

BELIEVE IN GOD



By,
Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

For God so loved the world that He gave
His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes
in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
John 3:16

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About the Author



Charles Chesnutt is a bankruptcy attorney in Dallas, Texas, where he has resided since 1979. He is married and the father of four. He has a Masters of Theology graduate degree from Dallas Theological Seminary with a Th.M. and an undergraduate degree in psychology. He is an ardent student of scripture and has been so since his salvation in 1974.

He is an attorney, an evangelist and an author who publishes his works without charge on BIBLEBOOKS.CO and publishes a website that argues for creation ex nihilo from the perspective of design in nature. That website is located at CREATIONDESIGN.ORG. He author's wife, Mary Chesnutt aided significantly to all of his works.

Through no merit of his own, the author came to know Jesus Christ in the manner described in this booklet in December of 1973. That experience continues to this day.

Believe in God—But How?

BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST,
AND YOU WILL BE SAVED

ACTS 16:31

Let's face it. If God is really there, why can't we see Him? Is there really an invisible God out there who never speaks and never makes Himself known? How can this God, who is said to have created us, not be able to communicate? Why should anyone believe that? And why should anyone believe some ancient Jewish religious writings that talk about Him? Where is this God? If there is such a God, He must be hiding.

Let's see what those ancient Jewish religious writings (the Bible) really do say about God. Then you can form your own opinion.

So, does the Bible say that God is hiding Himself?

Yes, it does.

Does that mean that He makes Himself known to some but not others?

Yes.

Where does the Bible say that?

Let's start from where Jesus says that God hides Himself. Jesus was conversing with a man named Nicodemus about this. This is what Jesus said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.¹

Jesus is saying that not everyone can see the Kingdom of God because the Kingdom of God is hidden from everyone who is not born again.

What did Jesus mean by that? Nicodemus asks Him.

“How can a man be born when he is old?”²

Jesus answers:

...Unless one is born of water [his mother's womb] and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.³

At this point, Jesus has referred to seeing the Kingdom of God and entering the Kingdom of God. And He is saying that in order to see and enter the Kingdom of God we must be born again; we must be “born of the spirit.” So there are two births. One is a physical dimension and the other is a spiritual dimension. So, there is a spiritual reality that we can't see unless we are born again. But how can that be?

Jesus answers:

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1. John 3:3
 2. John 3:4
 3. John 3:5.

Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.⁴

Jesus is saying that being born again is like feeling the wind blowing. You know the wind is there because you can feel it, but you can’t see it. Jesus is telling us that we can experience the Kingdom of God just as certainly as we can feel the wind. We can see it spiritually but we can’t see it physically. It’s a spiritual reality that is hidden from everyone who is not born again.

Of course, the next question is “How can we experience it for ourselves?” Jesus anticipates this question and answers it with an analogy:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.⁵

What did Jesus mean by that? The Bible tells us that after the Jews left Egypt, they complained to Moses about taking them out of slavery and bringing them to a wilderness where they could die. Because of this dissatisfaction and mistrust, God sent poisonous snakes into the Jewish camp and many people were bitten and did die.⁶ But the people repented and God sent a cure for everyone who had been bitten.

4. John 3:7,8

5. John 3:14-16

6. Numbers 21:5,6

The cure was simple. Moses was to put a statute of a serpent on a pole and raise it high so that everyone in the camp could see it. All they had to do was to look at the serpent in order to be healed.⁷

Jesus was saying that He is like the serpent in the wilderness. All we have to do is to look to Him and we will be healed.

But healed of what?

Jesus was making an analogy about sin. Anyone who has been bitten by the serpent of sin will die spiritually because the wages of sin is death.⁸ And we have all been bitten.⁹ But the cure is to look to Christ.

Why does looking to Jesus Christ make such a difference? Because sin can be forgiven through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself¹⁰ and died in our place.¹¹

7. Numbers 21:8 “Make a poisonous serpent out of brass and fasten it to a pole. Anyone who has been bitten and who looks at it will live.”

8. Sin kills. Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.” Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die...” Romans 6:21 “What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.”

9. Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned...”; Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.”

10. First Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

11. Romans 5:8 “...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

So Jesus paid the death-penalty of our sin and obtained forgiveness for us.¹² This is what salvation is. It is being healed of sin.¹³

And it is free.¹⁴ It has to be free because if we had paid it ourselves, we would be dead because death is the wage of sin.¹⁵ But why did Jesus compare himself to a serpent when the serpent represents sin? Because in order to save us, Jesus became sin for us so that we could be righteous in God's sight.¹⁶

Since the penalty for our sin has been paid, we are no longer spiritually dead and we have spiritual (eternal) life in Christ.¹⁷† This why Jesus said that experiencing the Kingdom of God is being born again. It is being born to spiritual life. Just like being physically born is to experience physical life, being born again is to experience spiritual life.¹⁸

12. Ephesians 1:7 "In Whom we have redemption through His blood [His death], the forgiveness of sins..."

13. The original Greek word means saving, delivering, preserving.

14. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

15. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death."

16. Second Corinthians 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

17. Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ..." † Although our body will die (Hebrews 9:27) it will later be resurrected (Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:4-6).

18. John 3:3 "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

When we pass from spiritual death to spiritual life,¹⁹ we can feel it and experience it. Eternal life is knowing God *now*, in this life.²⁰ So we are talking about a spiritual reality that we can *experience*. We are talking about knowing God. We are talking about feeling the wind.

So, specifically, how does one become born again? It's simple:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”²¹

Believing in Christ does not mean knowing Him. It means to trust in Him. Knowing Him comes later. And knowing Him does not come from us; it comes from Him. Trusting in Christ is the same type of trust that we place in a doctor that we have never met to perform an operation.²²

Trusting in Christ is simple. It may be done through prayer. For instance, one may pray “God, I come to You and I am trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all my sin.” You can pray this prayer even though you are not certain that

19. John 5:24 “Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

20. John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” Eternal life is not simply living forever. It is a spiritual life and entirely different from our physical life.

21. Acts 16:31. This passage refers to the “Lord” Jesus Christ because Jesus is God’s son and one with the Father. John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.” The Bible teaches that God is a Trinity. He is one God but three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The family is a mirror of who God is: all equal and all one but with different functions.

22. The original Greek word means to trust. See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (Second Ed. 1958, Univ. Of Chicago Press), s.v. πιστεύω, “believe (in), trust.”

anything at all will happen. That is what faith is. It is trusting even though you are not certain. Is it really that easy? Yes. He made it easy on purpose. And it free for the asking.²³ That means that it cannot be earned or deserved. And it is not dispensed by a pope or a priest. They have no control over God.

How much real faith does one need? Just enough to trust sincerely in Christ. The invitation is open to all.²⁴

Trusting in Christ is a leap of faith, not a leap of certainty. That is, it is not a leap from the point of certainty; it is a leap from the point of trust. Trust is what faith is and it is impossible to please God without it.²⁵

God resolves our doubts about Him when we experience the Kingdom of God. And experiencing the Kingdom of God is the result of faith; not vice versa. Faith is not the result of knowing God; knowing God is the result of faith. Faith is just the first step. After faith comes the knowledge of God—knowing God.

So we are talking concrete reality here. Spiritual reality, to be sure, but reality that we can experience.

Trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin is all that is needed for eternal salvation. But it is not all that is needed in order to experience the presence of God. Indeed, some people who have trusted in Christ experience nothing as a result of it. Some Christians don't feel any different and

23. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

24. Revelation 22:17 "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

25. Hebrews 11:6 "And without faith it is impossible to please God..."

many just don't believe that anyone really experiences the presence and peace of God. Others simply pretend. Why do some people who have trusted in Him never really know Him?

The answer to knowing Him is to yield your will to God. That is the second step.

Knowing God

The first step to knowing God is to get forgiven. The second step is to yield. The result is that God discloses Himself to you.

Getting forgiven is getting rid of guilt. It means leaving all past sins behind. It means getting “clean” inside and in the process getting rid of the eternal consequence of sin. Sin has a consequence and that consequence is spiritual death.¹ Jesus Christ died that death for you² and you may choose to appropriate it at any time you wish.³

Salvation is the free gift⁴ of spiritual life.⁵

Yielding means to surrender to God’s will. It means to obey Him and obeying Him means to turn away from sin. Sin is spiritual death.⁶ Obedience is spiritual life.⁷ One cannot engage in spiritual death and experience spiritual life at the same time.

1. Romans 6:23 "...the wages of sin is death."

2. First Corinthians 15:3

3. Revelation 22:17 "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come, and the one who desires the water of life drink freely."

4. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

5. John 14:16 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

6. Ephesians 2:1 "You were dead in your trespasses and sins"

7. Psalm 119:93 "I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have given me life."

If we trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sin but fail to turn away from the very sin that He saved us from, we are doing the opposite of what we should be doing. If we are cleansed of sin one day and then commit the same sin the next day, it makes a mockery of the cross.⁸ It is “receiving the grace of God in vain.”⁹ To know God we must turn from sin.

Taking the first step (trusting Christ) without taking the second step (yielding and turning from sin) is like the man who was given a gift certificate for the finest dinner in the finest restaurant in town. He was seated at his table but he left after eating the bread and butter. “Ha!” He said to himself on the way out, “I can get that meal anywhere.” He was there but he never got what he came for.

But what if we sincerely turn from sin but falter later? What if we really want to know Him but we keep failing and falling back into sin? Is that making a mockery of the cross? Are we out of the race? No, because faltering and falling back are part of the game. Knowing God is both progressive and fully accomplished at the same time. Spiritual growth is progressive because sin becomes replaced with its righteous alternative over time. But knowing God is not progressive. It is not based upon how well we do, but on how sincere we are when we do it. It’s all about heart.

Yielding is a state of mind, not a result. The result of yielding is righteousness, but it doesn’t happen immediately.^{10†} Sincerely yielding our will to God results in experiencing the peace of God and knowing Christ; but some sins fall off early and some late.

8. See Hebrews 6:6, discussed below

9. Second Corinthians 5:1

10. † We are always righteous in God’s sight even when we sin because

God is not silent to those who are sincere in their desire to know Him. Over and over the Bible speaks of knowing God and God's disclosure of Himself to us:

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.¹¹

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."¹²

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him...¹³

I am the good Shepard; and I know My own, and My own know Me.¹⁴

The concept of knowing God is throughout the Bible, not just in the New Testament:

O continue Thy loving kindness to those who know Thee...¹⁵

nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:28). But sin destroys our relationship with Him. See John 14:21, which is discussed below..

11. John 14:21

12. John 14:23

13. Second Peter 1:3

14. John 10:14

15. Psalm 36:10

And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord.¹⁶

And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with your whole heart.¹⁷

It's a relationship, not a ritual:

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things which you do not know...¹⁸

I called but no one answered; I spoke but they did not listen...¹⁹

These scriptures make it clear that “knowing God” is actually knowing God, not just knowing about Him. One can spend a lifetime studying what the Bible says or studying what various authors say about what the Bible says but never actually know God, and never experience His presence and His immense peace.

God's presence and His peace is spiritual, not physical, because God is Spirit.²⁰ Knowing God is therefore a spiritual experience. Don't believe in spiritual experiences? Try it for yourself.

16. Hosea 2:20

17. Jeremiah 29:13

18. Jeremiah 33:3

19. Isaiah 66:4

20. John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship in spirit and truth.”

Experiencing the presence and the peace of God is the apex of all human experience. There is absolutely no comparison to knowing Him. Committed Christians aren't building a stairway to heaven; they are already there. They have found something that just gets better and better as time goes on.

How to know God is no mystery. Jesus was crystal clear about how we can establish a relationship with Him. The secret is obedience and love:

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.²¹

This verse is a quotation from Jesus Christ. Christ is telling us that if we find out what His commandments are by reading the Bible and if we obey what we have read, then we have shown ourselves to be someone who loves Him. And when we show ourselves as someone who loves Him, Jesus promises to “disclose Myself to him.” Jesus says that He will disclose Himself (make Himself known) because He is just as much God as God is.²²◇

This is the reason why obedience is so very important. It results in Jesus Christ making Himself known. This is what knowing God is. But notice how often the word “love” is

21. John 14:21

22. ◇ Note the consistency of scripture. References to God and to Jesus Christ in this verse are interchangeable because Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20; John 1:24,19:7; Hebrews 5:8) and He is God (John 1:1-14, 8:58; Second Peter 1:2,3; Hebrews 1:2,3). God exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

used in this verse and others. Love is all these verses because love is all about heart. One cannot love without heart and one cannot relate God without love.

The very real beauty of knowing God is that you can try it out and see for yourself. You can discover for yourself that knowing God is really possible and that God certainly does exist. If your effort proves to be fruitless, then you have lost nothing. But if you try it and discover that it is all true, then you have gained everything. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain.

It's Relational

So, true Christianity is neither ritual nor rules; it is an experiential relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the reason why the scriptures that tell of knowing God are not formulas; they are love notes. And just like human love, the thing that makes them what they are is *heart*.

He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.²³ ◇

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.²⁴

God is not a judge to those who sincerely turn to Him. He is a lover, a lover whose language is righteousness. Keeping God's commandments to get Him to do something will not get us to Him. But keeping His commandments in order

23. John 14:21 ◇ Note the accuracy of scripture. This verse requires us to keep His commandments to express love to Him. How then can the Christian life be a series of successes and

24. Jeremiah 29:13

to know Him will. Why? Because God is a Spiritual Lover who speaks with righteousness. Righteousness is the way that God relates. Righteousness is God's embrace.

So, it is a love thing because God is love.²⁵ But don't worry about loving God enough, so quit trying. When He makes His presence known, you will love Him. You won't be able to stop yourself.

Perfection is not required and nothing in our relationship with Christ is forced. When we love, we do not require perfection nor does He.²⁶ What God wants in His relationship with us is the same thing that we want in our relationship with others: sincerity and good motives. We want heart and so does He because sincerity is everything. God does not settle for fake. He may endure fake for a time, just like we do, but ultimately what God requires is a real from-the-heart relationship.²⁷

The Christian life is a progression toward being conformed to the righteousness that He has already begun in us.²⁸ Those who have turned to Christ are already righteous in Christ²⁹ because Christ has paid for their sins. It is just a matter of yielding and cooperation.

25. First John 4:8 "...God is love." God is love, but He is not just love. He is much more. God's love is described in First Corinthians 13.

26. Romans 5:8 "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

27. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes (trusts) in Him will not perish but have everlasting life."

28. Romans 8:29 "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son..."

29. First Corinthians 1:30 "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness..."

We have all things that pertain to life and Godliness through the true knowledge of Him,³⁰ so, of course, knowing Him is the most important thing. He *makes* us righteous;³¹ all we do is cooperate as we partake of His divine nature.³²◇

Our Purpose

God's purpose for us is to yield the fruit of the Spirit. Like the vines in His vineyard we are here to yield this fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is composed of the various products of righteousness. And they are all good.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.³³

Within the “love” that God gives us to give to others is additional fruit.

30. Second Peter 1:3 “...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us...”

31. Second Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Philippians 3:8,9 “I count all things as loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith.”

32. ◇ It is for this reason that the true knowledge of Him does not come progressively as the result of overcoming sin. It is based upon heart because the true knowledge of Him is necessary in order to turn from sin. We cannot do it without Him.

33. See Galatians 5:22

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.^{34†}

Yielding fruit is immensely important to God and to us because it is what He has created us to do.

I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain..."³⁵

These different kinds of fruit are virtues, traits to be cultivated. Basically, God is telling us that He wants us to be good. God is not interested in being part of anyone who is bad. He has made us to be righteous, but without Him, we can do "nothing."

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.³⁶

God did not create man to spin out his life chasing the things of the world like mouse in a golden running wheel. God has a purpose for us. His purpose is for us to bear the fruit of righteousness, to be virtuous, honest and good. *That is His stated reason for creating us.* He did not create us to chant and burn incense or explode bombs among people who do not believe the way we do. He created us to be good.

34. First Corinthians 13:4 † There are 4 different loves in biblical Greek. The love referred to in this verse is supernatural and can be fully expressed only through Christ. See the author's *Endless Love*.

35. John 15:16

36. John 15:5

“I chose you...that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.”³⁷

Note that *all* of the fruit of the Spirit is relational. The fruit is either the key to excellent relationships (love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) or result of excellent relationships (joy). God has created us to relate to one another because love is expressed in relationships and love is what God is.³⁸ God is expressed (or not expressed) by us in relationships.

We yield fruit by being attached to the vine (Christ). When we are attached, we are relating God³⁹ and we yield fruit because of it. We yield fruit by knowing Him because by knowing Him we have all things pertaining to life and Godliness.⁴⁰ We yield because Christ is in us.⁴¹

Christ is the vine and we are the branches. Vines provide sustenance to many branches, but the vines themselves do not yield fruit. Only branches yield fruit. It is we who are the fruit bearers. Christ empowers and we yield. We are incapable of yielding God's fruit without Him, but together we bear fruit. What honor the Father has bestowed upon us! We are His vineyard created to yield fruits of righteousness.

37. John 15:16

38. First John 4:8 "...God is love"

39. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." John 14:23 "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

40. Second Peter 1:3 "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him"

41. John 14:20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

Why then does God plant His vinyard in a fallen world? And why are His branches so very frail and imperfct? Because the the fallibility of humanity is required if acts of righteousness are to have any significance. It is the choosing to do what is right by someone who is tempted to do wrong that renders the choice to do right to be significant. Righteousness cannot exist without its counterpart. It is for this reason that God has placed us in an world that is filled with adversity and sin.⁴² But sin is not simply a counterpart. Sin kills.

Sin

Sin is the opposite of righteousness and it kills. Sin does not simply maim or hurt or inhibit. Sin kills. Sin kills righteousness; sin kills spiritual things, sin kills relationships including our relationship with Christ. Sin kills. It cuts us off from “all things that pertain to life and godliness.”⁴³ God does not remain in the presence of repeated sin.⁴⁴ Sin causes the branch that continues to sin to become separated from the vine and to be burned in the fires of this world. These branches die spiritually because they cease to draw life from the vine.⁴⁵ The entire Bible is a warning that sin kills:

42. See the author's *A Reason for Adversity*.

43. Second Peter 1:3

44. John 14:21 “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make Our home with him.”

45. See Hebrews 6:6. Any branch is perfectly free to dis-attach from the vine and live for the world, but they are of no eternal value. Dis-attached branches can renew themselves through sincere confession of sin (they should use Psalm 51 to do so) and by relinquishing further sin. See First John 1:9. But it is impossible for anyone else to renew them because they have put Christ to "open shame" by their sin. The sinning Christian is most miserable having rejected Christ and yet not a child of the world. Hebrews 6:6 does not refer to the loss of salvation.

Genesis 2:17

1400 BC

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. 1400 BC

Psalm 33:18,19

967 BC

Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death...”

Ezekiel 18:4

593 BC

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die...

Ezekiel 33:11

593 BC

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?

John 8:51, 52

30 AD

Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death. (Jesus Christ)

James 5:20

45 AD

Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death...

What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Altogether there are 50 scriptures from Genesis to Revelation that warn us that sin kills.

What is Sin?

But what is sin? Some people believe that there is no sin. And there are differing opinions as to what sin is. But the Bible teaches that if you want to know God, then avoid these things: lying,⁴⁶† cheating,⁴⁷ stealing,⁴⁸ adultery,⁴⁹† fornica-

46. † Lying is viewed as a very significant sin. Revelation 21:8 "...all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Those who lie to others will eventually lie to themselves.

47. Mark 10:19 "You must not give false testimony [or cheat anyone]"

48. Mark 10:19 "You shall not steal" Also see Exodus 20:15

49. Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery" † To adulterate means to pollute. Adultery is not limited to the pollution of a family by the introduction of the seed of a stranger. The marital relationship may be polluted by inappropriate flirting and one's relationship to God may be polluted by the worship of an idol.

tion,⁵⁰ lasciviousness,⁵¹† sexual immorality,⁵²† deceit and gossiping, malice, slander, boasting, untrustworthiness, being unloving or unmerciful,⁵³ envy, drunkenness [including drug use], debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits

50. Fornication is coitus outside of marriage and it is sin. Promiscuity is gratuitous fornication. It dilutes the capacity of a man or woman to experience true eros (romantic love) and trivializes its expression. Without an encounter with Christ, one can hardly engage in promiscuity prior to marriage and become faithful after marriage. Be wise young man or young woman. See First Corinthians 6:14.

51. Galatians 5:19 “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness [sensuality]...” (KJV) † Fornication is coitus outside of marriage and it is a sin. Lasciviousness, also a sin, is the outward expression of exaggerated sexual appetite. One should not confuse lasciviousness with sexuality, however. Sexuality is not a sin. God created man as sexual beings and His creation is always good. Just as most sin is the misuse of what God has given, lasciviousness is the misuse of sexuality and fornication, the misuse of eros.

52. First Thessalonians 4:3 “...abstain from sexual immorality.”† Sexual immorality includes promiscuous sexual encounters that are not necessarily fornication. Except for actual coitus, however, the natural sexual expression of affection to one person prior to marriage is not limited by scripture. It is, however, limited by wisdom and common sense. True love is quite real and powerful. It exists in an environment of mutual righteousness and once ignited it need not ever die. The Bible addresses homosexuality in Romans 1.

53. Romans 1:28 “God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worth of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, orgies, and things like these,⁵⁴ taking advantage of people,⁵⁵ being critical and being condemnatory or unforgiving.⁵⁶

Eventually we all sin in one way or another.⁵⁷ Indeed, the only difference between us with regard to sin is that we all commit different sins. The only cure is to trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of *all* sin and turn from committing any more sin. And if we falter, we can confess and obtain forgiveness and begin anew.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.⁵⁸

Two Kinds of Sin

There are two different kinds of sins. There are overt sins and there are covert sins. Sins such as theft, murder or adultery are overt sins because they are committed outwardly. Sins such as condemnation and unforgiveness are covert sins because they are committed inwardly. Overt sins by their nature are occurrences that start and then stop. They may be repeated, but each occurrence has a beginning and an end. Covert sins, however, are different. Covert sins are secret and they may continue for years.

54. Galatians 5:21

55. First Corinthians 8 "...you yourselves wrong and defraud."

56. Matthew 7:1 "Judge not for in the way you judge, so shall you be judged" Matthew 6:14 14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours."

57. Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short..."

58. First John 1:9

Covert sins have another dangerous characteristic. They are justified (or appear to be so) because they are always caused by someone else. For instance, if we are unforgiving it is because someone has hurt us or hurt a loved one. Someone else causes the pain that we must bear. Someone else is responsible, so why should we forgive? If someone speaks injury to us without a cause, we condemn him for it; we categorize him as someone who is (to some extent) bad. Since covert sins appear to be justified, they often become normalized and become part of life. But they are sin nonetheless.

Sins that destroy relationships are called relational sins. There are two primary relational sins and both of them are silent.

The Twin Sins

These two primary relational sins are called “twins” because they are two sides of the same coin. These two relational sins are judgment and unforgiveness.

Judgment of others means to make a critical determination about a person, to judge another. The Greek word for judge is “krino,” which means to criticize or judge another person. Criticism and judgment can be either spoken or thought.

It feels perfectly normal to take offense when we are offended. If the injury is an emotional injury, it results in emotional pain and emotional pain causes an emotional response against the person who caused it. Sometimes the response is not proportional to the injury and sometimes the injury is simply our perception of an injury.

Taking offense is the natural result of an injury or perceived injury. We may see the offending party to be malicious or neglectful or we may see him or her as selfish or any number of other things. But one way or another, we make a determination about that person and we begin to resent what he did. It is normal to take offense when we have been injured and it is normal to resent the person who perpetrated the injury. It happens all the time. This is life.

But notice the progression of what occurs; several things are happening here. In order to take offense in the first place, we must judge the other person as in some manner defective or malicious or uncaring or something else. Without this determination, we would take no offense. For instance, we never take offense at the thoughtless actions of small children because we know that the offensive act is the result of immaturity rather than malice. And sometimes we judge the motives of another only to find that the offensive act was in fact never intended or was due to some other cause that had nothing to do with us. When that happens, resentment disappears because there is no longer any basis to judge the person to be offensive or malicious. Scripture tells us to stop the process before we get to the judgment phase because all resentment is sin and it does not matter if it is deserved or not.

Do not judge lest you be judged for the way you judge, you will be judged and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.⁵⁹

The companion sin to judgment of others is the failure to forgive.

59. Matthew 7:1

Forgiveness is what we do to get rid of resentment once we have it. And just like condemnation, the failure to forgive is a sin because it results in continued condemnation and resentment and continued resentment.

For if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.⁶⁰

And, just like condemnation, sometimes forgiveness is difficult. It is difficult to forgive when we have been injured, especially if the injury is serious. It takes patience to wait it out and let it pass, but that is what we are commanded to do.

Unforgiveness is a cancer that becomes part of us. The only cure is Christ because only He can provide the power to truly forgive. If the cut is deep, it may years before true forgiveness occurs. True forgiveness occurs when the injured party reaches the point where he or she is willing to be fully reconciled with the perpetrator if the perpetrator sincerely confesses and asks for forgiveness. If the perpetrator of the injury never asks for forgiveness, the injured party has still forgiven and is right with God and free to leave the incident behind.

These two sins carry an immediate and corresponding response from God: He will judge us or forgive us to the same extent that we judge or forgive others. He relates to us with the same leniency with which we relate to others. These are the only two verses in the Bible that have a response of this nature. Obviously God considers these two sins to be very serious. Why?

60. Matthew 6:14

To understand why, let us consider the inflexible foundational principle with which we all relate to other people. We relate to other people our *perception* of everything about that person. A significant part of that perception is our opinion of his or her character. That perception may be accurate or it may be inaccurate but whatever it is, it will always be a significant contribution to how we relate to that person. If our perception is accurate then our relational skills will be on target and the relationship will be smooth because we will gauge our relating on an accurate understanding. We will establish relational links where it is appropriate and beneficial and avoid those that are unwise. For instance, it is sometimes smart to avoid political or religious discussions. If our perception is inaccurate, our relational efforts will be off and whatever limitations that we may place (or not place) on the relationship will be inappropriate. Social advances toward someone whom we inaccurately perceive to be receptive will be rebuffed. In every case, however, it is always based upon our *perception* of the other person.

The problem, however, is that the only accurate judge of character is God Himself. We can never know what the other person is going through, the burden or the pain or the joy that he bears. We can never fully understand the complex of fears and pains, hopes and dreams or loves and sorrows. We can never judge the intents of his soul or what he will believe tomorrow. God says never even try. Do not judge him.

In place of judgment we supply unconditional love and acceptance instead. We do this for *every* relationship no matter what. But we define the relationship itself to whatever is appropriate. If we wish, we may define it as a long term and intimate friendship or we may limit it to a five minute conversation at an annual office party. But during those

five minutes, God commands us to love, to accept and not the judge. When both parties obey these scriptures, the five minutes may stretch to ten and this is good. But scripture does not require us to have any relationship at all if we don't want one. Don't want to speak to him? Then don't. Scripture does not limit your choice in this regard. But in the silence of your mind, do not judge and hold neither ill-will nor grudge. Decline that chalice filled with poison and forgive.

And this is not to say that the act itself should not be judged. If the act is sin, then call it sin. Indeed, we are told to be wise and careful in how and avoid the sins of others. So, avoiding the company of those who sin is both prudent and scriptural. And determining if someone has committed a sinful or illegal act is likewise prudent and scriptural. But if we wish to live the Life that God gives, the character of the offender is off-limits. Do not judge. Avoid the person because of the acts that he does or may do, but never condemn him for them. Hate the sin but love the sinner.

This can be very difficult when we have been injured and the cut is deep. Let us therefore consider why the Creator has made us in this way and why He commands us to do something that often grates against our nature.

Notice the drastic effect that obedience to these scriptures has on the person who has been injured. If the injured person declines to criticize or condemn (judge) after being injured, he cannot take offense and therefore can hold no resentment. If there is no resentment there is no anger and no internal impediment to reconciliation. The goal of scripture, for us to live free of anger and resentment and to create a place for love and acceptance.

Just like a physical injury, when we are injured emotionally, we hurt. Hurt is inescapable and sometimes the hurt may be long term and very bad. But feeling hurt is neither judgment nor condemnation. Condemnation is not hurt; condemnation is the *result* of hurt. And, exactly like a physical injury that we guard and protect, when we suffer an emotional injury, we guard it, protect it while it is healing. Scripture teaches that we are healed by forgiveness and the decision to decline the offense.

The decision not to take offense to an emotional injury is like a salve that is placed on a wound caused by a physical injury. Taking of offense and retaining condemnation for an emotional injury is the same as opening the wound and infecting it. It will never heal.

If the parties are not married, complete biblical reconciliation does not mean that the parties are required to be in a state of closeness. Each party is always free to limit the scope of the future relationship in whatever way he or she sees fit. If the parties are married, however, they are not free to limit the scope of the relationship but are scripturally required to be totally reconciled. If the injury rises to the level that justifies a biblical divorce (physical adultery, actual physical abuse, child abuse, criminal acts or abandonment), then divorce may be an alternative. But short of divorce, scripture requires reconciliation.

How many times have we been injured and said things that can never be recalled? What would a marriage be like if all of those things had never been said? What would it be like if we had never yielded to the temptation to throw back the vengeful words that were thrown at us? What would it be like? And what would you be like if your mate had never

thrown one at *you*? What love would you have saved? God's command is to never throw vengeful words for any reason and when you receive them bleed rather than be a part of death's minuet.

A Different Kind of Power

There is tremendous power in never criticizing and always forgiving. But it is a different kind of power. It is a quiet power, a power that flows to others and to God rather than to self, a power that binds and heals, a power that shields a marriage and protects a family, a power that creates a haven where there is acceptance and rest in spite of imperfections and shortcomings, a power that saves marriages and preserves families. To exercise this power is to express God, because this power is the power of selfless unconditional love and it is this love that is what God is.^{61†}

To forgive and never to judge is to exercise this power. It is healing to a dying marriage and the resurrection of a dead one. The effect of obeying these scriptures is immense. Indeed, obedience on the part of *only one* spouse can save a family.

Obedience to these scriptures is not "sweeping things under the rug." Sweeping things under the rug means to take offenses and "stuff them" somewhere inside and to ignore them. This is unhealthy because refusing to deal with resent-

61. First John 4:8 "God is love [agape]" † Agape is one of four different words for love in biblical Greek. Agape is unconditional love. It is carefully defined in First Corinthians 13. All uses of "love" in that chapter ("charity" in the KJV) are agape. There is no other love in First Corinthians 13 other than agape. Thus, to agape one must know God.

ment is to turn it inward, to turn anger inward. Anger turned inward is the classic psychological taboo. It results in numerous psychological disorders, such as depression.

But scripture is not telling us to stuff. Scripture is saying that we are to decline to take offense in the first place, so there is nothing to stuff. That is the only way to stay clean. And if there is already dirt under the rug, the scriptural way to remove it is forgiveness, not venting or vengeance. Venting does not remove the dirt; it spreads it. The only way to be clean under the rug is to forgive. We may not be willing to forgive, but if we are willing to be made willing, and if we are willing to wait, then God will empower us to forgive.⁶²

Scripture commands forgiveness, period. There are no conditions, no exceptions and no hesitation. But does this mean that we are commanded to simply forget what happened and let the perpetrator walk away just because he asked for forgiveness—or worse, let him go free when he does *not* ask for forgiveness—and leaves us with heavy baggage filled with pain? Are we to simply ignore the injury and do nothing? In a word, “Yes.” That is exactly what scripture commands us to do. *Drop the baggage*. Forgiveness has little effect on the perpetrator; forgiveness is intended to protect the *injured* party.

Look carefully at what is happening here and how it affects the perpetrator. When the injured party forgives from the heart, the perpetrator has been denied a forum in which he could defend himself and dredge up past wrongs to justify what he has done. When forgiveness occurs, there is no conflagration in which the injury can be obscured as

62. Second Peter 1:3 "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him."

the perpetrator focuses on self-defense and avoids facing the reality of the bad. Forgiveness deprives the perpetrator of an opportunity to self-justify or the opportunity to mollify what he has done or simply lie. Instead, he is forced inward. He is forced to face what he has done alone and he must face his Creator.⁶³ If he is a Christian, his sin will deprive him of his relationship with God and to restore it he must come to you and apologize.⁶⁴

What about working through it? Sure, but forgive first, then the only thing to work through is a misunderstanding.

God's goal is for us to live free of baggage, free of pain and free of condemnation.

Make no mistake about it. We are talking miracle here. Not flashy, spectacular, look-at-me type miracles, but quiet, internal miracles, miracles that open the door to knowing God, miracles that enable us to experience eternal life (His life) *now*. These are miracles that enable us to take no offense even though offense has been given and to forgive even though the sin is painful. They empower us to leave all baggage behind and live the Life that God intends for us to live.

63. Romans 12:19 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

64. Matthew 5:23 "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." Also see John 14:21, 23.

What is the practical result of these miracles? An absolutely indescribable sensation of total freedom⁶⁵ and peace.⁶⁶

The commandment to avoid all criticism and condemnation and to forgive always applies to one's self as much as it applies to others. If we confess our sin and ask for forgiveness from anyone we injured⁶⁷ and of God, our sin is forgiven⁶⁸ and we can rest in that assurance. God's forgiveness of our sin is complete, lacking in nothing even if we have not received forgiveness from the one we injured. Trust that God forgives your sin and go on.⁶⁹ Christ became sin for us⁷⁰ and offers forgiveness for free.⁷¹ All we have to do is to accept it.

65. John 8:36 "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

66. Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

67. Matthew 5:24 "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

68. First John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Note the accuracy of scripture. Why not simply say that God "will" forgive us rather than that He is "faithful and just" to forgive us? There is a reason for these words. God is "just" to forgive us because Christ has paid for our sins. And God is "faithful" to forgive us because He is faithful to His own promise, "I, yes I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake and remembers your sins no more." Isaiah 43:25. Every word in the Bible is divinely inspired, intimately connected and life-transforming.

69. The very first thing a Christian in need of forgiveness to do is to turn to Psalm 51.

70. Second Corinthians 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

71. Revelation 22:17 "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

Who are we to ignore what He did for us simply because it is our own self that must be forgiven? God does not do guilt and neither should you. Guilt died on the cross. God's goal is for each of us to live entirely without guilt or self-condemnation. God's goal is our freedom, our peace and our salvation. What does God get out of it? Us.

A Different Kind of Peace

The peace of God is different. It is not the kind of peace that comes from an accomplishment, a good marriage or from a good day's work or from a healthy bank account. It is a deep spiritual serenity that is deeper than any physical or worldly thing. It is the peace that we often search for in the things of the physical world but cannot find.

God's peace is not deliverance from the troubles of the world. He promises exactly the opposite.

In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.⁷²

Christ is saying that His peace overcomes the troubles of the world but does not remove them. We will have tribulation, that's a given. But God's peace exists in spite of them. God's peace exists where it is not expected to exist because it is not the peace of the world; it is the peace of God. God's peace is experienced through righteousness.⁷³ God's peace (His presence) is the "pearl of great price"⁷⁴ it is worth nothing less than everything.

72. John 16:33

73. Romans 14:17 "...the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

74. Matthew 13:45,46 "...the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl

The twin sins of criticism and unforgiveness are the edge of the blade that kills the peace and kills the family. How many marriages have withered in the serpentine tangle of justified condemnations and wrongs that were “forgiven” never forgotten? How many families have been eviscerated with this blade? Look closely at the cost of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is spiritual and relational death.⁷⁵

What of justice? It is God who judges; it is God who condemns, not man.⁷⁶ Forgiveness is not supposed to be justice; forgiveness is in spite of justice. Forgiveness opens the door to experience the presence of God. The point at which forgiveness and the absence of criticism meet is the point of interface between man and God. It there that God makes Himself known. It is there that faith becomes knowledge. It is there eternal life (His life) is experienced and the Kingdom of God is lived. This interface, this relationship with Him is everything.⁷⁷

Reproof

But all criticism can't be bad! Some criticism is necessary and helpful! Indeed, we cannot sit by and watch someone injure us—or themselves—without saying something. It can't

of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

75. See the author's *Endless Love*.

76. Hebrews 10:30 “For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord.” KJV

77. Second Peter 1:3 “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him...for by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”

be wrong to discuss an affront; and indeed, it may well be wrong to say nothing. So, where is the line to be drawn between good criticism and bad criticism?

The answer is quite straightforward. There is no good criticism. “Good” criticism is not criticism; it is something else. It is called reproof and reproof is always good.

So, what is reproof? Reproof is a critical statement that is received as helpful. Criticism becomes reproof and beneficial when it is well received and reproof becomes critical and destructive when it is not. So, the difference between the two is not the statement itself, but how the statement is received.

Some people can receive reproof and some cannot. Indeed, the measure of a person’s spiritual strength is the extent to which he can receive reproof without taking offense.⁷⁸ But everyone is different. Some are spiritually weak and cannot listen to reproof without taking offense. And some people can receive reproof about some things but not about others. We must take each person as we find him.

If the person is not strong enough to receive the needed reproof, it should not be offered because it's not reproof. And it cannot help because it is not reproof.

This does not mean, however, that we are to ignore the sins of others or pretend that sin did not occur, especially if we are the victim of it. It means that we are to draw a very clear line between the sin and the person who committed the sin. We are free to demand that the sin cease, but we are not

78. Proverbs 9:8 “Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.”

free to condemn the person who commits it. We are free to address the act but we are not free to criticize the person who committed the act.

Look at the beauty of how these scriptural admonitions fit together when we draw the line at the person himself and address the act alone. First of all, when we follow the scriptural command not to condemn the person, we do not place him in a position where he will be forced to defend himself and we leave him free to admit to himself that the act was wrong without requiring him to show himself as less than he perceives himself to be. And we leave him free to confess his sin without risking condemnation and retribution.

Modern psychology has struck upon this same biblical concept and incorporated non-threatening approach. The method focuses on the act and not the person. The classic psychological approach is to say "When you did this it made me feel thus and so." In this way, the speaker avoids saying that the person is bad; only the act is bad. The injured party is saying "it (the act)" caused me to feel bad, but I am not making any judgment about you." Of course everyone knows what happened and who did it, but when the accusation is removed, healing is possible. This is nothing more than an application of Matthew 7:1. Generally speaking, when the sentence begins with "You" is probably ill phrased.

Scripture forbids the condemnation of the person because acceptance of the person is by far the more important course of action. Within a marriage, acceptance of a sinful person is more important because acceptance is an expression of unconditional love and God is unconditional love.⁷⁹

79. First John 4:8

Therefore, if God is in us,⁸⁰ each expression of acceptance that we offer is an expression of God. God loved us while we were yet sinners⁸¹ and He expects to love as well⁸² because it is the *same* love from the same source. He is in us and we are empowered to love with that same power—but only when we choose to. Yielding to Him in this context is like opening a sluice on a reservoir of endless love. There is simply no end to the love the flows.

On the other hand, each piece of criticism is the opposite of acceptance; each piece of criticism is a piece of rejection. Therefore unless the critical statement will be received as edifying and helpful, it should not be made. Or else, it should be made in a way that is calculated not to be offensive. Repetitious "reproof" is always odious and clearly forbidden by scripture because it inevitably becomes critical. Speaking the truth in love repeatedly is not speaking the truth in love.

Human Relationships

The unconditional acceptance required by scripture does not mean that all relationships must be close relationships.

Each of us is free to determine the nature and the extent of any relationship (except for the biblical marriage). A relationship may be the long-term sharing friendship of lifelong companions or it may be a 5 second interchange with a

80. John 14:23 "If anyone love Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make our abode with him."

81. Romans 5:8 "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

82. Romans 8:29 "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son..."

mendicant on a street corner. Either way, each person is free to define the relationship as he wishes. But within the limitations of whatever definition is applied to the relationship (be it wide or narrow) we are to be unconditionally accepting of the person. We can limit the relationship but we cannot limit the acceptance that the relationship must contain. Therefore, the scriptural response to an unpleasant or dangerous relationship is not rejection of the person but limitation of the relationship. This is not at all difficult. Simply shake hands and leave.

The only exception to our right to limit our relationships is the scriptural marriage. The scriptural marriage relationship cannot be defined by the parties because it is already defined by scripture. Scripture defines marriage as “oneness” between a man and a woman.⁸³ Oneness means total and unconditional acceptance of each other; we are to love our spouse as we love ourselves,⁸⁴ which means that we are to accept our spouse as we accept ourselves. Oneness creates comfort and security when each spouse honors it. A wise pastor once put it this way, “Think we, not me.”

Fidelity in a marriage is faithfulness to the marital vows and to the oneness described in scripture. Fidelity excludes not only physical encounters with others, but also all inap-

83. Mark 10:8 “And the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.” Hence, the biblical marriage consists of only two people, one man and one woman.

84. Mark 12:31 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’The second [commandment] is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” Thus, the two greatest commandments issued by Jesus Christ are to both to love. Love should be preached repeatedly from every Christian pulpit in the world.

appropriate social relationships as well, such as flirting. Flirting adulterates the marriage by injecting a third party into the minds of two spouses.⁸⁵ Fidelity excludes any act that compromises the integrity of the marital vows and scriptural oneness, such as removing one's wedding ring or threatening divorce.

Summary and Conclusion

The Bible is not a book about religion. The Bible is a book about spiritual life and spiritual death. It is a book about knowing Jesus Christ⁸⁶ and experiencing the presence of God. It is a book about spiritual freedom and the bondage of sin, about internal peace and internal void, about wisdom and folly, about contentment and futility, and eternal life and eternal death.⁸⁷

We live in a world that is filled with people who are empty inside and know it. However, they are not aware that the void they live with is spiritual death so they try to fill it with physical things. But physical things cannot fill it. Many people refuse to admit that there is a spiritual anything. But inside they know different. Nothing will fill the void but spiritual life. And there is only one way to obtain spiritual life and that is through Jesus Christ.

85. How does one deal with his own inappropriate affection? With prayer. A suggested prayer is to have God's love for the other person. Love is always good—if it is the right love.

86. John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

87. Revelation 21:8 "But the...unbelieving...their part will be in the lake of that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.⁸⁸

Experiencing spiritual life requires two things. The first thing it requires is that we be forgiven for all sin. We obtain forgiveness by trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin. It is a free gift.⁸⁹ It has to be a free gift because the wages of sin is eternal death⁹⁰ and if we paid that price we would be eternally dead.

The second thing is obedience to Christ's Word (scripture). Obedience can't be free and easy because if it were we would not be called upon to make righteous choices. It is righteous choices in the face of adversity and temptation that make fruit-bearing meaningful and significant. Bearing the fruit of righteousness is God's stated reason for creating us.⁹¹

88. John 14:6

89. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

90. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death..."

91. John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." See the author's *A Reason for Adversity*.

We come to know God by yielding our will to His because when we do He discloses Himself to us.⁹² Knowing Him is to experience eternal life *now*⁹³ because Christ is the life⁹⁴ and it is His life that we experience when Christ is in us.⁹⁵

Eternal life is not simply living our life forever. It is not an extension of mortal life; it is a different life altogether, a life that is *already* eternal. To receive eternal life is to receive a life that has always been, a life that not only will never end, but a life that also never began. Eternal life is God's life and through Christ we can live it now.

The scriptural analogy is a sheepfold. We are the sheep and the shepherd is Jesus. Jesus is the door to the sheepfold⁹⁶ and it is Jesus who gives us spiritual (eternal) life.⁹⁷ Once we

92. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him , and will disclose Myself to him."

93. John 17:3 "And this is eternal lift that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

94. John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life..."

95. John 14:23 "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

96. John 10:9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved."

97. John 3:14,15 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes [trusts] may in Him have eternal life."

have been admitted to the sheepfold we go in and out and find pasture;⁹⁸ we drink the water of spiritual life⁹⁹ and "eat" the bread of life¹⁰⁰ through scripture (the Word of God¹⁰¹).

Jesus Christ is the light of the world¹⁰² but He cannot be known outside of the sheepfold because knowing Him (experiencing eternal life) is a spiritual experience.¹⁰³ So don't expect to find Him or understand anything about Him¹⁰⁴ until you walk through the door¹⁰⁵ and experience eternal life for yourself.¹⁰⁶

Remember that God is love.¹⁰⁷ So God is all about relationships because love is expressed in relationships. And relationships are all about communication and we commu-

98. John 10:9b "... if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

99. John 4:10 "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

100. John 6:50 "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."

101. John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

102. John 8:12 "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

103. John 1:9 "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

104. First Corinthians 1:18 "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

105. John 10:9a "I am the door..." John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

106. John 17:3 "This is eternal life that you might know God..."

107. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

nicate with God by speaking His language. God's language is righteousness.¹⁰⁸ God does not communicate through ritual, unknown languages ("tongues") or sacrifice. His language is righteousness (what we do), especially as it relates to how we deal with others. He is present with us when we are righteous and good. We live in His universe and whether we like it or not, it is moral universe where the currency is not money and power but righteousness.

If we express our love to Him through righteousness, He makes Himself known to us¹⁰⁹ and lives in us.¹¹⁰ It all revolves around love. Expressing love is everything in the Kingdom of God because that is what God is. God is love.¹¹¹

Once a person has truly perceived and experienced a full measure of the love of God, he cannot turn away. It is overwhelming, magnificent and irresistible. But it is spiritual,¹¹² not physical. It is like the wind. One can feel it but not see it.

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from or where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.¹¹³

108. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them [righteousness], he is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love disclose Myself to Him." This is what knowing God is: God disclosing Himself to us.

109. John 14:21

110. John 14:23 "If any one loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him."

111. First John 4:8 "God is love"

112. John 18:36 "My kingdom is not of this world."

113. John 3:8

That is why we cannot simply decide to believe in God without coming to Christ. Because the natural man is spiritually dead¹¹⁴ and cannot understand the things that are spiritually alive.

The natural man does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.¹¹⁵

It is for this reason that Jesus taught that one must be born again before he can even perceive the Kingdom of God.¹¹⁶

Try it yourself. Trust in Christ and yield sincerely to God's will and see what happens.

If you are someone who truly wants to find God but wonders if there is a God to find, let me say that I have been where you are. I was just as doubting as you are or perhaps more so. But I found God exactly as this booklet describes, and then I opened the Bible and read about what happened to me.

The author found God by trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of all sin and fully yielding at the same time. I was searching for something that I could not describe and trying to fill an internal void. I came to know Jesus Christ through

114. Ephesians 2:1 "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins..."

115. First Corinthians 2:14 (Berean Study Bible). See also the King James translation, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

116. John 3:3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

a silly, fumbling prayer that I prayed one evening long ago telling Him that if He would fill the void and give me the peace that I wanted, then I would give Him everything I had—doubting all the time but meaning every word.

I had no idea that anything would happen. But it did. He came to me with His immense peace and love and He is still there. He filled the void of eternal death with eternal life. He made me new. And He will do the same for you if you come to Christ and yield to His will. All it takes is a decision to trust in Jesus Christ. After that, it is all about heart.

My time was in 1973. Your time is now.

