family. In our house there were no quarrels, scandals, and I did not drink alcohol. We were properly taught and educated. But in our family, they didn't say anything about God, neither good nor bad. My parents were busy with work and career, but they didn't work with me at all. All this could not but affect my life — at the age of sixteen I found myself in the dock. While in the colony, I once thought: *What is the meaning of life? Perhaps there is no point, people only use these words as a cover?* At the time, I didn't realize that God was knocking on my heart.

In the colony, I tried drugs. I came out of there as a drug addict with a strong addiction. Upon returning home, I entered the institute and began to work in the Philharmonic with my parents. Outwardly, I was successful, but no one guessed that I had a different life — drugs and brothels. Soon they found out about my addiction and gradually everyone abandoned me, except for my mother. I had to leave the institute and my job.

My mother took me to doctors, psychics, we paid a lot of money for courses of treatment, but nothing changed. I was treated in a psychiatric clinic, but this did not give any result. They cleaned my blood, but internally I did not change.

We tried a lot of things, but all in vain. One day, a woman came to our house and said that we were in trouble because we didn't know God. I thought then that, in fact, we had not yet been to the church. We then visited an Orthodox church. The minister of the church baptized me, and at the same time my mother. We hoped that these rituals would somehow help me get rid of drug addiction. Nothing helped. Immediately, when I came home, I injected. Then I was angry with God, even though I didn't really know Him. The last thread of my hope was broken. I realized that there was no way out for me.

Soon another simple woman came to our house, in whose heart the Holy Spirit dwelt. She told us about God's love, but I didn't listen to her because I was embittered. But my mother listened to her carefully and began to pray for me.

My condition worsened, I ended up in the hospital more and more often. I started to have gas gangrene in my leg. I was lying waiting for an operation to amputate my leg. At that time, I was visited by this Christian woman. She persuaded me to personally turn to God in prayer. I don't remember what I prayed for, but I remember well that I prayed. In the morning, the doctor came and said that they would not perform an operation on me for the time being due

to the lack of necessary medicines.

When this believing woman came to me again and saw that I had two legs, she could not contain her joy. I didn't understand what she was happy about, so I rudely threw her out the door. Medicines did not appear even after ten days, but my leg came to life: the corpse spots disappeared. I left the hospital on



two legs, but I didn't realize that God had done it. It wasn't until years later that I learned that this woman and her family were praying and fasting for God to show me mercy. I am still deeply grateful to this wonderful woman.

Then they put me back in the hospital and they wanted to amputate my other leg. My mom was praying, and the doctor somehow didn't. Instead of amputation, he put artificial veins on me. It was an expensive operation, and I believe that the Lord Himself controlled the hands of the doctor. After the operation, he said that I would not be able to walk for the next one and a half to two years. When, two months later, I entered his office with my feet, he was very surprised and said that he did not understand what was happening to me. I didn't understand it either.

I continued to get sick: for several days I could not get out of bed, I began to have thrombophlebitis in both hands, my hearing and vision disappeared. When I literally crawled out into the street, I looked more like a monster than a person. Passers-by spat after me, everyone hated me, and I responded with mutual hatred. The doctor told me that all my insides were falling apart. I didn't have a single normal organ. A large list of my diagnoses completed the most terrible — HIV infection. I knew it was the end — the days of my life were numbered. My mother and I came home from the hospital and began to prepare for my funeral. We bought a dress in which I

was supposed to be put in a coffin.

The most terrible period of my life began, during which there was no hope, no dreams, no plans for the future. Falling asleep, I thought that I would not wake up in the morning. Spring was fragrant outside the window, and I understood that this was the last spring in my life. But the believers did not stop praying for me.

One day, my mother began to tell me animatedly about the rehabilitation center in Bucha. I didn't listen to her because I didn't believe that anything or someone could help me. But suddenly I heard that the center offers help to people for free. I was interested, because we always paid for everything, and agreed to go there. Under the influence of drugs and alcohol, I first came to the Sunday service of the church in Bucha.

As soon as I crossed the threshold of the house of prayer, I suddenly felt something incomprehensible inside me. I had the feeling that someone was looking at me. I looked around: no one was paying attention to me. Here I heard the first sermon of my life. For me, it was incomprehensible, but interesting. Then all those present began to pray. And something broke in me. I saw that they were really happy, they had something that I had never had. I immediately pulled a pack of cigarettes out of my pocket and gave it to my mother to throw away, because I decided that I would never smoke again. I also told her to pour out the drug because I wouldn't need it anymore. I looked at the people around me — and I wanted to stay with them and be just like them. And I didn't return home then, but stayed in a rehabilitation center.



At the end of the third day, I was convinced that people there live as they say. I was used to living in a world of deception and evil, but here everything was real, truthful. And I bowed my knees before the great God, repented and wept,

and gradually the pain left my soul, and freedom came in its place. A day later, I experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. God healed my soul and body. I had new thoughts and desires. Two weeks later, I told the Lord that I was dedicating my life to Him.

For more than a decade, I have been serving God and by His great mercy I have been faithful to Him. I have never regretted following the Lord. Three years later, a ministering brother proposed to me, and we were allowed to get married. I was diagnosed with *infertility*. I thought I would never have children, and I accepted it, but the Lord decreed otherwise and gave us four beautiful sons.

I prayed for prison ministry, and the brothers began to take me to prisoner services.

After a while, we adopted two children (a boy and a girl) born in prison. Then a Sunday school opened in our house and we began to minister to children from disadvantaged families. The children were different: sick, exhausted. We took care of them, and they stayed with us. Today we are raising eleven children, seven of them are adopted. The Lord heals them according to His mercy, they, together with our children, take part in the work in the field of God. And the most important thing is that today I have hope, I have a future that God Himself guarantees. For what the Lord promises will surely come true. This is what I live for and comfort.

I want to encourage mothers and fathers who pray for their children who have not yet been saved. If the Lord came into my crippled life, healed and saved me, then this will definitely be fulfilled

in your families, just keep praying. I want to encourage those people who work and evangelize: a simple sister came to me and told me about the love of God — and this influenced me. Don't think that if you don't own something special, you won't succeed! You have God, the Holy Spirit. And this is the greatest value we have. Go, work for the Lord, and you will experience something extraordinary, you will see the people you served and preached, for whom you prayed. You will see them kneeling in prayer beside you. There is no greater joy than this! I want to encourage those who work with difficult children from brothels: do your work to the end, because your reward from the Lord is great. Those who have not yet tried to work — try, and you will see the extraordinary miracles of God. May the Lord bless us all to be faithful to Him and reach the blessed end!

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What if life breaks down?

It seems to me that in the life of every person there was such a moment when time froze. For example, when an accident occurs, out of the corner of your eye you notice a car and, like in a movie, events slowly unfold, you are like an observer, you just notice: here are the hands turning the steering wheel, here is the leg pressing on the brake, here are the eyes of that driver, full of horror, some other moments — and bam... glass is flying, metal is creaking...

Or someone accidentally pushes a cup, and it, like in a slow-motion movie, flies down and bam... Breaks...

And imagine how on the playground someone throws a bottle on the asphalt — bam — and fragments all over the playground... There are not even words... Especially when a child, having cut

a toe, asks: *Who did it? Who put the glass in the sand?*

But it's not just cups and bottles that beat in life. And accidents don't just happen to cars. Sometimes life itself is broken. And then the same question arises: who? Who made it so that life is solid fragments? No matter how you hold them, sooner or later you will get hurt.

*In love you find a fragment of hatred that cuts the heart...*

*In friendship you find a fragment of betrayal that cuts the soul...*

*In health, you find a fragment of disability that cuts a career...*

*In society you find a fragment of loneliness...*

*And in life itself you find a fragment of death that cuts off everything, everything...*

## Shards of Life

Life is often shattered. And someone, collecting the fragments



of life, begins to connect and glue them together to make life, but it turns out a bottle and a glass, and another has a syringe and a cigarette, the third has a knife and a pistol... There are also works that are not so

dramatically glued together, but time passes, and they turn into regular fragments.

If in your life you have experienced what it means to have a broken life, if you have learned how painful it is when someone else's fragment digs into your skin (not you, but another was drunk at the wheel), then look at the One Who managed to collect quite a lot of absolutely destroyed destinies, and not one of them later turned into fragments. He said so: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)*.

God says: *Come to me, bring all your fragments, whether it is your fault or not your fault. I'm not going to tell you, "Where do your hands grow from", no! I'll take it and collect everything. The scars will remain, but*

*life will be glued together more tightly than it was before. And it will be better than it was. Because I will give you peace in your heart.*

The sharpest fragments of this life were driven into the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, and a thorn lay on his head, digging into the throbbing temples with thorns. In his side, under the very heart, was stuck a spear of cowardice and doubt. There, on the shameful cross, He gathered all the bam of life to take with Him to the grave.

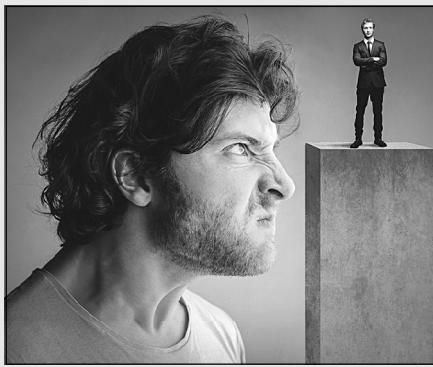
Friend, turn to Him in prayer and give Him what has been broken, and you will see how God gathers up what has been broken. The scars will remain, but you will be a different person, completely different, because your soul will be touched by God.

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## IS ENVY THE DRIVER OF PROGRESS?

It seems to be so, because when you compare yourself with someone, there is a reason to develop. And you don't need to be a specialist to know that competition stimulates economic growth. Don't feel any catch?

What's wrong with comparing yourself to others? It seems to be nothing, if we think correctly. Some call it the mindset of sufficiency, according to which everyone who wants to achieve success will be able to achieve it. Otherwise, the person thinks something like this: *If I win, the other will lose*. The world seems to such people to be a pie, where the number of pieces is limited. If one took a piece, then the other will not get it.



People who think this way perceive the world around them as a threat to their success. This generates constant anxiety and tension. How can you collaborate with others while constantly expecting a dirty trick from them? To get rid of this, you need to rebuild your thinking and believe that everyone who wants to succeed will achieve it. And that means (get ready) that both you and your competitors! Agree, if we assume that this is the case, then that would be great. But that's the way it is! Check. Therefore, it is not only not necessary to crush a competitor and sculpt the image of an enemy out of him. You can rejoice in his successes and strive to achieve your goals. As one successful man said, *don't I destroy my enemies by turning them into friends?* Is it logical? And you no longer have to look at others with envy.

There is one more thought that can inspire you. The tenth commandment of God's Law points to envy as a sin. On the other hand, the Bible instructs us to be content: *It is a great gain to be godly and contented (1 Timothy 6:6)*. A satisfied person is a happy person. I want to deal with him. And the root of this contentment with life is in a trusting relationship with the Almighty. Whatever my problems are, I know I can swim out with His help. And I don't need to use anyone to do that. Everything is honest, everything is according to conscience. Ask God for the ability to rejoice for another person. He will feel it and, perhaps, in due time will even help you.

And here are a few more arguments in the piggy bank against comparing yourself with others:

- **Limitations.** If I say: *I want to like him*, then I limit myself. God has given you imagination and uniqueness. Use it!

- **Dependence.** If you motivate yourself with the race for the championship, it turns out that the secret of your victory is not in you, but in another person or company. Such a comparison makes a person dependent on another.

- **Uncertainty.** Comparing yourself to others is the most thankless task. The opinions and assessments of others are constantly changing, so it is impossible to please them! Those who try to do this doom themselves to hellish torments. I think, to one degree or another, this is familiar to everyone.

- **Suspicious.** Envy warms suspicion of others. Trust is decreasing, and so is the spirit of cooperation.

So, wouldn't it be better to compare yourself... with yourself? Have I changed? Have I gotten better? After all, the biggest battle is with yourself. Having won this victory, you can be happy regardless of the victories or failures of others. Go for it!

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When creationists suggest to the average person that evolution is not scientifically viable, a common response is: *How can all those scientists be wrong?*

This is understandable. Most popular books, magazines, TV programs, movies and even ordinary conversation seem constantly to confirm that the big bang, the natural origin of life from primeval ooze, and the evolution of all living things from some original organism, are simply accepted by the scientists. It is believed that the only people to question these things are religious fanatics or the scientifically illiterate. So, can *all those scientists* be wrong? History certainly says they can.

Note that, without confirming data from experiments, or attempts at falsifying a scientific theory by antagonists' observations and alternative theories, a scientist's ideas can be strongly colored by philosophical bias. This is especially so with *interpretations of evidence* rather than direct observation of phenomena in the present and applies particularly to theories about historical events such as the

## CAN ALL THOSE SCIENTISTS BE WRONG?

concept of evolution. Indeed, as we will see, not only one, but a whole body of scientists can see the world through a paradigm that is wrong at its root. That is because a scientist is like any other person in that one can hold a belief very strongly even in the face of strongly opposing evidence.

### EXAMPLE: ASTRONOMY

Perhaps the best known scientists who went *against the trend* are Galileo and Copernicus. The *majority of scientists*, who were their contemporaries, believed the earth was the centre of the universe, and all the heavenly bodies revolved around it. As with modern scientists and evolution, their belief was based on a philosophical idea, not observation. **And they were wrong.**

Galileo's famous *fight* with the church was not with the Bible, but with church leaders who followed what the scientists of their day held as scientific truth, and thus with the scientific community as a whole. Scientists held this belief even though continuously improving observations and calculations showed that there must be a flaw in the universally-accepted idea of *epicycles* (heavenly bodies moving in circles within circles). It took a long time, and much published observational evidence from the newly-developed telescopes before the scientific community began to accept that they had believed in a faulty system — the earth was not the absolute rotational center of the heavenly bodies.

Further observation through improved telescopes dismantled another universally-held belief of the time: that the heavenly bodies were perfect spheres, and moved in perfect circles. Irregularities were observed on the moon, indicating it was not a perfect sphere. Alarm! The earth's orbit around the sun was an ellipse. More horror! *All those scientists* had been wrong. The very basis of their view of the universe was false.

Today scientists tell us that our universe burst into existence from nothing for no reason with a big bang. Is it not possible that all those scientists could also have a false view of our universe and its origin?

### EXAMPLE: CHEMISTRY

*Phlogiston* was used in the late 17th and early 18th centuries to explain how substances burned or rusted. It was believed (by *most scientists*) to be a substance contained in combustible materials, which came out when the object burned. It took the persistent work of several leading scientists of the day, including Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier, to demonstrate that burning was a chemical reaction, usually with oxygen. Substances that burned usually got heavier because of the added oxygen, rather than lighter from losing phlogiston. The majority were wrong. Later, Lavoisier was executed during the fanatically anti-Christian *reign of terror* in France. One story goes that the sentencing judge said, *The Republic needs neither scientists nor chemists.*

Today most scientists believe that the basic chemicals of life (such as proteins) put themselves together in defiance of experimentally established chemical probabilities. Is it possible these scientists may also be wrong?

Alchemy is the idea that base metals (such as lead) could be turned into gold. This concept persisted for hundreds of years, and, although experiments directed at this goal led to the discovery of many interesting chemical substances, proper experiment proved it impossible (by chemical methods). Much money and time (and whole careers) were wasted on this wrong scientific idea, which blinded so many to other, more useful, possibilities.

Is it possible that scientists searching natural phenomena for the origin and variety of life are also wasting their time and energy on a futile exercise?

### EXAMPLE: MEDICINE

That wrong ideas can persist pervasively for hundreds of years is evident in the theory of *humours*. The basic concept goes all the way back to Aristotle (384–322 BC), but was clarified and popularized by the famous physician, Hippocrates (who originated the code of practice incorporating the *Hippocratic oath* traditionally sworn by beginning doctors).

The concept was that the body has four basic fluids — bile (Greek *chole*), phlegm, black bile (Greek *melanchole*), and blood (Latin *sanguis*). These were supposed to correspond to four traditional temperaments: choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic, and sanguine. Under the theory, these four must be kept in balance for good health.

Mostly the recommended treatment for imbalance involved good diet and exercise, but sometimes laxatives and enemas were administered to help purge the unwanted *humour* from the body. Similarly, if one had a fever, it was put down to an excess of blood, so the *cure* was *bleeding* of the patient

(commonly by leeches), called bloodletting. Obviously, this *cure* was often worse than the disease. Nevertheless, doctors persisted with it through the Middle Ages because no one was prepared to question Galen, the first-century physician, writer and philosopher who publicized the idea in his popular and authoritative writings. In spite of Galen's example and teaching of observation and experiment, and mounting evidence that there was something wrong, it was common medical practice up to the late 19th century.

Again, they were wrong! Their whole view of the cause of disease was wrong, and all because they believed another scientist's theories without question. This is like many scientists today who believe in evolution for no better reason than that other trusted scientists believe it.

### EXAMPLE: BIOLOGY

Where do vermin come from? Do cockroaches, rats, and maggots just *appear* out of rotting vegetable matter and animal waste, or even from rocks? For a long time it was believed that they did, even by famous thinkers such as Aristotle (4th century BC). The idea was called *spontaneous generation* and regarded as a fact into the mid-19th century. It took a creationist scientist, Louis Pasteur (1822–1895), to prove that life comes only from life, a process called *biogenesis*. Those who believed in spontaneous generation were wrong.

Today, in spite of Pasteur's proof, and our continuing observations, many scientists still believe in abiogenesis (that *all* life has come from non-living chemicals). How that could happen is called (by evolutionists) a *mystery*, because it defies chemistry, but they still believe it. Why?

### SCIENCE IS NOT DECIDED BY MAJORITY VOTE

Actually, a major reason most scientists believe in evolution is that most scientists believe in evolution! This is a type of *confirmation bias*: the alleged scientific consensus was reached by counting heads, which themselves reached their conclusion by counting heads. If most of them were asked for actual evidence, they would likely give very weak answers outside their field of expertise.

For example, one of the world's leading experts on fossil birds — and a staunch critic of the dino-to-bird dogma, is Dr Alan Feduccia, Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina. He remains an evolutionist, however, yet when challenged, his prime *proof* was corn changing into corn!

As the famous author Michael Crichton (1942–2008), who had a previous career in medicine and science, said:

*Let's be clear: the work of science has nothing whatever to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics. Science, on the contrary, requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable by reference to the real world. In science consensus is irrelevant. What is relevant is reproducible results. The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus.*

*There is no such thing as consensus science. If it's consensus, it isn't science. If it's science, it isn't consensus. Period.*

Nevertheless, like the believers in epicycles, and phlogiston, and humours, and spontaneous generation, many scientists today believe in evolution. Can so many be wrong? History says *yes*. Mounting evidence in genetics, molecular biology, information theory, cosmology and other areas all say *yes*. These scientists believe in the dominant paradigm, naturalism, in spite of the evidence against it. They don't wish to confront the idea of a Creator, but, as in the past, honest appraisal of the evidence of operational science will prove them wrong; the Creator will be vindicated (**Romans 1:18–22**).

# DID GOD CREATE US WITH A DESIRE TO SIN?

There is no doubt that humans want to sin. Why would a loving God that does not want us to sin create us with that desire? What an evil thing to do! Apparently, He wants us to sin! How is that fair? Why would He expect us to not sin and then tempt us by giving us the desire to do it? That's sick. How could He be a loving God? Several months ago, a young lady approached me and made these accusations against God. Is this a dilemma for the God of the Bible?

For the sake of argument, we will assume for a moment that it is true that God created us with a desire to sin. First, if we grant that He created us with a desire to sin, is it not also true that He simultaneously created us with an ability to choose not to sin? In other words, He did not create us so that we had to sin. He clearly gave us freewill — the freedom to make our own decisions. Every capable human proves on a daily basis that he does, in fact, have the freedom to do or not to do various activities. We are not mindless robots that act solely on instinct. You can choose to read this sentence or not. No matter how intense a particular temptation is, it has been proven to be able to be resisted by man. Now, if God wanted us to sin, and had the power to cause us to sin, why would He create us with the ability to choose not to do so? That would not make sense. Ironically, at the very beginning of time, God directly stated that it is not He Who wants sin to rule over us. Sin has a desire to do so, but He created us with the ability to rule over it (Genesis 4:7).

That said, it simply is not accurate to say that God created Man with an inherent desire to do evil. If anything, since He gave us a conscience and inherent sense of justice or fairness, He created us with a pull or pressure to not do certain things. Every human being on the planet understands that there are some things that are fair, and some things that are not fair, and an unseared conscience pressures us to do the right thing by others.

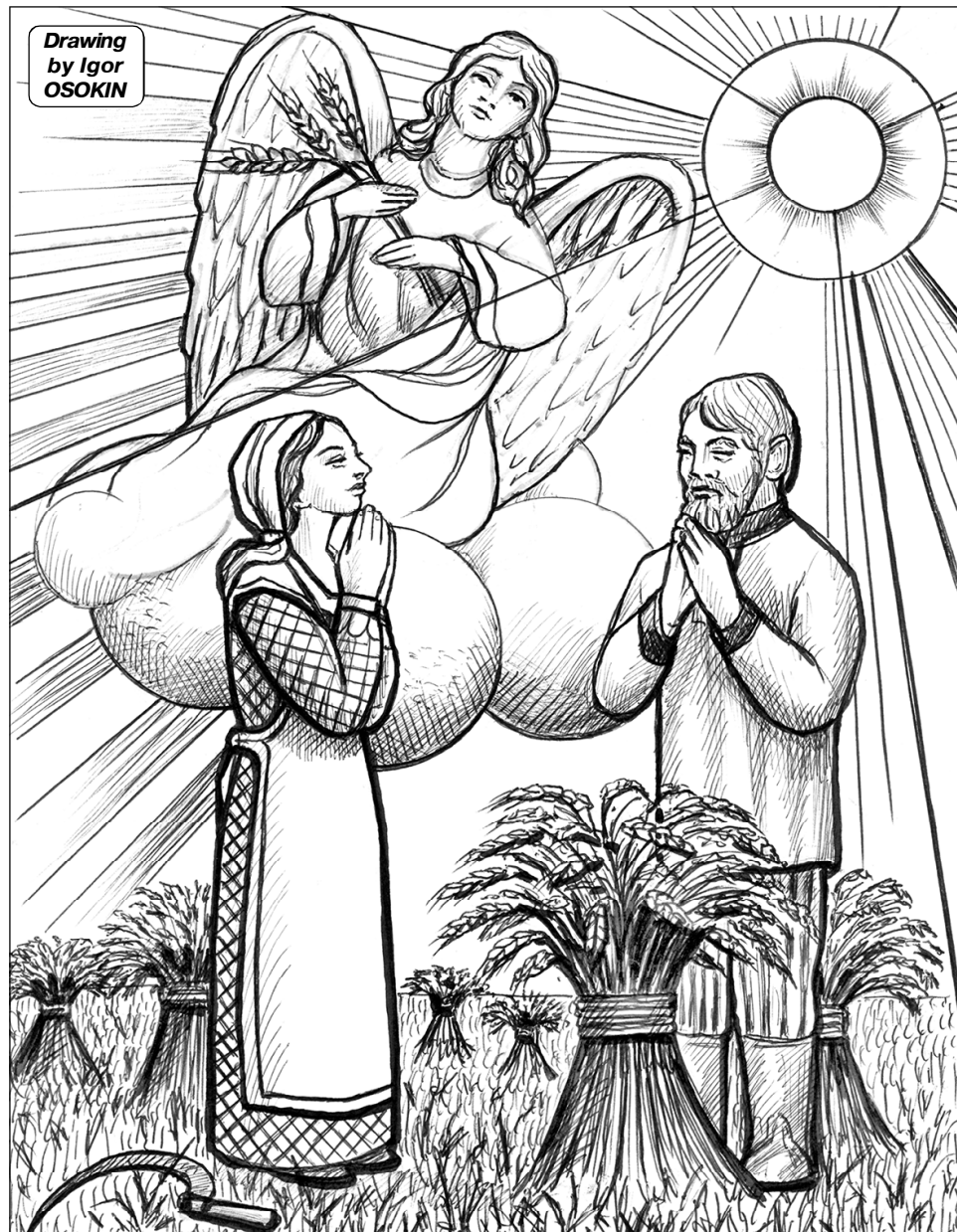
Further, while we sometimes might desire to do evil, is it not also true that at other times we have a desire to do good? One could just as easily and equally ask the question, Did God create us with a desire to do right? Even the most hardened atheist or agnostic (e.g., Bart Ehrman) admits that he wants (i.e., is tempted) to do good and does so (i.e., succumbs to that temptation) through various philanthropic activities. If God created us with a desire to sin, it must also be conceded that He created us with a desire to do good as well.

How can this apparent contradiction be explained? Is it not likely that God did not in fact create us with the desire to sin? We desire both activities at times because we have discovered that they both can make us feel good in different ways. That said, it is fair and consistent to conclude that God created us with that desire — i.e., the desire to feel good (i.e., to be happy, appreciate pleasure, to desire enjoyment and satisfaction), not purely the desire to do evil. For example, we were created to want to eat — to feel good from doing so — but not with the desire to be cannibals. Perhaps it would be better to describe it this way: God created us with the capacity to experience and appreciate feeling good. When we feel good, we naturally want to continue having that feeling. Those things with which we choose to fill the feel good tank up are our decisions as individuals with free will. Those decisions are no doubt influenced by many factors (e.g., experience, pride, our parents and teachers [Proverbs 22:6; 19:27], our

friends [1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20], Satan [2 Corinthians 2:11], etc.), but the bad influences or evil desires are never from God. James 1:13–14 says, Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. We desire to do evil things because of the momentary pleasures or good feelings they can give, not because God wants us to do evil. The wise individual will recognize that not all pleasures

such an environment, God would cease to be a loving God Who grants us freedom. He would be a dictator, forcing everyone to obey Him as mindless automatons.

But why would God give us the capacity to experience feeling good at all? If it makes us do evil, how is that a good thing? There is no doubt that God's choice to allow us pleasure is a blessing to us, in spite of its dangers. Who would honestly argue that a life completely devoid of having pleasurable feelings or feeling good would be a good (i.e., pleasurable)



should be engaged in at will. He will choose to endure temporary affliction if it is necessary to do right, rather than enjoying the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25).

But why would He not create an environment where we have no interaction with others and cannot be deleteriously influenced by them? In such an environment, we would lose the blessings we receive from interacting with others as well (e.g., conversation, companionship, physical affection, kind words, medical attention, technological advancement, gifts, etc.). There is a reason why solitary confinement is used as a serious punishment within the prison system. Isolation and loneliness are unhealthy. It is not good that man should be alone (Genesis 2:18). Interaction with others, and the blessings we can have from those interactions, are gifts from God. We live on a planet with over seven billion others. Since we all live together, our free will inevitably affects those around us, for good or ill. If we could not affect others with our decisions, then we simultaneously would cease to have the free will to affect those people for good or ill. Only through creating an environment where all humans were forced to obey God could the temptation to disobey God be eliminated. But in

one? The very idea is self-contradictory. For the same reason we long to make our children happy and give them joy in life, God created us to be able to experience the same. One would not expect an unloving God, One Who wanted humans to sin, to also create us to be able to experience pleasure and joy. Such a decision, however, would be perfectly in harmony with a loving, gracious God Who cares for us and wishes to bless us with happiness, in spite of the bad decisions we and others around us often make. So notice that the desire to feel good is not inherently evil. In fact, the Creator's decision to instill in us the desire to feel good and to experience pleasure is actually a blessing, not a curse, as long as He gave us, along with the capacity for appreciating pleasure, the ability to distinguish the good kind of pleasure from the bad, either through instruction or creating an environment where we can learn from experience.

Is it not true that a loving parent wishes to maximize happiness or joy for his child? This includes giving that child an environment where he can have a certain degree of freedom and independence. He is not chained to his bed his whole life, but is given rules (i.e., advice), warnings about what will happen if the child chooses bad

pleasures, and the freedom to decide whether or not to obey or disobey those rules. He can decide to believe his parents, that they know what will make him happy, or believe that his way will have a better result. A child might reason that he would be happier if he ignored his parents' warnings, and touched the stove anyway. For a moment, the child experiences the pleasure we often feel from engaging our free will, and as he feels good from the freedom he pridefully believes that he has proven his parents wrong. A moment later, when he is burned, he discovers why his parents made the rule in the first place, and learns to trust (i.e., have faith in) them. But what about when he touches the stove and nothing happens because the stove is off? In such cases, a loving parent's discipline is given in order to make sure the child does not happen to touch the stove the next time — when it is on. Though the child does not yet understand why the rule has been given in the first place (since nothing happened when he touched the stove the first time), he learns to obey his parents anyway, and in time, learns to trust their wisdom through the verification of that wisdom in numerous other rules and warnings. But why does the parent go through this procedure? Clearly, to maximize happiness for the child in the long run.

God has done the same for us. First, God created an environment conducive to learning right and wrong. Notice that the created order has a system of punishment worked into it to help us distinguish certain things on our own. For example, pleasure can generally be gained from sexual activity in any form, but that does not mean that all forms are going to maximize our happiness. So God communicated certain ways we should engage in such activity in order to maximize happiness. He also designed a natural system whereby when we deviate from His rules about sexual activity, pain and sorrow will come in some way (even if we do not always recognize that our behavior is the cause of it). While we have the freedom to reject God's will, He still encourages us to do right through a system of punishment worked into the created order (e.g., venereal diseases; physical danger from a lack of sobriety or reckless, imprudent behavior; potential for drug overdoses; diseases and cancers that come from certain sins; depression; family strife; loneliness; etc.). Also in the created order are constant admonitions helping us to behave correctly (e.g., through pressure from our conscience to behave in certain ways, through lessons gained from our observations of others, as well as through the direct admonition given to us by others who have made bad decisions). Does the creation of such an environment sound more like the work of a God Who wants us to sin or not to sin? Does such a system prove that the Creator apparently wants to encourage us to obey Him, while also giving us independence and the freedom to disobey Him if we choose?

Second, as a loving parent would be expected to do, God was sure to give us direct instruction to warn us about the differences between good and bad pleasures. The Bible is clear in communicating explicitly that our happiness is a major motivation behind the rules that God gave us (e.g., Psalm 19:7–8). The rules in the Bible were not selected randomly merely to control humans, in the same way a loving parent's rules are not so selected.

(Continuation on page 12)

# DID GOD CREATE US WITH A DESIRE TO SIN?

(Ending. Beginning on page 11)

The great Sermon on the Mount is begun with the Beatitudes — the Son of God's rules of thumb for being happy (i.e., *blessed*) in life. In **Deuteronomy 10:12-13**, Moses reminds the Israelites that God's rules were for their good. In **Deuteronomy 6:24** he says that God's laws are *for our good always, that He might preserve us alive*. God's commandments are often about more than how to get to heaven. They affect our lives here and now. In **Proverbs 29:18** Solomon warns his son that eliminating God's rules (i.e., His *revelation*) from a society will certainly allow total, unbridled freedom in the behavior of that society (i.e., people will *cast off restraint*) and that conscience-free behavior will be thought to be the way to happiness. That total freedom, however, contrary to what we might think, will not bring people happiness. Solomon warns, *Happy is he who keeps [God's] law*.

A child might think that having no rules about running out in the street will make him happy, but in truth, happiness in the long run comes from (1) having those rules, and (2) obeying his parents' rules. We may not always agree at the moment with what He says will make us happy, just as a child does not always agree with his parents; but, as with a child, we are oftentimes simply not in a position to know in the long run what will be best for us and the people around us. A child would love to make those decisions on his own and develop his own system of right and wrong. He thinks that he can do so effectively — just as adults sometimes think we know better than God what will make us happy. But the bottom line is that the parents know a lot more about what will bring lasting happiness, and so the parent teaches, makes rules, and enforces them — as does God. The difference is that humans are imperfect in designing and enforcing rules, because like a child, we also do not know everything we need to know to do it perfectly. Parents disciplined us as *seemed best to them* (**Hebrews 12:10**), but biblical rules were made by the omniscient Mind Who created the human mind. Who could possibly know better what will bring the human mind happiness than He Who created it?

Did God create us inherently to desire to do evil? No. God created us with the capacity to experience pleasure and happiness and the desire to pursue it. He created us to be able to enjoy pleasure and feel good, through our eyes, ears, tongues, noses, and nerves, as well as in our very souls. He created an environment where we can choose to fill our pleasure tanks in different ways — right and wrong ways — as a parent does with a child, and then He gave us valuable instruction about which are the best choices. By creating such a free environment, pain, suffering, and evil are inevitable, since humans will oftentimes reject God's rules and admonitions. But with such inevitably bad decisions, He made sure to provide a means by which we can be forgiven, and eventually, live with Him in an environment free from all evil.

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What would you say if you were asked to name the most dangerous country for Christians? Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia come to mind. But in fact, the most dangerous country for Christians today is Nigeria. Here's why.

Last year, 5621 Christians were killed worldwide because of their faith. Ninety percent of them were residents of the northern provinces of Nigeria.

Missionary organizations report that the persecution of Christians in this country has reached its highest level in the last thirty years. And this is primarily because of what has been happening in northern Nigeria over the past twenty-four years.

They demanded that she renounce her words about Jesus. But she refused. Instead, she defended her Christian beliefs.

Muslim students immediately claimed that she was guilty of blasphemy under Sokoto Sharia law, which is punishable by death. Therefore, they called on other members of the community to lynch themselves.

School guards tried to protect Deborah, but the crowd overpowered them. Police officers were called, but they were allegedly frightened by a large crowd. The mob threatened to kill anyone who tried to help them, so the rest of the Christian students fled the scene and fled to their homes.

The crowd found her hiding in the security

## CHRISTIAN NEWS

# THE DEADLIEST COUNTRY FOR CHRISTIANS



Approximately half of Nigeria's population is Christian, and most of them live in the south of the country. However, the other half are Muslims, and most of them live in the north.

Northern Nigeria is the place where *Boko Haram*, an Islamic terrorist group, has kidnapped thousands of young girls and killed tens of thousands of people over the past decade. But *Boko Haram* is permitted by the Sharia law of northern Nigeria. There is a direct link between terrorism and Sharia law in Nigeria.

*Boko Haram* was founded in northern Nigeria in 2002, shortly after twelve northern states reintroduced Sharia law between 1999 and 2001, despite Nigerians' constitutional right to freedom of religion. Since then, at least fifty thousand Christians in northern Nigeria have been killed.

And the situation is getting worse. Last year was the deadliest for Christians in Nigeria. Sharia blasphemy laws, terrorist attacks and mob violence killed at least five thousand Christians last year.

One of these Christians was Deborah Samuel. She was a university student in Sokoto State in northern Nigeria. She was killed at school because she thanked Jesus for her academic success.

On the twelfth of May 2022, a classmate asked Deborah in a *WhatsApp* group for their class how she did in a recent exam. She replied that it was thanks to Jesus. Classmates considered such an answer a crime worthy of death.

room. They dragged her outside, and shouting *Allahu Akbar*, her classmates and other residents of the community, including elderly women, beat her with sticks, threw stones, doused her with gasoline and burned her alive.

In response to the assassination, incumbent Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said:

*Muslims all over the world demand respect for the holy prophets... But where misconduct occurs, as is supposedly the case in this case, the law does not allow anyone to take matters into their own hands.*

In other words, according to the president, the only problem with the murder is that it was the mob that killed her, not the local government.

Unsurprisingly. The president hails from a northern state where Sharia law is observed. In 2001, he said:

*I will continue to openly and internally demonstrate my full commitment to the Sharia movement that has swept across Nigeria. We will not stop campaigning for the total introduction of Sharia law throughout the country.*

Let us support our brothers and sisters in Nigeria in prayer, as all Christians are members of the same Body of Christ. And if one suffers, then everyone suffers.

*Remember the prisoners, as if you were in bondage with them, and the afflicted, as you yourself are in the body* (**Hebrews 13:3**).

*The Christian Post.*

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**ATTENTION!**  
Dear readers, today the newspaper "Prisoner" has the status of the three languages: Russian, Ukrainian and English. "Prisoner" is printed in 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.

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

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## 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!"*



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