

# **A Handbook for Believers**

**Aaron J. Smith**

**2008**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.



# Contents

CONTENTS.....	3
THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY.....	5
<i>Buddhism</i> .....	5
<i>Hinduism</i> .....	6
<i>Islam</i> .....	7
<b>CHAPTER ONE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
WHY WE ALL NEED SALVATION.....	9
<i>Defining Salvation</i> .....	9
<i>Defining Sin</i> .....	10
<i>The Origin of Sin</i> .....	12
<i>God Metes Out Punishment for Sin</i> .....	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO.....</b>	<b>17</b>
GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION.....	17
<i>It Began in Eden</i> .....	18
<i>The 'Plan' Drawn Up</i> .....	21
<i>A Gradual Revelation of God</i> .....	23
<b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>	<b>27</b>
STEPS TO SALVATION.....	27

<i>Belief (Faith)</i> .....	28
<i>Repentance</i> .....	29
<i>Baptism</i> .....	30
<i>Receiving the Holy Spirit</i> .....	31
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	<b>33</b>
HOW TO KEEP YOUR SALVATION .....	33
<i>Can We Lose Our Salvation by a Single Sin?</i> .....	34
<i>We Must Continually Turn Away from Sin</i> .....	36
<i>Specific Acts the Believer Should Perform</i> .....	36
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	<b>50</b>
A LOOK AT THE BIBLE .....	50
<i>How the Bible Was Compiled</i> .....	51
<i>The Books of the Bible</i> .....	53
<i>About Aaron J. Smith</i> ... ..	57

# The Uniqueness of Christianity

One definition of religion is “an organized system of faith and worship.” And of course the faith and worship must be toward some type of deity. Using that definition, we see that there are many religions in the world. How would a person newly arrived from another planet and wishing to worship, select the right religion? Or is there more than one right way to worship? For that matter, in what or whom should he place his faith?

It is impossible in this space to extensively study religions other than Christianity in order to make the right choice based on our knowledge of them. The reader can take a cursory look at the prominent features of three of them below and compare them with what we have written in this book on Christianity. We have decided, of course, that there is no belief in all the realm of religious beliefs like that of Christianity. But naturally we are biased.

The reader can decide for himself which form of religion is likely to please whatever deities there are out there. Or, if he chooses, he can take years in studying them before he makes his decision. But, of course, then he might have died of old age.

## Buddhism

The religion<sup>1</sup> of about one eighth of the world's people, Buddhism is the name for a complex system of beliefs

---

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia Copyright 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 The Learning Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

developed around the teachings of a single man. The Buddha, whose name was Siddhartha Gautama, lived 2,500 years ago in India.

To the follower of the Buddha, life goes on and on in many reincarnations or rebirths. This wheel of rebirth, known as samsara, condemns the individual to the suffering of being alive and striving. Life's goal, according to the Buddha, is to escape from this cycle of rebirth, to stop being born as a suffering individual with selfish cravings and passions. This release is called Nirvana, the highest bliss, the end of the self.

## **Hinduism**

It is a religion that worships many gods. Yet it also adheres to the view that there is only one God, called Brahman. All other divinities are aspects of the one absolute and unknowable Brahman.

Another distinctive feature of Hinduism is belief in the transmigration of souls, or reincarnation. Associated with this belief is the conviction that all living things are part of the same essence. Individuals pass through cycles of birth and death. This means that an individual soul may return many times in human, animal, or even vegetable form. What a person does in the present life will affect the next life. This is the doctrine of Karma, the law of cause and effect.

## **Islam**

The word Islam<sup>2</sup> means "surrender" or "submission," submission to the will of Allah, the one God. Muslims are those who have submitted themselves. The basic creed of Islam is

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

brief: There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah. The message Muhammad received told him that there was but one God, not many gods, as most Arabs believed. This God was creator of the world, and He would one day judge mankind. This was no novel message: Judaism and Christianity were already spreading the idea of one God.

God is always ready to pardon the individual and restore him to the sinless state in which he started life. Because He [Allah] is also just, on the Last Day He will judge every person according to his deeds. On the Last Day, all the dead will be resurrected and either rewarded with heaven or punished with hell.

## Chapter One

# Why We All Need Salvation

### Defining Salvation

In a spiritual context salvation means being rescued or delivered immediately from sin and spiritual death. Eventually, we shall be delivered from all the corollaries of sin such as illness, physical death and the adversities of life. The Apostle Paul informs us that “...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) This declares there is not one good man or woman in the entire human race from Adam down to us today. All have broken the Law of God. All have come short of God’s glorious ideal.

The Law of God is simply the will of God; it is what God wants. This will predated even the Mosaic Law, which was the Law of God *for that time* in codified form. In both time frames, then and now, it demands that whoever sins should die. (This may surprise you when you see sinners all around you who are very much alive and continually sinning. But God has not forgotten nor overlooked their sins: He will repay.)

The penalty for breaking God’s Law is extreme because sin (the breaking of the Law of God) is utterly reprehensible to God. But, under the old Mosaic Law, the love of God temporarily allowed a substitute to die in the sinner’s place. However, this was not a permanent solution because the justice of God makes rigid requirements of any valid substitute. A fully acceptable substitute (sacrifice) has to be human, willing and sin-free.

This required the coming of the God/man Jesus Christ. He came to earth, human, willing and sin-free. Through His dying in humanity’s place, all men and women are granted forgiveness of their sins if they will avail themselves of it through faith. By

Jesus' rising again He guaranteed eternal life to all who believe in Him. If He had not risen, His supposed power over death would have been exposed for a flagrant deception and we would neither have forgiveness nor eternal life.

This subject is dealt with further in chapter two, "God's Plan of Salvation."

## Defining Sin

Before going further, we should state again what sin is and what its effects on mankind are. Sin is the breaking of the Law of God. (1 John 3:4) It is the ogre in our lives that created the need for salvation. To break the Law of God means to go contrary to whatever God wants you to do. This covers a broad area.

Using this definition of sin, if God wants you to take the right fork in the road and you take the left, you have broken His Law; you have sinned. If God wants you not to do something and you do it, you have sinned. If God should will for you to go somewhere or perform a specific service for Him and you fail to go or perform, you have sinned. It is not that you broke the Law or will of God "a little." You either break the Law or you do not break the Law. You either sin or you do not sin; there is no great or small transgression of the Law.

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all [the law]. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." (Jas. 2:10, 11)

It becomes evident now that having been washed clean of iniquity once does not mean that you can never sin again. Such an idea is impossible. Living holy is an uphill push. We are imperfect in the knowledge of God's will and we are plagued

with our own weak will, so we are apt to sin somewhere in our daily walk, either by commission or by omission. But we should not assume the attitude that we have to sin. The proper Christian attitude should be that we are determined not to sin deliberately even while we admit our human weaknesses. The point is that sin need not loom threateningly over our troubled heads like a cruel slave master.

Sinning or not sinning is a matter of choice — your choice — but, more than that, it is a matter of your being literally imperfect. On one hand, you deliberately choose not to sin, but on the other hand, although you choose not to sin, you are not literally perfect and you will sin at times without realizing it, and sometimes you will sin when you did not mean to do so. Nevertheless, through weakness and shortcomings, despite defect and default, the blood of Christ covers you if you continue steadfast in your faith.

When a person is saved it means that he is immediately saved from sin. The new convert is instantly snatched out of his iniquities and there is not the least sinful blot left in him although he literally still lives in the midst of sin. His faith in Jesus Christ has made him perfect in God's reckoning. The same faith keeps him continually perfect in the sight of God.

“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under [the old Mosaic] law but under grace.” (Rom 6:11-14 RSV)

By faith we reckon or count ourselves to be dead to sin and by reason of this faith God reckons us to be perfect. And you can be sure that God's reckoning makes it so.

Still the problems that attend this sin-cursed life are not all disposed of so quickly. While the believer has the assurance that his sin is washed away, getting rid of its attendant ills cannot be accomplished until later, much later: after this life is over.

## **The Origin of Sin**

Concerning sin's beginning, all we shall say in this treatise is that the first sin was committed when Lucifer (Satan) one of the angels of God, rebelled against God. (Isaiah 14:12-14) Lucifer was defeated and cast out of heaven. Jesus briefly referred to the event once during His ministry on earth: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." (Luke 10:18)

The question now arises: How did mankind become involved in sin? When Lucifer, now usually referred to as Satan, rebelled against God's sovereignty and was expelled from heaven, his sole purpose thereafter was to destroy everything God had made or planned. Nothing was more inviting to him than to annihilate or discredit the man God had created and placed in the Garden of Eden.

If God had permitted Satan to do so, Satan would have demolished Adam and Eve without a moment's hesitation. But Satan's power was limited. He could not destroy the pair, so he did what he could. He placed temptation in Adam's way so that Adam would fall. The plan was to mar this vessel God had formed, thus confounding whatever plan God had for mankind, perhaps even causing God to destroy His own handiwork. (Gen. 3:1-19) Because of his limitations, Satan could not foresee how the love of God would rescue man from divine wrath. We shall discuss this in chapter two, "God's Plan of Salvation."

Lucifer saw what he thought was an ideal setting for his master stroke: There were Adam and Eve, created by God for His glory, in their blissful state in the Garden of Eden, enjoying their communion with their Maker. It was a perfect setup for the Spoiler. Lucifer knew that God had told the pair, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The entire story is recounted in the third chapter of Genesis.

You know the rest of the story: Lucifer deceived Eve, telling her, “You won’t really die. God doesn’t want you to eat the fruit because He knows that if you do, you’ll become like Him, knowing good from evil.”

Lucifer had now planted a seed of doubt in Eve’s mind. She ate the fruit and persuaded Adam to do likewise. This was the first sin committed by mankind and it brought with it tremendous consequences.

You will note that this one sin, which was to doom mankind forever unless a remedy was found, was not murder nor adultery nor any of the so-called great sins. It was “merely” disobedience. This underscores that sin is sin. It is not “great”; it is not “small”; it is SIN. Any breaking of God’s Law is just that, or, rather, it is *all* of that. It is fully a transgression of the Law or will of God and is punishable by physical and eternal death. All individuals, whether they are believers or not, shall experience physical death. But only those who do not accept Christ will suffer the curse of spiritual (eternal) death.

## **God Metes Out Punishment for Sin**

God pronounced a curse on each of the three parties involved in flaunting His will, one on each individual.

1. He placed a curse on the serpent through whom Lucifer had brought the temptation to Eve.

“...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

The curse was not directed primarily at the serpent; it was spoken to Lucifer (Satan) and it indicated that eventually man, through Jesus Christ the Son of man, would inflict a mortal wound on Satan.

2. Eve was next to receive punishment.

Gen 3:16: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”

Adam, who bore the primary blame, did not escape:

“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen 3:17-19)

The curse that God inflicted on Adam was effectively imposed on all mankind descending from Adam. We are his descendants and we suffer the same punishment. All men enter this life under the burden and the curse of sin. Even the newborn infant comes under the baleful influence of sin and, before he can know good from evil, he is a sinner. Sin is the baggage with which he comes into this world. He inherited sin from his

father who inherited it from his father, and so on, back to Adam. If it were possible for you to have lived without ever committing a sin, you would still be a sinner because you are wrapped in it. It is an integral part of your being before you are “born again.”

### Other Effects of Sin

Whenever we ponder the different types of sin and the effects they have on us, we usually concentrate on what men call the worst sins. But murder, adultery, drug addiction and the like are no more sinful than lying, cheating and lusting. Just one unforgiven sin of whatever type will result in total death.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23)

However, there are other effects of sin in addition to eternal death. They vary in their intensity and their time of occurrence. Some will have an immediate result in addition to, and before the eventual physical death all men must experience. A graphic example of this would be if a person would go berserk and kill a well-known public figure who had bodyguards all around him. The murderer would be instantly slain by the bodyguards, his death resulting from his breach of the Law of God and man.

There are other sins that are not so outstanding and whose effects are not so immediate. They have what might be termed an intermediate effect. That is, their results are experienced in this life but not right away. An example would be the person who has abused his (or her) body with alcohol or other drugs before finally breaking free from them. Although he may be a drug-free Christian now, he could, later in life, be distressed by

any number of ailments because of his former indiscretions. His sins are forgiven, but they may bring forth an unwanted harvest.

There are two salient facts brought out in this probe into the effects of sin: Many unforgiven sins have their evil effects on the sinner both in this life and in the life hereafter. Furthermore, all unforgiven sins (even just one) will result in eternal death, even though the sinner may have already suffered for it in this life.

“For he that soweth to the flesh [‘his own evil nature’ - Wuest] shall of the flesh reap corruption.”  
(Gal. 6:8)

Sowing to the flesh means to commit deeds in conformance with one’s natural evil impulses. To reap corruption means to suffer for having committed the evil deeds.

The lesson to be learned from all this is simple: To avoid more distresses in a life full of them, you should quit sinning. But the prime reason for not sinning should be that you love God. If you love Him, you certainly should not want to offend Him in any way.

## Chapter Two

# God's Plan of Salvation

If you are a new convert to the Christian belief you may not know the history of God's dealings with man throughout man's brief stay on earth. We want to give you just the sketchiest outline of how and why God revealed Himself to man. It will give you a better understanding of the salvation you now enjoy.

The grand design of salvation is outlined in the Scriptures. That is, in fact, the main purpose of the Bible. It lays out before our startled eyes the redemptive concept that God had in mind from an eternity ago for His creatures. We can see the plan unfold as we read the history of Adam, Enoch, Seth, and the other early biblical characters. Whatever His reasons for doing it this way, God has chosen not to reveal Himself fully to man all at once. The revelation of the nature and the mind of God is, and has been, a gradual step-by-step unveiling.

God has used this same method in many other areas. A new-born infant is not brought to life full-grown. It develops slowly over a period of nine months before it is even brought to birth; and at birth it is a mere approximate eight percent of the size it will attain as an adult. For about eighteen years the infant grows until it is finally a physically mature person. It will then take several more years for the adult to mature in all other phases of being.

A beautiful flower does not emerge from a bulb or a seed at the peak of its growth and beauty. It begins life very insignificantly as a mere seed looking nothing like it is predestined to be. It progresses slowly. First the seed germinates under the soil in which it was planted, little sprouts reaching out

as they are programmed to do, seeking sustenance from the earth around them. Soon the tender young plant pushes its way up through the soil to the sunlight above. This is the beginning of life.

It has yet to grow and develop over the months or years, depending on what type of plant it is, until one day it shall have reached full growth. The beautiful flower one sees then is a long way from its insignificant beginning. It has reached its predestined end.

So it is with God's dealings with humankind; and there is a measure of predestination here too. God brings mankind to a fuller knowledge of His nature, His will and His plan of salvation over the centuries. This evolutionary method is still at work today.

The evolutionary process is also in effect in the life of the individual saint. God delights in unfolding His glorious Self to the individual. You cannot expect to know as much about God now as you will in two, five, ten years from now. So often God is a God of gradualism. It was to be expected, then, that God would move slowly in unfolding His glorious Being and the grand plan of salvation.

## **It Began in Eden**

In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden where Adam lived, there was perfect harmony between God and man. Adam had not yet sinned; and of course God never breaks His relationship with man; only foolish man does that. But the Creator wanted man to serve Him as a matter of choice, not because he had to do so. God let man have a voice in the matter by giving man a commandment he could obey or not obey, as man chose. This was an early move in the unfolding of the nature of God. The Creator told Adam:

“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Gen. 2:16, 17.

There it was. Adam was given the opportunity to exercise his will. He had the option of taking the wrong course by disobeying God and dying, or of taking the right course by obeying God and living. You may object, saying it was not much of a choice because the wrong choice had such a horrendous consequence. That may be, but evidently it was a viable choice because Adam chose to take the wrong course and in so doing he committed mankind’s second sin. Eve’s partaking of the fruit was the first sin although it seems not to have been “official” until Adam, as the head of the human race, joined her in her transgression

Consider this: Adam’s one “little” sin has forever condemned the human race. As we noted earlier in this study, sin is sin with God, neither major nor minor. The better way to put it is that all sins are major. Adam could not have committed a more heinous sin, if we look at sin the way God does, than this one so-called harmless instance of disobedience. He broke God’s holy Law just the same as if he had spit in the face of God. We too often fail to see sin in this light: the Righteousness of God was offended, and when Righteousness is offended it must be appeased.

Having committed a capital offense, Adam was now in dire straits. The penalty was that he should eventually die physically, which was a fearsome fate for one who was not familiar with such a thing as the cessation of being. Even we who have lived all our lives with the dread knowledge of death, fear it if we don’t have a hope in Christ.

## Sin Brings More than Physical Death

But there was something yet worse than physical death that Adam had to face. He had to cope with the idea that spiritual death would shrivel his soul and trouble his spirit. Here he was, a creature completely dependent on his Maker and who had known God's fellowship all his life. Suddenly there is no divine friendship any longer. It apparently went beyond the loss of friendship because God summarily ejected Adam from the Garden and forbade him to ever enter it again. Adam had done more than lose God as a Friend; he set up God as his enemy.

Nor was this the full extent of Adam's woes. Whether he realized it or not, Adam would eventually be cast into the lake of fire, the "second death." These woes all resulted from disobedience to God.

God could have left Adam and all his descendants mired in their hopeless state. But there is more to God than the righteous, demanding aspect. He is a loving Person, not willing that anyone should be lost. (2 Peter 3:9) Although He totally detests sin, He does not hate the sinner and wants so very much to save him from his sin. Here is the situation at this point in the story:

1. God hates sin and is determined to do away with it entirely.
2. Sin is an integral part of man, so man must die...

*but*—there is a mitigating factor in this unfortunate affair:

3. God loves man and is determined to rescue him from the destruction that God must bring down on him because of God's own Law.

There is one persistent question remaining: Why could not God, who is all-powerful, have saved man without going through the tortuous maze of His own attributes and laws, all of which demanded satisfaction? This is a valid question, but it

arises from an inadequate knowledge of God who is indeed answerable to no one.

Notwithstanding God's sovereignty, His faithfulness to His own standards binds Him. This unique Person who is Righteousness and Justice and Truth cannot ignore His own characteristics and leave unpunished the breaking of His will (law). The very nature of God compels Him to exact "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" as the Mosaic Law so graphically states it. This is true justice; it is equity demonstrated by the only One who is the epitome of justice and equity.

To us limited humans this state of affairs would present an unsolvable problem. We would be faced with the task of trying to satisfy justice and love at the same time without compromising either. But, lashed by the urgency of both attributes, God worked out a plan that would take into account all factors.

## The 'Plan' Drawn Up

In His plan God would transfer man's sins onto another created being.<sup>3</sup> The unfortunate being would then become the "sinner." Next, God would slay the creature that had just become the sinner, so fulfilling the demand of justice that required the death of the sinner. In this way man would once again enjoy a sinless state and regain the life that he was losing spiritually and

---

<sup>3</sup> Please bear in mind that this account is given from a human standpoint. At no time did God ever have to figure out what to do. He has always known what He would do in any crisis and is never hesitant or wavering.

naturally. Once again he would know communion with his Maker.

There was one flaw to this otherwise ideal plan. The creature that assumed man's sins would have to be completely free from sin and it must have an intelligence and a will of its own. Justice dictated it: "eye for eye," like for like; equity. No lower life form lacking the intellect and power of choice that man had, could die in man's place. In short, the redeemer would have to be "near of kin" (related) to man. This was borne out by the "law of redemption" as stipulated in the Mosaic Law. (Please read Lev. 25:47-55.) The conclusion of the matter was that a perfect man who was willing to make the sacrifice of himself would have to bear man's sins. We know that all men sinned in Adam, thus making the situation still irresolvable.

But the love of God solved that problem too; and this is where love exceeded itself. Since there was no one capable or willing to die for man, He, God Himself, would come to earth, take man's sins on Himself and die like a sinner for man! There truly can be no greater love.

How could God do this? He is a spirit and a spirit cannot die. But we should know by now there is no insurmountable obstacle to perfect love. So here is the master stroke as devised by the Master Planner:

God created a body within the womb of a virgin named Mary and in the usual nine months He brought the infant to birth. It was a normal human infant with two notable exceptions: It was born without sin, and within the infant dwelt the Spirit of the Almighty God. The child was named Jesus, meaning Jehovah is Salvation. He was the Son of God because God was His Father. The important item is that Jesus lived a sin-free life and, beyond that, He entered this life in a sin-free state because He did not inherit Adam's sin since he was not fathered by man. Jesus was the only perfect human the world has ever known. Meeting the demand of justice, this perfect Person could be the

acceptable sacrifice who would become a “sinner” and, as a man, die for all men.

He died in great agony on the cross; and His suffering came as much from the crushing weight of the sins of all time as from the trauma of being hanged on the cross. His love is great and marvelous! We who were sinners are now washed clean. Not only are we washed clean; we have His Spirit within us. Not only do we have the Spirit of God within; we have eternal life and blessed communion with our Maker once again.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33a)

## **A Gradual Revelation of God**

At this point the plan of salvation was only in the mind of God. It had not yet been put into operation. Part of the overall scheme was that God would begin to reveal Himself to man in a step-by-step process through the centuries until the plan culminated on the cross. We have seen that He began His Self-revelation prior to Adam’s sin.

The method that God finally settled on in this gradual revelation of His Person was to deal at first primarily with a chosen line of Adam’s descendants. They were men like Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham. Their story is in the early chapters of Genesis. They were men who cared about what God wanted and to whom God bequeathed a strain of faith that His mercy and grace had left in the midst of sinful humanity.

In His dealing with Abraham, God began a new thing. He called Abram (Abraham) away from his idol-worshiping relatives and neighbors and led him into an alien land. There he was to become the founder of a separate nation. This nation

would carry the knowledge of the one true God and would show in its religious rites the means by which God would save mankind. It would be the vessel in which the full revelation of God as Father and Savior would be carried and in due time revealed to the entire world. Abraham's son was Isaac; Isaac's son was Israel (Jacob). Israel's twelve sons were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

A close look at some of Israel's religious ceremonies will show how the rituals pointed to the coming salvation of man and to Jesus the personification of the love of God. For example, for their sacrifices God commanded them to choose a perfect animal, one without any physical blemish, lay their hands on its head, slay it on the altar, present the blood to God by sprinkling it on the altar and then burn the sacrifice. The ritual varied depending on the type of sacrifice the worshiper was presenting to God, but this was essentially the way it was carried out.

The animal was a symbol of Jesus who was yet to come as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of all men. When the worshipers would lay their hands on the head of the sacrifice they were, in symbol, transferring their sins to it just as Christ would take our sins upon Himself. When they slew the animal it was being slain in their stead in a manner similar to the way Christ died for them and all of us. In this way their sins were absolved, if only on a temporary basis. It was temporary because these animal sacrifices of themselves could never atone for sins. They were symbols and depended on the coming ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ to make them effective.

“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those

sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Heb 10:1-4 NIV)

In presenting the blood to God by sprinkling, the Israelites were symbolically presenting to God life for life (“the life of the flesh is in the blood...” Lev. 17:11): the life of the perfect animal for their own imperfect lives. In like manner Christ presented His perfect life to God in exchange for our tawdry sinful lives.

The symbolism of all these rites was merely a faint glimmer of the beauty and glory of the reality that would be revealed in the living and dying and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He fulfilled in Himself all the old Mosaic Law and ushered in a New Covenant that centered on the hearts of men and manifest itself in their outward actions.

It is true that the majority of the Israelites were not aware of what the rituals represented. Nevertheless God was conditioning their hearts and minds for a later fuller revelation of Himself and the plan of salvation. Paul would write generations later: “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.” (Gal. 3:24)

God would lead Israel to Christ by the law and they in turn were to lead the world to Christ. But Israel was not obedient to their God and when Christ came Israel rejected Him. This did not prevent the few Israelites who did believe in Christ from presenting Him to the world. Furthermore, Israel’s fall, as Paul stated it, turned out to be the riches of the world because after their wholesale rejection of Christ, God offered salvation to the Gentiles who accepted Him in great numbers.

As we look back on the history of man from Adam to Christ, we can see better than the Israelites of those days how the Law gave a striking picture of Jesus as the Lamb of God, slain

for the sins of the world. Jesus fulfilled the demands that outraged Righteousness made on iniquitous man because He (Jesus) was the love of God and in that role He placated the righteousness of God.

This very brief account of the way in which God brought salvation to man is merely a synopsis of a very profound subject. It requires a more thorough study than can be given to it in this text.

## Chapter Three

# Steps to Salvation

For the sake of convenient study we may say there are four steps to salvation:

4. Belief.
5. Repentance
6. Baptism
7. Receiving the Holy Spirit.

Shortly before Jesus left this earth He told His disciples:

“...that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:4b, 5)

He also told them at that time:

“...ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

God kept His promise. He gave the 120 persons who believed in Him the Holy Spirit, which was evidenced on that occasion by their speaking in other tongues as the Spirit prompted them. The full account is in the second chapter of Acts. This first general outpouring of the Spirit of God was so spectacular that people came running from all around to see what had happened. Some were confused by the event; some ridiculed it. “They’re drunk!” they sneered. This comment brought Peter to himself. It was time for his first witness as a Spirit-filled believer.

“Ye men of Judea...these are not drunken, as ye suppose...but this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [saying], In the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh...”

Peter then proceeded to show them how this was all planned beforehand by God and prophesied by the prophets of old.

“Now when they heard this, they...said unto Peter...Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The answer Peter gave them was exactly what we do today to be saved.

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

You may notice that Peter did not tell them to believe. This was not necessary as they would not have asked what to do if they had not already believed. But in considering each step that Peter laid out for these people who wanted to be saved, we shall also look at belief or faith:

## **Belief (Faith)**

There are many scriptures to prove the need for faith. Romans 4:2-5 is one of them. Paul declares:

“If Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about -- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Paul's theme, as condensed from his epistles, is that there is nothing sinful man can offer on his own to God that God wants or will accept. Paul's reasoning is parallel to Isaiah 64:6 although he does not quote Isaiah directly:

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...”

God is aware that man cannot perform any meritorious acts of himself, that is why He deemed it necessary that He should die for man. God in Christ was the only worthy substitute for depraved humanity. Man could not and cannot save himself. Consequently, the initiative in any reunion of God and man has to come from God, not man. Then, when God makes the first move and offers salvation to the individual sinner, it is up to the sinner to respond with a fervent “Yes, Lord!”

## Repentance

The original Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means changing one's mind. He who repents of his sins has a complete change of mind toward them. He no longer enjoys sinning. This does not necessarily mean that the flesh can no longer receive pleasure from these illicit acts, but that the spirit within (the mind) is repulsed so much by the sins it once relished it cannot continue in them.

There can be no forgiveness of sins without repentance. Jesus told His hearers once, “...except ye repent [have a change of heart], ye shall all...perish.” (Luke 13:3)

## Baptism

I cannot agree with some that baptism is for the remission of sins. Faith takes care of all sins committed by the believer. If faith is indeed the justifier of the believer, as Paul states so cogently in his epistles, it necessarily follows that the believer's sins are remitted. There can be no justification without forgiveness of sins. This assertion needs no abstruse arguments to sustain it. Scriptural logic is its proof.

There is, nevertheless, one scripture that has to be examined in the light of the assertion that baptism does not bring remission of sins. In Acts 2:38 (KJV) Peter seems to say that baptism is for the remission of sins: "... be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." The Bible Knowledge Commentary gives a better rendering of this clause: "Repent unto the remission of your sins and be baptized..."<sup>4</sup> In this translation of the passage, we see again that repentance (which comes immediately with the sinner's heartfelt belief in Jesus Christ) brings forgiveness of sins.

In the same passage Kenneth S. Wuest, using "as many English words as are necessary to bring out the richness, clarity, and force of the Greek text," renders it this way:

"And Peter said to them, Have a change of mind, that change of mind being accompanied by abhorrence of and sorrow for your deed, and let each one of you *be baptized upon the ground of your confession of belief in the sum total of all that Jesus Christ is* in His glorious Person, this baptismal testimony being in relation to the fact that your sins

---

<sup>4</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary, an Exposition of the New Testament, Dallas Theological Seminary Faculty.

have been put away, and you shall receive the gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit...”<sup>5</sup>

## Receiving the Holy Spirit

What, or more properly, who is the Holy Spirit? In His final discourse with His disciples Jesus said:

“...I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit]; whom the world cannot receive...but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:16, 17)

Undoubtedly the Spirit of Truth to whom Jesus referred was Jesus Himself because He said the Spirit was at that time dwelling with them. Furthermore, Jesus said in the next verse, “I will not leave you comfortless: *I* will come to you.”

Jesus, and not another person, would come back to them as the Spirit of Truth. Jesus then is the Holy Spirit we have within us today, and He will never leave us alone again. He has said that He will be with us forever.

This so-called fourth step (receiving the Holy Spirit) will often occur right after the first two simultaneous steps of heartfelt belief and repentance. Many times the new believer is

---

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, an Expanded Translation*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961, 276.

not aware of the requirement of baptism, but faith, which does not depend on works, saves him without works. However the viability of faith is attested to by the convert's works, which are in this instance submitting to water baptism. Whenever he becomes aware of the requirement of baptism, if he is obedient he will submit to it.

### Jesus Is Never Absent From Us

In a way we are more blessed today than the disciples were in Jesus' day. When Jesus was not physically in their midst, they had no Jesus. For example, when Jesus was in Nazareth, His disciples in Jerusalem could not enjoy His presence. When He was on the mountaintop the people in the valley could not have His power and assurance with them there. And, life being as uncertain and crisis-filled as it is, heartbreak and tragedies were always lurking nearby, ready to pounce on the unprotected. Without Jesus with them, His followers were like sheep lost in a wilderness full of ravenous beasts.

But today we are never left unshielded. We are never, never left alone. Wherever we go we have Jesus' power and comfort and guidance within us. Indeed, He will never again leave us comfortless!

## Chapter Four

# How to Keep Your Salvation

Paul spoke of the "gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13), indicating that salvation embodies the acceptance of the Gospel or Good News as the New Testament defines it. This Gospel or Good News as brought to us in the New Testament tells us of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It further admonishes us to accept Christ and His teachings into our hearts and lives. We do this by taking Christ and His teachings into our spiritual selves as the "bread of life." (John 6:31-58) In the sermon on the Bread of Life Jesus told His hearers that He Himself was the Bread of Life.

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever." (John 6:51)

The only way we can partake of this Bread of Life is by faith in Christ as Jesus declared:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of Life" (John 6:47)

But to "believe in Christ" implies more than a mere historical belief that He existed at one time or even that He still exists. According to James 2:17 faith is not alive without works. You must act on your belief. James instructs us further:

"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." James 2:18, 19 (NIV).

So we must not only believe in Christ, but live according to His teachings and those of His apostles after Him. The prime factor in this, though, is still faith, not deeds. A scriptural faith will inevitably produce the works that prove its viability; and it is that living faith that results in the victorious life of the Christian. (1 John 5:4)

### **Can We Lose Our Salvation by a Single Sin?**

We are not talking about deliberate, continual sinning here. The reference is to the sin that one may succumb to in a moment of temptation. Despite the teaching in the Scriptures to the contrary, many saints are plagued by a constant anxiety that they may lose their salvation by committing one misdeed. And they fear that before they can confess the sin to another saint, the Lord may come or they may die unsaved. God does not work that way.

First, we should understand that God does hate sin and will not compromise His stand against it. One day God shall completely obliterate sin, and He will cast into the lake of fire all who live in sin. (Rev. 20:15) But being overtaken by one fault, one sin or whatever we choose to call it, does not constitute living in sin. Nor does it mean that one has renounced God.

There was a time that Peter was guilty of reverting to his old Jewish ways. He began to separate himself from the Gentiles and Paul had to reprimand him for it. (Galatians 2:11-21) He was guilty of respect of persons, a trait which the scripture condemns in James. 2:1. This was not the will of God who died in Christ that He might break down the wall of partition between the two peoples. What Peter did was a breaking of the will of God. And what is sin but a breaking of the law or will of God?

Did God summarily consign Peter to the flames of hell because of this one error? No. God graciously had a Paul there who reproved Peter for his backsliding. But if the Lord had come before Paul had a chance to rebuke Peter, He would not

have left Peter behind. Peter was not committing himself to sin; he was still committed to Jesus Christ. God was there to reprove him through Paul just as He is there to reprove the erring saint today if the saint will but listen to His voice. The reproof will come from a passage of Scripture, from a brother or sister, from a sermon or testimony or as a "still, small voice" within. In some way God will surely reprove the errant saint.

If being lost were to result from one's every misdeed, there would be no one saved. Hebrews 7:25 states:

"Wherefore he [Christ] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The phrase, "ever liveth to make intercession for them," implies that Jesus is at this very moment interceding for the shortcomings of His sons and daughters. This is much like the priests of old who brought the blood of the sacrifice before God to atone for the sins of the Israelites. Christ is presenting His own atoning blood to God for us. That blood is constantly washing away our ongoing imperfections and sins.

"Who will enter a charge against God's chosen? God is the Acquitter; who is the condemner? Christ Jesus is he who died; what is more, who rose again, who is at God's right hand, who also pleads on our behalf."  
(Rom. 8:33, 34 - RSV).

The scripture passage does not use the past tense and say Jesus *was* at God's right hand nor does it say that He *pled* on our behalf. He is presently — at this moment — at the right hand of God pleading our cause before Him by presenting the atoning blood. When the believer in Christ inadvertently sins and acknowledges his sin, he has the assurance that Christ is always there interceding for him with the blood of Christ.

John told his readers, according to Kenneth S. Wuest in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, vol. II:

"Everyone who in Him is constantly abiding is not habitually sinning. Everyone who is constantly sinning has not with discernment seen him, nor has he known Him..." {1 John 3:6}

This scripture does not say that a believer will never commit a sin; it does firmly say that the believer will not continue in his sin.

Further in the same passage of scripture John asserts:

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit ['does not habitually commit'- Wuest] sin; for his seed [God's nature] remaineth in him: and he cannot ['is not able habitually to'- Wuest] sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9)

No single acknowledged sin can take away the believer's salvation.

## **We Must Continually Turn Away from Sin**

This is a point worth noting: Any sin of which the believer is aware and from which he does not turn (repent) can send him to hell. The believer's guarantee of continuing salvation does not lie in his being able to do as he pleases no matter what God wants. It is predicated on an ongoing rejection of sinful impulses. It is based on the believer's staking his whole life, the now and the forever, on the eternal God and trusting completely in Him. Therein lies the believer's salvation and eternal security.

## **Specific Acts the Believer Should Perform**

When we were first saved, in order to "work out" our salvation we did at the time what God said do. We repented

(actually we received the repentance that God offered to us), we were baptized if we were aware of that requirement, and we received the Holy Spirit. To continue in this way of salvation there are some specific things we should do. They are:

1. Read God's Word (the Bible).
2. Pray.
3. Hear the Word of God spoken through His "prophets" (those persons He anoints, for a moment or for a career, to preach and teach His Word).
4. Obey God in every way.

Let us examine these things that are vital to staying saved:

### Reading the Word of God

Every believer should have a Bible. It is the written Word of God and is the guide to doing His will. As you study the Bible daily it gives you a continuing reorientation to the things of the Spirit. All men naturally tend to do what God does not like. It is our natural state. That is why there is a need for a continual renewal or reorientation of our minds.

Any idea, of your own or anyone else's, that disagrees with the Word of God is wrong. No matter how good and logical it may seem and no matter who proposes the idea, if it goes contrary to what the Word of God tells you, it is in error.

Read your Bible every day; live with it; become familiar with it. Above all, obey it.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." (Psa. 119:105)

## Praying

What is prayer? Immediately most of us will say it is asking God for something. That is only partly correct and falls far short of the full blessing that can be obtained by utilizing the privilege of prayer properly.

Prayer goes above and beyond the mere act of asking God for favors. Prayer is communion or intimate fellowship with God. It is being in close touch with Him at a particular moment. It is sensing Him to be near and praising Him and thinking on all aspects of his glorious Being: Who He is, what He is, what He wants, how He works and how very gracious He is toward us, sinners all.

When you take time out for prayer, don't approach it as a duty. Come into God's presence as a friend. If you have nothing to say at the time, just meditate on God's mercy and goodness. Think of His grace in light of your total unworthiness. You needn't worry about proper words, grammar or syntax. God made you; He knows all about you and it bothers Him not the least if your words are halting, your grammar poor or your syntax weird. He is not concerned with such trivial matters. He wants your heart and your life.

As you wait before the Lord, He will direct your thoughts into channels of illumination and insight. This is not to say that God will give you world-shaking revelations, but what He whispers to you through your thoughts can be just what you need at the time. Or He may direct your thoughts into praying or doing something for your brother or sister who has some type of need. At that time the Holy Spirit can take over and pray through you in His own way.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the

Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom. 8:26, 27 - RSV)

Do not expect always to have an attitude attuned to prayer. We are creatures subject to shifting moods and our moods may at times be unsuited to quiet contemplation and prayer. At other times it may take a resolute will to extract time from your busy schedule or your leisure so that you may unwind and unburden yourself in the presence of God. But forcibly taking the time will reward you, sometimes right away and always in the gradual unfolding of a life that is dedicated to God. Consistent communion with God will build you up spiritually and give you grace to help others who are in need.

As we have already noted, prayer can also be just as most people view it: a time of asking God for what you want and need. This is good if it does not consume your times of prayer. And do you really want to ask Him for a new car or new house or such like things so that you can boast of what you have? Or so you can keep up with the couple next door? Is this what Christ bled and died for? Think, friend, of what you are doing when you come to God. There are more important things than satisfying your vanity.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God [those things that will promote His Kingdom and His will] and his righteousness; and all these things [the material needs of life] shall be added unto you.” (Mat. 6:33)

Many children of God are perplexed because their prayers are going unanswered. They want to know why. Aren't they a part of the Church? they ask. They want to know if God is a respecter of persons who answers the petitions of some and rejects those of others. They wonder if their faith is weak.

Let's be practical here. ("Practical" should not be a word that clashes with faith. Practicality is common sense, which is wisdom, which, if it comes from above, is acceptable to God. See James 3:17) Where we go astray from good scriptural common sense is in equating faith with miraculous happenings. Where we lose our way is in demanding that God do such-and-such for us because we have faith. We never give a thought to the will of God in specific situations. We insist that God heal where He (this may be a surprise) does not want to heal.

It is evident that the Apostle Paul could not heal irrespective of God's will in the matter. He writes in 2 Timothy 4:20b, "...Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." Now think: Why didn't Paul heal Trophimus? Trophimus was apparently a valued worker with Paul. (Acts 20:4, 21:29) Yet here was Paul who had the gift of healing, and here was Trophimus, a trusted worker in the Kingdom, who could not accompany Paul on his journeys because he was sick. Why did Paul not heal him? The truth almost jumps out at you. It was not God's will at the time to heal Trophimus.

There is yet another example that tells us that even a miracle worker cannot work miracles outside of the will of God. The evidence is not as forceful as that in the previous example, but it is worth considering. In Philippians 2:25-27 Paul told the Philippians that Epaphroditus had been very seriously ill but that God had mercifully healed him. We cannot positively say that Paul did not miraculously heal Epaphroditus, but, from the context, it appears that it had been a slow natural occurrence. God let him experience physical distress for a time and then brought him out of it because that was what God wanted at that time for Epaphroditus.

So often there is a work of purifying and purging that God wants to effect in the life of the one who is ill or who is experiencing material/financial difficulties. Some impurities cannot be purged by anything but heat – as in fire. So what are

we going to do? Insist that God make us well and wealthy while at the same time we are spiritually weak and lacking in the power of God to shape us and make us what He wants us to be? We can't have our own way and let God have His way at the same time. Something or someone has to give. We should be the ones to give in to the will of God.

All of today's so-called healers die. (Do not misread me: I firmly believe there are people who have the gift of healing.) Their own families die. The healers are not infallible or they and their loved ones would continue to live, that is, according to their own pronouncements. They are the ones who declare that, if we have faith in God, He will not let us be ill or poor.

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." (3 John 1:2)

"...thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow." (Deu. 15.6b)

This is the health-prosperity litany today's preachers continually use to support their claims that God does not want anyone to be in poor health or financially hard-pressed. This is what they sincerely believe. But hear me well: If I don't begrudge you your health and prosperity (and I don't), when you see me in my rags, slowly dying of some undiagnosed disease, don't look at me with a jaundiced eye. Yes, I love God. Yes, I am His follower, and yes, I trust Him whatever my lot, rich or poor, sick or well.

What the health-and-wealth propounders are doing is naively misappropriating the promises made to the Israelites of old, under the Old Covenant in which outward glory and material prosperity were often the signs of the blessings of God. And, concerning John's wish that his friend Gaius might be well

and financially successful, that is a normal desire of anyone for his brother or sister. John had no intention of making it a dictum of faith.

No doubt it is God's perfect will that everyone should be prosperous and healthy, but He now allows His perfect will to be limited by some circumstances and man's volition. Paul wrote in 1 Tim 2:4, "...who [God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," but it will never happen that all men are saved. It is not that God has little power; it is that He gives freedom of choice to men.

Not all men (even the saints) are well and prosperous. We have just given the reasons for this: circumstances and man's own will in handling his affairs. Nevertheless, if a person yields himself (herself) fully to God, God can take the contrary forces of life and work them together for the benefit of the person who is yielded to Him. In that way the will of God is fulfilled in the life of that person.

We must also be aware that there are some things for which we pray, and which God wants us to have, that are not happening right away. We are praying to a certain end, and God wants to bring us to that certain end, but – it isn't happening.

So what is the secret to having these divinely-ordained prayers answered? It's simple, and yet not so simple. The secret is that you pray and you pray and you pray - and then you pray again and again.

We have a cogent example of continually praying for what God wills to give us in Elijah (I Kings 18:41-46) He prayed seven times for the rain that he knew was coming. But he also knew that God wanted him to present the petition that God wanted all along to grant him. What Elijah experienced is an example to us today: If your petition is scripturally sound and if you believe, God will hear you.

Never give up. Don't lose faith. Immerse yourself in your prayer life. You may present some of your prayers in a time

formally set aside for sweet communion with God. Others can be one of the many prayers you whisper inwardly during the course of a busy day. Cultivate the habit of being in God's presence. Think of Him as being right there with you as you move about so that, when you need to tell Him something, you have the sense that He hears you. God hears in a crowded work space or a noisy traffic jam just as surely as He does in your prayer cubicle. He is by no means hearing impaired. You may be distracted by external stimuli, but God isn't. If you can get your mind focused enough to utter your prayer, He will always hear you.

Let your supplications flow in a continuous stream so that you inundate heaven with their flood. If the wicked judge of the Parable (Luke 18:1-80) answered the widow's petition because she wearied him, how much more will a righteous God respond to our continued crying to Him? The Unjust Judge answered out of desperation. He was tired of the woman's incessant pleading. God will answer out of a loving heart. He hears; He sees; He knows your requests before they are made. He will answer - in His own way, but He will answer without fail if you don't lose faith.

"And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8)

Talk to God. Remember, if you are saved, He is your Father. Tell Him your sorrows and fears. Spill out your grief to God. Believe in Him with all your heart; He does hear you.

### Listen to God's Anointed Prophets

Every Christian has some ability, great or small, that will add something to the Church. Some have the gift or talent of prophecy, which means proclaiming to others, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, God's message. For your spiritual growth and welfare you must listen to these messengers and preferably do so in a worship service with others. God is not well-pleased if you elect to stay at home and read your Bible and pray. Listening to a sermon on radio or television is not enough either. God wants you to worship Him with others of like faith:

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” (Heb. 10:25a)

There may be times when a Christian cannot worship with others. He may be in a hospital or prison or kept in at home, ill. There can be any number of valid reasons for not being able to attend worship services. God understands these situations and, “if there is 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)

God will honor the believer's desire and give him what he needs for his spiritual well-being. The obligation of any believer is to do whatever he can to please God – and this brings us to another requirement we have not yet mentioned but which no one can ignore if he expects to have the slightest chance of pleasing God.

### Obey God

The necessity of obeying God cannot be stressed too strongly. There is nothing whatsoever that can make up for disobeying God. You cannot give enough, you cannot sacrifice enough nor do enough good works to please God if you willfully disobey Him.

It cannot suffice just to read God's Word. Many have read it and died in their sins. It is not enough to pray. Others have

prayed long and often and departed from the presence of God to “do their own thing.” Many of them have gone their obstinate way to the judgment that awaits them. Nor will it help to hear the Word proclaimed and to worship with others if we fail to submit to the Word we have heard. How many have given outward reverence to God in His house and then gone out to serve the devil!

You must obey God. This is one of the most important facts you can learn from this book.

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in...sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” (1 Sam. 15:22, 23)

### The Benefits of Fasting

After we have made sure that we are obeying God, then we can go on to doing the other things that will help us in our walk with Him. One of these things is to deny ourselves of food and water for a set time. This is called fasting. Fasting is a special effort put forth in our continuing effort to be effective saints and to keep our carnal nature under control. Remember what we said previously about “staying saved.” We are saved by faith alone and not by works. But we cannot stay saved by folding our hands and relaxing. No, no. This way of holiness is definitely not a stroll through a beautiful rose garden; it is a struggle against the world, our own flesh and the devil.

## Fasting Defined

Fasting generally means to do without food and drink for a predetermined length of time. The usual fast begins with a person's arising in the morning and ends with the evening meal. There are other types of fasts and there are some of longer duration. We shall not deal with them here.

As we have said, fasting is a special effort. The Lord did not categorically tell us to fast, but its benefits are marked and the precedent for fasting is in the Scriptures.

The history of the fast goes back to Old Testament days, although there was only one day in the Jewish year in which the Israelites were required to fast by the Mosaic Law. This was the Day of Atonement, a day in which the people were supposed to mourn for their sins; and they never reached the place where there were no sins for which to lament.

There are other examples of fasting in the Old Testament for special purposes. When the children of Israel had sinned during the days of Samuel the prophet, Samuel told them, "If you really want to return to the Lord, put away all your idols and serve the Lord only." (1 Sam. 7:3-13)

He then gathered the people to Mizpeh where they "drew water, and poured it out before the Lord." This was a dramatic symbol of pouring out their souls before God. They also fasted on that day in a special effort of humbling themselves and seeking God's favor. It worked. God delivered the Israelites out of the hand of the Philistines who "came no more into the coast of Israel."

In another example, Ahab, a king of Israel known more for his wickedness than for any good deeds, resorted to the fast one time when the Lord had pronounced severe judgment upon him for slaying Naboth and seizing Naboth's vineyard. The full story is in 1 Kings 21. The Scripture informs us "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell [give] himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord..."

But when Elijah revealed to Ahab how God's wrath was incurred by Ahab's evil ways, Ahab "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh [a sign of mourning], and fasted...and went softly." Because Ahab had humbled himself before God in this manner, God set back the judgment that would have overtaken him. God said to Elijah:

"See how Ahab humbleth himself before me?  
Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not  
bring the evil in his days."

In the two examples given above, fasting accompanied distress and mourning and entreaties to God to grant His favor to those who were fasting. In the New Testament fasting took on a slightly different aspect. It definitely was not a joyous event in New Testament days (when has denying the body ever been a happy time?) and there were, and still are, occasions that call for repentance and a period of emotional distress, but the emphasis now seems to be more on the special entreaty than on the mourning and spiritual distress.

Nevertheless, up to the time of Calvary fasting was still a token of distress and sorrow. This is one reason that Jesus refused to make His disciples fast as the disciples of John wanted Him to do. Jesus answered them:

"Can the children of the bridechamber [the wedding guests] mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?"

However, it is a matter of biblical record that Jesus' disciples did fast after His ascension. Fasting is truly a solemn affair and carries with it by its very self-denial a humbling of oneself before God, but it is also the time to press for those requests about which you feel such urgency. This is what the

disciples did in the days of the apostles, and apparently they continually felt a sense of urgency because they fasted often.

It was at Antioch, while “they ministered to the Lord and fasted,” that the Holy Spirit said to the church,

“Separate [set apart for] me Barnabas and Saul  
[Paul] for the work whereunto I have called them.”  
(Acts 13.2)

The church then fasted and prayed for this specific matter and, after laying their hands in consecration on the two chosen workers, they bade them Godspeed on their journey into the mission fields. “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed...” This all happened because the congregation in Antioch was routinely yet urgently seeking the will of God by prayer and fasting.

What is the conclusion on this matter of fasting? Is it necessary or not? Please allow this author to shed his impersonal pose at this point and talk in the first person. My reasoned opinion, in the light of the Word of God, is that nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus or the apostles command the disciples to fast. However, we have enough evidence of the practice in the New Testament Church to convince me that fasting is a very good and effective observance.

As an individual I have found it to be nearly indispensable for my spiritual life. (This was written before it became physically unwise for a period of time for me to undertake a full fast.) However, I cannot flatly say that if you do not fast you cannot remain saved.

Fasting is a discipline, a keeping a rein on the flesh; and if you cannot deny yourself in that appetite that is relatively simple, how are you going to deny yourself the more complicated and subtle appetites of your carnal nature?

Fasting is designed to hurt the flesh. It is meant to deprive the carnal nature of those things that are detrimental to your

spiritual progress. No, this is not saying that eating is spiritually harmful. It is only pointing out that when you put aside one basic, normal craving of the flesh for a season you are teaching yourself much needed self-control. Moreover, you are voluntarily, in some small measure, suffering with Christ.

When you begin your fast, assume the attitude of coming to God with a sacrifice: yourself. Then, as your flesh hurts and demands the attention you refuse to give it, simply wait in the Lord's presence and present your petitions to Him. If you hurt too much to pray articulately, just groan in His listening ear. He will hear you, and He will answer according to His will.

So what do you want? Do you want to serve God a little and not distress the flesh too much? Or do you want to put pressure on the carnal nature within you and urgently seek God and know Him as intimately as you can? As you are aware, no one can make you come to the Lord, or, after coming to Him, no one can make you seek Him with all your heart. The choice is yours.

## Chapter Five

# A Look at the Bible

First, what is the Bible? It is the Word of God of course, but what does "Word of God" portray? Words that came from God, yes, but we are aware that God did not directly write one word in the Bible. They all came through human intermediaries whom God inspired to say or write them. So, although not spoken or written directly by God, the words of the Bible are still the Word of God.

But this word that came from God is more than the literal saying of words such as "salvation," "love" or "you." The Word of God is larger than mere words. It is the intents and purposes of God. It consists of His thoughts. The Word of God *is* God.

Now we do not mean that the printed words on the pages of the Bible are of themselves God; they only represent what is in the mind of God. But that eternal Concept in what we choose to call the "mind" of God (which is limited human terminology) is God Himself. For example, imagine that we know a person named Harold Green, but we have never seen him. We know him only by what he has written to us over an extended time. If he writes extensively, telling us what he wants of us and how he thinks and feels, we will come to know this Harold we have never seen. The words that he writes are not Harold, but the image they convey is the true Harold. They are more the essence of Harold than if we had a portrait of him.

In like manner the image portrayed by the written Word of God is indeed God. He has written to us extensively, telling us His primary concerns, His major desires and even His "whims." God is there for us to know Him if we will just study His "letters" to us.

Since the spirit of the Bible is the essence of God we should be very careful not to ignore it or attempt to contravene

it. It is necessary to caution the child of God that any so-called leading of the Spirit that does not conform to the written Word of God is patently erroneous. God is not behind the "leading." At best, it came from the believer's own mind. At worst, Satan is its progenitor. God does not go against His own word. That would be the same as saying that God goes contrary to God. That cannot be.

The same word of caution applies to dreams or visions that do not square with the Word of God. The child of God should beware of them lest they send him off on a tangent away from the Word and will of God. Only by adhering closely to the Scriptures can the believer insure that he will not lose sight of spiritual reality.

## **How the Bible Was Compiled**

The Bible is a collection of books written by many different authors under divine inspiration. These authors wrote at widely divergent times over a period of centuries. There are two main divisions to the Bible: the Old Testament, which consists of thirty-nine books, and the New Testament, composed of twenty-seven books.

Below and on the next page is a chart listing all the books of the Bible and their respective human authors. To see them in their biblical order, please read down the columns from the beginning to the end, starting with the first column and ending with the last.

<b>OLD TESTAMENT</b>	Proverbs	Malachi	Hebrews (Paul?)
<b>LAW</b>	Ecclesiastes	<b>NEW TESTAMENT</b>	<b>GENERAL EPISTLES</b>
Genesis	Song of Solomon	<b>GOSPELS</b>	James
Exodus	Lamentations (after Jeremiah in biblical order)	Matthew	I, II Peter
Leviticus	<b>PROPHECY</b>	Mark	I, II, III John
Numbers	Isaiah	Luke	Jude
Deuteronomy	Jeremiah	John	<b>PROPHECY</b>
<b>HISTORY</b>	Ezekiel	<b>HISTORY</b>	Revelation
Joshua	Daniel	Acts	
Judges	Hosea	<b>PAUL'S EPISTLES</b>	
Ruth	Joel	Romans	
I, II Samuel	Amos	I, II Corinthians	
I, II Kings	Obadiah	Galatians	
I, II Chronicles	Jonah	Ephesians	
Ezra	Micah	Philippians	
Nehemiah	Nahum	Colossians	
Esther	Habakkuk	I, II Thessalonians	

POETRY	Zephaniah	I, II Timothy	
Job	Haggai	Titus	
Psalms	Zechariah	Philemon	

## The Books of the Bible

There are sixty-six books altogether. The Old Testament books were written originally in Hebrew except for a few chapters written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek.

The Old Testament canon (roster of books accepted as being of divine inspiration) was not fully compiled until possibly the second century before Christ. The New Testament was completed as a unit around A.D. 397, although all the books existed by the end of the first century after Christ.

### The Old Testament

(Brief Details on Each Division):

**LAW** contains the creation of mankind and the universe; man's fall; the beginning of the nation of Israel in Abraham; the giving of the Mosaic Law; Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.

**HISTORY** concerns itself with the continuing history of the Israelites. It includes the split of the nation into two often fractious kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom, still known as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah. After much backsliding by both Israel and Judah, Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. Judah fell to the Babylonians in 587 B.C.

The Assyrians dispersed the Israelites among the heathen nations and the Israelites' identity is unknown today. Judah, after a period of captivity, turned again to her God and He brought a remnant of them back to Palestine. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show that some of the Jews had not learned their lesson and went back to their old sinful ways.

POETRY comprises Job, a book on suffering; Psalms, praise and prayer; Proverbs, wisdom; Ecclesiastes, life; Song of Solomon, a mysterious song of love; Lamentations, Jeremiah's sorrow for the fate of Judah in her captivity.

PROPHECY is divided by some into "major" and "minor" prophets, according to the size of the respective books. The first four books constitute the Major Prophets. The remainder make up the Minor Prophets. The prophets were God's messengers warning both kingdoms to turn from their wickedness. In conjunction with the history of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms these divine messages show how the love of God surpasses all expectations. It will not let the sinner go unless he continually and determinedly resists all divine overtures.

Malachi was the last prophet on record before the birth of Christ. Malachi is also the last book in the Old Testament.

## The New Testament

(Brief Details on Each Division):

GOSPELS consists of four records of the life of Jesus Christ. They are written respectively by four different authors. Each adds his paint strokes to the total picture of the life of Christ.

HISTORY is what it implies: It is a history of the birth and experiences of the Early Church and the working of the Spirit through His disciples.

PAULINE EPISTLES includes the letters written by Paul to the various local congregations in his far-flung pastorate. The authorship of Hebrews is a matter of debate, but it is similar to

Paul's views. If Paul did not write the epistle, possibly someone who sat under Paul's teaching wrote it.

GENERAL EPISTLES consists of letters written by the authors whose respective names they bear. The authors wrote them to a general constituency.

PROPHECY contains the revelation made by God to the Apostle John concerning the last days.



## About Aaron J. Smith...

Aaron J. Smith is a second generation Apostolic/Pentecostal who does not look on the term as a rigid mold from which there can be no scripture-based variation. The son of Karl F. and Josephine Smith, Aaron and his siblings were taught early on to deliberately choose their faith, not inherit it. Both parents considered themselves to be, first of all, Christians without regard to a denominational label. His father, a bishop in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc., was the pastor of the Church of Christ of Apostolic Faith in Columbus, Ohio and was what might be termed an "enlightened Pentecostal thinker" of his day. He had the penchant for examining doctrinal thought in the clear light of the Scriptures regardless of tradition. This trait was passed on from father to son.

Aaron married Pat Herring Ross in 1981. She has been a tremendous help to him in his career at Aeon Bible College and in his various literary efforts. Aaron contributed articles regularly to the Christian Outlook in the early 60's and in the period between 1982 and 1984. He is the author of several other published books, \*A Devout Man, •Acts: History and Theology. •One Believer's Thoughts on Various Christian Topics, •From Eternity to Eternity: Jesus Christ, and • On Growing Old Gracefully.

In 1991 Aaron retired as the director of External Studies of Aeon Bible College in Indianapolis. He had also served, during his tenure with the college (1975-1991), as coordinator and occasional instructor of the Aeon Mini-Academy seminars held each year at the General Convention of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc., and editor of the Aeon Forum newsletter. His wife Pat was also on the Aeon staff as coordinator of the Aeon Bible Institutes and, following his retirement, she replaced him as the director of External Studies until her own retirement in 1993.

Aaron and Pat had moved with Aeon Bible College from Columbus, Ohio to Indianapolis in 1981 shortly after their

marriage. In 1994 they moved to Atlanta, Georgia where he requested and received permission from the Georgia State Council of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World to launch the Georgia State Counselor, the official newsletter for the council. He resigned from the post in 1998.

Further indulging his love for writing, Aaron Smith has written a wide variety of teaching and evangelistic pamphlets targeted both at Christians and those who do not yet follow Christ.



