

# A Life in Christ

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## Chapter 1

### The Life We Have Been Given

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A life in Christ is the greatest fulfillment a person can ever know. The words of encouragement that would begin this discourse of such a life would be the assurance that God has left nothing undone in preparing us for the day unto which He has called us. What has come to us from God is a full measure of strength and light. It is not merely religion; for if religion is all we have received, then we are drinking from an empty cup. Through faith, we have encountered Christ and our life became more than a moment in time.

For the Christian then, born of God, there has been ignited within, a fire fueled from an eternal source. However, far too many experience far too little of that raging flame and long for the comforting warmth of Christ within them.

To that end be assured, it is not difficult to kindle the flame. The scriptures urge us to stir up the gift of God within us. It takes but a small spark to ignite a massive fire when the conditions have been created for it. Wet wood bears little flame, but a combustible element in the right conditions is waiting to erupt because it is inherent to its nature. So is every last person born of God and filled with His Spirit. When it ignites, when the embers are stoked, the fire of God is contagious to those who hunger for its light. One person, alight with the brilliance of His glory has the ability to ignite and fan the flame in others. One of the terms we use to describe this occurrence is “revival”.

For true revival to spring forth, we cannot desire schemes, devise plans, create programs, employ gimmicks or institute our own movements of God and expect to see the results we desire. In fact, the incessant implementation of these things by ambitious men only serves to further distance the Body of Christ from partaking of the life God intends.

The truth of the matter is that the change we seek, whether we speak in regards to ourselves personally or the church corporately, is not as far away as we might think. The word is nigh you, in your heart and in your mouth. You see, revival is not a formula, nor is it a method properly implemented. The voice of God brings all revival. It is never manufactured, but originates in the choice we make every moment as to whether we will believe God or believe ourselves. It lies in whether we will trust in that which God has assured us is true, or trust in our experience and our interpretation of that experience.

Experience is a fine teacher. She holds back no lessons and conceals no truth. As pure as her instruction is though, she cannot teach you all things since she is limited by your capacity to receive her wisdom, or the framework through which you interpret her lessons. Therefore, experience cannot be the sole, ultimate source of truth because we can misinterpret the meaning.

If you measure truth solely, or primarily, by your experience and your interpretation of that experience, then you become the source of truth. When you make yourself the source of truth, it is like fashioning an idol in your own image. If our own rhetoric becomes our reality, we have situated ourselves in a hopeless place.

Revival is sourced in the truth- not dogma, tradition or our false conclusions of truth. Within truth, truth that is from God and truth that is God, we always find revival. If we are not experiencing revival, if we are not experiencing freedom, we cannot be abiding in the truth. God's word always brings life and freedom- period. It is the truth that makes us free.

There are those who do not abide in the truth, then question the surety of God's promises because of what their life becomes. The same holds true within the church at large. Christians set themselves aside to a lie, then flounder in the dryness of a lifeless soil. Eventually, they give up to this condition, considering it to be a God ordained event. This is not the life He intends.

Within God's kingdom, it is not uncommon for people to go from despair, hopelessness or spiritual anguish, to all out revival in their spirit and those changes occur between breaths in a moment of time. All of that is a result of renewed perception of the truth that is in Jesus Christ. Such perception de-clutters the convoluted thinking that creeps into our heart and mind without notice.

When Jesus prayed to The Father and declared, "Your word is truth", and made known to us also that His words are Spirit and life, what He revealed, in part, is that truth is not simply facts. Though informative, bearing the brand of wisdom, truth originates in God. Ultimately, what it discloses to us is the very person of Christ because He is the truth.

In knowing the truth, it becomes evident to us that there is not more spiritual strength available to us now than when we first came to Christ, nor has there been differing measures of spiritual strength through the course of history. As long as men can be saved, revival exists in the Earth. As long as God extends the salvation of Jesus Christ to mankind, revival is inherent in the offer.

So then, revival is not a privilege withheld, it is a reality resisted. Revival flows like a river, it never stops. What prevents it is that we will not drink from it, or we resist drinking from it because we prefer our own broken cisterns. We prefer the bitter water of our own wells which we have dug for ourselves. But, the source of revival is a spring not of our own making. It flourishes, not because we make it

happen, but because it is already happening and, in truth, has never ceased from the day salvation poured from heaven like rain. Where we look for it makes all the difference in determining if we will find it. We will not find revival in front of the television, we will not find it in the ballot box, nor will it come to us because we make a full exercise of our rightful, Christian duties. Neither is revival the lifeless illusion of emotionalism. Revival is the vibrancy and fullness of life that only comes from God. It goes with you wherever your foot may tread if that life is resident within you.

Revival then, is only as far away as the heart that is prepared to receive it. The Bible declares in Proverbs 4:23 that out of the heart spring the issues of life. When something is done in the heart, it is produced in the actions, the substance of our life. What your heart desires is what you pursue, what you pursue is what you will serve. What you serve will define your life. So again, whatever grows in the heart is produced in the life.

You will find God when you seek Him with all of your heart. Revival begins in the heart. Maturity occurs in the heart that desires Christ more than anything else. Simply put, it is no more complicated than that; which makes it a complicated matter indeed.

The choice of whether we will seek Him with all our heart falls to us. We are compelled to do so because that is the way God has sought us. That is how we, who were once enemies, have become His friends; we who were once strangers, have become His children. Christ is the full expression of The Father's heart, the full expression of His love. Through Christ, God has searched for each of us with all His heart.

It should be clear then that what you choose is what you want and what you want is what you pursue. That choice begins in the deep recesses of the heart. When the heart is in the hand of God, it is a mighty weapon. Once in the hand of God, it is conditioned to receive the fullest extent of what He intends.

In Hebrews chapter 10 we are told:

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and having a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

In addition, we are told in 1 John chapter 3:

*<sup>19</sup> And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. <sup>20</sup> For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all*

*things.* <sup>21</sup> *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.*

How we approach God is affected by our heart. When the conscience is pure, the heart is not condemned and will therefore engage in relationship with Him in such a way that reflects the absence of condemnation. Full of confidence before a perfectly holy God, we hold no reservation to enter when our heart does not condemn us. Are we clean because we think we are clean or because God says we are clean? Certainly it is because God says we are clean. However, if the heart is condemned, it will not fully engage with a loving, holy God because it has assessed itself as unclean.

The tangle of such a web inhibits the fullness of life intended by God, not because it is withheld, but because the heart shuts itself off from the wellspring of life. Out of the heart spring the issues of life. It is meant to be a fountain with flowing streams of living water. But, condemnation sits as a mighty stone upon it, capping the flow.

Therefore, whatever exists in the heart shall surely be manifest in the life. If the heart is capped by condemnation, if it is burdened with a darkened lie, the fruit of that lie will inhabit every corner of our existence. What it produces is perpetual sadness, loneliness, a sense of worthlessness, or all manner of hooks meant to barb into our soul and draw us away from the source of life.

For the lonely heart, life is a broken mystery. Loneliness, however, is not simply experienced through isolation from human contact. Some of the loneliest souls are constantly surrounded by other people because their sense of loneliness has ripened in the field of their heart. What a terrible torment to feel so desperately alone, with unspoken pain, in a room full of mirth and laughter. Sometimes people hurt so deeply that they purposely harden their heart because they have determined it is better to not feel at all than to continue experiencing such inexpressible pain within their soul. In truth, the heart can only bear so much.

Many of us know what it is like to sneak into the back row of a church at the last minute hoping no one sees us. As we sit there, our heart anguishes between the wish that no one speak to us and the longing that someone will. We know what it is like to sit through a service in desperate hope that we will hear something that relieves the burden of our soul.

Through Jesus Christ we have received everything that pertains to life and Godliness. What we have with God must be guarded in every way. Whatever springs up in our heart that quenches or restrains the flow of His life must be removed without confusing the source. To misidentify what is choking or restraining the flow of life does not relieve the problem. The parable of the Sower shows us those prominent things that keep the word from bearing fruit such as

being deceived by riches, the cares of this life, passionate desire for other things, shrinking back from God when affliction arises because of the word, and lack of understanding. All of those things have an effect, in different ways, on the full bearing of fruit in our heart.

Take for example the lack of understanding. We can lack understanding for a number of reasons. The least common reason is that it is too complicated. More common is the fact that we simply do not want to understand, or the word of God is contrary to a mindset we already possess. Sometimes people have a loyalty to something else and to receive the word would necessitate an abandonment of that loyalty. For them, the truth is not important enough to make such a change.

Instead, the heart is hardened so that it will not allow the word to penetrate the soil. As a result, it becomes dry and fallow. Tares, weeds and bramble spring up in the soil instead. The truth of the matter is that tares can grow in hardened soil, but good seed cannot. In fact, tares such as bitterness, anger, hatred, and envy all grow better, perhaps exclusively, in hardened soil.

Sometimes people receive the word with joy, but shrink back from God because of the affliction or persecution that arises because of the word. We will respond to persecution and resistance by either hardening our hearts to the word and bending towards the demands of men, or we will harden our hearts to the persecution and bend towards the word.

We all need encouragement at times. Even the strongest soul can be worn down by some of the futilities life requires. Distracted and disillusioned, the mind grasps to regain its footing in a steady place. The heart longs to be rekindled from weariness. Places such as these use distinct colors to paint in reminiscent hues what truly brings us life.

For those who do not continue in God's word, who hear but do not respond, or do not receive the word into their heart for whatever reason, they walk away and immediately lose perception of who they truly are. But, for those who continue in His word, they are blessed in all they do. That contrast shows clearly that if we forget who we are, if we lose the perception of Christ in us, then it is soon regained by hearing the truth, receiving it into our heart, and then responding.

As the heart refocuses, our steps are shifted into eternal paths, and the Holy Spirit whispers reminders of what and whom we are committed to. In His great love, He knows that we are indispensably dependent upon Him to turn us in the way we should go, to lead us into all truth. It is by His effective power that we rise, time and again, from the doldrums of our days. Moreover, it is in the warm, sometimes unexpected whisper that says, "This way my child" that we find the greatest encouragement of all.

You cannot have revival within a church, home, or heart until all of it belongs to God. If you want change, if you want revival, want Him and nothing

else. Sadly, that is greatly discomfoting to many who are called by His name. For them, it is too great a price to pay for the deal of lifetime. Far too many seek to walk with Him possessing a desire, an attitude that it is better to keep Him at arm's length. By doing so, He's close enough in case one needs help, but far enough away that one retains some measure of autonomy; which is, of course, an illusion.

Another example of how a lack of understanding keeps the word from taking root in our heart is the fact that oftentimes people fear the nearness of God out of concern over His intent or methods. Even as Christians, we sometimes struggle with the misguided perception that for God to change us, or change our circumstances, there will need to be some major, perhaps painful overhaul. The very thought is exasperating and to a certain degree can be frightening. Such a perspective is followed by questions like, "What will God have to do to me in order to make me better?", or "What kind of affliction will I have to go through to get away from the sin in my life?" Where we desire to be in God, where we know God wants us to be, can seem so distant at times that we wonder how we will ever find our way there. Deep within the recesses of our heart, we want change, we want transformation, we want the revival we have heard of for so long but never tasted.

Our change, our alteration of course, is no less than the result of the provocative action of God. We are drawn from a place of pitiful loss by the sudden appearance of truth, bearing the banner of hope. It is the flicker of an eternal flame that draws our attention to repentance and the change which God brings thereafter.

Let it be understood then that repentance is a beginning. At the heart of all repentance which leads to true transformation is the accompanying perception of God. He is the glimmering light in the dark distance that provokes our first step toward Him. He is the dancing glow of orange embers on the horizon that we come to long for in the harsh winds of winter.

Therefore, an accurate assessment of true repentance is understood not only by where we have left, but unto whom we have arrived. It is a marvelous quest that is God in the beginning, God in the end, and God every step in between. Repentance prepares the heart to be transformed, but transformation occurs from the presence of the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

<sup>18</sup> *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:14-18)*



The verses leading up to this passage explain how Moses illuminated the glory of the Lord from his face. That illumination occurred as a result of Moses beholding His glory, and thereby being transformed by the very presence of The Living God. Paul goes on to explain that because the children of Israel could not bear to look upon the glory of God shining from the face of Moses, he wore a veil over his face. In so doing, the children of Israel were inhibited from not only beholding the glory of God, but being transformed by it. According to Paul, that veil is taken away in Christ. He goes on to explain that as we behold with unveiled face as in a mirror, we are transformed into the same image we behold, just as Moses. As Moses beheld the glory of God, it shone from his face as though a reflection of that same glory shining back at God. The statement that we are being changed from glory to glory is a declaration of, a comparison to, that very same event with Moses. The intention of the statement about being changed from glory to glory is not so much about gradual, incremental changes as it is about transformation which results from the glory of God radiating to us, and consequently, from us. As the scripture plainly states, we are transformed by The Spirit of the Lord into the same image from glory to glory.

Transformation occurs, not by turning or repentance, but by the glory of the Lord. Repentance prepares the heart to be transformed, but transformation occurs from the presence of God. The new man is created by God, not made by man and it is truly righteous and holy in His sight because it is an expression of His own person and image within us.

One only needs to consider how communion and interaction with Him has so altered and empowered us in times past. There is no vestige of anything impure that does not dissolve to nothing at the sound of His voice. When we hear Him speak, when we find ourselves enveloped in His love and the wonder of His presence, then doubt seems to wane like shadows from the noon sun. Then it becomes laughable, even ludicrous, when men declare "God can't".

We are changed in every part by the perfection Jesus Christ has accomplished on our behalf. Nothing has been left undone to create the opportunity for communion with God at the deepest level. The residue of everything unclean has been washed by the pure blood of a perfect sacrifice so that full entrance to the innermost place is made. Within the picture of the tabernacle, it was necessary for every part to be clean for God to dwell in the innermost place. That innermost place is within us and nothing is deficient in His offering.

We read in John 6:63:

*<sup>63</sup> It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

His word is so much more than a collection of facts that if assembled in the proper order, feed the intellectual mind; His words are spirit and life. What that means is the word does not produce itself through your flesh or your natural faculties. It penetrates to the deepest part of your being, into your spirit, into your heart, and produces everlasting life on the inside of you.

A significant result is that it changes your answer to the question, "What do you want?" If you have feasted on the finest cuisine known to man, it is difficult to return to a diet of tasteless food that is less than ordinary. When you have tasted of the goodness of God, the richness of life that is only in Him, it is difficult to settle for ordinary, natural things. What becomes the longing of your heart instead is the joyous presence of your Father that abides with you always. In His presence, you begin to comprehend those things which most people spend a lifetime looking for.

When we experience physical hunger, there are pangs within us which give us indication of the need for nourishment. Our need for His word brings with it pangs of its own. A significant difference between physical and spiritual hunger is that we understand when we are experiencing physical hunger all too well. But, the source of hunger within the sea of souls across the face of the earth for spiritual life is often unrecognized. Though people possess such hunger for spiritual life, they neither understand it, nor what they need to fill it.

God understands all too well what we need. What he has provided for us in Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of our singular, greatest need before our realization of it. The Lord has never condemned us for needing a savior. In His grace, He makes every attempt to thoroughly convince us of that need, but He has never condemned us, or ridiculed us for it.

Instead, in Christ, He has expressed the limitless, passionate care He has in His heart for those, who by nature, have no heart towards Him. Jesus Christ is the heart of the message God has given to man. If He is not the heart of the message, the message is heartless and cruel. If Christ is not the heart of the message, then the heart of God cannot be revealed.

Possessing the wealth of Heaven's splendor, Jesus gave all that He had that we might gain all that He is. All that He is, is more than enough. All that He is not is nothing worth having.

Within the gospel, it is a wondrous mystery that such a simple message unfolds into a brilliant tapestry, revealing heavens wealth. The gospel is a message of hope to hopeless men. It is an offer from God Himself to trade us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning. The incomparable sound of eternal liberty rings out from the echoing chime of the gospel bell.

Ephesians 1:10 tells us that in the dispensation of the fullness of time, all things have been gathered together into Him. At the point of His greatest weakness; bruised, bleeding, beaten and dying- He gathered into Himself, by His

will and because of His love, all things. Everything in Heaven, everything in Earth, sin, death, every person born or yet to be born, all things within the folds of time and time itself were gathered into Him like a swirling, darkened storm being pulled into the vortex of a force greater than itself. He is the source of life.

Planted in the hearts of men, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the seed from which all spiritual life springs. To the intent that for those who believe the gospel, Christ is formed in us. Hence, the apex of human existence and experience is that Christ Himself, the source of life, lives within us. What else could we possibly need? What else could we possibly be searching for? This reality is so clearly revealed in Galatians 2:20 which reads:

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

There is perhaps nowhere in scripture that gives such clear definition in so few words as to what it means to be a Christian. In this verse, you have an explanation of how the gospel works. There is a revelation of what God does in us, what He does to us through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son. We are shown with clarity the end result which God intends.

Once again, the Gospel reveals to us what was accomplished in Jesus Christ through His death, burial and resurrection. Throughout the entirety of the writings of the Apostles, the ultimate result of the gospel concerning us in this life is that Christ should be formed in us. The living God makes us one spirit with Him and the fullness of His life, His power, His nature empowers us, flows forth from within us. Christ in you- leading, governing, and empowering you- is the dictate and source of life by which you live. Within that existence is true and perfect rest in Him. In fact, it is the only place of rest for the soul of man.

If I, in my natural ability, fail in every aspect of life by human standards, but Christ truly lives in me, then I am the greatest of successes. If I achieve the highest accomplishments and everything I touch in this world turns to gold, yet Christ does not live in me, then I am the most dismal of failures. True reward is not the dark commodities and decaying treasure of a dying world. With the Lord is the light of life and in that light there is neither sorrow, nor regret. His possession is love and through righteousness he dispenses grace. The incomparable value of His Kingdom is the only commodity worth trading; the abundance of His presence the only treasure worth possessing.

Most people will not pay a large sum unless they know the value of what they are buying. The mystery of the Kingdom of God is that you cannot truly

know the immense value of the pearl until after you buy it with all you possess. It will never be a reality at arm's length.

However, when you buy it with all you possess, what comes into your possession are riches sourced in God that touch and beautifully alter every part of your existence. For example, when His love is experienced in truth, such love is like the refreshing wind of a warm spring breeze. Gently, it brushes across the spirit and soul of a man. The touch of His love promotes and engenders deep peace, steadiness in the face of unpleasant things in a woefully unpleasant world. At the same time, God's perfect love is so powerful, it conquered death, vanquished the power and sting of sin, casts out fear with all malice and makes us stand complete in Christ. It is a force against which no foe can stand.

Furthermore, it stops being only an ideal, a cliché we speak about from time to time. In Christ, He has made it so that the reality of His presence and the fruit thereof, is more apparent and of greater depth than the most intimate of human relationships- though the world cannot see Him. Within the hallowedness of who He is, who we are is changed in every way.

Within the church, we speak often of transformation. Frequently, we do so in terms of events, as though the situations of life or the trials we face are something God sends to change us. What is often forgotten is that the situations and trials we experience are nothing new to mankind. Since Adam fell, man has faced affliction. Those afflictions never carried with them the capacity to transform us in the manner God intends. While it is true that many people only come to an end of themselves and turn to God in the dark hours of life, the difficulties faced are not the source of change. If God could accomplish spiritual transformation through common affliction, why would He feel the need to send His Son?

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)*

As this scripture so beautifully declares, transformation occurs through renewal. Paul writes "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In addition, he explains an ever important result such transformation has in that it enables us to prove the will of God. Through transformation that results from renewal, we prove what the full and complete will of God is.

The word "prove" expresses the idea of testing, then approving. It is the capacity to evaluate the purity of something so that it can then be confirmed for

use. What is communicated in this word is the idea that as we walk the corridors of this age and face decisions, ideologies or circumstances, we are able to put those things to the test. We test them to discover whether they bear the purity and excellence of God's will, then live in those things that do. The renewing of our mind is transformative, in part, because it aligns our thinking, our perspectives, the deepest sense of our being with what is already true in God. We stand in the will of God because we are renewed.

What he is speaking of is a mind that is no longer engaged in the realities of life through the limited perceptions of the human mind. In other places within his writings, Paul uses the term “spiritually minded” to describe this same occurrence. Therefore, a renewed mind is to be understood as something completely new and different from what it had been previously. Ultimately, it is a way of thinking, a manner of perception that has become like God’s; that understands life through Him.

So then, it would become obvious that this concept of renewal to which Paul refers is not simply reconditioned thinking. What is being referred to is not merely the acquisition of new facts, but the oneness of mind and thought we gain from our unity with Christ. We have come to not just know new things, but we have become something all together new through the magnificent work of His cross, and the power of His resurrection. Obviously then, a true perception of transformation begins at the cross of Jesus Christ.

In order to truly grasp the miracle of the cross, it helps to first grasp the desperation of the human condition apart from Christ. Jesus made this declaration in John 8:31-36:

*<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

*<sup>33</sup> They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?”*

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. <sup>36</sup> Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*

God seeks to make us free. By coming to know the truth that is Jesus Christ, that freedom is found. What He seeks to make us free from is sin and the ravages of it. That is made clear in verse 34 when he says “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”

If you ever read an accurate description of what slavery is like, you will come to discover that it is about much more than forced labor. Slavery is about

afflicting a human being in such a way that they are robbed of everything. Not only can there be severe, physical abuse, slavery intends to leave a person as something less than a human being. Those who have been kept in bondage by it not only lose their families, but it also seeks to take their dignity, their self respect and the significance of their identity as a person. Slavery has at its core the awful intention of reducing a person to less than nothing. Sin is exactly the same.

Furthermore, those who have subjected others to slavery could only do so with a complete absence of conscience. Sin is exactly the same. Without conscience, it brings misery to everyone it touches. If you doubt it, you only need to look at the effects it has had on our world, on people that you know, and within your own life.

The way sin has manifest itself in your life, and the effects it has had, differs from the way it has manifest in the lives of your family, friends, neighbors or community. Sin has many faces, but it only has one child- his name is death. Regardless of the specific way it has infected each person, its ultimate intention and end is our destruction.

Without God, man has no capacity to live any differently than within the corruption of a fallen world. Therefore, when we see people overcome with specific sins which are decimating them, we do well to see them, not just within the context of their sin, but according to the context of their need for a savior.

We can preach against sin and not preach the gospel. To lay such a burden on people is akin to a task master requiring a crop from his servants but providing no field in which to plant, no tools to till the ground, and no seed to sow. Regardless of the demands, regardless of the threats, the servant will never produce what is required. Some enemies are not overcome by sheer will and determination. Some enemies are not subdued because we have determined to not give up until they are defeated. However, when we preach the gospel, victory over sin, freedom from its chains, abandonment of it as a master is an inherent part of the message.

When we speak of hell, it is usually in reference to fire, brimstone and eternal torment. Those things are realities that should not be denied within sound teaching. But, the truth is, those things are inconsequential compared to the true loss of such a fate. True loss, true hopelessness, the anguish of eternal damnation is eternal separation from God. The scripture teaches that every good and perfect gift comes down from The Father. Whatever joys we experience in this life, even if we do not walk with God, are part of our existence because of the work of God amongst mankind in this world. In a sense, heaven is shadowed for us ever so slightly by the warmth of our love towards our children, by the solace of a warm fire on a cold, winter night, by the majesty of a mountain range that captures our breath. Life is filled with good things from God. When a person is lost eternally, all of the goodness that God has ever expressed to them is lost for them forever.

Never again will they feel love or joy. Never again will they know the blessing of something so common as human contact and friendship, nor will they ever again sense, in any capacity, the voice or presence of God that has reached for them all their life.

As we consider the people we come in contact with, we must bear in mind that if they are living separate from God, they are experiencing all too well the shadows of an eternal existence apart from God. They feel it every day, though they do not necessarily understand it. What they must know is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the light in the darkness which their soul so desperately longs for.

Man, apart from God, is a pitiful thing. His capacity to perceive his own condition is hindered by the limitations imposed upon him by the sin which blinds his mind to God. When you speak of Spiritual things to the carnal mind, it is foolishness to it because there is no apparatus whereby it can grasp that reality. There is no capacity to perceive the things of The Spirit.

Because there is no perception, they will spend their lives waiting and hoping for light to shine from a source that cannot give it. Having heard the gospel, but choosing to reject it, they will continue to feast on forbidden fruit, pretending to delight in the taste of sorrow and death.

Unlike forbidden fruit, the gospel produces life and change within our innermost being. We cease from the failed endeavor of seeking encouragement in death, for there is no encouragement in death, only in life. The rich intent of God is that we are transformed into the image of His Son, without blemish and without condemnation.

It cannot be emphasized enough that transformation truly occurs when absent the weight of condemnation. No one ever changes at the deepest level by being condemned. We are changed at the deepest level because of Christ who is in us. We are changed at the deepest level because we are crucified with Him, leaving every vestige of the sin that enslaved us hanging on the cross. In Him, we stand complete, having been raised to newness of life through the glory of His resurrection. Through this gospel, sin is meant to no longer have dominion over us, nor keep us bound under the weight of condemnation.

Concerning condemnation, man-made religion teaches otherwise, even amongst those confessing faith in Jesus Christ. Some Christians only feel good when they feel guilty. They only feel secure when they feel condemned. Condemnation in the conscience is the fruit of doubt, while at the same time it feeds doubt. Ironically enough, this creates a cycle. A person stumbles into sin, or constantly revisits certain sins. Then, they experience prolonged condemnation in their conscience because of those actions. That very same condemnation creates a foothold for sin, which continuously manifests itself in the life because it is fed by the condemnation. The more one struggles with the sin, the deeper the

condemnation; hence, the deeper the condemnation, the deeper the root of sin. So it goes, on and on, while the life is destroyed.

The ultimate source of that cycle is doubt in the sufficiency of the cross of Christ. Usually, a person bears guilt for sin as their own pitiful attempt to atone for it. Such attempts are entirely self-focused. The principle reason people make such attempts to atone for their sin is because of the reasoning in their double mind which insists that God requires that in addition to the blood of Christ. Put in other terms, they are not sure if the blood of Christ, by itself, is enough to satisfy what God requires from them. That is doubt.

James 1:6-7 tells us that what things we ask for, we are to ask in faith without doubt or wavering. Furthermore, the one who wavers shall not receive anything from God. It seems evident that within the body of Christ, doubt is one of the primary reasons we struggle spiritually. Doubt is a stagnant pool from which so many drink, the waters of which poison and paralyze the soul. Because of it, so many are inhibited from living in the fullness of life Jesus promises us. It is a gaze that is fixed on something other than God.

When doubt comes to visit, he brings an acquaintance with him named fear. Fear is a thief that steals away our perceptions of the goodness and promises of God. It robs us of love, joy, peace, and leaves us desperate in a darkened, dingy room void of comfort. Lies, accusations, and a description of every bad situation that could ever happen to us is what this villain leaves behind.

Adam was placed where there was no shame before his creator. He dwelt openly and freely in the full presence of a pure and holy God. However, when he partook of the tree and died spiritually, both his conscience and his thoughts changed. Afterward, when he heard the steps of God, he hid himself because of his nakedness, or more accurately his doubt, his fear, and shame at his nakedness. God's response, the question He asked, is profound, "Who told you that you were naked?" The question infers that it was not He who had revealed nakedness to Adam. In fact, no one laid accusation at their feet concerning their nakedness, not even the serpent. It was a condemned conscience before God, filled with fear and riddled with doubt.

Just as Adam, you will hide from the presence of God in a downward spiral of guilt when nakedness becomes a giant in your thoughts. If our thoughts are of a natural origin, viewed through the lens of who we were before we were placed in Christ, then we will make ourselves guilty and accuse ourselves continuously before God. Because of our shame, we find nakedness in ourselves all the time. Child of God, who told you that you were naked? There is neither virtue nor freedom in accusing ourselves of things that God does not.

When framed in false religious virtue, condemnation becomes an expected part of life. As already stated, some Christians only feel good when they feel



guilty. Ironically enough, they will begin to feel guilty for not feeling guilty in moments when they forget the wretchedness they constantly accuse themselves of. Condemnation becomes comfortable, normal. In reality, it is the spice of religion and the bread of self righteousness. For some, righteousness is equivalent to self abasement, not divine justification through Jesus Christ.

These words are meant for the Christian who has become famished in the journey, longing for true meat and nourishment. Yet, they find themselves eating berries in the bramble being scarred by the thorns. For you to impose on yourself, or someone else imposing on you what God does not require will always bring condemnation.

So goes the never-ending battle in the minds of men unless the conscience is clean. A clean conscience allows us to give ourselves permission to gain the full access unto God which He has offered and provided for us.

Doubt, and the defiled conscience that comes from it, forbids access to God. Be encouraged in knowing there is no miracle needed to move past doubt. Understand that doubt is not something that is cast out of you; it is something you release by laying hold of the truth. Its origins are in thoughts issuing forth from a mind waiting to be renewed. The deadliest deeds ever committed began with one thought. Every doubt that produces death and condemnation is the same.

Shall we then concede our ground, even in small measures, to the voice of condemnation? To which voice shall we give heed? Which declaration shall proceed from our own lips?

It is amazing how clear our vision becomes, how stabilized our thinking becomes when it is no longer veiled by condemnation. How high a peak it is we ascend to when we no longer equate humility with guilt, but with the greatness of God instead.

Consider what a blessing it was for Lazarus to walk by his tomb on occasion. No evidence could be given him, nor argument made to dissuade him from the reality of God. There was no doubt for he only needed to pass his tomb. For us, there have been places where God has met us in our death, delivered us from our tomb. These are places where we have seen the glory of God and it has raised us up. When life rises up to challenge us, when doubt and unbelief press against us, we need only take a walk past our tomb to possess all the evidence we will ever need. Only believe, and you will see the glory of God. Only believe, and you will find an undivided focus of purpose and strength.

We do not grope about in an unaided search for truth. It is God Who brings us to the perception of what is true in Him and gives us the ability to set our mind on those things. The scripture assures us in Isaiah 26:3, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you." In the Hebrew, there is a double usage of the word "shalom" in this verse which is

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