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*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of
God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved
and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
1 Timothy 2:3,4.*

WHAT IS A REAL CHRISTIAN?

INTRODUCTION

A significant number of people today consider themselves to be a Christian yet without any real understanding or knowledge of the actual Biblical definition of the word. It is a word which has gradually become carelessly used. Let me illustrate what I mean.

You will have heard a housewife say something like, “The house is in such a mess, I must Hoover through”. What she really means is, “... I must vacuum through”; Hoover being the trade name of the appliance. The same applies to the word biro when it is used to mean a ballpoint pen; Biro being the name of the inventor. There is the same implication in the use of the word Christian, which has come to be wrongly used to mean, a person who acts without guile, or, an honest, upright citizen, who shows every consideration for his fellow man.

Whether the word Hoover or vacuum, biro or ballpoint pen is used is not of any great significance, but when the word Christian is wrongly used or misconstrued then that is a different matter.

As a child my father encouraged me to ensure that I was aware of all the facts, regardless of any previous thoughts or ideas I had, before making a decision or comment on a particular subject. I have come to realise that it is so easy to have a set way of thinking on an issue, so that when the truth is heard we may not recognise it because of our existing bias.

Many of our fixed opinions come from early childhood and are formed from what we are taught at school, what our parents tell us, what we read, what we hear, what we experience and so forth. More often than not we carry these fixed beliefs into adulthood, and because they are so firmly rooted in our minds it does not occur to us that there is the slightest possibility they could be wrong. I would like to encourage you, therefore, that as you read on you endeavour to let your mind be open to the fact that what you are reading is from God's Word and that there is the possibility that your own present views could be wrong.

SOME INCORRECT ASSUMPTIONS

Whilst we are talking about fixed thoughts or ideas, it would, perhaps, be appropriate to look at some frequently used erroneous definitions of a Christian.

- **Living a good, honest life and doing good deeds makes you a Christian:** Incorrect. In all probability this is the most common erroneous definition of a Christian. It is certainly one which is frequently encountered. However, God's word says. *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. Titus 3:5.* It is not by our deeds or actions we are saved, it is by faith in what Jesus did for mankind.
- **Believing in God makes you a Christian:** Incorrect. Even Satan believes in God, and that certainly does not make him a Christian!
- **Going to Church makes you a Christian:** Incorrect. People go to church for a variety of reasons, but that does not mean that they are all Christians. Some go because they feel they should, whilst others treat it purely as a social event. A visitor to our home, who had attended church all her life, discussed with us a business decision she had to make. We encouraged her to see what the Bible had to say regarding the matter. She was amazed when she realised that she had never been taught how to seek the Bible and apply its principles to her daily living. After a little more discussion, and much to her surprise, it became apparent that she had never become a Christian. For most of her life, she had thought that regularly attending church was sufficient.
- **Reading and knowing the Bible makes you a Christian:** Incorrect. In his youth, Karl Marx wrote an excellent exposition of John's Gospel. Later he rejected the Bible's authority and called himself an atheist, a communist ... but not a Christian. Satan himself quoted Scriptures to Jesus when he tempted Him in the wilderness. ... *"If You are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge concerning you'"*. *Matthew 4:6.* No one would suggest that knowing the Scriptures makes Satan a Christian!

- **Praying makes you a Christian:** Incorrect. It is possible to pray and not be a Christian. Hindus pray all the time and Muslims pray five times a day. Praying in itself does not make someone a Christian.

- **Being born in a Christian home or environment makes you a Christian:** Incorrect. Many people will say that being born in Britain, which is reputed to be a Christian nation, makes them a Christian. Others have said that they have been a Christian all their life, because they were born in a Christian home. Neither of these assumptions is correct.

THE BIBLE

As we have just seen, there does appear to be a number of incorrect or misunderstood definitions of a Christian, so we need to look for a trustworthy explanation. The point is though, where should we look? Since the word Christian means, pertaining to Christ, it would seem reasonable, therefore, that in order to find out all about Jesus we need to look at the only reliable book that tells us about Him, and that is the Bible.

The Bible is the Word of God, written by man through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and as such is the only reliable means by which the absolute truth can be established. *The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever. Psalm 119:160.* It contains the answers to life, past, present and future. In fact, it contains the answers and solutions to every situation and problem known to mankind. If the situation or problem itself is not specifically stated, then there are certainly principles and guidelines which govern the solution. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.*

Invariably, man's views are influenced by his own knowledge, ideas, reasoning or thoughts, all of which can vary from one person to another, and can even at times be totally at odds with the Bible. It is important, therefore, that each one of us should study the Scriptures

for himself. *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Acts 17:11.*

THE DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN

As we begin to establish what the Bible reveals about becoming a Christian it becomes apparent that there is a form of process. This begins with hearing and then a subsequent response to the “gospel message”. Often a person will actually hear the gospel message a number of times before making a positive response. So what is the gospel message? Why is it so important? Paul understood this importance when he wrote to the Christians in Rome, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Gentile). Romans 1:16.*

The Gospel

Remarkably few people have a full understanding of what the gospel message is. This may be the main reason why many churches today are so full of nominal Christians, that is Christians in name only and not in reality. Reliable statistics show that out of a total world population of around 6½ billion people there are 1½ billion nominal Christians. This is an alarming revelation, so unless the truth is revealed to them, they, like all unbelievers, will not spend eternity in heaven, but in hell. Incidentally, the choice to become a Christian and follow Jesus has to be made here on earth before death – after that is too late.

Obviously it is essential to know what the gospel message is before we can make a response to it. The word “gospel” means good news, and the “gospel message” means the good news about Jesus Christ. So what is so good about the news of Jesus Christ? Why did He have to come to earth as man in the first place, and why did He have to die an excruciating death on the cross? Not only that, why did He then rise from the dead after 3 days and remain on the earth for another 40 days before finally rising to heaven on the clouds where he is now seated at the right hand of God? To answer these questions, we need to go back to the beginning.

Sin

In the beginning God created man and woman for a relationship with Himself. He placed them in the Garden of Eden where He provided for all their needs. They were given complete freedom, but God made one proviso, and that was that they should not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However Adam and Eve both succumbed to the temptations of Satan when they chose to disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit.

Because of this one act of disobedience sin entered into the world. Their perfect nature had now become sinful and their perfect relationship with God was broken. From that time onwards each one of us has been born with this same sinful nature and broken relationship with God. As a result we have sought to make our own way in life by living totally independent from God. ***Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12.***

That was something like 6,000 years ago (certainly not millions of years ago as some scientists and naturalists would have us believe). This is how man has continued to live up to the present time; he has lived independently from God and gone his own way. That is the definition of sin; not living according to how God would have us live by following the directions in His Word, the Bible, but living our own way. Not only did Adam and Eve sin by directly rebelling against God, but they also broke the perfect relationship they initially had with Him.

God's Initial Answer to Sin

From the time of Adam and Eve up until the time Jesus came to the earth, God's solution to the consequences of man's sin was the shedding of blood by the sacrifice of animals. Each animal had to be perfect, without any fault or blemish and its shed blood atoned for the person's sin. It was once a year that the high priest went alone into the Most Holy Place in the Temple and offered the sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. Obviously this was not a permanent solution as it did not resolve the problem of man's inherent sin.

God's Answer Today

God is loving and just, so two thousand years ago He provided the ultimate solution to man's sin through His son, Jesus, who came to earth in the form of man in order to restore that broken relationship with Himself. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16.*

Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested and crucified in order that He might become the final, once and for all time, sacrifice for the sin of all mankind. Just as the animals that were sacrificed were perfect and without fault or blemish, so too was Jesus – He never sinned. His death on the cross, His burial in the tomb and resurrection from the dead after 3 days, and His final ascension into heaven 40 days later was God's plan for dealing with the consequences of man's sin and restoring his broken relationship with Himself.

Our Response

It is not sufficient to merely acknowledge that Jesus died for our sins. That was an action on his part, because He allowed Himself to be crucified in our place. God now requires some action from us and that is quite simply that we should a) repent, b) believe and c) confess and d) be baptised. Not fully observing these four basic actions has, in all probability, resulted in the great number of nominal Christians referred to earlier. Let me explain:

a) Repentance

So far it is God Himself who has shown us our desperate plight, that we are sinners from birth. The next step is solely our own responsibility, and that is making a personal decision to turn away from living our lives our own selfish, self-willed, self-centred, renouncing it as sin towards God and exercising a decision of the will to genuinely forsake it and lead a life of submission and obedience to God. *... that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. Acts 26:20.*

Sadly today the word repentance has become watered down to mean simply feeling sorry for what we have done or being upset that our

wrongdoings have been found out. This is not repentance; this is not turning away from our sins. There has to be a genuine renouncing of sin and a sincere decision of the heart to follow God's instructions to us in the Bible. ***For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.***
2 Corinthians 7:10.

b) Believe

The next step is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He was crucified and died for our sins, was raised to life on the third day, that He ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven. All this, the Bible tells us, He did on our behalf. ***... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.***
1 Corinthians 15:3, 4.

c) Confess

The Bible tells us that it is necessary to tell others what we believe and what we have done, but it has to be sincere and genuine. ***That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.*** ***Romans 10:9, 10.***

d) Baptism

And now we come to baptism, which is the outward demonstration of the inward change produced by repentance. It is symbolic of the complete washing away of sin and that is why baptism entails the complete submersion of the believer in water. ***Repent and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*** ***Acts 2:38.***

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, or Helper as He is sometimes called in Scripture, is the third person of the Trinity (God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit) and usually at the point of conversion or baptism, He comes and lives within the new Christian. The Bible makes it clear to us that it is only those who have followed the process so far who will receive the Holy Spirit. ***Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he is not His.*** ***Romans 8:9.***

The roles of the Holy Spirit are many and varied, but mainly He guides, leads, convicts of sin, teaches and equips. *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you – John 14:26, and However, when He the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. John 16:13, 14.*

Assurance

Not everyone necessarily feels any different when becoming a Christian, so it is encouraging to be assured of our salvation, to know that we are indeed now children of God, that we have been redeemed, and that we are now part of the family of God. *The Spirit Himself, bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Romans 8:16.*

LIVING OUT SALVATION

Being “saved” and becoming a Christian is not, by any means, the end of the process; far from it. It is only the beginning, for the Bible tells us that our salvation will not be complete until the day Jesus returns to the earth again. *Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6.*

We cannot, therefore, afford to be complacent; salvation is an ongoing process. *Therefore, My beloved ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you ... Philippians 2:12, 13.* So God has worked salvation in us and it is for us to work out, with “fear and trembling”, what God has put in. It is essential that we make every effort to ensure we continually live a Christian life in the way God shows us by living in accordance with the Bible.

Let us now look at some of the characteristics of living a Christian lifestyle:

A Daily Time with the Lord

It should be understood that God is a living person. As with any relationship of value that is going to grow and develop, communication is essential. So in order to grow spiritually it is necessary for us talk to

and listen to God regularly, quietly and alone. ***But you, when you pray, go into your room and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Matthew 6:6.***

Jesus Himself frequently prayed to God, His Father. ***So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. Luke 5:16.***

It is during this daily devotional “quiet time” that we can pray, read the Bible and receive direction and guidance from God, and all that we need in order to do His will, and to know how He wants us to live.

Not only should we be in close communication with God in our daily quiet time, we should also learn to be in touch with Him throughout the course of the day.

We can only have a relationship with a person we know, so if we are to have a relationship with God, we have to know Him, to know His ways, and we can only know Him through reading the Bible and prayer.

Reading the Bible

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. The Bible is the foundation of our faith, and it is the means by which God gives direction for daily living. To live as a Christian it is essential, therefore, to know and understand the Word of God, and it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to understand and remember what we have read. It is only by studying and applying it that we are able to develop the characteristics of Jesus. ***Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realised they had been with Jesus – Acts 4:13.*** I would very much doubt that anyone who professes to be a Christian and yet leads a careless, carnal (worldly) and self centred life is a true believer.

The more time we spend with a person, the more we get to know them. So it is with the Bible, the more we study it, the more we get to know God and His character and the plans and purposes He has for our lives.

Prayer

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4: 6.

Prayer is simply speaking to God, but as with any conversation it is two-way, so that means as well as speaking to God, He also speaks to us. Often this can be through reading the Bible and the Scripture becoming very much more meaningful to us.

There are many facets to prayer: thanking God, praising Him, asking for forgiveness of sins, praying for others, seeking His guidance and listening to Him. For Jesus prayer was a constant priority. *So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. Luke 5:16.*

Praying is not necessarily easy, so the Holy Spirit helps us. *Likewise the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us. Romans 8:26.* He also guides us to pray in accordance with God's will. This amplifies the importance of reading and studying the Bible since it gives an understanding of God's will.

As well as praying alone, *(But you, when you pray, go into your room and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place ... Matthew 6:6)* we can also pray with groups of other Christians. *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication ... Acts 1:14.*

Not all prayers are heard by God, for a variety of reasons. There could be unconfessed sin in our lives, unforgiveness, wrong motives, lack of faith. It is interesting to note that God does not hear the prayers of non Christians. *Now we know that God does not hear sinners: but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him. John 9:31.* There is, however, just one prayer of a non Christian that God does hear and that is when a sinner cries out for salvation.

Prayer may not be easy, but it is one of the most important aspects of the Christian life for it is the main way in which we develop a relationship with our heavenly Father. That was the sole purpose of

Jesus' death on the cross, to deal with the consequences of sin and to restore that broken relationship.

Fellowship

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ... Hebrews 10:25.

After conversion has taken place there is a deepening desire to be with other like-minded Christians, a need for spiritual companionship, godly company and conversation. In fact, the Christian may find that a gap begins to develop between him and his unbelieving friends, because he feels different and is committed to different principles, values and desires.

Becoming a Christian does not mean refraining from the company of unbelievers. Not at all, it is simply that there is a greater desire to be in the company of other Christians.

Being a Servant

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Jesus' very act of dying on the cross in our place saved us from the consequences of our sins, that is eternal life in hell, to everlasting life, which is eternity with God when we come to Him in repentance and faith. In this respect He is our Saviour; because He physically did something to save us. However, we must also acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our lives. There are many who refer to Jesus as Lord. ... *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9.*

Having ascertained Jesus as Lord of all in our lives, we need to turn our thoughts towards Him as our Master and ourselves as His servants. For example, if I go into a shop and purchase an item, then that item becomes mine, I own it and I can do with it whatever I wish. In effect, the same can be said of a Christian, ...*you are not your own ... you were bought at a price ... 1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20.*

Jesus bought us with the price of His own blood, He paid the price for our sins by dying on the cross. This means, therefore, that we are His, He owns us, and He is our Lord and Master. *For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the living and the dead. Romans 14:9.*

In reality this means that Jesus is our Lord, and we are His servants. What He requires of us is our unconditional surrender, our total submission to His will. Jesus Himself set us some excellent examples of “servant-hood”.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28. And but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:7 (KJV). He relinquished His heavenly privileges, came to earth in the form of man, and submitted Himself completely to God, His Father. *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. John 6:38.*

The apostles also often referred to themselves as “bond servants of Jesus Christ”. Paul in Romans 1:1 James in James 1:1, Peter in 2 Peter 1:1 and Jude in Jude 1:1. Out of their love for Jesus, they chose to submit themselves to Him. They willingly chose not to do things their own way, but to allow God to guide and direct them His way.

Dealing with Self

It sounds quite simple that if Jesus was able to submit Himself to the Lordship of God, and His disciples too, then what is standing in the way of so many “Christians” today doing the same thing? A very good question indeed, the answer to which is very simple, it is **SELF**.

Let me explain what I mean by referring back again to the beginning to Adam and Eve and that first sin when they took control of their own lives to live their own way and to do their own thing. It has been that way ever since.

Man wants to be master of his own destiny, lord of his own life and to live his own life, his own way - it all revolves around SELF. Self

dominates, and man does whatever he wants to do to gratify his selfish nature and to make himself feel or look good.

This is living totally independent from God – a far cry from His original plan, which was for a loving relationship with Him, to make us one with Himself, and to enable us to have the nature and character of Jesus formed within us.

This focus on self completely opposes God's purpose for the Christian. As long as self rules a person's life, it is impossible for "Christ to be formed in him". God's remedy is to "die to self". That is, just as Jesus died as a ransom for our sins, so then we should identify ourselves with His death.

Although I am still alive physically, I am no longer the same person that I was before I became a Christian, because I "died" to my old way of living and am now identified with God's plans and purposes for my life. *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20.*

This means making a decision to relinquish our own individual independence and submitting our lives completely to God to use as He chooses and becoming identified with His plans and purposes.

Obedience

One of the signs or evidence that we have received Jesus as our Lord is our obedience to His teachings and commandments. ... *He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Hebrews 5:9.*

It is interesting to note what John has to say on this subject of obedience. *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him" and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 1 John 2:3-5.*

Furthermore, Jesus says, *If you love Me, you will keep my commandments. John 14:15.* You can only love someone with whom

you have a relationship, and you can only have a relationship with someone you know, and the evidence that we love Jesus is that we keep His commandments.

The greatest of these commandments is found in Matthew. ***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. Matthew 22:37.***

The evidence of our love for God is that we obey His commands. ***For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments. 1 John 5:3.***

Everything that Jesus said and did whilst on earth as man was just as His Father told him. ***...that I do nothing of myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. John 8:28.*** And also ***But that the world may know that I love the Father and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. John 14:31.***

Now let us look at Jesus' final commandment to us. ***Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20.***

Disobedience

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1 Peter 4:17, 18. This is quite an awesome Scripture, as it would indicate that the righteous are saved only by being obedient to God's Word, and that the ungodly and the sinner will perish. Notice that the ungodly (the nominal Christians) are referred to as being the same as the sinner who will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

It is significant to note the final state of those who are in rebellion to God by disobeying His commandments and living their own way, and that is that they will be shut out of heaven and the presence of God. ***Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Matthew 7:21.*** This brings us back to the nominal Christians referred to earlier; those who are Christians in name only, who have little or no understanding of

the Gospel and the Bible, and who do not realise the implications of their disobedience. ***He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power ... 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9*** (NIV).

It needs to be stressed that salvation must be secured whilst here on earth in order to establish our eternal destiny in heaven. After death is too late, as can be seen from the story of Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in hell in Luke 16:19-31. Verse 26 in particular makes this clear, ***And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here (heaven) to you (hell) cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.***

New Creation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

In other words we have now become a brand new person with a completely changed heart. Our old nature has changed, we have disposed of our old way of life, and taken on a new nature, a new way of life. In the Bible the old nature is sometimes referred to as the “old man”, or “flesh”. ***Knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Romans 6:6.***

When we are no longer living in sin, we no longer have the same desires for the things of our old life, our old ways. There is a complete change of heart, a change of lifestyle, a desire to only do those things that are pleasing to God. ***Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24.*** This new heart leads us to a love and compassion for others.

Love, Compassion and Forgiveness

There are four forms of love, *philia*, *storge*, *eros* and *agape*, but the one to which I am now referring is *agape* love for our fellow men. This is something God commands of us. ***This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. John 15:12.*** This *agape* love is not an emotion, it is an act of the will; you can choose whether or not you wish to obey God and love another person.

One of the reasons God commands us to love one another is that love always forgives. Jesus demonstrated this on the cross when He said, ***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34.*** God wants us also to have a forgiving heart. ***And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. Ephesians 4:32.***

Jesus frequently stressed the importance of forgiveness. ***But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:15.***

I recall an incident when a Christian man was horrifically tortured and murdered, and his wife made a public declaration that she forgave the perpetrator, which in turn resulted in ten council officials making public declarations on television and in front of newspaper reporters of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only does love stimulate us to forgive, it also stirs a compassion within us for others. The greatest act of compassion was demonstrated by Jesus as He hung on the cross when He said, ***Father forgive them for they know not what they do ... Luke 23:34.***

If unforgiveness is not dealt with, it begins to fester and form a root of bitterness. Bitterness is a weapon of the enemy and should not be allowed to take root. The antidote to unforgiveness is quite simply forgiveness. It should be remembered that forgiveness is essential before we can approach God in prayer, or take Holy Communion.

Perseverance Through Trials and Tribulations

Becoming a Christian does not exempt us from trials and tribulations, but God provides the means to overcome them. ***Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm 34:19.***

There are a number of reasons why God allows us to go through trials and tribulations, the main one being that it is for the testing of our faith. It is often through trying circumstances that we become more conscious of God. ***In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that***

perishes, though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6,7. It is when we come through these trials that our faith is strengthened and increased.

Dealing with Sin

For sin shall not have dominion over you ... Romans 6:14. Even when we have become born again with a new nature, Satan will constantly seek to draw us back to the old way of living, to turn us from the straight path of living God's way and living in accordance with His word. Being born again does not mean we are not able to sin. We can, but we no longer have to. God has blessed us with the freedom to choose for ourselves.

Although Jesus came to earth as man, He was sinless, and our aim should be to have His nature, His character formed in us. *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:5.*

Another way of dealing with sin is to regularly seek the Lord's help. *Search me O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23, 24 (KJV).*

Yet a further way is to follow Paul's direction to the Corinthians. *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified. 2 Corinthians 13:5.*

And finally, the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, talking to believers of the coming of the Holy Spirit after His death and resurrection said, *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement”. John 16:8.*

Sharing your faith

All Christians have a desire to share their faith with unbelievers, because they share God's desire that no one should perish and go to hell, but that everyone should attain eternal life, and go to be in His presence when they die. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9.*

It is for this reason that God has commissioned all Christians to tell the gospel message to everyone. ***And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned”.*** ***Mark 16:15, 16.*** Notice how God leaves the choice with us – if we choose to sincerely believe the gospel message we will be saved, but if we reject the gospel message or fail to make the choice then the consequence is eternity in hell.

In order to preach the gospel, God has equipped Christians with the power of the Holy Spirit. ***But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8.***

THE END TIMES

The “end times” is a subject about which very little teaching is given today, and yet it is a subject of extreme importance. Every single person who has been born is going to live in eternity at some point in time, but, as has already been said, it is our choice whilst here on earth which will determine whether that is permanently in hell or permanently in heaven.

The Bible’s account of what is known as “the end times” is relatively detailed, but for the sake of simplicity and relevance I will give only one or two very basic facts. There is going to come a time when there will be two judgements, The Judgement Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgement of God.

The Judgement Seat of Christ

Many have heard of the second coming of Christ, but very few understand exactly what is going to happen. So who is Jesus actually coming for? The Bible makes that perfectly clear: ***For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.***

This scripture describes firstly the manner in which Jesus will return, and it then goes on to tell us that those Christians who have already died will rise up first to meet Him in a similar way to that in which Jesus rose after His resurrection. These will be followed by those Christians who are still alive at that particular time. It should be noted that at this time the unbelieving dead will remain in their graves and the unbelieving who are alive will remain on the earth for a period of time whilst other events take place. As has already been said the final destiny of each person is settled by the choice they have made whilst here on earth – to choose to follow God’s plan for salvation or to ignore or reject it.

After the Christians have risen with Jesus, they will all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, at which time they will be given rewards according to how they have conducted themselves on earth. *For we (this is only referring to Christians) must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10.* There are other events which then take place, but the final destination of Christians is, as has been said a number of times, eternity in heaven.

The Great White Throne Judgement of God

It would be appropriate here to point out that God keeps a record in what is known as the Lamb’s Book of Life of the names of those who are Christians.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it ... and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books ... and anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15. This is the ultimate end of all sinners, those who have chosen not to put their faith and trust in Jesus, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life.

CONCLUSION

This booklet has not been easy to write for a number of reasons, the

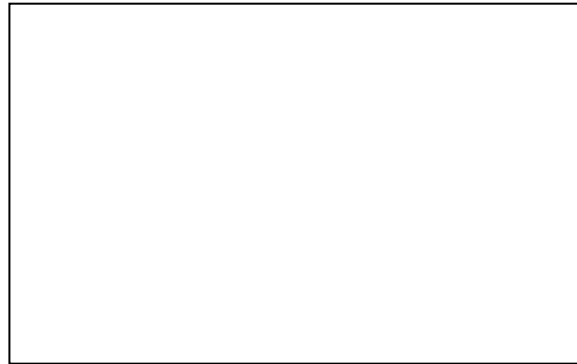
main one being that it had to be written graciously, firmly, and without offence, but in such a way as to bring about a realisation to those who are not after all the saved Christian they had at one time thought themselves to be.

It is my fervent desire that through the words of this booklet the Lord has achieved His goal in speaking to you. If you have found that as you have read you have become disturbed and concerned with what you have read, then I graciously suggest that you may possibly not be a true Christian. The reason you are feeling troubled is that each point I have made has been supported with a Scripture, which in actuality is God speaking, and He says that He will accomplish with His word what He has purposed it to achieve. ... ***so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11.***

If after having read this booklet you have come to realise that you are not a Christian, then you can either follow the steps outlined in the chapter entitled The Definition of a Christian and receive the promise of eternal life with the Lord, or you can choose to ignore Him with the prospect of spending eternity in hell - the choice is yours to make, now. Who can know when his life will end leaving no opportunity to receive God's free gift of salvation. ***For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6:2.***

If you need further guidance, please contact the person who gave you this booklet. They will be able to assist you personally, or direct you to a mature Christian who will be willing and able to give you all the help you need

For further help please contact



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