

Just Between You and Me

Vol. III

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JacLyn Enterprises

Atlanta

2007

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Preface

The essays in this book consist of comments I have written in church bulletins during the years covering 2004 and 2005. They are in chronological order although not all of the comments within that time frame are included.

I have already admitted in the previous two volumes that I may be stretching it a bit in referring to these brief comments as “letters” in the title of the book. They don’t have the tone of letters written from someone to an acquaintance. There is not the intimacy you would expect from one friend to another. But, there is nevertheless a sort of closeness and there is implicit in the words a desire to help someone in any way that I can. That makes the words more personal and gives them (we hope) more of a sense of familiarity even though you and I may not know each other. We are still brothers (or brother and sister), and I still want to reach out to you. It’s not that I have an overabundance of virtue to bestow on some poor spiritual waif. It’s that the love of God within any one of us should make us reach out and be a blessing to others. You no doubt could enrich my life in some way.

I have always written the bulletin comments with the aim of helping someone else. If you are looking for love, it is in these comments. I yearn to draw my brothers and sisters, while at the same time heeding my own need, closer and closer to God. I want to “scale the utmost height and catch a gleam of glory bright” – and I want you to come with me.

If you are looking for gentle reproofs, that is in the “letters” also. And peering behind the veil (our human limitations) to perceive more of God’s inexpressible majesty and power? I have tried to do that too.

There is no doubt that in my own subjective mind I have made these weekly comments more important than they really are. I have realized that all along. But from my perspective the comments are what God wants me to do **at this stage of my life.**

He could give me another direction tomorrow. I take it day by day. My life is continually in a holding pattern.

You scoff, “What ‘stage of life’? At eighty-two you are practically at the end of life already!”

Maybe, and maybe not. Only God knows what He wants me to do and only He knows how long or short my remaining days will be. That is not my concern. I have other things to do. In the meantime I fully intend, by the wonderful grace of God, to be all that I can be in this small task He has given me – for Christ’s sake.

So read these comments carefully and try to discern what God is saying to you through me. I believe they are not just letters from me; I believe they are God-inspired. That is not a boast in my skill or spirituality; it is a supreme confidence in the faithfulness and power of God. Confidence, faith, assurance: That is what the Christian’s life is all about.

But enough of this chitchat. Read and be blessed!

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Beauty and Reality

There is quite a difference between a picture drawn or painted by an artist and its real-life counterpart. I am not talking about paintings by Picasso or Dali and other artists of their class. Their art is like a simile in speech; it approaches the real thing (sometimes), but often leaves the “commoner’s” imagination unfulfilled. Being one of the bourgeoisie or middle class, I prefer down-to-earth artists like Norman Rockwell and his peers who have a metaphoric (my term) approach to art. They make an apple an apple or a woman a woman and not some disjointed alien from outer space with body parts scattered all over the painting.

If the artist is good enough, he can make a picture seem very real. If it's a tree, the viewer can imagine, from the realism infused into the picture, the side of the tree that isn't shown. He knows it is there because it is always there in real life. If it is an outstanding portrait, the viewer can see a glint of awareness in the eyes and can almost reach out and touch the real person. A sculpture can have an even more realistic effect.

But, as good as they may be, these things are not real. They are beautiful and have a wondrous touch of reality – but they are not the genuine item they copy so well. They are, after all, only incredibly skillful paint strokes on a canvas or sketches on a paper. Or, if they are sculpture, they result from the dexterous work of the sculptor who has the advantage of working in a three-dimensional art form, which gives even more life to the inanimate object.

The portrait is unable to speak or love or comfort. The sculpture can neither see nor hear nor speak. Both possess unbelievably lifelike semblances of human body parts portrayed in exceptionally realistic manner, but they don't function. They make beautiful art and satisfy the aesthetic side of the viewer, but they are useless in a practical sense, not having the power to

do, to effect, to accomplish. In other words, they can't make a real difference in a heart or in a life.

A portrait or a statue cannot raise a prayer nor can it console one who is deeply grieved. A life-like work of art is unable to worship a God or bring the Gospel to a sinner. For that matter, such things have not the least awareness, no cognizance of God nor of His wonderful love. They know nothing at all. The slighting remark, "beautiful but dumb," is remarkably appropriate in this instance.

It is obvious that appearance and near-realism are not enough. Beauty alone may please the senses, but it is not enough in a demanding world of in-your-face reality. Beauty is not enough in the religious world where there are many beautiful forms in worship, edifices of worship, groups of worshipers (congregations), prayers and individual worshipers. But what do these lovely-looking items actually do of themselves?

Beauty is woefully inadequate. Attractiveness falls far short of what God wants and what the world of PEOPLE needs. There are two sources making demands on us who call ourselves Christian. First, there is a God who demands REAL beauty in our living, and second, there is a world full of individuals who have staggering needs both in the physical and the spiritual realm. A truly beautiful life will address both the demands of God and the needs of God's creatures.

We need to mature and reject the notion so widely held that appearance is the sum total of existence. Outward appearance is like the beautiful painting that delights the eye but has no practical use. God is a God of realism and practicality despite our ideas to the contrary. He wants action; He wants profitable service; He wants progress and improvement in our service and our likeness to Him.

Paul warns of "Having a form of godliness [the beauty of appearance], but denying the power thereof..." He urges us, "from such turn away." (2 Tim 3:5)

Rev 3:17 gives us this warning: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing [the beauty of appearance]; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked [the harsh reality]..."

There is certainly a vast difference between the picture we draw of our own worth and accomplishments, and the ruthless reality of truth. Even we who are filled with the Spirit have a tendency to see ourselves in our own rosy light and not in the cutting glare of the reality found in the Word of God. Most of us don't do it deliberately; it's only that we want so much to be what God wants us to be that we fudge a little. If God wants perfection, we will give Him -- and ourselves -- the perfection He and we both want so avidly. In our minds we blur our imperfections so that they gradually metamorphose into good traits. I know. I have done it occasionally until I came back to reality and realized there is much work to be done before the beauty of my aspirations becomes a completed thing of beauty according to the Word of God.

In this discourse I have tried to show the need for more than beauty. We need real-life quality, and we do not have the full reality yet. But there is good news. God in His grace and mercy has given us both beauty and reality before we have literally attained the full reality. We don't have to wait for the final work of perfection and beauty to be accomplished in our lives. If we are fully yielded to God and have the works necessary for a living faith, our lives at this very moment are breathing, pulsing works of art to Him. Reality as we know it may say it is not so, but God's own reality makes it so, and who can argue with the Judge of all as to what is real?

Without boasting I can say that God has truly made something beautiful out of my life, and it is possible only by my LIVING faith in Him.

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." (2 Cor 8:12)

If you too are a believer, your life and mine are both undeniable beautiful works of art created by the Master Artist. He has breathed His own life into these works of art and they have come vibrantly alive.

Is God Unfair?

Before we cry, “Unfair!” – that we are sinners because of Adam’s sin and not our own – consider this in Rom 5:19:

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

Do you see the justice and fairness here? It is true that we have been deemed to be sinners before we can make a choice in the matter: one man’s sin (Adam’s) befouled us all. But we can be made righteous, if we so choose, by the righteousness of one man – Jesus Christ.

Look at this: We have no righteousness of our own, but by the obedience of Christ (His suffering and dying on the cross) we can freely take on his righteousness simply by believing in Him. We are sinners without choosing to be sinners, but we can leave the estate of the damned and become righteous just by making the choice to be righteous.

God is by far the preeminent figure in all of existence. He is the model for the nature of all created creatures and things. The Model is inherently balanced and just in His essence and His dealings with creation. It is only reasonable and consistent that all creatures and things should partake of the same characteristic. They did, at one time before the fall of Adam. With the fall came all sorts of imbalances and inequities, traits that the nature of God will not tolerate forever.

To rectify matters in a universe and a human creature that were totally out of sync with Him, God had to deal with His own nature. God’s own nature demanded that neither man nor Nature could be made equitable without giving something in exchange for their restored pristine state; that in itself would be equity or balance – which is as much a part of God as love and truth and righteousness.

God Himself had the perfection and balance that man and Nature needed – but which they had no means of procuring. You know what this great Creator did: He came to earth as a Man so that He could die and thus give His perfect life as a vicarious sacrifice/exchange for the

grossly misshapen life of man and the sometimes cruel and erratic characteristics of Nature.

There is more, much more to this subject that we cannot go into at this time. Suffice it to say that our God is a God of balance and symmetry, surely a just and loving God.

For fuller information on this topic, read the book, *From Eternity to Eternity: Jesus Christ*, chptr 3, specifically, “Factors Requiring the Revelation of the Son.” <http://www.lulu.com/ajs>

Looking at the Amazing Love of Christ – Once Again

The love of Christ for mankind is forever unfolding before us like one of those old-fashioned barber shop rotating poles. It keeps moving and coming from – where? and going to – where? Or a better figure would be that the love of Christ is like a kaleidoscope that, the more you turn it and look at it, the more beautiful and amazing it becomes. Without attempting to be “deep” (this is not the place for that), I want to run this bit of truth by you:

“The human Jesus was the Logos or Word of John 1.1, enclosed in a body of flesh. (John 1.14) Therefore, He was fully aware of the relationship existing between Himself (the Logos/Word) and the Father, an unbreakable bond that was greater than any attachment between a man and his closest relatives and friends. But the human Jesus, in full concert with the Father, chose to take on the sins of all mankind, knowing that God the Father could never be associated with sin, a thing loathsome to both the Father and Jesus Himself.

“Jesus knew the Father would have to abandon Him (the human Jesus), and when the Father did in fact turn His back on Jesus, Jesus could only cry in terror, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Blackened by sins He had not committed and cursed by atrocities to which He had not acquiesced, Jesus became the first denizen of a hell prepared originally for the devil and his host of fallen angels. No human has ever suffered to the extreme that Jesus did... for you and for me. He willingly submitted Himself to the rejection and the wrath of His Father because He and His Father both loved us, mankind, with a love stronger than suffering and death – even greater than the torment of hell.”

This is not a sermon; it’s a laying out before you how much Jesus loved us – and if He loved us that much 2000-some years ago, He loves us even now while we are turning our backs on Him and rejecting His

overtures of peace and love. I am not nagging at you; I am just wondering what on earth is keeping you from this love, which is the only thing that will save you from an eternity in hell

Our Need for God Is Overwhelming

During the time of Noah, of the godly line only Noah and his family maintained their integrity. Only they remained true to the principles of their Creator. That must have been a horrible time if all the descendants of Seth the progenitor of the righteous line had defected and become one with those who were opposed to God and what He wanted!

God eventually said, “My Spirit will not contend with (remain in) man forever, for he is mortal (corrupt); his days will be a hundred and twenty years.” (Gen. 6.3 NIV)

God set a target date for man’s stay upon this planet. At the end of the 120 years God sent a mighty flood upon the earth and wiped out all land creatures with the exception of Noah and his family and the animals in the ark with them. With the advent of the flood, the consummate need of all mankind for God became a glaring fact. Righteous or unrighteous, sons of God or children of the devil, they all needed God.

When God created the universe, He set certain self-governing laws within it, but they needed (and still need today) the Creator’s existence to keep them activated. Without a continuously existent Creator they cannot function. Consequently, all men need God to the utmost whether it be the newborn infant or the gray-headed old person in his last moments on earth. We all need God equally, instantly and continuously. Different persons have varying specific needs of the moment, but no person needs God more or less than another. We all need God to the ultimate degree.

The greatest need any person can have is the need for salvation. Without salvation all other needs are meaningless. The lost soul is a child of hell, and in hell there is no such concept as “need.” The term presupposes at least the slimmest of hopes it will be met, and hell annihilates all hope – forever. In hell need and hope are alike preposterously impossible.

Jesus Is All We Need

In this life there is an abundance of hope for all men and women. But we can never find that hope in worldly pursuits, not even in those pursuits that are relatively good and noble. It is good to acquire knowledge; it is a noble endeavor to seek to eradicate all social injustice, and God demands that you take care of your family. These are all good deeds, but they cannot, in a lifetime filled with them, meet the need for salvation, which need can be filled only by Jesus Christ.

When I think on the uniqueness of Christ, then my vision of Him, which, like everyone else's, is relatively obscure, becomes, for a fleeting moment, clear and focused. I see Him, in a crystal-clear moment, as a colossus among the petty icons, mythological figures and would-be gods of mankind. I have always known this is true of Christ, but in the special instant of clarity I know it more fully and can get hold of that mental image more facily. It is abundantly evident that there is no other person, no other name that is even a distant second to the name of Jesus; all others are lost in His surpassing glory. There are other truths also that I see more clearly in the focused moment:

- Jesus of course is God Himself.
- He is the summing up of the Godhead – as are the Father and the Holy Spirit. They are three in one and what one is or does as the primary agent, the others are participant in it.
- When we read that Jesus died for us, we know that God also (in the Person of Jesus) died for us, according to the above statement (that Jesus is the summing up of the Godhead and the three - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are one).
- No so-called God or prophet of any other religion ever voluntarily assumed the sins of all men and died in great agony for them. The prophets could only die for their own sins and the so-called gods of

mythology were too busy being “godly” to stoop to such indignity and suffering.

This unusual (for me) perception directs my thoughts to the following scriptures relative to Jesus’ position in the Godhead (please note the capitalized words):

- “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of GOD OUR SAVIOUR, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope...” (1Ti 1:1)
- “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of GOD OUR SAVIOUR...” (1Ti 2:3)
- “But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of GOD OUR SAVIOUR;” (Tit 1:3)
- “Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of GOD OUR SAVIOUR in all things.” (Tit 2:10)
- “But after that the kindness and love of GOD OUR SAVIOUR toward man appeared...” (Tit 3:4)
- “To the only wise GOD OUR SAVIOUR, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jud 1:25)

Whether you think the “God” referred to in the above passages means the whole of the Godhead or just the Father figure, Paul and Jude are, at the least, combining the offices of the Son (“Saviour”) and the Father into one. They consider the Father and the Son to be one.

Furthermore, Jesus was the Holy Spirit who, he said, would come back to them after He (Jesus) had left the earth. He assured them with these words, “I will not leave you comfortless; **I** will come to you.” He fulfilled this promise when He came in the form of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. We know Jesus is the Holy Spirit because we are told in Acts 16.7 (RSV, ASV, ISV) that the “Spirit of Jesus,” whom the KJV refers to

only as the “Spirit,” meaning the Holy Spirit, forbade Paul and Silas to go into Bithynia.

There is much in Holy Writ to attest to the all-ness of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians on this wise:

“...and he [the Father] has put all things under his [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him [Christ] who fills all in all.” (Eph 1:22-23 RSV)

In addition Paul wrote the following to the saints at Colosse:

“For it pleased the Father that in him [Jesus] should all fulness dwell...” (Col 1:19)

“For in him [Jesus] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” (Col 2:9)

Nor can we overlook what John said about Jesus in John 1.1:

“In the beginning was the Word [“the Divine *Expression*, (that is *Christ*) – *Strong’s Dictionary*], and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**”

If you fail to see (which is highly unlikely) the oneness of God and Christ in the passage above, the fourteenth verse of the same chapter should do away with all ambiguity. John declares,

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

That settle sit. It is evident that Jesus is wholly God. It is further evident, as we have shown previously in this essay, that in this Jesus we see the Father and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Jesus is all we ever need.

God the Primal Life Force

The Scriptures tell us that the people of Jesus' day were amazed at His teaching, that He taught them as one with authority and not like the scribes and Pharisees of the time. But if they had only known who it was speaking to them, there would have been no cause for amazement. Jesus was the great Creator God come down from heaven to tell the people what He – the Creator God Himself – expected of them in grateful worship and service. Their Teacher was the Almighty Himself squeezed – and “limited,” if you will – into a frail, mortal frame for the purpose of redemption and teaching and living a perfect life before them. They had God in their midst and did not know it.

God is the Primal Life Force who has within His perfect being both male and female attributes. Thus, He is gentle and He is powerful; He is lowly and He is so glorious that humanity cannot bear to see His full glory. God is a loving Father and He is the sword of justice that slays the wicked. He is longsuffering, but when the cup of His indignation overflows, people are slain and souls sent into everlasting judgment.

We refer to God as “He” because we see Him as a powerful Being, which is a male trait. But He is neither male nor female. He is simply – and in an extremely complex way – GOD, having all the traits we now possess in attenuated form from Him. (Our evil tendencies come from the fall in Eden where Adam and his posterity all plunged into not just one sin, but SIN in its horrible entirety.)

God infused a portion of His life force into Adam after He had molded Adam into the physical form God wanted for him. Therefore Adam and all of his descendants have both male and female traits in them, with one of the two traits being dominant and determining the sex of the embryo early in its existence. Both life forces or streams were resident in Adam, but the subsistent life force, which, if dominant, would show itself in the

development of female organs, was diverted into Eve at the moment she was drawn from Adam's side.

In the human life cycle, what I am pleased to call the two "streams" of life are initially represented by the male's sperm cell and the female's ovum or egg cell. Upon a new conception in the womb, these "streams" converge to form a specialized cell, which in this instance is a human cell. But we cannot rashly presume that a *person* began at that moment. The life in the womb in the early stages is no doubt human life as it was conceived by the confluence of the two human life forces, male and female. But that does not validly argue for the embryo's being a person. In like manner, the ovum and the sperm cell are human, but it is stretching the imagination overmuch to refer to them or the early life in the womb as a person.

God is the Primal Life Force who has within His Almighty Being an entire universe and yet He can be concerned about one tragic sinful person and take the repentant sinner into God's capacious heart. God cannot be limited; He cannot be coerced nor tricked into doing what human con artists want Him to do. He is perfect in knowledge, in power and in love.

If you don't know God, you are woefully deprived despite any natural attainment you have. There is a hole in all human psyches that nothing but God can fill. Often people who are deprived of the knowledge and presence of God, are not aware that they need God and they drink to excess, trying to fill the void with alcohol. It's a fruitless quest. When that fails, as it must, these persons who don't know God throw themselves into their work, trying to make more money and seeking to scale the ladder of success in order to fill the persistent void within. When that fails, they try to find satisfaction for their souls in the inordinate pursuit of sex as though a carnal pleasure, which will die with them, could ever gratify a longing of the soul for God! It is an impossible pursuit. After cavorting madly for months or years like stallions in heat, they eventually find that nothing, nothing can even begin to fill the emptiness that only God can fill.

The happy ending would be that they finally did the only sensible thing they could do and gave their lives to Jesus – I would to God that were always true!

Come unto Jesus all ye that labor,
All that are weary, worn and defiled.
Bring Him your burdens; seek now His favor,
Tell Him your sorrows, in Him confide.

Chorus

He satisfies, He satisfies.
O will you let Him in your heart abide?
He'll keep your soul, whatever betide
Won't you try Jesus, He satisfies.

I know from experience: Jesus does satisfy that longing of the soul for something above and beyond oneself.

Reverie on a Ridiculously Hot Day

Today the electric power in our area has failed – once again. It seems that the Southland has a disproportionately high rate of power outages when compared with the North, where I lived the first 74 years of my life. Since our house is electric-dependent except for the hot water heater – we heat and cool, cook and operate the appliances with electricity – this latest outage was an outrage. I tried to walk softly in this demanding house and not get overheated as the temperature slowly began to rise. I also ate very little during this down time, which was only three hours (three hours that were beginning to seem like twenty-four hours), because I did not want to open the refrigerator and lose any of the precious cold air that was keeping my food safely preserved and edible.

There was another concern: I didn't go into the freezer because once the meats and other foods thawed, they could not safely be refrozen due to health and taste issues. It really did not matter since I would be unable to cook any raw food or rewarm the leftovers: I had no operable stove or microwave. As you can see, I'm just a pore ol' man tryin' to survive. At this point I hope I have elicited a proper amount of sympathy from you.

But there was a bright spot in this sad picture. Wanting to move about as little as possible in order to maintain my body temperature as low as I could in the 88 degree temperature (and climbing), I just sat still and did a little reflecting. No, an apple did not drop on my head and reveal to me the mystery of gravity a la Sir Isaac Newton nor did a revelation of a great truth flash before me in my reverie. That happens to great minds and I have been shut out of that class. I am the type of person for whom God has to exert an extra portion of the divine might to break through my very natural pragmatism in order to bring to me just a small insight on a small grain of truth. There are no great revelations here. I am a plow horse, not a thoroughbred.

Be that as it may (I like that phrase; it betokens something deep, although in this case there is no “deep” forthcoming), God did give me some small things to think about. Here they are:

An area or regional power failure, of course, affects thousands of people. In that group are some who greatly need the power to operate devices that are essential to their health or well-being. That is not good, but additionally, in that group there are likely to be a good number who follow Christ.. What will God do with these people who belong to Him? Can we expect Him always to work a miracle of deliverance by not letting the outage occur? Or, if He lets the electric power fail, should we expect Him to work spectacular miracles in each individual’s life either to heal him of the affliction or to provide electric power to the individual while he or she is surrounded on all sides by power failure?

And further, can any who trust God expect Him to take away all trouble and adversities from their lives? There are accounts of great men of faith throughout the Bible to disprove that theory. What are we to conclude then? Christians of today can look for the same adversities to plague them that plague their fellow creatures - except in those special instances in which God chooses to show His power in a miraculous way. Other than that there is adversity on all sides for saint and sinner alike. There is one critical difference however: Christians have the Spirit of God within them to sustain them through all their troubles. And this is aside from the fact that Christians have a much better state awaiting them at the end of their day. They have a heaven to go to while the expectation of the sinner is only unremitting torment in the flames of hell.

I do not pressure God for miracles in my life aside from the daily miracles of living sin-free and maintaining my sanity in a world gone mad. He has brought me to the point where my faith is not predicated on the glories of the miracles Christ performs, but on Jesus Christ Himself. The faith is there whether He works the longed for miracle or whether He steps back and watches me while I suffer physically and mentally or actually

die - again while He is watching. But I have to speak candidly now: I am not implying that I am made of super stuff that allows of no fears and disdains pain. I know more fear than I care to admit and I honestly do not like to hurt physically or emotionally. But what is a guy like me to do? I know what the truth is, at least in this area, and all I can do is declare the truth and trust God that He will help me live up to my stout declaration.

Jesus' miracles were to attest to His divinity to a people whose hearts had grown gross and insensitive to spiritual matters. They talked a good talk, but walked not at all as they talked. Miracles, signs of great power in the natural realm were needed to shake them out of their spiritual stupor. The miracles were very effective. All Palestine was abuzz with the deeds of this uncommon man from Galilee. The apostles also worked many miracles. Jesus had said they would, and their miracles were to show they were true apostles and not just ordinary ministers of God.

I do not have anything to prove along that line. I am a simple servant of God and all I need to back up that claim is the Spirit of God leading me and causing me to walk and talk right.

I think I can do that.

The God of Wind, Earthquake and Fire

God is the God of all creation. He is Lord of wind and earthquake and fire. There are six separate instances in Scripture to confirm this claim, two for wind, two for earthquake and two for fire.

Wind

This first demonstration of His power over the wind needs no explanation to most people.

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry *land*, and the waters were divided.” Exo 14:21

God was obviously in the wind that beat back the mighty waters of the Red Sea, allowing His people to go through as on dry land. Then, after their passage through the waters rising high on both sides as they crossed over,

“Thou [God] didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered [their enemies]: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” Exo 15:10.

Once again God was in this particular wind, this time in wrath and judgment – on the enemies of Israel who were intent on pursuing and massacring the Israelites.

Earthquake

“And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.” Mat 28:2.

God was in the earthquake, which was a sign of His great power and authority, although it apparently was not needed to move the stone from the sepulcher. The angel took care of that. The next incident revealing the power of God is this:

“And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.” Act 16:26

This earthquake was not just a sign of power; it was the power unleashed to free God's servants Paul and Silas – and, incidentally to show they were approved of God.

Fire

In this first incident of divine fire God is once again showing His approval of an act or a person. The person was Gideon and the act was his obedience in laying out a sacrifice for the Lord.

“And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay *them* upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that *was* in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.” Jdg 6:20-21

In the following incident God, in the person of the angel, showed beyond all doubt that He is God of the fire, and He was literally IN the fire itself.

“So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered *it* upon a rock unto the LORD: and *the angel* did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on *it*, and fell on their faces to the ground.” Jdg 13:19-20.

We have proved that God is indeed the God of wind, earthquake and fire. But this does not mean that every time there

is one of the three occurrences God is directly involved with what happens. He dramatically demonstrated the fact to Elijah on Mt. Horeb. It appears that Elijah was running away from his job...

“And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was *so*, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, *there came* a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?” 1Ki 19:9-13

God was giving Elijah a strong lesson: God is not in every demonstration of the awesome power of Nature, which of course means it is the power of God. Nevertheless, God is not always moving, at any particular time, through whatever cataclysmic happening it may be and He does not want us to expect God always to show that great power whenever He wants to bless us or get our attention. Sometimes He speaks in a “still small voice” – He whispers to us in the quietness, and we will have to create moments of quietness in order for God to speak. He is not limited to awesome displays of might. He is a diverse God and works and speaks in a diversity of ways.

Be alert. Expect God to come, look for Him, listen for His voice from any quarter. He doesn't always announce His message or appearance in advance; you have to be ready and look for Him to visit you in His own way and time.

Be sure to listen for that still small voice!

The Will of God – An Ongoing Concern for the Believer

There are many perspectives from which to study the Will of God. In this essay we want to look at it from the following angle:

There are some general rules of thumb that can be gleaned from the Scriptures. One is this: If there is an evident need in a brother's life that can be filled by any resources you have - fill the need. Quickly. There is no need to pray about it. But there may be an infrequent exception to this general rule, and most general rules do have exceptions. The particular exception is this: There can be some needs – even glaring ones – in a brother's or sister's life that God does not want YOU to fill despite your having the means to do so. (That is a surprise to some of you!) He has another way to meet the need; and God is a wise God who sees and foresees all contingencies and knows precisely what He wants to do in all situations involving His people.

Now please don't use this as an excuse to refrain from doing a good deed that you really did not want to do anyway. And be sure of this: Any good deed that does not have the proper motivation (love) propelling it, would give you only a big fat zero on your resume of good works in the sight of God.. Or have you forgotten the admonition of the Apostle Paul who wrote,

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing.” 1Co 13:3.

Love should be the driving force in all our interactions with our fellow creatures, especially our spiritual brothers and sisters.

But what God wants us to do in our dealings with our brothers and sisters should also concern us. It is incumbent on us

as children of God that we be alert at all times to what God wants, when He wants it and how He wants it. That brings us face to face with the will of God. *Will of God*: It is a complex and abstract concept for the human mind. It is too broad a term for our limited intellects: it needs specificity. For instance, there is the will of God for all Creation; there is the will of God for Earth, the will of God for mankind, the will of God for sinners and the will of God for His people. Then there is the will of God for you. When we add these specifics to the abstract concept – and learn what they entail – the will of God may, in a sense, become more complex, but it also becomes a little more tangible, a more structured concept, one we can at least make an effort to handle with some degree of success – yet only by the grace of God.

It becomes clear that the believer who cares about what God wants him to do, cannot follow God at a distance and always discern what God's will is at any particular time in his life. Meanwhile, it is still true that when you see your brother in need, you should fill the need if you have the resources to do so. You never have to pray about it. But you do have to walk so closely to your God that He can, merely by a gentle nudge, hold you back from doing what usually would be a routine good deed. It usually would be a spiritual slam-dunk.

But, in this instance, perhaps God wants someone else to perform the charitable act, or He wants the one in need to suffer a while longer with the need unfilled so that he might be mellowed and rounded by the experience. In any event, we are to do good at all times when it is within our power – except when God rules otherwise. As we have seen, the will of God can be complex and abstract, and it is certain that fully doing that will at all times is no casual thing. The will of God does not come sashaying up to the believer and announce, “I am the will of God for you! Follow me!” No. You will not encounter the will of God by chance. You will not trip over it lying right before you. You have to actively look for it and, when you have found it, pursue it diligently so that you will be doing what God wants at

all times. It is imperative for your own well-being and that of the lives you should be touching. The will of God should consume your life. It IS your life – if you are a born-again true believer.

This Too Shall Pass

We have to learn to appreciate the specific moments in our lives. That is because most of our blessings and good feelings are temporary; they are for the moment only. No, God is not toying with us when He gives us blessings only for the moment; it is just that life itself is merely a temporary thing, a very small drop of water in the sea of eternity. Even we – children of God – have to endure the fickleness of life, and we should thank God for every blessing that comes in a fleeting second and then evaporates.

If you were being tortured in a literal fire and the one tormenting you gave you an option of a two-minute respite from your torment or of continuing it without pause, you would not disdain the two minutes of reprieve because it was not long enough. You would eagerly accept it. So accept with a grateful heart whatever blessings God bestows on you in the midst of your continuing afflictions. There is no situation in which we are mired that could not be worse. There is no pain and disappointment that could not be more severe. And that it is not worse than it is, is due to the grace and mercy of God. Man brought suffering down on his own miserable head when he sinned in the Garden. The blood of Christ takes away the sin of those who believe in Christ, but we are still reaping what we sowed, in Eden and in our respective lives.

God is not tormenting us. He is allowing the flames of adversity to work their work of mellowing and maturing us. He is molding and shaping us in the fire and making us into the vessel of gold He wants us to be. All men have to suffer because we are all under the curse placed on Adam when he fell, but those who believe in Jesus know there is a purpose to their suffering. “If a man therefore purge himself from these [the other unsanctified vessels], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work.” (2 Tim. 2.21)

Our negatives of life come at us in a wide variety of ways. Whatever hurts us, tempts us, tries our faith and/or patience can

be termed adversities, things that go against our mental, physical or spiritual well-being. For example, my oldest sister Ruth departed this life June, 2005 and my brother Walter left us in December 2006. Although there was a year and a half between the events, they occurred after our not having lost a brother or a sister for roughly sixty years. Then – within the space of less than two years, *swoosh! swoosh!* – with two mighty swings of his cruel scythe, death felled one third of the six siblings. There was no negotiating with the Grim Reaper. He came, he chose, he conquered. It was not a good feeling at all.

After the passing of my brother Walter in December, my schedule, such as it was, became a shambles. My faith was not shaken by the loss – after all, Ruth and Walt were into the years where each day survived is a small victory – but I missed them and would have missed them if they both had been over one hundred years old. But, as a matter of fact, Walt was nine years my junior. By normal reckoning I should have left this life first. My emotions, it seems, were adversely affected and the turmoil reached into the physical, upsetting my body's normal resistance to affliction and pushing an already tenuous memory another notch lower. My writing muse took a leave of absence and my ability to meditate was for a time impaired. Altogether it was not a good time.

But, despite all appearances, it happened as I knew it would – again despite all appearances. God, who is faithful and infallible, stepped in, in His own way and His own time, and set me back on track. I was floundering, I was confused, but in the fuzzy back reaches of my mind I knew (or *sensed?*) God would interpose His mighty hand; I just did not know when.

What have I learned from this? Really, it was what I had already known, that God will never leave one who trusts in Him, hanging in the wind forever. We may be battered and tossed wildly about like a small craft in a stormy sea, but He will never forsake us. God will let happen to us just what we need for our reaping and molding and purging; no trial of our faith can go beyond that. No negative situation lasts forever. Whatever it is, it too shall pass.

A Response to a Blog Comment

Today I was looking at some of my old posts and I came across one titled *Reading the Bible Is a Must*. What struck me is one viewer's comment and my response to the comment. Below is my response, posted July 13, 2005. After you have read it, "Go, and do thou likewise":

"I have just received a comment on the post I made Saturday, July 9, titled *Reading the Bible Is a Must*. The writer says they didn't use the Comment section because they are ashamed to admit publicly they are not reading their Bible as they should. Let me quickly and earnestly remind you: We are not perfect beings and we will fall short here or there, in this way or that way. The beauty in serving Christ is that He is so very gracious and understanding – and forgiving. He will forgive again and again and again if we will only admit our shortcomings or sins or whatever and get up from where we have fallen and turn full-face to Him. This is called repentance and it must precede forgiveness of our sins or whatever shortcomings we have. When we see where we are wrong, we have to acknowledge our wrong *and correct the wrong*.

I have a 'confession' of my own to make: Reading the Scripture is not always a joy for me; some days it starts out as a chore, but it is as needful to my spiritual life as any natural practice, such as eating, is to my natural life. I find that God helps me in my understanding of what I read and, once again, it builds me up spiritually as I continue doing it. My correspondent writes, with very good insight, '...it is what I have to do, like brushing my teeth and showering in the morning. It just has to become part

of my day, part of my routine, whether I like it or not.’

They have gotten the point without my saying it. You don’t wait for a ‘spirit of reading the Bible’ any more than you wait for a spirit of prayer before you pray. We are all fallible humans and we are not always going to want to do what we should do, but we do what we should do because it is for our benefit and for the benefit of those whose lives we touch. My correspondent further says, again with that good insight into what they need, “I’ll have to take on this same mentality [of doing what needs to be done] with reading the Bible and do like you suggest in your blog and read two chapters from each Testament.”

The writer really didn’t need me; as they wrote they saw what their problem was and began to address it. I believe what they needed was someone to whom they could admit their failure. It was a gesture of cleansing themselves. Well – they have admitted it to God and He unquestionably hears their confession and has forgiven them for neglecting His Word.

I wish everyone would respond as positively to admonition as this viewer did! Forget that it would make me happy – it would make God smile in heaven and the effects would ripple down until they reach deep within the soul of the viewers themselves.

Ultimate Divine Primacy Gives Ultimate Divine Rights

I want to draw you a picture, a picture of 1) great power and 2) absolute majesty and 3) comprehensive knowledge – all of this and many other attributes that are all concentrated in one ineffable Being: the Almighty, omniscient Elohim of Genesis 1.1. That is all there was “in the beginning,” a beginning whose date we find it hard to calculate because time did not exist prior to the creation of the worlds. Space and time were brought into being to accommodate Creation and the man who as yet existed only in the mind of God. It was for this creature whom He would love to death, that God spoke planet Earth into existence.

God is the Creator of all things, including those human creatures capable of reason who have not yet submitted themselves to their Creator. All Creation is the property of God and if He elects to send to hell those who rebel against Him – He has full right to do so. Who can order Him to do otherwise?

Remember: There are only two factors in all of existence: that which is created and that which is not created. The factor that is not created must perforce be eternal, and the only eternal (in the full sense of the term) entity is God. So we have on one side of the existential equation, all of Creation. On the other side we have only God. (Please understand that referring to it as an “existential equation” means only that the equation refers to all of existence, nothing more; nothing “deep” and quirky.) There can be no gray area here, that is, there can be no area that is part of creation and part of eternity. Our logical minds, enlightened by the Word of God (the same Word of God quotes God as swearing an oath based on His eternalness: ⁴⁰ I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever...” Deut. 32.40 NIV.), impel us to that conclusion. Although all believers in Christ are at this moment a part of eternity, they cannot claim to have existed in the forever past. That prerogative belongs solely to God.

While speaking Earth into existence, this great all-everything God – who was all alone and yet not lonely due to His multi-faceted being that embodies “all things pertaining to life and godliness” – simultaneously created the universe with trillions of cosmic objects flying and whirling hither and yon, with no easily discernible pattern, either to their movements or the reason for their creation. He had no need to consult with a gaggle of architects and engineers before any step in the creative process and there was no one mightier or possessing greater authority than He – He was the only One who existed “in the beginning.” It was fitting, therefore, that He should create what He wanted, where He wanted it and when He wanted it. So, mighty and alone, did God create the universe.

If we were using man’s terminology, we would say that, after creating the worlds, God looked around and then decided to make a creature in the likeness of Himself. Perhaps God *was* feeling lonely, even after creating the innumerable host of angels that were at His beck and call. But, of course, that was not the way it was at all. How can a perfect Being who has all-sufficiency ever be lonely?

Furthermore, all that God has ever done has already been decided by Him from forever. His knowledge is not like ours, forever growing as we learn and experience new things. God’s knowledge is static and perfect; it is the same today that it always was. We are not here on a sudden divine whim: God has had a plan from all eternity for all mankind and for each individual person within that generic term.

Perhaps you can see what I am trying to convince you of: There is no limit to God’s authority. No one can tell Him what to do. He brought all we see into existence by His own power. God smiles and the skies are bright and blue; He frowns and the storm clouds gather; He becomes angry and all hell breaks loose in the skies that had once been so pleasant and balmy. God alone is God and He alone dictates what shall be in His creation. When mankind gets that conviction rooted firmly in his mind and heart, his path, even when rocky, will be much easier to travel and his

entire outlook will change. There is a saying, “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!” You certainly can never defeat God, no matter how hard you try, so why not join up with Him? Your life will be better here and it will be much better in heaven – better than this present life and an infinity better than the eternity in hell toward which you are now so resolutely pressing.

A Reflection on Washing and Purging and Judgment

So wash me thou, without, within,
Or purge with fire if that must be;
No matter how, if only sin
Die out in me, die out in me.

The writer of the above song progresses in his thought. First he earnestly asks God to wash him thoroughly, “without [and] within.” Then, realizing that all believers need a touch of the fire of purging, he cries, “or purge with fire, if that must be” ...and indeed it must be. Then he becomes desperate in his need for total disassociation with sin and throws himself wholly on the altar of sacrifice – “No matter how,” he entreats, “if only sin die out in me!” His desire and submission to the will of God have now become complete. The writer is not asking for mercy; the mercy, he knows full well, is in the initial washing in the blood of Jesus, the daily washing by the Word of God and the trial by fire.

When we first come to Christ, His blood washes us clean from sin, inside and out. After that critical cleansing, the recurring “washing of water by the Word” (Eph. 5.25) cleanses from the filth of the world those who are already saved by the blood of Christ. The washing of the water by the Word flushes from their consciences the ambient sin they pick up merely by walking in the sinful world. The sins do not get inside and into the heart; the sins cling loosely to the soles of their feet in a symbolic sense and can be readily washed off by the daily application of the Word of God. It is similar to Jesus’ washing the feet of His disciples. “Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit...” Joh 13:10.

Do you feel with me the urgency to be completely and forever free of any lingering trace of sin? You are already free from sin in the sight of God, but you feel those insistent urges to

sin from your carnal nature that is dead by faith in Christ, but tries to resurrect itself daily and must be killed on a daily basis. This is no anomaly to the believer in Christ. That is why Jesus said,

“... If any man will come after me, let him DENY HIMSELF, and TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY, and follow me. 24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life [by dying daily] for my sake, the same shall save it.” Luk 9:23-24.

Paul cautions us,

“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged [by God when we did not judge our own selves by His Word], we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” 1Co 11:31-32.

Note: It is only by the mercy of God that, when we fail to correct our own shortcomings, he then chastens us “that we should not be condemned with the world.”

And finally Peter weighs in on the subject and warns us,

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” 1Pe 4:17.

Coupling this scripture with the one just quoted (that we should judge ourselves), it is clear that the judgment or chastening we receive from God in this life depends on how well we judge ourselves in the light of His Word. God has no wish to chasten us, but if we fail to judge ourselves, in mercy He will use the rod of correction on us.

If God is so intent on saving us from the judgment to come, shouldn't we be as zealous for our own eternal welfare? We should have the attitude of the songwriter that, whatever it

takes – whether washing or trial by fire – let God's perfect will be wrought on us and in us and through us.

The Ticking of the Clock

Perhaps you remember, or have heard of the famous grandfather clocks that used to grace the homes of many families in the 1800's. They had a certain mystique, an indefinable air of fate that was the result of a little bit of folklore and the fact that each swing of the large pendulum and each very audible "tick-tock" could be seen as sweeping the seconds away from a person's lifespan.

I have a fair-sized pendulum clock on my family room wall. It does not have anywhere near the size and grandeur of the grandfather clock of old, but it too measures out the time with each back and forth swing of its pendulum. There is no tick-tock nor any other sound from this electric hybrid, but it visually metes out the seconds and the hours of my day and my life. The pendulum ceaselessly swings to and fro and the hands of the clock go round and round, remorselessly sweeping seconds and years from my life.

With each imagined tick-tock of the clock and each very real back-and-forth swing of its pendulum I have lost two seconds of my time on this earth, thus: "tick" and a swing of the pendulum to the right - one second is gone, and "tock" and a swing of the pendulum back to the left - two seconds have flown from my life. They are lost never to be retrieved. They cannot be recycled and used again. My life, your life, both are slowly and surely ticking away.

This could be very disturbing if I should concentrate on the damning inevitability of the back and forth swing of the tireless pendulum and the unceasing sweep of the hands of the clock. We all know we cannot stop the clock merely by wishing it would stop, and we are as certain as death and taxes that we can never still the back and forth doomsday swing of life's clock nor mute its sonorous tick-tock, tick-tock.

But perhaps you are as I am: you are saved; you are a child of God; you belong solely to Him. You know that, although up to now you have not made perfect use of the precious time

allotted you, you are at present endeavoring to "redeem" (Eph. 5.16, Col. 4.5) or fully utilize the time you have left. God is not concerned with what you have done in the past, either of good or of evil, but what you are doing NOW. The past is gone, irretrievable, and the present is always with you. You can use the seconds that remain to you in positive pursuits; you can use them to please God and to do His will.

There is nothing you can do with the past – except to bring its sins and misdeeds to the cross. God alone can undo them and make them as if they never happened. And the beautiful thing is this: We have all this time remaining to us in which to throw ourselves into fully doing the will of God as it pertains to our own lives. Whether we have a few seconds, a few hours, a few days, months or years, it doesn't matter. All that matters is that we pursue the fulfillment of the will of God in whatever time is left. Then we can calmly look at the clock that is relentlessly pursuing its way to the end of our lives and say, "All is well."

But don't look too long at the clock. Raise your Ebenezer ("hitherto hath the Lord helped us") quickly and move on from there – the seconds are fleeting and you still have work to do!

Memories, Memories...

Memories That Appeal to Us from the Past

These are the remembrances of the good times of yesteryear. Older people have a habit of harking back to “the good ol’ days.” Incidentally, there are even a good number of middle-aged people who are now doing the same thing, fondly recalling the earlier times of their lives. The reason is obvious: For the past five or six decades conditions of the world in many areas have steadily been getting worse. These worsening conditions prevail in the following areas: 1) nation vs. nation, 2) domestic/marital, 3) morals and 4) the relations of various individuals and groups with one another.

Both middle-aged and senior citizens can remember when times were actually better though no period in world or American history has ever been perfect. People are not perfect, therefore conditions can never achieve that status. Even so, from this distance the days of our childhood and early adult years seem to have been better, less stressful, you might say. Maybe it stems from the penchant of humans, when looking back, to see only the good and overlook the bad. We have the need to see something better than today, whether it be the years gone by or the future yet to come with its longed-for blessings.

If we would only view the present as we view the past, we would be better off. That is, if we would emphasize the good happenings in our lives and look beyond the current mishaps and turmoil, our lot would not be so dreary. Apostle Paul advises us, “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Phi. 4.6.

Logically, if we grow in Christ, we should be able to look back from the future on today’s happenings with gratitude and joy. But our gratitude and joy should arise primarily from the knowledge that we have grown in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Just as today we can review the record of our many yesterdays and thank God for His goodness then and

especially for what He is doing for us and to us and in us today.

If we follow close after our Lord, we will never have to long for the good ol' days as far as our own walk with Christ is concerned. We may long for the experiences the Church knew back in former times; the visible church may experience backsliding in this or that area, yet individually we should always be advanced beyond the limited sphere of yesterday. And as we individually walk with Christ we will continually be making good memories for the future. They will be memories on which we can later look back with gratitude and joy – for the good times of yesterday and more especially for the good times we will know at that moment. With the followers of Christ the present is always better than the past.

Continue to walk with the Master and all your tomorrows will continue to shine brighter and brighter until you arrive at the Perfect Day that will eclipse all memories of the past.

Memories That Shape Us

What makes a person who he or she is? I am not an expert in the field, but we all have our own thoughts about most subjects. They may be well-founded opinions or just a hunch on this or that. Some of us will die clutching an erroneous idea that is based on no more than tradition, folklore or on what “they say” – you name it.

I am not clinging tightly to shaky beliefs. The statements I am making in this blog are NOT chiseled into a rock where they will withstand all scrutiny, unchangeable for all time. It is thought-provoking, though, that our memory has a great deal to do with who we are. A person who has full-blown amnesia has no clue as to who he is. He doesn't know what he thinks on certain topics, he knows no one, he doesn't even know if he has committed some dastardly act like murder or rape. He is devoid of a personality. When you consider it, while you are safe in the knowledge of who you are, you know the world of the amnesiac has to be a scary one. The victim of severe amnesia not only

knows no one, he doesn't even know himself. He is a complete stranger to himself. Frightening.

Let's go a little further into this uncharted territory. Imagine that this had happened to you and you had been a child of God before you lost your memory. But now you know nothing, not even the Savior who ransomed you with His blood. If you don't know Christ at this time of "nonpersonhood," how can you be saved? Having lost your memory, your empirical knowledge is severely restricted. In that unfortunate state, as far as you know, you have never yielded to the Master, you have never said "I surrender all," you have never known sweet communion with Him.

Will you have to learn about Christ again and go through months or years of deciding to yield to Him – that is, if you ever do yield? Will you, who were once saved, be cast into hell for unbelief? Now that is an unsettling thought.

But, not to worry; I'm just trying to rattle your cage a bit. It is possible that you might lose your memory, but you are, at this time, a child of God and He will let nothing harm you in an ultimate way. Hold on to the memories that have helped mold you into what and who you are. At the same time, as we have seen, you are building new memories, whether you know it or not. Your actions and your associations and your interactions with others are showing right now who you are. Above all, your relationship with Christ is the determining factor as to who you are and what you are becoming.

Don't worry about ever losing your memory or your personality or your "you-ness." At this point in time you are a child of God and, if you don't deliberately relinquish that status, you will be a child of God forever.

Don't Stop Now

In the following discourse I have synthesized a post written two months after the terrorist acts of 9/11/01 with a post written August 2007. Both posts are intended to push one who has newly turned to Christ into making that choice a committed way of life.
AJS

A Word to the Newly Converted

(11/18/01)

It is good to see the beginning of the evangelization of America (although it is not yet a completed work). It is unfortunate that it took the terrorist events of September 11 to shake America awake to the idea that they really need the God they have treated so callously the last few decades. But, since we cannot reverse the compound tragedies of that date, we need to accept the lessons they have taught us who are remaining and respond appropriately.

Be Sincere in Your Approach to God

Remember this, however: God is not a halfway God. He doesn't care for mediocre service or insincere worship. Don't come in a bargaining mood: "Lord, I'll give you such and such if you just keep me safe from this and that." You forget that you are the beggar and He is the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Don't bring your con-man behavior to God, trying to trick Him out of His valuable resources in exchange for your worthless peanuts.

We are trying to say here that no matter what your original reason was for turning to Christ – I believe fear would be the key reason – at this point you need to bring Him everything you are and everything you possess. Sure, you were frightened and a little panicky, or you may have turned to Christ because logic dictated that you do so. Whatever drove you to Him is not now important. What does matter a great deal now is that neither fear nor logic can make you continue to follow Christ. The ups and

downs of life and the continuing stress of just existing in the midst of a world in upheaval will shake all your good intentions out of you if you do not love Him for who He is. Neither fear nor logic can keep you faithful to Christ.

Bring Him your all. Only then can you find in Him the peace and confidence that you need in these turbulent times. As you serve Him acceptably, He will make that beautiful life that you have often seen in your mind's eye come vibrantly alive. It will be a reality, a thing of beauty in the eyes of God.

I hope, now that you have “chanced upon” this Savior of sinners, you will learn to love Him. (He is really easy to love.) Only love will keep you faithful: His love for you and your return love to Him. You could never love God if He did not first love you. You would not know where to start nor would you want to start because sin had deadened your heart and you could not feel His overtures toward you. But now, if you have begun to love God and your fellowman, this means you have begun to grow in Christ.

How to Keep the Faith

A holy life is without doubt a beautiful life. It is also an unusual one. It is like swimming upstream; you have to go against the flow. Just floating in the water doesn't mean that you stay in the same place. If you do nothing and lazily float in the stream, you will drift backward with the tide. Human nature naturally flows against what God wants of us. We all need to learn more about God in order to swim upstream against what “comes naturally.” To counteract your natural bent, we have listed below three basic steps you need to take. If you really want to follow this Jesus, each step is important to you in your new life.

1. Study your Bible daily. If you don't have a Bible, get one. It will be your lifeline.

2. Become a member of a church that believes in the Bible. You may be surprised, but not all churches teach a crucified and risen Jesus and a Christlike manner of living.

3. Cultivate a prayer life. You say, “I don’t know how to pray.” Don’t let that stop you. Go to God as a child would go to its father. Ask Him for what you need, and ask in faith. Forget about your poor grammar and wrong choice of words. God wants sincerity. If you give Him sincerity, He will understand your poorly worded prayers and will flood you with His spiritual blessings. Learn how to wait in His presence, just thinking on God’s goodness and mercy and love. Meditate on God’s greatness, His perfect knowledge, His pervading Presence and His all-powerfulness. Immerse yourself completely in your waiting before God and worshiping Him. It may well overwhelm you.

I must repeat: Now that you have decided to seek God, do it fervently. Avoid the twin pitfalls of half-hearted service to God and lukewarm love for Him. Half-hearted service means service (even service that includes a considerable sacrifice) without genuine love.

In the same category are impressive worship rituals that are devoid of the worshiper’s heart. Of course what is an impressive worship ritual to one may not be to another. Whether you prefer a church that is very vocal and demonstrably emotional in their liturgy or one that is less physically active but no less sincere, be sure that your heart is into the worship. By itself, the outer wrapping of the gift to God – the physical movements and the spoken words – matters little. What moves God is when you give your **SELF** to Him with the gift. An impressive–appearing liturgy without “heart” is like the beautiful painting or the masterful work of sculpture: It has no life. Such worship cannot please God nor can it help you. Absorb yourself in your service and worship and God will bless you abundantly.

You Are Part of a Global Community

(8/13/07)

New converts to the Kingdom of God are so euphoric and glad to be delivered from their old way of living that they are scarcely aware there is a worldwide network of believers. The network is variously known as the Church or the body/bride of Christ. This worldwide network, along with the brothers and sisters of the new converts in the local community are a unique fellowship bound together by love, the love of Christ. So let me give you new converts, wherever and whoever you are, a few words of counsel:

Remember your fellow saints of the global community. You have certainly read or heard of the many, many tragedies occurring all over the world. They range from savage thunderstorms and tornadoes to deadly wars to tsunamis and floods to earthquakes, fires, and – the most tragic of all – genocide or the attempt to kill whole national or ethnic groups. You do not live on an island in the middle of nowhere; and if you did, you could not successfully turn your back on your fellow creatures on this planet and you certainly in love could not isolate your heart and your sensibilities from your brothers and sisters in Christ.

As a follower of Christ you must do as He did: reach out a helping hand to these poor, wretched souls who so desperately need it. If you know of no other way to help, you can pray “the effectual fervent prayer” of faith that will work wonders of deliverance AND of keeping in the fire those who are destined for the fire. Yes, there are some whom God has decreed should go through the hot fires of adversity for a season. How long is a season? As long as God decrees in His love and wisdom and foreknowledge.

God Works in His Own Way and Time

You are new in Christ and you will have to learn by good teaching and inevitable experience that there are others beside

yourself in the body of Christ who greatly need your prayers and any other assistance you can give them. For some of these souls in need God will work a miracle of deliverance. Others will have to suffer awhile before deliverance is granted. Still others will have to suffer awhile before literally perishing in the flames of adversity. Their death will be their deliverance.

Yes, you have much to learn, but in your learning you will grow in Christ and you will grow in peace and joy despite any adversities that you personally may encounter. (You would have known adversities even had you not known Christ.) You have embarked on a wonderful trip replete with wonder and pragmatism, moments of elation and times spent in the valley of depression – through which the grace and the presence of God will, without fail, take you. You are heaven-bound and nothing can alter that fact if you will keep your faith in Jesus Christ through the good experiences and the bad. Just keep the faith!

We Can Live Above Sin

There Is a Word from the Lord for You

In this metaphoric little cubicle tucked under the remotest edge of the World Wide Web, there is a communication for you from God. Does this sound a bit stuffy? It isn't really as pompous as you might think. I have no delusions about the relative size or importance of this communiqué. Neither do I presume to say that every single person who reads this will get the purported message from God. Nor do I assert that, if they don't heed this particular message, they are outside the canopy of God's will. Nevertheless there are unquestionably some readers to whom these words are directed. Not all people will see the thoughts propounded here, not all will respond favorably, but there is no doubt that God's Word will accomplish His purpose. It will not return to Him unfulfilled.

To you who were surfing the Web and idly chanced upon this website, think on this: There are stars too numerous to count in the Internet sky. That you found this lone insignificant little star hidden amongst millions of others of greater magnitude is some sort of indication that you were meant to find it. Saint or sinner, if God has targeted you, there will be, somewhere in this space, a word for you and it will find you.

I can't say what your reaction will be, but be sure of this: Regardless of your response, a mark, however small, will be left on your inner consciousness. Then, again whether you are a believer or unbeliever, God will combine other seemingly insignificant gestures He makes toward you with this small mark already on your heart. The cumulative weight of these small importunate imprints can leave you with a deep imprint of what God wants of you. If you will obey the heavenly directive, you will be greatly blessed. If you refuse to obey, His Word will have fulfilled its mission, but you will be left unfulfilled, unfilled and unsatisfied. And you will still have His mark on you.

Now we can turn to our main topic of discussion: We Can Live Above Sin.

Coping with Wrong Desires

This discourse is not concerned only with sexual desires; it is dealing with morality in general and how to cope with the thoughts to sin that come to your mind. If you have no such problem, well and good – but it might be good to pinch yourself to see if you are still alive. All living sane persons are beset by unwanted thoughts that they know God does not want them to entertain, and we need to face the problem head-on.

Let's first define "lust." Lust, as it is used in the Bible, comes from a variety of words in the Hebrew and Greek, meaning anything from "desire" to "craving" to an overpowering longing to do what God has forbidden us to do. The last meaning is how we understand the word today. A desire or even a craving to do something or to have something forbidden by God is not a sin if the person who has the desire does not give in to it. It is the nature of mankind to lust, and salvation does not remove it. Salvation washes away the dreadful stain of past indulgences and imparts grace to overcome all residual sinful impulses arising from our carnal nature.

Sin Does Not Have to Be a Deed

But there is a danger that we may be lenient with ourselves and think that if we do not put the desire into action, we have come through the test unscathed. Be careful: If it is in your "heart" (if you yearn) to commit a sin, you are guilty of the sin before you have literally committed it. Jesus said, "...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Mat. 5.28)

Perhaps this will make it plainer to you: When you hold the thought fondly and wish you could do whatever it may be, you have crossed over the line. You have sinned. The truth is that you would do whatever the sinful desire is, if you had the opportunity – without being caught in the act. Unlike people like you, who can discern only outward actions, God sees the heart:

If the will to do is only in your heart without the actual committing of the deed, you are guilty,

This does not mean there should never be an impulse to do wrong in the mind of a believer – that is known as temptation and we all experience temptation – but when the desire is strong enough that it demolishes the barrier of your Christian conscience, it becomes a sin to you. The “barrier of your Christian conscience” to which I refer is that restraining wall that does not allow you to host sinful thoughts. The thoughts will come often and uninvited, but you should meet them at the door and bid them a hasty adieu. Never ask them in to stay for dinner.

If you harbor a wrong thought that comes into your mind instead of rejecting it, it will go deeper and deeper into your mind until it enters the heart and becomes a part of you. Even though you may never act on the thought, you are guilty of the overt deed. You have entertained the lust and thus, in effect, you have done what God said not to do. Quickly get rid of all sinful thoughts and replace them with virtuous concepts, so as not to leave a vacuum in your mind. Paul advises us,

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Phi 4:8.

Keep your mind occupied with positive thoughts.

The Lingering Effects of Past Misdeeds

For the believer in Christ, being restored to the favor of God after the believer has unfortunately fallen into sin – and even wallowed there awhile – is something he will never forget. It can be a bitter remembrance, and the grace, the mercy, the tender love and compassion that delivered him from his downward plunge into the cesspool of sin – these are things he can’t understand, but he is so very glad they were there for him. He knows he did not deserve the least bit of grace, mercy, love

or compassion, but God lavished them on him despite his being totally undeserving of them.

Yet there are times when the enormity of his past sins – sins that are now forgiven – come washing over the restored former defector, bent on sweeping him away from his haven in Christ. And the more God pours His grace into this now repentant sinner’s life, the greater his sins loom in his mind. It’s ironic that the closer the believer gets to Christ, the more he can see how terrible those sins were. They were, as a matter of fact, terrible offenses against the One who created the erstwhile sinner and lavished His love upon him.

It is difficult, at certain vulnerable times in our lives, for us who at one time fell and did not bounce right back up, to realize we are forgiven. The thought of what we did and to whom we did it can be a cancer that gnaws at us from within. But the blood of Christ has washed us clean from sin, inside and out. And further than that, as we go about our daily life, the “washing of water by the Word” (Eph. 5.26) cleanses us from the filth of the world that we pick up merely by walking in a sinful world.

The sins do not get inside of us. In a figure they cling loosely to our feet and can be readily washed off by the daily application of the Word of God. It is similar to Jesus’ washing the feet of His disciples. At first Peter refused to allow his Lord to humble Himself in that manner, but when he realized how important an event it was, he completely reversed himself. He asked Jesus to wash not only his feet, but his hand and his head also. But “Jesus saith to him [Peter], He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all [referring only to Judas].” Joh 13:10.

That is why, if it is possible, we should ingest the written Word of God into our beings daily either by reading it or hearing it; and if we can do neither, we should meditate on the Word that is in our hearts.

The disciples were cleansed from all their sins by their coming to Jesus: His blood, not yet shed, had washed them

clean. The foot washing was symbolic of their daily cleansing from the sins of the world through which they walked and with which they necessarily came in contact. They were cleansed continually by their association with the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

Time Is Running Out

I feel the need to plead further with you who do not yet know Christ: God's people are continually praying for God to be merciful to you.

You should be thankful for this small act of grace that God extends to you. The prayers of the righteous are certainly effective in bringing a canopy of grace and mercy over your head. It's evident (at least to us) that God pushes back your scheduled time of punishment because of our constant bellowing to Him for your sake. He did the same for us before we turned to Him. Someone – or some ones – somewhere, prayed that God would be merciful to us, and He was.

Right now He is merciful to you in part because we have prayed for you. But be sure of this: Regardless of the grace and mercy of God, all of His final times or dates are set in stone. That includes the time of your coming judgment. In a final sense the ultimate times can neither be altered nor nullified.

⁸⁹“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.”

(Psalms 119:89 KJV)

⁸“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” (Isa. 40:8 KJV)

The above scriptures may seem to contradict what I have just said about the grace and mercy of God thrusting back judgment. Also, you who are familiar with Scripture may differ with my view. “Look at Moses,” you will argue, “He literally broke the laws that God Himself had written on tablets of stone (Ex. 33:19) when he dashed the tablets to the ground in his anger at the Israelites' turning to idolatry. These tablets were made of the very stone in which you say God's times and dates are set.

And if, as you have said, anything that God wills to be is the law of God, evidently mankind can drastically alter God's laws and schedule of events."

You're right. Moses did break the stones in which the laws were written by the finger of God. Nevertheless, despite Moses' breaking the material stone in which they were couched, those laws were still set in stone, or rather a rock – the Rock of Ages. As the Commandments lay in shattered pieces of stone, they were still unbroken within the Being of God. They were a part of God Himself. No man could break the Commandments; no man could remove them until God was pleased to do so. Then, only when it was His will to do so, He replaced them with the "law of liberty" or the New Covenant that He established between Himself and His people.

"¹⁰But when that which is perfect [the New Covenant] is come, then that which is in part [the old Mosaic law] shall be done away." (I Cor. 13:10 KJV)

"⁷But if the ministration of death [the Mosaic law] written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: ⁸How shall not the ministration of the spirit [the New Covenant] be rather glorious? ⁹For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. ¹⁰For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

¹¹For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." (2 Cor. 3:7-11 KJV)

The Prayers of the Righteous Are Effective – for Now

God foresaw the prayers that would arise for you under the New Covenant of grace (and that arose for us while we were in

our sins), and He knew that He would put off your impending doom because of the effectiveness of the prayers. But don't be misled: there is a final time/date set for judgment in the schedule of God; beyond that there can be no mercy. This applies to all men and women. The combination of God's grace and the prayers of the saints have forestalled your Day of Judgment, but if you continually reject divine grace, it will finally evaporate like a drop of water sparkling alone in the desert heat. Or perhaps we should say "like a snowball in hell." That seems to be rather appropriate for the occasion. Whichever simile applies, grace will have disappeared for you only, never to return.

Your Fate Is in Your Own Hands

God has many ways that mystify us, but we know enough of His will and His ways of doing to be sure that anyone who is finally condemned to eternal death will have brought it on himself or herself. Consider the love of God from this angle: God the Almighty Creator knew no grief until He created man. He suffered no sorrows before the advent of humankind. To use human terms, there was no word for heartache in God's lexicon prior to His mind's conceiving and bringing to birth His greatest creation, man. Although angels defected from His favor before He created man, we read nowhere in the Scriptures of His being subjected to the grief of a spurned lover and husband until the human race came traipsing down the pathway of fickleness. And yet, because God loved this creature -- that He had not yet made -- He had to bring him into being.

In the scriptures below you can see how God pled with backslidden Israel. Because He is the same God today and because Israel at that time represented all humanity, you can take the same words and substitute your name for that of Israel. God is still pleading with mankind. He is pleading with you as He never pled with a fallen angel:

²²"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." (Isa. 44:22 KJV)

“⁴ I [want to draw you] with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I [will be to you] as those who take the yoke from [your] neck...” (Hos. 11:4 NKJV)
 “⁸ Oh, how can I give you up?... How can I let you go? ...My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows.” (Hosea 11:8 NRSV)

In the event that you don't already know it, my friend, this is LOVE – from a God who doesn't need either you or me and who would be just as powerful, just as glorious and just as majestic without us.

He pleads with you from a grieving heart: He wants so very much to save you from the coming Day of Judgment. He wants you to love Him in return, not just as a fire escape from hell, but as the tender, loving Savior He is. Would a man want a woman to love him just for what he could give her? God wants your heart; He wants an intimate relationship with you. Courting you with tender, loving words, He has a deep-seated longing to save you from your own wickedness. He sees, before the time, when your hour of judgment will come crashing upon you and He is imploring you to come to Him while grace still flows for you. Inevitably the burning desert heat will some day evaporate your last droplet of grace. When? Only God knows. It could be soon.

I feel like the marksman who unknowingly struck King Ahab in battle despite Ahab's attempt to disguise himself. The Bible tells us, "And a certain man drew a bow at a venture [at random], and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness [armor]: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded." You may find the full account in 1 Ki 22:1-38. God, through the prophet Micaiah, had pronounced judgment upon Ahab because of his many wicked deeds and Ahab thought he could outwit God. But the unfailing arrow of judgment sought him out in the confusion and fury of battle and found him.

I am not the prophet Micaiah. God has not told me to pronounce your judgment; He has told me only to plead with you and to warn you that all of His will shall come to pass and that all who stand in the way of the juggernaut of God's will shall eventually be crushed under it. But this small word does not contain your judgment; it is not all doom and gloom. What you are now reading is the mercy and grace of God. God is standing before you with His arms outstretched, waiting for you to hear His voice and come to Him. Don't harden your heart. Let it melt in repentance while He pleads with you:

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die...?”
Ezek 33:11.

This word that God is sending you through me is not a final condemnation – not yet. It is still couched in grace and love: “Turn ye, turn ye,” He implores. Almighty God has descended from His throne to plead with you and even the implied warning – not yet a passing of judgment – is spoken in love. How on earth can you refuse the heavenly plea? Your feet are mired in the sins and eventual judgment of earth and God is offering you a hand from the heavens. I repeat: How can you, a sinner inextricably bogged down in the wickedness and soon-coming damnation of this earth, reject the heavenly plea?

All I can do is reason with you and entreat you and warn you. But the warning doesn't have to be of concern to you if you will just turn to the Savior. What more can He do? What more can He give? He gave up glory and majesty and his own mortal life that you might live. He is waiting for you now as though that glory and majesty and life depended on your coming to Him. Believe me, it does not. Only God's great love and the boundless grace birthed from that love are holding back your judgment. You are bringing grief upon yourself by constantly rejecting Him. You have heard Him in the stillness of the night. You have

felt Him tugging at your heart. You won't find peace until you run into His open arms and let Him save you and hold you and comfort you.

“Turn ye, for why will ye die?”

Please, please, as God's representatives on earth – and who, in an ironic way, know better than you about the wrath of a spurned God – we urge you in the name of Jesus to come to Him now.

A God Who Never Changes

Allow me to make a broad statement at the outset. I will then try to answer the questions that naturally arise. Here is the statement – which is certifiably true:

“God positively *never* changes, not even in the smallest way. There is no need for Him to modify His Being or His way of thinking or His manner of interacting with His people. God stands alone, unchallenged in His glorious perfection and in His perfect glory. He neither shifts nor turns. Changing His mind is a thing repugnant to this God who knows “no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17 (KJV)

God Never Changes Because He Is Perfect

God never changes because God is perfect. Perfection cannot change. If it did, it would be evident that it was not the perfection it was supposed to be. It would no longer have been perfect even though the change would make it perfect. We imperfect beings will one day be perfect, but we can never say that we were always perfect. We gladly accept that limitation, however, and will be deliriously happy one day just to live from then on in an unblemished state.

But there can be no such limit with God. The God we look up to and on whom we depend for our very lives must be a faultless Being and, since He lives in the eternal *NOW* (ref., “*Eternity, Time and You*”), He can never have been imperfect. What He is today He has always been and always will be: the ultimate in Perfection.

Why Pray to a God Who Never Changes His Mind?

Here the footing gets slippery, but, if we are careful, we won’t lose our balance and fall off the narrow pathway into the chasms yawning on both sides of the trail. We can, *in the short term*, change the mind of God, but the transformation will be only apparent. It will come as no surprise to God that we swayed Him with our tearful petitions. What God determines to do as a

result of our prayers is what He has always known He would do. And yet, if we had not prayed, He would not have made the apparent shift in His thinking. Our present actions, whether they are petitions or manner of life, control the action God will take for or against us and the attitude He will assume toward us.

Hezekiah Changed God's Mind

When Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would die (Isa. 38:1-22), Hezekiah would certainly have died if he had not entreated the Lord for his life. Hezekiah was a good king and his impending death was not a result of any sin on his part. It was the natural conclusion of the lives of all mortals. Reduced to a trembling ball of nerves, Hezekiah tearfully besought the Lord not to take his life. God heard him and added fifteen more years to his life.

Once again we have to be careful that we don't get the wrong meaning from what we read. Despite your urgent prayers, God may not give you more years to live unless it is His ultimate will to do so. God only apparently lengthened Hezekiah's life: God foreknew that Hezekiah would pray to Him and God had already determined to give him fifteen more years.

Discounting all false claims to miraculous healings (some of which are sincere although not valid), we still conclude that there are believers in whose lives God shows more of His exceptional miracles than in the lives of others. God deals with each believer differently. He heals some; others He does not. He gives the power of healing to some; to others He does not. Although I have never seen it personally and although I am by nature of a skeptical mind, I am convinced that on rare occasions God has raised some persons to life after doctors had pronounced them dead.

This doesn't mean that I am about to jump on anyone's miracle bandwagon and see spectacular miracles in every routine act of God. Nor does it mean that all for whom God has performed such prodigious feats are saved and destined to sweep into heaven at the next trumpet blast. It means only that God

chooses to show His mighty arm when and where He pleases and on, and for whom He pleases. Remember, the goodness of God is not only bestowed on the righteous; it is also designed to lead sinful men to repentance. Rom. 2:4 (KJV)

We shouldn't need modern-day miracles for the evidence of the existence and goodness of God. We can see Him in the miracle of creation all around us – and then, as an added bonus, we have the evidence within us: the Spirit of God is the “earnest” or evidence of the treasured possession we have waiting for us in heaven. Of course unbelievers don't have this added proof of the existence of God. They have to believe in Him first; then He will give them His Holy Spirit.

Now that we have followed this side path a while, we come back to our contention that a) God never changes, and b) what He does or how He seems to think is something that was settled from eternity. God does not change. If He did, our world and our lives would be in great peril.

Does God's Immutability Confirm Individual Predestination?

I don't want to try your patience, so I will give short shrift to this argument. Please reference again “Eternity, Time and You.” I am using this quote from the article because it is so very important:

“No individual is predestined to do right or wrong. He alone writes on his own slate of time. He alone determines his eternal destiny.”

Summation

In a world of uncertainties and unreliable persons and fashions and laws, we desperately need something or Someone who is as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar and as sturdy as the Colossus of Rhodes. We need an Absolute, an undeviating code of morals and justice. We can't depend on our own sense of right

and wrong because we too are imperfect, changing human beings.

We have all experienced moments when everything seems to be crumbling in our grasp and the very ground on which we stand is shifting and rolling like a drunk in the wee hours of the morning. For our very sanity we need a Rock, an impenetrable fortress. We can never make it through this life successfully without such an underpinning. God is that Rock. God is our fortress. We need only to run into it in faith. Oh yes -- **we can make it** because the Rock has told us we can, and He never changes His mind, and His almightiness never wavers.

“The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength. For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God?”
Psa/ 18:31.

A Love That Will Not Let Us Go

There is one thing we all have in common: We are all sinners of the vilest sort apart from the grace of God. Do you ever take a negative look at yourself – you know, when you see all the past sins and mistakes and all the present blemishes? I know you have. No matter how much it makes us cringe, we need to see ourselves as we are – slimy, loathsome worms. It is a hard reality of life. We are obviously imperfect; we are patently creatures of the lowest, sinful nature, and, when measured against the lofty standard of God, we have committed some terrible sins in the past.

Do you ever start brooding about what you have done and how short you are even now of the perfect standard in Christ Jesus? I know you have. We don't belong in the same universe with our Creator. He is "high and lifted up." Low, base, slimy creatures that we are, we are afraid to crawl out of the holes where we have been hiding except when He touches us with His grace. ALL men have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are painfully imperfect, creatures of the lowest, sinful nature, and, according to the heavenly record, we have committed some appalling sins in the past.

Have you ever looked at the love and grace of God and felt that you didn't deserve them? Do you wonder how you could have committed such heinous sins against your Lord? I know you have. You, who are now walking upright before God, are still only a sinner saved by grace. There is a carnal nature within us that is waiting only for the opportunity to break out like a plague. We who are saved are not super humans. Without the ever-present grace of God, we are grossly imperfect; our natures are utterly depraved and, when our record is viewed in the light of the Word of God, we have committed many outrageous sins in the past.

We can't gloss it over just because it hurts our self-image. We are sinners, down, dirty and repulsive. We can be nothing else in the glare of the perfect righteousness of God. But before

we throw in the towel and accept our total worthlessness as something that neither God nor we can ever forgive, let's look at the record of Scripture. David, a "man after mine [God's] own heart," was aware of his own sinful nature. The scriptural record is there for all to see: David was like us; he was a sinner by birth. Even as we have done, David committed some atrocious crimes against the righteous law of God, but he then did what we sometimes are afraid to do: He looked squarely at himself in the bright light of God's Word. When he looked at God's standard, David was horrified by what he saw in himself and he called out to God desperately in his extremity. Listen to the pleas of a man who knew and acknowledged his sins:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. (Psa. 51:1-3)

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Psa. 51:14-17

"Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to thee, when my heart is faint. Lead thou me to the rock that is higher than I." Psa. 61. 1,2.

Our salvation lies in confessing that we are sinners without the grace of God to redeem us. When our hearts are "faint" with the realization of our undone condition, we need to cry to God. We need to go to the Rock. The Rock never changes in His steadfast love to us. The Rock is so very assuring in His unchanging sameness, solid and strong.

God has declared and – talk about “taking this to the bank” – His Word never fails:

“... Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”
(Jer. 31:3)

Then, as you ponder that declaration of always loving us, consider Paul’s words as he drives home to us the strength and persistence of divine love and grace:

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present [including our present imperfections], nor things to come... nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8: 33-39.

Take hope: God died for our salvation when we were at our most disfigured state. Now that He has washed us, He will give us hope for despair, He will keep our hearts clean and undefiled and give us eternal life for death. Love will not let us go – if we are yearning to be held by that same magnificent love. When we fall, all we have to do is acknowledge our fall and look to Christ for help. He invariably forgives us.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of

his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” Rom. 5:6-10.

If you will only believe, God will never, never let you go. His love can't give up on you, if you only keep the faith, no matter what your failings and in spite of your innate sinful nature. Hold on to Him – He will then hold on to you. His strong grasp on your hands will keep you from falling even when you have reached the end of the rope by which you are dangling over the chasm of doom yawning wide for you.

Don't be afraid. If you trust Him implicitly, hell cannot claim you and death will have lost its terror. Just believe in God; believe in His love; believe in His power. If you do, your final victory is sure. Eternal security is yours only by your living faith in God regardless of your temporary victories or failures.

A New Resolve for a New Year

(12/30/01)

Once again I am borrowing from, and expanding on, an article in a Sunday bulletin (12/30/01) of Faith Covenant Church in Decatur, GA. There is not sufficient space in a small church bulletin to fully expound on some subjects, so I impose these expanded thoughts on those who view the JacLyn Website. Is this plagiarizing? I think not.
- AJS

You will notice the word “resolve” in the title. We are not referring to just another New Year’s “resolution.” People make resolutions by the thousands every New Year and break them by the thousands within the first week or the first month at the most. What we are focusing on here is determination or willpower aided by the grace of God. We all know that without the grace of God the human will is unable to overcome human weaknesses and sinful habits.

Next we have to realize that there is nothing magical about a new year. New Year’s Day carries no special weight with God. It’s just another day in which He wants you and me to serve Him and to fulfill all His will for us for that day. But I must admit there is a certain psychological effect in the beginning of a new year that we can use to our advantage. God has no reservation against our using the start of a new year to help us in our service and worship to Him. He knows that in our impressionable and childlike psyches the dawn of a new year can signal a time of new customs and a renewal of zeal in serving God. It’s a convenient starting place for an improved way of living. We can forget the mistakes and failures of the past year or the past decade. They can’t be undone by brooding over them, and they can only hinder us in our present and future actions.

This is the start of a new day; it’s the dawning of new opportunities — and of course every day has that potential if we would but realize it. We often fail to wake up and smell the

coffee brewing for that particular day. If you are reading this before January 1, 2002, I would advise you not to wait until the actual first day of 2002. Today is your opportunity for a new beginning. You are not assured of tomorrow or any day in the future. So put the past behind you and live for today; it's all that you have. Instead of fretting about past mistakes and our own worthlessness (God and we both are already aware of them), we, including myself, should be like the "Little Engine that Could."

You know the story. The little steam engine was rolling over the plains with ease until it came to a lofty mountain directly in its path. Undaunted, the little engine went straight at the mountain. But as it actually began the precipitous climb up the mountainside, it began to have doubts. This was hard! No engine could ever conquer that mountain. In fact, the little engine slid backwards to the foot of the mountain. The mountain was steep – my, how steep it was! -- and our little engine was so small, so insignificant. It was such a little locomotive – not much power. But it felt it had to make the effort. The mountain was there, bold and insurmountable, and it seemed that the mountain had thrown the dare in the little engine's face: "Climb me if you can...you'll never make it!"

As small and weak as it was, the little engine knew it had to climb the mountain. So up to the mountain it went and lunged at its unscalable side. As it made the upward effort, it kept telling itself with every labored huff and puff, "*(huff) I think I can... (puff) I think I can... (huff) I think I can... I think I can... I think I can.*" It didn't pause to rest between huffs and puffs, but maintained its ground until the next huff or puff. and – *voila!* -- soon it was at the top. Then, as it proudly crested the mountain and started smoothly down the other side, with each easy chug-chug-chug it sighed, "*I knew I could, I knew I could, I knew I could.*"

If you want to make a resolve to follow the Lord or, if you are already following him and want to get closer to Him – you can do it. Don't listen to your own self-doubts or look at the immensity of the task. YOU CAN DO IT. Sure, you're weak and

insignificant in the face of the huge heap of earth and rock confronting you, but there is no doubt that you can make it. All that is required of you is your best, conscientious, consistent effort.

I dislike saying it, but it is even possible that you will lose steam temporarily and slide backwards, but don't you dare give up! Ask God to give you more steam for the effort, and believe in your heart that He will. When you are halfway or even an eighth of a way up the mountainside, it would be a tragedy for you to go belly up and crash in a heap at the foot of the mountain because you didn't have enough faith.

Some days will be more difficult than others and you may falter in your trying, but there has never been a man of God who did not falter or fail at times. What makes such men indomitable is 1) the Spirit within them; 2) their realization that God is with them even when they fail, and 3) their determination to try and try again. Don't wallow in your failure. Whenever you fail, believe in God; believe in yourself because you are filled with His energizing Spirit. It's the same vitalizing Presence of God who will give you the steam that will enable you to push up and up and up – farther and farther away from the flatland.

I have to further caution you: Contrary to the vignette of the little engine, this push will not be over quickly. We are in this for the long haul. We won't reach the top in an instant, nor a day nor a year, but we will certainly thresh that haughty mountain if we will only try and try and try again. Do you get the message? Conquering the mountain takes steady and repeated effort. When we go one inch up the mountain, we always have to go another and then another. That's why I have used so much repetition of certain words or combination of words in a single sentence, words like "try" and "push up" and "farther away." It's all about continually trying and pushing up and away from the old status quo or life as usual. It's about rising above the flatland of existence. Yes, I am sure you get the message.

I am also sure of something else: We can make it. There is no doubt, that we can make it. We may be little engines, but the top of the mountain is ours! God will be with us every huff and puff of the way.

After Carmel – What?

Please read 1 Kings 18:17-19:18.

Elijah the Prophet had had a most illustrious day on Mt. Carmel. It was one of many such days in the life of that extraordinary man of God. In it he had achieved a glorious victory over the pagan god Baal and his worshipers. He had:

- Set up a contest between himself as a representative of Jehovah and the 450 prophets of Baal the sun god. Jehovah won hands down. The false prophets had tried in vain from morning to evening to get their god to send fire down on their sacrifice. Then Elijah prayed a prayer of about a minute's duration and the fire came whooshing down on Elijah's sacrifice as a sign to the people that Jehovah was the only true God. The false prophets paid for their folly with their lives.
- Ended Israel's 3 years of drought by praying to God for rain, in answer to which God sent a gully washer, a deluge, the first rain Israel had experienced in three years.
- Immediately before the rains came, outran, on foot, the horses and chariot of King Ahab from Mt. Carmel to the entrance of the city of Jezreel! That must have set a world record for the distance. If the record had been clocked, it would still be standing today. Elijah is the only man known to win a race with a horse.

But the next day brought a complete shift in Elijah's circumstances and in his demeanor. Here is the rest of the story:

When Ahab arrived in Jezreel, he told Jezebel that Elijah had slaughtered the prophets of Baal. This infuriated Jezebel and she quickly dispatched this message to Elijah: "May the gods kill me also if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life just like the prophets of Baal you killed!"

Elijah reacted in a way that was strange for him. Fear overtook him and he fled for his life. Arriving in Beersheba, a town in Judah, he left his servant there. Then he pushed on alone into the desert, traveling all day. Finally he became weary with physical exhaustion and fear and sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die.

“I’ve had enough, LORD!” he said. “Take my life for I’m no better than my ancestors.”

Surely, someone else must have taken the place of the fearless, courageous prophet of yesterday. This man looked like Elijah, but he didn’t act like Elijah. The Elijah of yesterday had boldly confronted a wicked king and 450 of the king’s handpicked prophets before a crowd of Baal worshipers and he had come out of it with a great victory. Today’s look-alike was frightened like a hare that a ravenous wolf had trapped in a dead-end ravine. Jezebel was the wolf and she was closing in for the kill. Elijah got out of the dead-end ravine fast, and a day later, when he finally quit running like a timid hare, he sat down and wished for death. He could have stayed in Jezreel and Jezebel would have gladly granted him his wish.

What had happened here? Why the complete transformation in a man God had used so mightily? There is one explanation that we often overlook. Elijah lived in a time when the Holy Spirit was not necessarily a constant companion as He is today. The Spirit would descend on a person one moment and he would be a fearless advocate of divine truth. But when the Spirit would leave the man the next moment, he would then be only a man. See what happened to John the Baptist when the Spirit of God departed from him. (Mat. 11:2-6; Luke 7:19-23) This formerly fearless man had to seek reassurance that Jesus was indeed the Christ. It was as John had predicted early in his career: “He [Christ] must increase; I must decrease,” because the Holy Ghost could not be given to or be resident in any other mortal while Jesus was active in His ministry on earth. (John 7:38-39; Col. 1:19)

I am not ready to say that God's Spirit completely left Elijah; it was only that God was not "active within" him, converting him from within into whatever it was that God wanted at the time. God had not abandoned Elijah; He was still there at Elijah's side. This was evident by God's providing food for Elijah and then sending him where God wanted him to go, to Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai). Elijah made the full forty days' journey on foot apparently without pausing to rest, eat or drink! God was no doubt with him, but God's Spirit, for a time, was not moving and energizing him from within.

There seems to be no other explanation for the difference between the Elijah of Mt. Carmel and the Elijah who ran like a frightened Great Dane before the angry yelping of a solitary Chihuahua. In hindsight it was a ludicrous scene, this huge dog being chased by a ridiculous lap dog, but we can't be too amused. We have reacted the same way on numerous occasions and I am sure God is not exactly convulsed with laughter about it.

The Spirit of God does not play games with His people. God was not moving within Elijah for a purpose. God always has reasons for His actions or inactions and there was a lesson for Elijah in this unfolding drama. There is a lesson in it for us today. You will notice that God did not severely reprimand Elijah at any time for his unseemly flight before Jezebel. The nearest to a reproof was after the Spirit of the Lord had directed Elijah on the forty-day journey to Mt. Horeb (Sinai). When Elijah had reached the mount and entered into a cave, God mildly reprimanded him, saying, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Let's see if we can ascertain God's reason for allowing Elijah to go through this tumultuous period. Elijah presented his case before the Lord: "Lord, I've been very zealous for your law despite the children of Israel having forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars and slain your prophets. I'm the only worshiper of Jehovah left, and they are trying their best to take my life." It was a sad tale, one that we would have told, with more elaboration, in the same circumstances.

The Lord listened to his dirge and did not say. “Poor man! I know how you feel.” God merely told him, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.

Now see the tremendous natural cataclysms that occurred before Elijah’s terrified eyes, and note too that the Scripture says that “God was not in them” (the cataclysms):

“And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; **but the LORD was not in the wind**; and after the wind an earthquake; **but the LORD was not in the earthquake**, And after the earthquake a fire; **but the LORD was not in the fire.**”

The words, “the Lord was not in” this and that do not mean that God did not send the wind and the earthquake and the fire. The words simply mean that God was not trying to speak to Elijah through His awesome power such as He had shown on Mt. Carmel. It was time to leave Carmel behind: God was dealing with His servant in a new way.

“and after the fire **a still small voice** whispered within the prophet’s spirit. He sensed it; he didn’t hear it, and when he sensed it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and gingerly went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Again the voice came to him: ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’”

It is a very significant question for all whom God has called to any work. What are you doing here, and why are you not about your Father’s business?

Elijah repeated what he had told the Lord about the conditions in Israel and the threat to his own life. God brushed these complaints aside and told Elijah what He wanted him to do. In other words God told Elijah to leave his wallowing in the ashes of despair and do the work he was supposed to do. Here is the agenda God laid out for Elijah:

15) And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:

16) And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room

17) And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

God was telling Elijah to get back to work. And then God took away Elijah's pitiful claim to uniqueness. God told His him, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Even when it seems that no one else loves the Lord as much as you do, be assured of this: You are not alone in your service and devotion to God. Others have a love for God that can match or exceed yours.

I believe there were several things God wanted to show Elijah on Horeb:

- God is not only a terribly powerful God; He is a God within the stillest reaches of a man's being and within the quiet of Nature itself.
- God had not originally wanted Elijah there on Mt. Horeb. Elijah was defaulting in the face of the enemy's roar. To remedy the situation, God sent Elijah from Horeb with detailed instructions of what He wanted Elijah to do.

As we have noted, despite Elijah's gloomy notion that he was the only one true to God in Israel, there were 7,000 loyal followers of Jehovah in the nation. Elijah had been so absorbed in his own circumstances that he failed to realize that he still had fellow worshipers of Jehovah somewhere out there.

Perhaps God is asking you in your gloom and self-pity, "What doest thou here when you should be fulfilling my purpose

for your life?” We have all had our small Carmels, moments of exhilaration and a sense of purpose. But Carmels never last. Until Christ comes, there is only one way to go from the top: that is down. Eventually you have to come down from the mountaintop, and that necessarily means descending into the valley.

Have you gone down, down, down into your valley of self-inflicted defeat and lay there luxuriating in a pity party attended only by your poor lonesome self? If you have, take a leaf from Elijah’s experiences and get up! Shake off those ashes of despair and get to work for God. You are not on this planet to lament your pitiful state; you are here to reach out and away from yourself to others. You may not presently know your specific tasks in life, but your general purpose is to fill the need of anyone – **anyone**-- who has a need that you can fill. That is a tall, tall order.

Come to God with a repentant heart. Ask Him to speak to you once again. Then be prepared to hear the voice of God in any way that He chooses to commune with you. If it’s in the crashing thunder – that’s good. If it’s in any other show of divine power – again, good. But don’t be so intent on looking for the spectacular that you fail to hear the “still, small voice” inside that tells you what God wants of you.

“What doest thou here, Elijah?” Quit wishing to die. Get up and live. God is not through with you yet!

Bringing Christ to Birth

(12/23/01)

This essay is an expansion on a very brief article of the same title printed in the Faith Covenant Church bulletin (Decatur, GA) of December 23, 2001.

Ebenezer Scrooge would say, “Bah! Humbug!” Madeline Murray O’Hare would curl her lip in scorn and heap invectives on me for presuming to ask Her Majesty such a question; the majority of today’s scientists would smile tolerantly as one smiles at a child’s ignorance; but you – what do **you** think of the Christ Child? Was He born of a virgin? Did He die for the sins of the world? Did He really rise again from the dead?

If you answer yes to the questions above, I have another pertinent question for you. If you believe what is written about Christ, why aren’t you following Him? There is a serious lack of sound logic here, or perhaps it is a lack of caring. It is difficult for me to accept that you believe in the virgin birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and you still reject Him. And let’s not overlook Gethsemane, where not a blow of the scourge was laid upon Jesus and no one spit in His face. No soldiers drove nails into His hands and His feet -- and yet He lay prostrate on the ground in the extreme agony of assuming the sins of all men and women before he was crucified for those sins. Does all of this love and suffering mean nothing to you?

But you say you believe. Then I have to say your heart is not where your mouth is, friend. In fact, even the devils believe – and they tremble in fear because they know their mere belief is a futile thing. Your having the concept of a Christ Child in your mind and not bringing it to birth in your actions is the same as though He had never been born of Mary. It is as though the Christ had remained in the womb, useless and ineffective, a divine abnormality. In like manner, a mere mental conception of the Christ is clearly not enough. Now that He has been born and has lived and has died and risen again for you – what are you

going to do about it? Bring Him to birth in your heart. Let Christ live again!

A permanently pregnant Mary would have done mankind no worldly – or heavenly -- good. A concept of Christ in your mind that does not result in His being brought to birth in your heart and life is no doubt a futile and potentially tragic thing. You will die with that precious gift existing only in your mind. As a never-ending pregnancy is against nature, so an unfruitful concept of Christ in the mind is against spiritual normalcy.

“So,” you say, “what can I do about it?”

There is really nothing you can do except to believe. But that is the beauty of it all. When you believe from your heart, God will bring the concept of Christ that you have in your mind to birth in your heart. The concept will go from a mere intellectual fleck of information to a glorious reality within your innermost being. Then the life of the newborn Christ will shine through your own life. As you yield more and more to Christ, He will take over your life, directing and controlling it as He sees fit. Your life will then be a thing of beauty.

Please don't read this and then go your way without giving it another thought. Remember what I have said: Your eternal destiny depends on your bringing the thought of Christ out of the womb of your mind and allowing it to become the living, breathing Christ in your life. Do that and you will...

Have a Very, Very Blessed Christmas

This is my sincere wish for ALL of my readers.

“Climb the Mountain!”

(This essay is patterned after the JacLyn Enterprises pamphlet of the same name.)

Let’s suppose that God told you to go to the Himalayas, that far-off mountain chain extending across Asia between India and Tibet. We’ll further suppose that you, in your childlike faith, make that long trek, wondering why God is sending you there. Okay, you get there and hang around, waiting for more instructions. (Oh yes, you are foolish enough to blindly go where God commands.)

God finally tells you more of what He wants of you in that remote land. He directs you to the foothills of Mt. Everest, which you can see from a distance. It is an imposing heap of stone and earth, rising 29,028 feet above sea level. Then, as you are waiting expectantly in the lowlands, God lays His command on you, mincing no words.

“Climb the mountain,” God states tersely, “and use no special equipment. I want you at the top.”

That’s it. No explanation, no elaboration. Just, “Climb the mountain.”

You need time to recapture your thoughts that have exploded in every direction, so you go back to your hotel room and sit down and think:

What’s this all about? How do I — without special equipment — climb a mountain that seasoned mountain climbers view as a difficult task?

So you go to God again and ask Him, “Why – and how, Lord? I know nothing at all about climbing mountains.” And you get the same words He gave you before. “Climb the mountain.” Now the feeling within you has to be chaotic and tense. It’s not that you don’t trust God. It’s just that your faith needs bolstering. You know if God told you to scale the mountain, He’ll get you to the top somehow. But that’s faith in the abstract. You need dynamic faith, and at the moment you have doubts about YOU.

You really don't trust yourself to trust God enough to perform the task.

But then you remember what you have often said: "If God told me to climb the highest mountain, I'd do it!" You remember those brave words, but you don't want to.

All right. You begin to put faith in action and you travel across two continents just to get near your pesky mountain. Finally, here you are, practically an arm's length away from the world's highest peak with the command of God ringing in your ears: "Climb the mountain, climb the mountain!" Now it's time to put your foot where your mouth has often been — on that mountain you said you would climb. So, climb the mountain.

You take what things you can: sneakers, sun glasses, a sleeping bag, and the like, and you head toward the mountain that looms so tall and insurmountable in the distance. And you ask yourself,

If it looks so formidable from a distance, how overpowering will it be when I get close to it? Am I just imagining all this? Has God told me to do this or is it the fantasy of an overwrought imagination?

But, after all your probing and testing, you know that what God told you was what God told you. Climb the mountain!

You take the long hike to the base of the mountain, and experienced mountain climbers who have come for their own expert assaults on Mt. Everest, look down their expert noses at you with your little backpack and tennis shoes and think you have lost all sanity.

Despite these doubters, you begin the long, arduous ascent up the side of Mt. Everest, the killer of men. I can't tell you how you made it; I've never tackled a foe like Everest. I can tell you, however, that soon after you started up the face of the mountain, you began to tire. You scabbled on and upward and the toeholds you thought you had, turned to gravel beneath your unsuspecting feet, sometimes threatening to send you plummeting back down to where you started. But you kept struggling upward. God had

told you to climb the mountain. At one point you foolishly congratulated yourself,

For an amateur without climbing equipment, I could do worse.

That was very unwise; your ascent of Everest had just begun. Soon the mountain threw your indiscreet words back into your teeth. You were scraping your hands raw as you continually reached up for the least bit of handhold you could get in the flinty mountain. And too often the apparent outcropping of rock that you seized on, treacherously pulled away from the rock face as you were pulling yourself up on it.

Over to the northeast thunderclouds were forming and the rain began to pelt down on you as you gasped for air in the rarefied atmosphere into which you were entering. Looking for a place to make camp, you found there was no suitable niche in the rock and no land flat enough to rest on without the danger of falling down the mountain. Then, finally, you found the sought-for crevice just as the fury of the storm overtook you. As the lightning flashed in demonic fury above and all around you and the booming thunder enveloped you and rocked the very mountain, you huddled under the blanket you had thrown around yourself and prayed. Oh, how you prayed!

But God gave you no voice from heaven, there was no immediate easing of the storm that was tearing at the mountain; there was not even a still small voice inside your heart. Nothing but the howling wind and the drenching rain, rolling thunder and dangerous lightning. Heaven had forgotten you on the mountain God told you to climb.

Finally, the storm ceases — so that the numbing cold can set in. At this point Everest doesn't care if you climb it or not. Nature has no interest in your quest. God Himself seems to be far off and unmindful. But you know that you have to go on; you have to at least try to conquer this monolith that stands so tall and aloof and unfeeling. God had said, Climb the mountain.

Digging in, physically and mentally, you start up the mountainside again as ice begins to form on the slope. By now your hands have lost much of their feeling, and when you grasp at the jagged spurs of rock, they tear at your hands, causing them to bleed. On your wretched journey you encounter areas so slippery that you wonder now how you ever slid and scrambled your way over them. You had no ice axes with which to pick at the ice, and you had no piton, which is an iron spike with a ring at the end, designed to be hammered into a crack in the rock or ice for support. How you crawled up and over the ice without these pieces of equipment and didn't fall to your death was miraculous.

But at last you made it. You dragged your aching body over the last few yards to the summit just as the sun came out and the skies looked the bluest you had ever seen. You gratefully soaked in the warm rays of sunlight and triumphantly planted your banner on the summit of Mt. Everest.

It was then that God finally spoke to you again. The voice came inaudibly, deep inside, as you stood before Him with the broken pieces of your pride lying at your feet (a Mt. Everest can do that to a person).

God told you then that His command to climb the mountain did not mean it would be easy. It was neither easy nor was it an instantaneous happening. Nor did God's command make you impervious to discouragement. The task was extremely grueling, and you did not hear a gentle, reassuring voice telling you, You can make it, you can make it, when you were swinging out over nothing at times but the thinnest of bone-chilling cold air. You had nothing but God's word telling you to do the impossible.

It became evident to you, as you pondered this amazing happening in your life, that all you needed was His command and your faith in Him to carry you to the top. God had said, Climb the mountain, and you did just that. By faith in the power of God's sovereign command—*you actually climbed the mountain!*

Have you a mountain to climb? Has God laid on you an impossible task? God can ask some difficult things of us at times. They may not be as extreme as climbing Mt. Everest in everyday clothing or walking through fire, but in our fearful minds they can come close. Remember this: God would not have asked the “impossible” of you if He hadn’t seen that you already had a faith like a grain of mustard seed, a faith with great growth potential. That faith will undoubtedly need His bolstering, but then, whatever God asks of us, He has to give us the added grace to do it.

We are not super humans. We are not strong in our own might. We are fragile earthen vessels. Our strength always has to come from Him. So, when God asks the impossible, we know that it is possible because He would not have required it of us if He had not meant to give us the necessary grace. He is nothing if He is not a God of grace and power.

Now go out, shock the devil (and yourself), and climb the mountain!

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2 · p · □k

2 · p · □k

2 · √ ··········· FSFC ······ A · J ··· Comm