

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".

John 8:32

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IT'S TIME TO LEARN TO FORGIVE OTHERS

Unforgiveness is like destroying yourself from the inside because, when you don't forgive someone, you constantly live with that anger, and it doesn't give you peace. The inability to forgive often comes from a lack of love and from being proud and selfish. When a person doesn't forgive their offender, revenge plans start forming in their mind. The strength of revenge depends on the nature of the offense. For example, if someone insults you with words, you think about how to respond with an equally strong word. If it's a physical offense, your desire for revenge also takes a physical form. A person who can't forgive constantly lives with these thoughts. Even if they can't take revenge, the desire to do so doesn't go away. Sometimes, people even feel somewhat comforted if they see others suffer in a similar way, which gives their wounded pride a small sense of relief.

Why is there so much hatred, revenge, and evil in the world? It's because of the lack of love. Sadly, most people are imperfect in love, which leads to the inability to forgive. If there were a test to measure unforgiveness, the results would be shocking. The main problems in society come from not being able to love and forgive. These actions show that a person lacks God in their life, meaning they are without faith. For unforgiveness and lack of love are foreign to God, who not only loved this sinful world but also forgave every repentant sinner.

Many people today come to God asking for forgiveness of their sins. But often, while asking God to forgive them, they do not forgive others. Jesus Christ, while on Earth, taught His disciples what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. He gave a very instructive parable showing the importance of forgiveness:

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he could not pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children, and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all". Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all". And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him (Matthew 18:23-34).

After this parable, Jesus added: *So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matthew 18:35).*

In today's world, do we love and forgive as Jesus did? It's clear that unforgiveness brings bad consequences. Many countries claim to be Christian, and preach ideals of love and goodness. Millions of people attend Christian churches, but unforgiveness still exists in society. Not only is there individual unforgiveness between people, but there is also societal unforgiveness. For example, former prisoners

often face prejudice and rejection from society. Why do society and even so-called believers look down on them? Is every ex-convict guilty of wrongdoing to every free citizen? Why are they automatically ostracized? By rejecting ex-prisoners, society only increases crime rates. Many ex-prisoners return to crime after facing rejection. This cycle continues, affecting families and communities.

Unforgiveness also harms a person's mind. When you hold onto anger, you destroy yourself inside.



Unforgiveness often involves the desire for revenge, which can make a person just as bad as the one they can't forgive. And sooner or later, everyone will answer to God for their actions — good and bad. The Bible says: *For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).*

In all Christian nations, it is taught that God sent His only Son to reconcile humanity to Himself. Jesus Christ showed us that all sinners, no matter who they are — thieves, murderers, or liars — can be forgiven if they repent. The Bible clearly says: *There is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10).* And also: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).* The Bible tells us that all people are sinners, but if they repent, they will be forgiven: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*

Yes, God does forgive the repentant sinner and cleanses them from all unrighteousness. But what many people miss in their repentance is that unforgiveness is a sin, just like all others. So asking God for forgiveness while not forgiving others is meaningless. Jesus made it clear: *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 your trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15).*

I believe that today's society needs to change its view of righteousness because true righteousness and truth are found in God's laws, and those laws are based on love. Love that forgives everything. God showed us that love in His Son, who forgives us and continues to forgive us. So maybe it's time for us all to follow God's laws and learn to love and forgive everyone? Let each person reading this remember who they still haven't forgiven. Living with unforgiveness is like praying in vain.

Let's remember, as we approach the celebration of Christ's resurrection, that the Lord washed away all our sins with His holy Blood and forgave us. Let's also remember those we still haven't forgiven. Christ rose for our forgiveness and justification. Let's learn to forgive others too!

I. GORIK

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Islamist villagers in eastern Uganda burned a pastor and his family to death after he led three Muslims to faith in Christ, the pastor's brother said.

Pastor Weere Mukisa, his 25-year-old wife Annet Namugaya and their two daughters, 7-year-old Judith Banirye and 4-year-old Sylvia Bamukisa, died when the assailants set fire to their home shortly before 3 a.m. on Oct. 13, said the church leader's brother, James Tusubira. Pastor Mukisa was 30.

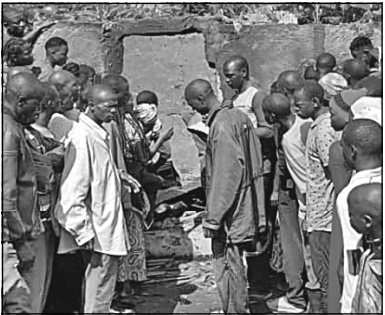
Pastor, family killed in Islamist attack

The tragic attack took place in Kibale village, Mpumiro Parish, Bulange Sub-County, Namutumba District. Pastor Mukisa had led the Muslims to Christ in September.

When the three young Muslims converted to Christ, my brother started receiving threatening messages that he should stop any contact with the three young converts, and that the act committed is against teaching of Islam to not join the religion of infidels, Tusubira told Morning Star News.

Tusubira said he saw flame and smoke coming from the family's home at 2:48 a.m.

We rushed to the scene of the incident and found the house torched and the five bodies burned beyond recognition, he



said. Many people started arriving till the break of the day. Plastic bottles of petrol were found outside the house.

The killings have been reported to police in Kibale. Officers were hunting for the suspects, who have absconded, Tusubira said.

Villagers were in great shock and fearful over the gruesome attack, he said.

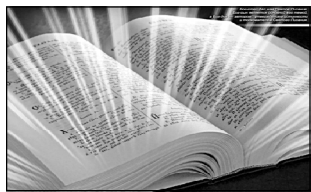
Please pray for us so that these radical Muslims who destroyed my brother and the entire family can be brought to book, Tusubira said.

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.

Christian Daily

PASTOR'S WORD

LIVING BY FLESH AND LIVING BY SPIRIT



The Church of Christ is a group of people who believe in Jesus and serve God together based on the teachings of the Gospel. The church is not a place where perfect people gather; instead, it is like a hospital for the sick and lost, where they find purpose in life and, by helping one another, find healing. This is why Jesus said that it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

All people on earth are spiritually sick because we are all born with a sinful nature. However, not everyone realizes this. When Jesus was on earth, He was able to help only those who understood their need for Him and asked for His help.

If you offer to help a blind person cross a busy street, they will be very grateful. But if you offer the same help to someone who can see, they might feel insulted. In the same way, only those who recognize their spiritual blindness can accept Christ's help. Others, when invited to repent and turn to Christ, may take it as an offense and ask, *Why do I need saving? I haven't killed or robbed anyone. I work honestly. Why do I need salvation?*

This kind of blindness can also affect believers. After receiving forgiveness and making some progress in their spiritual lives, they may become proud and stop growing in their faith.

In **Romans 8**, the apostle Paul talks about two different ways Christians can live. One way is to live by the flesh, which cannot please God and ultimately leads to spiritual death. The other way is to live by the Spirit, which allows a Christian to follow God's will, resist sinful desires, grow spiritually, and bear good fruit.

Romans 8:5-8 — *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Romans 8:13 — *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Since the Bible gives such a serious warning that those who live by the flesh will die, isn't it important to understand this topic better? That way, we can make sure we are not living by the flesh, which leads to spiritual death. So, what does it mean to live by the flesh and to live by the Spirit?

LIFE BY THE FLESH

Life by the flesh is inherent to all people and occurs automatically, without any special effort. The apostle Paul calls it *walking by sight*, meaning living according to what our eyes see, our ears hear, and our brain analyzes. It is a way of life where decisions are made based on the analysis of accumulated information and personal experience. This is a life controlled by the soulish man, by intellect. Based on the information received through the five senses and processed logically by the mind, life decisions are made, characterizing this system of guidance as walking by sight (eyes) or **living by the flesh**. In such a way of life, information plays a key role, as it forms the basis for crucial life decisions. The more convincing the information, the greater the likelihood that the scale will tip in its favor when *making a decision*. At the same time, people can plan their life's direction several steps ahead: *What will happen if I make this decision? or What will happen if I act this way?*

In general, people naturally take pleasure in having control over something. But this freedom of choice always brings responsibility for the decisions made.

Life by the flesh, or *walking by sight*, is not only characteristic of worldly people but also of many Christians. Such Christians may even appear pious, compassionate, and exemplary in many ways. Carnal Christians can be deeply involved in saving sinners, building the church, and demonstrating remarkable self-sacrifice, yet at the same time **not walk by the Spirit**.

WHO IS A CARNAL PERSON?

A carnal person is a born-again individual who is guided by the old, Adamic nature (**1 Corinthians 3:1-3**).

Such a person may labor in the church using their own strength and talents, do many good deeds, yet at the same time be envious, seek their own interests, take offense, prove their rightness, and strive for preeminence.

In serving God, carnal people are usually inconsistent. Today they pray and labor while condemning the lazy, but tomorrow they may stumble over someone or become consumed with their own problems. Carnal Christians are almost always right in their own eyes: they know everything, understand everything, and clearly see the shortcomings of other Christians while knowing what everyone should do. Carnal believers believe they know how things should be done in the church. They see flaws in ministers. When criticizing or discussing others, they are often harsh and categorical. Carnal Christians are often filled with *soulish compassion* for others (caring more about their flesh than their spirit, meaning they focus more on earthly life than on spiritual matters), are talkative, and always quick with advice. They are guided by their carnal minds and admire human wisdom, especially from people who seem authoritative and all-knowing.

Romans 8:13 — *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die...*

THE SPIRITUAL PERSON

A spiritual Christian is a born-again person who lives and walks by the Spirit.

Romans 8:14 — *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:7 — *For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

Because spiritual Christians are obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they know what and when they need to do things — when to be silent and when to speak, when to help a neighbor or when to leave them alone, entrusting them to the Lord for instruction.

Spiritual Christians are usually characterized by *humility, patience, and endurance*. They are not talkative, and despite their friendliness and gentleness, they are extraordinarily firm and unwavering in matters of faith and loyalty. Spiritual people do not seek preeminence and prefer to remain unnoticed in their good deeds. They are always present when needed. Spiritual Christians never accept praise for themselves but redirect it to the Lord. They exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, as written in **Galatians 5:22-24**.

Such people truly embody the words: **Galatians 2:20** — *...I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...*

BACKGROUND

Initially, man was created in the image and likeness of God — righteous, sinless, and possessing God's nature.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 — *...God made man upright (righteous)...*

Genesis 5:1-2 — *In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female...*

Through obedience to the devil and committing sin, man lost his direct connection with God, the Source of Life, and spiritually died.

2 Peter 2:19 — *...for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.*

Romans 6:16 — *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey...*

When man became a slave to the devil through sin, he also inherited the devil's corrupt nature — pride, independence from God, and selfishness. As a result, man became capable of all kinds of evil. This sinful inheritance was then passed on to future generations.

Through repentance and turning to God, a person experiences spiritual rebirth, and the process of restoring God's lost nature begins. However, these two natures (God's and the devil's) start to war against each other within the regenerated person.

Galatians 5:17 — *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another...*

If a person follows the guidance of the Spirit, they walk by the Spirit; if they rely

on their own understanding, they likely walk by the flesh. Some believe that once a person is saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit, they automatically live by the Spirit, and only unbelievers live by the flesh. However, this is not true. Even good deeds initiated by the flesh are still carnal. If the motives are wrong, the actions are not pleasing to God.

A biblical example is Paul and Barnabas, who were chosen by the Holy Spirit for missionary work. Let's ask: in this particular case, were they acting by the flesh or by the Spirit?

Acts 16:6-10 — *Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

If the Holy Spirit did not allow them to preach in Asia and Bithynia, this means that these were their own plans, not aligned with the Holy Spirit. Even though they intended to preach the Gospel, their efforts were still guided by their own reasoning.

Undoubtedly, the apostles were acting according to the general will of God: *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature* (**Mark 16:15**), but they were not under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit at that moment. God had a different plan for them at that time, which He revealed to Paul in a vision, directing them to Macedonia instead of their intended destinations. This is a prime example of how the apostles' plans, though well-intended, were still according to the flesh, relying on human logic rather than the Spirit.

This means that even when preaching from the pulpit, singing in the church choir, or participating in acts of charity, a Christian can still act by the flesh rather than by the Spirit.

A biblical example of true spiritual guidance is found here:

Acts 10:19-23 — *While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them". Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" [...] Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day, Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.*

LIFE BY THE SPIRIT

Life by the Spirit is a system of governance in which the renewed human spirit, united with God, plays

the decisive role in guiding a person's life.

Life by the Spirit is a method of decision-making where a person aligns all choices with the will of God. Eventually, they become fully led by the Spirit, as their senses are trained by habit to obey Him (**Hebrews 5:14; 1 Corinthians 2:10**).

Romans 8:14 — *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

Philippians 2:13 — *For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

Even before Pentecost (the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the earth), Christ promised full guidance by the Spirit to all who believe and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13-14 — *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.*

HOW TO BECOME SPIRITUAL?

First, it is important to realize that a person cannot become spiritual by their own strength alone. At the same time, this transformation will not happen without a person's willingness to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Only someone who has been born again and has submitted to the process of transformation can become spiritual.

Matthew 19:26 — *But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible".*

There are two main motives for seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

First — A deep love for God, where a believer longs to do nothing apart from Him and passionately seeks His will in all things.

Second — A person, after experiencing painful past mistakes, resolves never to act again without God's direction.

In the first case, love is the driving force; in the second, it is the desire to avoid past pain.

The biggest challenge in discerning God's will is a reluctance to sacrifice personal comfort and put in the effort required to seek it. Jesus said:

John 12:25 — *He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

Those who wish to be led by the Holy Spirit must always be ready to surrender their own priorities in favor of the Spirit's guidance.

HOW DOES THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT WORK?

Psalms 27:8 — *When You said, "Seek My face", my heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek".*

1 John 2:27 — *But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*

When a believer's heart is in the right state, desiring to be led by the Holy Spirit, they begin to receive impulses and promptings from God in their human spirit. These do not come through the mind, as they are received instantly, without logical reasoning.

Sometimes, God reveals insights about someone or gives a vision of what will happen in the future to prepare the person to act correctly. This also happens during intercessory prayers, when God reveals the spiritual struggles of others and even what they need to do to resolve their situation.

Often, the human mind resists the leading of the Spirit, but the believer always has a choice — to obey the Spirit or to follow the reasoning of the flesh.

Being led by the Holy Spirit is a privilege available to every believer (**2 Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 5:17**).

Galatians 5:16 — *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

Aleksandr BORISENKO

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

In sermons, we often hear that Jesus died for our sins. But why did He do this? Why was death the necessary payment for sin? Why was Christ's sacrifice the key to our salvation? An incomplete understanding of this question creates uncertainty about God's forgiveness and a superficial attitude towards the Redeemer. To truly appreciate the significance of Jesus Christ's death, it is important to understand what sin is, what its consequences are, and how Christ's death became our salvation.

WHAT IS SIN

Sin is any deviation from God's perfect and holy will. It manifests both through conscious resistance to the commandments set by God and through inaction, when a person misses the opportunity to do good that is expected of them.

1 John 3:4 — *Everyone who commits sin also commits lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.*

Lawlessness can be defined as the conscious or unconscious violation of the boundaries set by God. These boundaries are meant to regulate human behavior, protecting people from spiritual and moral decay. Partial understanding of these boundaries is embedded in each person's conscience. Conscience, being the inner voice, reminds us of the principles of good and evil, helping us distinguish the righteous from the sinful. However, full knowledge of God's boundaries is revealed only through the Scriptures, which serve as the unwavering authority and guidance for human life. When a person, knowing these commandments, deliberately crosses them or ignores them, they consciously choose the sinful path, thereby violating God's will and depriving themselves of closeness to Him.

James 4:17 — *So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

Often people try to behave cautiously, avoiding conflicts or obvious harm to others. They strive for a neutral position, where their actions do not harm those around them. However, in their caution, they may limit themselves to passivity, taking no positive action and failing to assist those in need. This approach, although seemingly harmless, is spiritually wrong. Indifference to good and unwillingness to actively do good

are considered sins, as inaction in righteous deeds contradicts God's purpose for humanity. A life devoid of good deeds resembles an undeveloped potential that could have served God's glory but was consciously or fearfully left unrealized.

CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

The world created by God is a harmonious system where both

nature of sin, its destructive consequences, and the need for redemption. One such major law is the proclamation: *For the wages of sin is death...* (**Romans 6:23**). This law reveals the depth of sin as a spiritual separation between man and God, leading to both physical and eternal death. Moreover, the Bible says that *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*



physical and spiritual laws operate. These laws are neither random nor changeable according to human desire, as their foundation lies in the perfection of God's plan. Physical laws, such as gravity, the water cycle, or thermodynamics, regulate the material world, making it predictable and suitable for life. People can study these laws and use them, but they cannot cancel or alter their nature.

Similarly, in the spiritual realm, there are laws that govern the relationships between God and humans, as well as between people. These spiritual laws are just as immutable as physical ones, and their violation leads to real consequences. For example, the law of sowing and reaping states: *Whatever one sows, that will he also reap...* (**Galatians 6:7**), emphasizing the inevitability of the consequences of human actions.

Among spiritual laws, especially important are those concerning sin. They explain the

(**Romans 3:23**). No one is exempt from this fate.

Another important law states that *everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin* (**John 8:34**), highlighting that sin enslaves the human will, turning it into a prisoner of its desires and passions.

All these laws indicate that sin never goes without consequences. Ignoring spiritual principles leads to destruction, just as neglecting physical laws can result in catastrophe. Understanding these spiritual laws is crucial for realizing our responsibility before God and for understanding the necessity of salvation, which is only possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

WHAT JESUS CHRIST DID FOR US

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world, taking on human nature, to save people from eternal destruction and restore their relationship with God. His coming into the world

was not merely an act of mercy but a necessary step to fulfill God's plan of salvation. Contrary to what people might have expected, believing in a Messiah who would abolish the strict demands of the law, Christ came not to destroy or abolish God's commandments, but rather to fulfill them completely.

The laws given in the Old Testament were perfect, but they also revealed the imperfection of man, his inability to meet God's requirements, and his need for salvation. Christ not only lived according to these laws, but He also embodied their deeper meaning, becoming the perfect sacrifice capable of atoning for human sins. His life and death became an example of how a person should live in harmony with God and with others.

Jesus fully fulfilled the law, accomplishing what was impossible for a human being. He took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved, thereby opening the way for reconciliation with God for all people. In His life and death, Christ demonstrated that salvation is not possible without full surrender, without fulfilling God's will, even if it requires the greatest sacrifice.

Thus, the mission of Jesus was not to abolish the law but to fulfill it by carrying out all its demands in His own life and sacrifice on the cross. This not only allowed forgiveness for those who believe in Him but also provided an example of how God desires those who believe in Him to live: with love, compassion, and obedience to His will.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is a key component of the path to forgiveness and freedom from sin. However, in order to experience true forgiveness and purification, it is necessary not only to acknowledge one's sins but also to sincerely desire to break away from them. Sin not only breaks the relationship between man and God but also brings destruction into his life. Liberation from sin is impossible without realizing one's guilt and desiring change. Repentance becomes an act of personal choice, in which a person rejects their sinful nature and turns to God for help in changing their life.

CONCLUSION

The death of Jesus Christ holds the greatest significance for all humanity. Only through this do we receive forgiveness, liberation from the slavery of sin, and the hope of eternal life. But it is important to remember that salvation is only possible to the extent that we open our hearts to God. Partial obedience does not save but only leaves room for spiritual death. Only by opening our hearts completely can we experience true freedom and life in Jesus Christ.

Revelation 3:20 — *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him...*

A. BURTSEV

Over 400,000 people formally left Germany's Catholic Church in 2023

In 2023, a substantial number of individuals, totaling 402,694, decided to formally dissociate themselves from the Catholic Church in Germany, a significant figure though slightly less than the record set in 2022.

The German Bishops' Conference, which came out with these statistics, said while these numbers are high, they reflect a slight decrease from the 522,821 departures recorded the previous year, indicating that this was the second-highest departure rate to date, according to National Catholic Reporter.

In Germany, church membership has financial impli-

cations due to the church tax system, which is a part of the broader tax structure. Members who formally exit the church no longer need to pay this tax, providing a financial incentive for deregistration. Exceptions to this requirement include low earners, the unemployed, retirees, students and others.

Despite the slight decrease in departures, the overall membership of the country's Catholic Church stood at roughly 20.35 million by the end of 2023, according to the German Bishops' Conference.

The backdrop to these departures includes a long-

standing crisis stemming from scandals related to abuse by clergy members, NCR noted. In recent years, many have turned away from the Catholic



Church as these issues have persisted.

In an effort to address these concerns, the bishops and a prominent lay orga-

nization launched a three-year reform initiative known as the *Synodal Path*. The process, marked by deep divides between progressive and conservative elements within the Catholic Church, culminated last year with calls for the church to sanction blessings for same-sex unions despite overt opposition from the Vatican.

Further tensions have surfaced in a subsequent reform process initiated this year following Vatican pressures to halt previous reform votes.

The figures are alarming. They show that the church is in a wide-ranging crisis,

Limburg Bishop Georg Batzing, the head of the Bishops' Conference, was quoted as saying. *Reforms alone will not solve the church crisis, but the crisis will get worse without reforms. And so changes are necessary.*

The issue of declining church membership is not isolated to the Catholic Church in Germany.

The Protestant Church also reported substantial departures, with around 380,000 members leaving in the past year, mirroring levels seen in 2022 and reflecting challenges facing religious institutions in Germany.

Christian Post

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Serhiy Dudka: God delivered me from darkness

Serhiy Dudka was born into an ordinary working-class family. He grew up in a criminal neighborhood, which led him down a dark path. Before reaching adulthood, he received his first suspended sentence for armed robbery.

In the 1970s, many young people idolized criminal figures, and Serhiy longed to be accepted among them.

The streets shaped me. I was under police supervision as a child, and my first crime was simply a result of the environment I grew up in.

He wanted to become an authority figure, someone others respected and feared.

I thought that strength was the way to prove my worth or to be above others. In the criminal world, I saw power. I wanted to be feared, to be talked about.

Living by criminal codes, Serhiy soon received a second conviction, this time with real prison time. Shortly after being released, he was imprisoned again.

For me, that was normal. I thought it was cool. Back then, having served time gave you status. Even tattoos had meaning — unlike today, where anyone gets them. For example, I have a large monastery tattooed on my back, and each dome represents a prison sentence I served.

While serving his second sentence, Christian believers were allowed into the prison to share about God. Serhiy respected them but believed he had his own path.

Deep inside, I knew I was breaking the law. But I justified myself; this was my way of life. If I had truly understood how wrong it was, I might have tried to change. But every night, before sleeping, I'd think: "Serhiy, it's

time to stop. How much longer can you keep doing this?"

After being released, Serhiy vowed to quit drinking and start anew. But after spending five years in prison, he struggled to adapt to life outside.

I was used to a different life — where I was provided for, where everything was arranged. On my first day of freedom, I got drunk,

hidden! Who would get it? That was my mindset back then.

Doctors did their best, but his chances of survival were slim. It was in that hospital bed that Serhiy cried out to God.

At that moment, I gave my life to Him. I realized that only He could help me. Humans could do nothing more. I called out to Jesus. Maybe it was a vision — I can't

God did. He is alive, and He acts. I know He loves me, and I have experienced His love.

Serhiy firmly believes that all his past sins have been forgiven.

I know that He has forgiven me because His Word says so. I believe in the Bible without a single doubt. If Jesus said that whoever believes in Him has eternal life, then it is true. If the Bible says we are redeemed by His blood and our sins are forgiven, then it is true. The price has been paid. I have given my life to Him, and I know I am forgiven.

After his conversion, Serhiy found purpose and hope.

I once lived in darkness, not knowing what lay ahead. I did what I wanted, with no regard for consequences. But now, at almost 69 years old, I have lived half my life in sin and half with Jesus Christ. And I am grateful that He rescued me.

I know who I am. I know why I live. I know where I am going. That is the greatest thing I have gained in Christ.

He is my Mighty, Glorious, Life-Giving, and Loving Father. We are His adopted children.

Serhiy has been happily married for 30 years and serves as a pastor of the Victory Church in Brovary, as well as a bishop of Victory Churches in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. His calling is to minister to those whose lives, like his once was, have been destroyed by sin.

Everyone needs God. If a person seeks Him, they will find Him. God will reveal His power and glory. I truly believe this. The greatest decision of my life was accepting Christ — it is the best thing that can happen to anyone.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Heaven TV7, YouTube



and within two weeks, I was back in jail.

Was I ever truly free? It felt like a brief, colorful illusion. My so-called 'freedom' ended with a store robbery and another prison sentence.

During his last sentence, Serhiy was in a severe accident involving a truck. He suffered multiple fractures and serious internal injuries, barely surviving.

As I lay there, I thought: "This is it. I'm dying". But my thoughts weren't about my mother or my son. Instead, I worried about the food package in my locker — my bacon! And the money I had

fully explain it — but I spoke to Him. I said: "If You save me from this, I will serve You". And I kept my word. He healed me — not just physically, but spiritually. He gave me a new life and completely transformed me.

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

Thirty years have passed since Serhiy repented and entrusted his life to God.

Throughout my life, different systems tried to change me — the juvenile justice system, the prison system — but none could. Only

Yuriy Ashykhin: I am learning to love again

Yuriy Ashykhin was born in Ukraine. After his parents divorced, he and his two brothers were raised by their mother. From a young age, Yuriy was part of a criminal gang and lived accordingly.

I was not a good boy. I was someone who constantly needed some kind of thrill.

After the army, Yuriy immersed himself in adult life. He found a well-paying job and enjoyed luxurious living.

I had a pretty good job. I worked as a driver for a private company. I had a foreign car. When people earned ten to fifteen dollars, I was making one hundred to one hundred fifty. Everything in my life was luxurious.

Financially, in terms of work, company status, and housing, everything seemed perfect. But deep inside, my life lacked meaning, and I felt constant inner dissatisfaction.

Yuriy could not imagine living differently, so he continued going with the flow. Then, drugs entered his life.

My first injection resulted in an overdose. Yes, it was bad, but it also felt good, paradoxical as that may sound.

One day, some acquaintances asked to use his apartment to cook drugs. By law, this entitled him to a portion of the substance.

But that time, when they injected me, I liked it. I liked the feeling itself. I suddenly realized that you didn't have



to drink vodka, get drunk, or fall into puddles. There was a noble, elite substance that you carefully draw into a syringe, inject into your vein, and then sit quietly. You are very calm, you don't bother anyone, you don't shout. And at the same time, you can maintain a seemingly normal life.

Yuriy never planned on becoming a drug addict. He was convinced he could control the situation.

No addict, whether it's their first time, fifth, or sixth, ever believes they will become trapped in the system. Each one thinks: "This only happens to others".

But I can do it. I won't become addicted. I can control myself. I know how to choose the right day, the right opportunity, and honestly, I don't even like the life of a drug addict. I'd rather live like this and allow myself to relax occasionally.

At that moment, I made a decision — I would have these relaxing days once or twice a month.

Six months later, after another relaxation day, Yuriy felt unwell. He thought he had caught a cold.

I remember that moment. I felt so awful, my whole body was aching. But then I took a shot, and everything went away. And that's when I realized and told myself: Yuriy, you're hooked. You can't live without drugs anymore.

(Continued on page 5)

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Yuriy Ashykhin: *I am learning to love again*

(Conclusion. Beginning on page 4)

But I wasn't scared. I still believed I could control it — I could work, I could talk to my mom, I could be a normal guy, even while using.

Drugs required money. And Yuriy started having problems at work.

To put it briefly, in six months, everything at work changed completely. I started stealing, and not just small amounts — I was taking large sums, and eventually, I quit. By that time, I had already started making drugs at home. Even my mom began noticing something was wrong. Why? Because things started disappearing from the house. And probably, the only person in the world who understood that a solution was needed was my mom. Because I didn't think I needed a way out. I accepted that I was a drug addict.

To get money for drugs, Yuriy began robbing his neighbors.

In the first year or two, my home became a place where I stole. I robbed almost all the basements, drying rooms, and hallways in the building. I kept

sinking lower and lower. People stopped greeting me, stopped inviting me to birthday parties. And when a person I considered a friend got married and didn't invite me to his wedding, that's when I realized — I wasn't just a drug addict, I had hit rock bottom. That realization sent me into a downward spiral. If, at that moment, someone had offered me drugs in exchange for selling my own mother, I would have done it without any remorse.

While I was deep in addiction, my father passed away. I have two older brothers. They knew I was an addict, but they still invited me and asked me to help with the funeral arrangements. They said, "Can you buy a coffin?" I asked, "What do you mean? With money?" They said, "Yes, we'll give you the money". I replied, "Of course, I can". They gave me the money for the coffin, and I disappeared with it. When the time came to bury my father, there was no coffin. Because I was a drug addict. Now, I talk about conscience.

One day, Yuriy's mother came across a brochure that said God delivers people from drug addiction. She started

attending church, repented, and prayed for her son.

I live on the ninth floor. One day, I sat on the balcony. One foot was inside the apartment, and the other was already over the edge. The railing was between my legs. I thought: If I swing forward, it will all be over. If I stay — what for? And I remember that prayer: God, if You are real, help me.

My mom came to me and said, "Do you want to go to a rehab center?" And I said, "I do".

Yuriy started rehabilitation at a Christian center for drug addicts. He quit smoking and firmly decided to complete the program to the end.

I realized that I didn't want to go back. At that time, I didn't know how to move forward, but I definitely didn't want to return to my old life.

Over time, Yuriy was completely freed from drug addiction. His life changed drastically and gained meaning.

I know what I've been through. Today, I'm almost at life's midpoint: I've lived one part without God and the other with God — almost equally.

And I can compare. Even though my life doesn't yet have everything I desire, everything has meaning. Because it is all filled with God and His love. And I am learning to love.

Yuriy is especially grateful to his mother for never giving up and fighting for his salvation and deliverance.

When I was a drug addict, the only person who fought for me was my mom. She truly fought. But she didn't fight by sending me to hospitals or anywhere else. She prayed for me. And today, I can clearly say that if you want to help your loved ones, find a church that believes in the living God, go there, and start praying before Him. Ask the people in that church to help, guide, and direct you. And I am almost certain: anyone who sincerely believes in the living God and begins to pray will see their loved ones revived.

Yuriy Ashykhin is fifty years old. He is married and has two children. He serves as a pastor at the Victory Church in Radomyshl.

Heavens TV7, YouTube

Christ is risen! Is He indeed risen?

Belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is perhaps the most difficult obstacle to Christianity.

It's easy to believe that the Bible is a book of wisdom, that the soul exists, and that prayer helps. But to believe that Jesus Christ died and then rose again bodily — that seems almost like a fairy tale. Many think that it didn't really happen — that Christ's disciples later made up the story of the resurrection.

Why is it so difficult to believe in the resurrection? Perhaps because we assume that people don't rise from the dead and we don't believe in the possibility of miracles?

If you think this way, you are in the majority. But is truth determined by the majority?

I used to think the same way. That's why I decided to explore whether there are solid grounds for believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This question turned out to be complex, and the answer could fill volumes of theological and scientific literature. But I want to offer you the keys that helped me unlock the mystery of the resurrection.

FIRST KEY — THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Criticism of the resurrection usually begins with the argument that true miracles do not happen — that there are no extraordinary events beyond the laws and objects of our world.

But if we accept that God exists, then denying miracles becomes difficult. Observations and reasoning convince us that the idea of God is not contradictory. On the contrary, the existence of God explains the origin of the world, and His design is the best explanation for the complexity of the universe and humanity.

In other words, the existence of God is not only probable but also best aligns with most known facts about the world. Therefore, it is more likely that He exists than that He does not.

However, Christianity elevates the question of God's existence to the highest level. It claims that **God possesses unique qualities — love and goodness.** And if such a God exists, **He will not abandon humanity without help.** And God did not abandon people in their helplessness, sin, and suffering. Coming into this world as a Man, He became like us to take the punishment upon Himself and redeem us before the Law. He provided deliverance from sin and death.

Oxford University professor Richard Swinburne wrote about this: *Any serious reflection on how a good Creator might respond to the suffering and sinfulness of the people He created inevitably leads us to the conclusion that He must incarnate.*

SECOND KEY — HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Yes, such evidence is not overly abundant, but it is sufficient to confidently affirm this event.

Jewish and Roman propaganda tried to suppress the news of the resurrection from the very beginning. The Pharisees, the religious leaders of that time, spread rumors that the disciples had stolen

the body from the tomb, while the Romans created stories about supposedly similar prophets. However, these efforts were futile, and Christianity spread so rapidly that even Roman officials were astonished.

At the end of the first century, Pliny the Younger wrote to Trajan about this: *The number of those accused is so great that the matter deserves serious consideration... Not only the cities but also small*



villages and remote places are filled with these followers of a foreign belief...

It is important to note that **the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a verifiable historical fact.**

No other event in the ancient world has been as thoroughly documented as the final years of Christ's life, His death, and resurrection. The reliability of past events is typically supported by eyewitness accounts, internal consistency of narratives, the credibility of sources, and the presence of testimonies that were inconvenient for the eyewitnesses themselves.

The resurrection story successfully meets all these criteria. No serious scholar today denies that (1) Jesus Christ lived in first-century Palestine, (2) He died, (3) His tomb was found empty, and (4) His disciples firmly believed they had seen Him alive after His death.

THIRD KEY — THE GOSPELS AND THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES

Until the mid-20th century, it was commonly believed that the Gospels were unreliable because they were written long after the events and not by direct witnesses. Another argument was that the accounts had been distorted through copying. However, this view is now outdated.

Under the weight of archaeological and textual discoveries, the dating of the Gospels has been confirmed within the first century A.D. Moreover, the Gospel writers have not been exposed in any significant errors or fabrications. Consequently, there is no serious historical reason to distrust the texts of the New Testament.

The New Testament is permeated with the message of the risen Savior. Consider this: why would the disciples create such an unpopular and easily disprovable story about their Teacher's resurrection? They could have adopted any popular ideology of the time instead of provoking the authorities and the public.

Yet, the apostles preached about the risen Christ and endured martyrdom because they had seen Him alive. **People may die for a lie they believe to be true, but they are unlikely to die for something they know to be false.**

Thus, Christian texts and Church history clearly testify that hundreds of people saw the resurrected Christ and thousands believed from the very beginning of Christianity. Eusebius of Caesarea testified about the early Church's proclamation: *The wondrous resurrection of our Savior and His ascension were already known to many.*

FOURTH KEY — THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Every investigator of the resurrection must answer the question: *Who was Jesus Christ really?* He does not resemble a deceiver, a manipulator, or a delusional philosopher.

His life, words, and deeds eloquently testify to His uniqueness and the purity of His character. Christ's teachings and history are too harmonious and perfect to be a fabrication. His actions and miracles confirm the truth of His claims. If we accept the portrait of Christ presented in the Gospels, we gain the fourth key to understanding the resurrection.

Ultimately, faith in the risen Christ explains all the facts about Him, is confirmed by history and textual analysis, and provides a philosophically coherent view of the world. But most importantly, this faith allows us to encounter Christ personally.

The resurrection is the master key that unlocks the meaning of Christianity. Jesus Christ came into the world to save everyone. He suffered so that we would not suffer; He died so that we would not perish; He rose from the dead to pave the way for us to eternal life.

Therefore, when we reflect on the resurrection, it is crucial not to miss the opportunity that God offers us today.

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16–17).

And if you believe in the miracle of the resurrection, you will lose nothing — except perhaps the need to let go of your sins. But in doing so, you will gain the most valuable gift — eternal life in Christ, for *...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).*

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TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

THE BIBLE ABOUT GOOD AND EVIL

Often people ask the question: **Why does a good God allow evil?**

To answer this question, it is necessary to find out what is good and evil in God's eyes. But first, let's find synonyms for the words good and evil.

Good: beneficial, favorable, positive...

Evil: unkind, disgusting, bad, vile...

I. WHAT IS GOOD IN GOD'S EYES

1. God and good
A. Everything was created by God very good

Genesis 1:31 — *Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.*

B. All good comes from God
James 1:17 — *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

C. God is the only one who is truly good

Matthew 19:16-17 — *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."*

2. What, in human opinion, is good:

- ☉ welfare;
- ☉ well-being, prosperity;
- ☉ family, children;
- ☉ good job, career;
- ☉ good friends;
- ☉ good deeds (useful for society);
- ☉ peace (tranquility);
- ☉ happiness;
- ☉ fulfillment of desires;
- ☉ health;
- ☉ education;
- ☉ power;
- ☉ fame (notoriety);
- ☉ affection between people;
- ☉ longevity...

3. What, in God's opinion, is good for man

A. To draw near to the Lord
Psalms 73:28 — *But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.*

Why is drawing near to the Lord good? Because God's will is that man seek God. This is the meaning of human life: **Acts 17:26-27** — *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us...*

How can one draw near to God? Through repentance, that is, renunciation of sin: **James 4:8** — *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

B. The prophet Micah on what is good

Micah 6:8 — *He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but (1) to act justly, (2) to love mercy, and (3) to walk humbly with your God?*

C. Jesus on goodness
Matthew 19:16-17 — *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

Which commandments are meant?

Matthew 22:34-40 — *"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. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

We have examined what is good in the eyes of God and man. What is the difference between human and divine perceptions of goodness? The difference is that human understanding is material, worldly, and earthly, whereas God is Spirit, and His understanding of goodness is spiritual, related to eternal, unchanging values and eternal life.

This distinction between spiritual and non-spiritual concepts is described in the Bible:

Romans 8:5 — *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh,*

longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

2. What the Bible calls evil
A. The present world is evil
Galatians 1:3-5 — *Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age...*

1 John 5:19 — *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*



but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

II. WHAT IS EVIL IN THE EYES OF GOD

1. Sources of evil

A. The first source of evil is Satan (the devil)

☉ **The Bible calls Satan the evil one:** **Matthew 6:13** — *...and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one;* **John 17:15** — *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.* In both cases, the Greek word *poneros* is used, meaning bringing pain, evil.

☉ **Satan as the source of evil:** **Matthew 5:37** — *But let your "Yes" be "Yes", and your "No", "No". For whatever is more than these is from the evil one;* **1 John 3:8** — *He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning;* **1 John 5:18** — *We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.*

B. The second source of evil is a man

Matthew 12:34-35 — *Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things;* **Matthew 15:18-19** — *...those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies...*

C. The third source of evil is a sin

Romans 7:14-20 — *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no*

B. The destruction of the soul is evil

Luke 6:9 — *Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"* According to this verse, the salvation of the soul is good, and the destruction of the soul is evil.

C. Seven things that God calls evil

Proverbs 6:16-19 — *These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: (1) a proud look, (2) a lying tongue, (3) hands that shed innocent blood, (4) a heart that devises wicked plans, (5) feet that are swift in running to evil, (6) a false witness who speaks lies, and (7) one who sows discord among brethren.*

III. THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

1. What happened in the Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:9, 16-17 — *And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. [...] And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

As a result of the fall, humanity...
☉ learned evil (because they already knew good) — sin and its consequences;

☉ understood and realized what they had lost (we often don't value something until we lose it) — not only eternal life in the Garden of Eden but also the relationship with their Creator, which was the greatest blessing they had in life.

Now, humans are born with a sinful nature: knowing how to do evil, but not knowing how to do good. Moreover, humans are born incapable of distinguishing good

from evil. The Bible says that only those who are perfect... have their senses trained to discern both good and evil (**Hebrews 5:14**). The *perfect* here refers to mature Christians in faith — those who, having reconciled with God through the sacrifice of Christ, continually grow in faith through the knowledge of God's Word.

2. What does God require of those who distinguish good and evil?

3 John 1:11 — *Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God; but he who does evil has not seen God.*

Romans 16:19 — *...but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.*

Romans 12:9 — *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good...*

Psalms 96:10 — *You who love the Lord, hate evil!*

James 4:17 — *Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

3. God's call to all people

Proverbs 17:13 — *Whoever rewards evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.*

Isaiah 5:20 — *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*

Amos 5:14 — *Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken.*

Discussion question: Why didn't God immediately destroy the world after mankind sinned?

Answer: To answer this question, we must clearly understand what happened between God and the first humans. The fact is, Adam and Eve, after tasting the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, questioned not only God's Word but also God's authority (leadership). They wanted to be gods: **Genesis 3:4-5** — *Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil".* This can be paraphrased as: *Why do you need God? Why submit to Him? You can be gods yourselves.* Adam and Eve wanted to become gods and masters of their own lives.

The Lord God, respecting their choice, did not destroy Adam and Eve. By expelling them from the Garden of Eden, where they could have enjoyed eternal life and all the blessings God had made for them, He gave them the opportunity to experience the consequences of their own choice and to prove whether they were gods or not. This was a disciplinary step from our Creator.

Moreover, God did not destroy the first humans after their fall because He wanted them to live on earth and see the results of the sin they committed in the Garden of Eden.

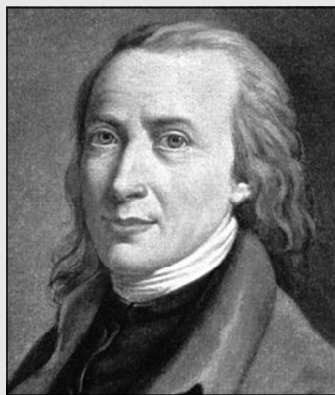
Today, the Lord calls everyone to turn away from evil and learn to do good: **Isaiah 1:16-20** — *"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; Seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together", says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

This promise was fulfilled through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

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[http://www.cogmtl.net/
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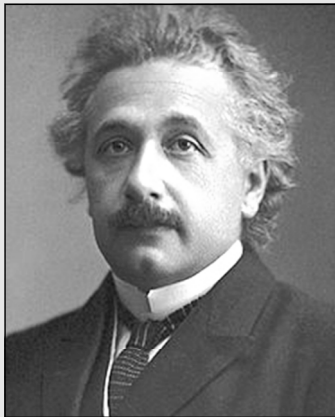
QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE

**Matthias CLAUDIUS,
Poet and Writer**



"Whoever does not want to believe in Christ must see how they can guess their destiny without Him. Neither you nor I can. We need someone to strengthen our spirit, to support our weary head when we must die, and only He can do this, according to what is written about Him. We do not know anyone else we would want in His place".

**Albert EINSTEIN,
Physicist
and Mathematician**



"If something is exact in terms of mathematics, it does not correspond to nature. But if something corresponds to nature, it is inaccurate from a mathematical point of view".

PROVERBS

The Parable of the Torn Cloak

A certain soldier once asked one of the elders whether God grants forgiveness to sinners. And the elder replied:

"Tell me, beloved, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away?"



The soldier answered: "No. I repair it and continue to wear it".

The elder concluded: "If you care so much for your cloak, will God not be merciful to His own image?"



Spiritual Gifts are the Key to Your Ministry in the Church

Only full dedication to God is the proper response to His mercy toward us. One of the first steps of such dedication is active participation in the life of the church. How, then, can we choose the right ministry, and what role do our spiritual gifts play in this?

The apostle Paul, in **Romans 12:3–8**, writes about a Spirit-filled, unified community, where each one serves with their gifts. Let's take a closer look at this passage.

INTERDEPENDENCE IN MINISTRY

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another (Romans 12:3–5).

In this passage, Paul refers to God's grace — *charis* — and later speaks about *charisma* (gifts) as the manifestation of that grace. The apostle encourages us to have a proper self-assessment, one that reflects a sound judgment of ourselves: not thinking too highly of ourselves, not being proud or arrogant, nor thinking too lowly of ourselves. This sober and humble judgment is a reflection of a renewed mind. It should be based on our faith, an understanding of our gifts, and the reality of living together in community.

Paul further uses the image of the body, an organism, to convey the unity and diversity of Christians in the community. The metaphor of the body shows us that we depend on one another, and that the Christian community functions because of the variety of our gifts. The verses draw a parallel between the fact that a single body has many parts, each with different functions, and the diversity of the Christian community, which forms one body in Christ.

We, as believers, are one body only in Christ, and it is only in Christ that we become a unified whole. This is especially important now, as our usual church structures are disrupted: brothers and sisters from different cities, possibly from other denominations, and young believers with different experiences or even using different terms, are joining us. Church communities are not formed merely because we gather in one place once a week. They are built because Christ unites us.

The image of the body is also significant because Paul points to the collective nature of salvation. God's grace and gifts are realized through the community. It is community that stands in opposition to the individualism that dominates the world. Being together is the condition for righteous living and for bearing fruit for God.

It's interesting that in all of Paul's letters where the body of Christ is mentioned, the body metaphor is always used in conjunction with gifts. Therefore, we can conclude that the unity and diversity of the body function only when there is mutual service to one another and to others.

Thus, the source of the gifts is God and His grace, and the purpose of the spiritual gifts is the edification of the church community and empowering us for ministry. Paul emphasizes grace as the source of gifts because God intends for us to live a life dependent on Him, not on our own resources. The fact that we have different gifts makes us dependent on one another. Therefore, we must know ourselves and serve, contributing to the community. Each individual believer does not possess all the gifts of the Spirit, but the community as a whole has the fullness of the gifts.

USING SPIRITUAL GIFTS ACCORDING TO GOD'S CALLING

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:6–8).

God's grace made Paul an apostle, and this same grace brings various gifts (charismata) to the members of the body of Christ.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifested and applied in the context of the church. Paul confidently speaks about the presence of gifts within a community he did not establish, which shows that charismata are present in the life of any living church community. However, these gifts are activated only through mutual, living relationships

between God and people. It's important to remember that these are functions and ministries inspired by God (both organized and spontaneous), not merely church positions.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul talks about seven gifts and encourages their use for the edification of the community. Neither this list nor other lists of Paul's gifts are exhaustive. Scholars believe the number seven is not accidental here: for the Jews, it symbolizes perfection. Therefore, the gifts listed in this letter are comprehensive.

Some scholars simply analyze the seven gifts sequentially, while others (like John Stott) divide them into two groups: speech gifts (prophecy, teaching, exhortation) and service gifts (ministry, financial support, leadership, and charity). We notice that the ministry of apostles is not mentioned in this list of gifts. As a result, researchers believe that this list refers to the local church, not the universal church: every local church has a combination of God's gifts for edification.

Spiritual gifts are intended for use — they are part of our inheritance in Christ. These gifts define our ministry and point to the tasks God calls us to. They are the key to our purpose and the meaning of life.



THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Prophecy is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The gift of prophecy encourages, gives comfort, reveals new insights into God's will, and so on. In the early church, prophets proclaimed God's will, gave courage, critiqued, and sometimes foretold future events. Therefore, it's clear that the gift of prophecy was comprehensive, not limited to merely predicting the future.

At the same time, the words of prophets did not carry the same authority of truth as the words of the apostles. Prophetic words had to be carefully examined by other prophets, and their words had to be weighed and tested.

A prophet should speak only when confident in their inspiration and must not add any words of their own. On the other hand, a prophet should not limit their gift or omit what the Holy Spirit has given for the church. They must also be sure that their prophecies do not contradict Christian faith and the content of the Gospel. In any case, a prophet must always remember their dependence on God.

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

In this context, the word *ministry* (diakonia) refers to both the duties of deacons and any form of practical assistance provided to the members of the church. Ministry can be either long-term or spontaneous.

Perhaps Paul emphasizes the gift of ministry because he feared that those with this gift might seek other areas to invest their time, neglecting the gift from God. However, regardless of what type of ministry gift a believer has, they must dedicate themselves fully to it.

THE GIFT OF TEACHING

Teachers preserved, developed, and interpreted the Christian tradition, solidified the doctrine in creeds, and provided moral instruction and practical teaching, especially for new believers. They also played a role in interpreting the Word, so they depended not only on their intellect or education but also on the action of the Holy Spirit.

The line between teaching and prophecy is quite thin: prophecy is a fresh insight into God's will, based on immediate revelation, while teaching is a new understanding of already revealed truths, based on studying the Word of God. Since direct revelations do not occur continuously, teachers play a significant role in the life of the church.

THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION

The verb *parakaleo* has several meanings, ranging from encouraging and persuading to comforting, reconciling, and consoling. It seems that Paul consciously uses this word for its broad meaning (similar to the word *diakonia* above).

In the letter to the Romans, this gift is mentioned immediately after the gift of teaching, so *parakaleo* likely refers to urging Christians to live the truth of the Gospel and helping people apply doctrine in everyday life.

This ministry can be carried out from the pulpit or in written form, but it often takes place informally, like the gift of counsel, comforting those who are faint-hearted. It is quite likely that Barnabas, the son of encouragement, had this gift and used it to help Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as the apostle Paul.

THE GIFT OF MATERIAL SUPPORT

When Paul mentions this gift, he likely refers to the gift of sharing what you have: food, finances, property. A person with this gift relies on God and can generously and simply give their own possessions without any hidden motive. This gift does not duplicate the ministry of *diakonia*, as it is not about distributing church resources, but rather about giving one's own.

Such ministry and this gift are crucial for the functioning of the church. We should not rely solely on the ministry of *diakonia* to meet the material needs of our brothers and sisters. If God has blessed us financially, we can become a blessing to others.

THE GIFT OF LEADERSHIP

Scholars do not have a consensus on the exact gift Paul refers to here.

The most common opinion is that Paul is speaking about the gift of leadership, which relates to church leadership. In that case, this refers to the ministry of elders and church leaders. After all, Paul mentions the deacon ministry, so why would he exclude the ministry of elders?

However, other scholars argue that the leadership of the church would likely not be placed so far down the list of gifts. This ministry is mentioned between two forms of aid, so sometimes it is considered one of the three types of social service. In this case, it refers to a member of the community who, because of their status or social position, can serve as a defender of the rights of the community or its vulnerable members.

THE GIFT OF MERCY

This is the only instance where Paul uses the word *eleeo* (mercy) in relation to human, not divine, mercy. God's people should be merciful, just as their God is. This likely refers to acts of mercy in general, not just a specific manifestation (such as almsgiving). Mercy is shown in caring for someone who is grieving or in distress.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the list of gifts, we understand that not only presbyters, deacons, or ordained ministers have spiritual gifts. The list also does not distinguish between male and female gifts. The Holy Spirit has gifted all believers, and each has one or more gifts.

Finally, let's note that Paul's teaching on gifts in the letter to the Romans echoes passages in his other letters (see **1 Corinthians 12**; **Ephesians 4:11**). However, in both the letter to the Romans and the letter to the Corinthians, a passage about gifts is followed by a passage on love.

Charismata are the functions of the members of the Body (for without gifts, the body is paralyzed). But it is love that defines how and for what purpose the Body functions.

Gifts without love are not fulfilling their purpose, so follow the advice of the apostle Paul: *...desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:1).*

way2god.today

Pastor Reveals How Smartphones, Tech Are *Decimating* Kids' Self-Esteem, Sowing Chaos

A Christian pastor believes the *most neglected spiritual practice in the modern world* is fasting and contends it *may be more needed than ever*.

Dr. Darren Whitehead, senior pastor of Church of the City in Nashville, Tennessee, is out with a book *The Digital Fast: 40 Days to Detox Your Mind and Reclaim What Matters Most*, in which he addresses the need to apply principles of fasting to our digital consumption

I am definitely a proponent of helping people participate in a food

fast several times a year or with some regular rhythm, Whitehead said. *We, as a church, take the first 21 days of the year and encourage people to have a season of prayer and fasting.*

And while fasting is often associated with food, Whitehead is also encouraging people to look more diligently at the technologies that have, in many ways, overtaken our lives, encouraging people in his book to consider embarking on a *digital fast*.

The reason that I wanted to do a digital fast is that for some of the

similar ways that we use food, he said. *We generally can go to food when we are feeling anxious, when we are afraid of something, when we have some surge of feeling ashamed about something.*

Something has happened in society in these last 15 years or so, where, instead of going to food, we're going to phone, he said. *And when you feel an unpleasant feeling, when you feel anxious, when you feel afraid. when you feel ashamed — you can just unlock your phone, maybe not even*

consciously being aware that you're doing this.

While this might seem benign, Whitehead said these sorts of actions can impact individuals as well as relationships. This is particularly true when it comes to the allocation of time.

If all the discretionary moments of our lives have been chased out, then we are not able to still ourselves and listen to the voice of the holy spirit to be paying attention to what God wants us to pay attention to, he said.

faithwire.com

CAN DINOSAURS FALSIFY EVOLUTION?

Dinosaurs are a constant source of fascination for young and old alike. At CMI, our dinosaur talks are often the most requested by churches, and the subject inevitably comes up during our question and answer times. But why? After all, there are thousands of other extinct creatures found in the fossil record — types of shellfish, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and birds. Biblical creationists have no problem in answering when God might have created such creatures. For instance, Day 5 of Creation Week, about 6,000 years ago, for the sea and flying creatures and Day 6 for land animals. However, when it comes to dinosaurs there is a seeming mystery. *How do you fit dinosaurs in the Bible? Why don't we see them mentioned in Scripture?* are the usual questions we receive.

DINOSAURS = MILLIONS OF YEARS?

But most Christians seem unaware that they are only asking these questions because of evolutionary indoctrination. Quite simply, most people are confused because the concept of dinosaurs is firmly equated with millions of years (MOY). The secular world is equally fascinated by dinosaurs, and so there is a plethora of movies, documentaries, and children's books; and museums that

Yet another Achilles' heel!

elegantly display and recreate them, and always within an evolutionary framework of MOY. And this alleged evidence is seemingly overwhelming to many.

Look, we can find their bones, therefore they are real and must be MOY old.

The MOY stronghold is so strong that even well-meaning Christians sometimes resort to extra-biblical ideas such as saying that they existed in an alleged gap between **Genesis 1:1** and **1:2**. Some confused Christians have even proposed that God created the fossils to

saurs existed because of their fossils. They are land animals and, thus, would have been made on Day 6 of Creation Week along with man. Wow! That means dinosaurs and man would have been contemporaries. But to suggest that dinosaurs lived only thousands of years ago alongside man would have people looking at you as if you have left your brains at the church door!

Evolutionists claim that it is impossible for any human to have seen a living dinosaur because they died out 65 MOY ago. According to evolution,

they were created on Day 5 (the day before the land animals).

DINOSAURS = MILLIONS OF YEARS? NOT ANYMORE!

Dinosaurs have been a pillar of evolution — a stronghold that unfortunately leads countless people (especially our children) to believe in the MOY of evolution. However, biblical creationists are leading the charge and revealing the truth about these wonderful created creatures. The tide is changing, and evolutionary assumptions about some of the most magnificent beasts that God created are being overturned.



Sauropod dinosaurs etched in the brass inlay surrounding Bishop Bell's tomb

test our faith, or some even claim that they are hoaxes.

However, this is simply a case of not thinking biblically about such things. So a major reason why CMI goes to churches is to help believers make logical deductions from Scripture on matters that the Bible, on the surface, might appear silent about. For example, we know that dino-

man (*Homo sapiens*) is a recent visitor on the evolutionary scale, appearing only about c. 200,000 years ago. That's a 300-fold difference in time. Moreover, evolutionists claim that some dinosaurs ultimately evolved into birds (strangely, the lizard-hipped dinos rather than the bird-hipped ones). But the Bible indicates that birds pre-existed dinosaurs because

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

For many years in *Creation* magazine and our other publications we've been highlighting sculptures, paintings, tapestries, vases and ornaments etc., where people have depicted dinosaurs that they must have seen firsthand, because of the incredible detail in the representations. For example,

note the engravings in brass around Bishop Bell's tomb at Carlisle Cathedral in the north of England. He was interred there in AD 1491. We can easily recognize the other creatures such as a bat, bird, fish, and even a dog wearing a collar! But one engraving depicts two necking sauropods (the long-neck-and-tail type). And specifically one of them appears to be a *Shunosaurus*, a little-known dinosaur with a cleft and spikes on its tail. Notably, the other one does not have this feature. There are now dozens of examples like this found all around the world, an evolutionary impossibility if man and dinos are separated by about 65 million years.

THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE — SOFT TISSUE

We first broke the news to supporters back in the 1990s when paleontologist Dr Mary Schweitzer claimed to have found unfossilized blood cells in the leg bone of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. At the time there was a massive effort to discredit the claim, trying to prove they were anything but dino blood cells. How wrong they were! We now have numerous examples of soft tissue finds, including ligament, flesh, more blood cells, and even skin from a hadrosaur. We featured all these claims in *Creation* magazine and on creation.com.

(Continued on the 10 pg.)

NICKY CRUZ: A STORY OF SALVATION FROM HELL

I was born into a family mired in witchcraft. My father was a priest of Satan, my mother was a witch. My parents were deeply immersed in shamanism and black magic. When I was born, I was lifted up and dedicated to Satan... my head was anointed with blood. I became the heir to my father's mantle. So a curse hung over my life. And when I was a child, my mother never kissed me, and I never kissed her either — never. I experienced no affection. When I was three or four years old, my mother beat me severely. Many times I lay unconscious in a pool of blood.

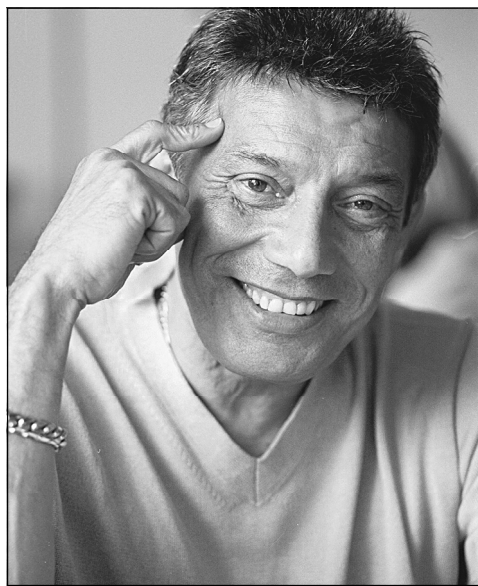
It's hard to believe it was like that. After all, love is passed through mother and father. And when I was four years old, I wanted to kill myself. I saw that my mother and father worshiped Satan. Sorcerers came and, falling into a trance, asked Satan to be their god and perform miracles. My father often lay motionless on the couch for three or four days, while his soul wandered and his spirit was recharged... I was brutally beaten until I was eight years old. You understand, when a mother calls you a freak, a bastard, it hurts. Knowing that she doesn't love me, I hated her. I cried out from emotional pain. I'd rather be called a bastard than her son. The last time she beat me, when I was eight, I swore that I would never love anyone in my life and never cry.

So, later the gang kind of made up for what the family didn't give?

Yes, what else to expect when you have no family? And here is a family of losers, hooligans. They gain strength from each other, take care of each other. I couldn't take care of myself. New York is a city where, as I remember well, you need to have eyes in the back of your head. It was about survival... And you have to behave according to the laws of the jungle. And a beast knows no difference between good and evil. A beast must kill to survive. I knew I would die very young. But I remembered my mother's voice when she grabbed me by the hair and started banging my head against the wall... I was

bleeding... I tried to look into her eyes, which were like fireballs, to see something human in them, but I saw cold and hatred. And I heard: *You are not my son, I don't love you... Get out of my life, I don't want to see you...*

And here the gang offers you family, security, strength. You know you'll die



young. But I died when I was already eight years old, when my mother said she didn't love me. So what else could I expect? I was already dead in my life. Here was a family that offered me protection in a vicious environment. And in this family, believe it or not, there were strict moral principles. Stricter than sometimes among Christians. Because in the gang they believe with all their heart: no matter how vicious the environment, they will take care of each other. And this code of ethics does not allow betrayal. It obliges loyalty, devotion, and honor. Therefore, you are ready to die for your own, as any of the gang would for you. And if someone is killed, you feel a great loss. That's why it's called your family. It's clear why you literally give

your life to the gang. It's a family of savages, but with their own norms. It's something you strongly believe in and when you don't regret the decision you made. It's a way of survival.

But, surviving, you were still dying, degrading?

Yes, but I didn't realize it. There was indifference to physical pain... They could cut me, they could shoot me... I could take a cigarette and extinguish it with my hand or lips. It was easy because my mother taught me one thing — to live with physical pain. I had to kill my feelings and thoughts to kill... Complete cold, you feel nothing, absolutely nothing. Psychiatrists call such people sociopaths.

It wasn't an innocent group of loafers hanging out on the corner by a beer bar with cigarettes in their teeth... You were dangerous?

We committed many crimes. Sometimes, from the roof of a house, you watch the victim like a beast in the jungle. He walks openly. From the roof, you aim at his head, pull the trigger, and... watch him jerk and fall. You shoot again... to make sure. The hatred for another gang is so strong that at night we go to the morgue, steal a body, take it out, cut it into pieces, and leave it on the street. We tried to spare the innocent. But once the guys were very drunk and went hunting for foxes. That's what they called girls. It was late and very dark. They had a blanket with them. They saw a woman and followed her. They didn't know who she was. They threw a blanket over her and hit her so hard that she lost consciousness. They dragged her onto the roof of the house and raped her in turn. Then one wanted to see what she looked like. It turned out to be his mother. He threw himself headfirst off the roof... killed himself. We're talking about terrible things now, they can't be forgotten.

You were sinking lower and lower...

I was sinking into the depths of hell. Many times I thought about suicide. That's when the police detained me. I was isolated from all the other prisoners because I was

dangerous. I lay and smoked... polluting my mind, philosophizing: if I am a human being, what am I doing here in the image of a beast and why am I behaving like a beast? If I am a beast, what am I doing trapped in a human form? I couldn't find an answer. The court ordered me to be treated by a psychiatrist. And then I met Dr. Goodman. He spent six months with me. He took me to many places, including the zoo, where he introduced me to stinking animals for three hours. Then he asked me to draw pictures of these animals. He took me to one of the worst hospitals, a very famous hospital where insane people are placed. There I was examined for a day. There I saw teenagers like me, completely insane. Then he took me to other psychiatrists at a psychiatric clinic in Manhattan. And six months later, when we were walking down the street, he told me straight: *You are cold. I tried to penetrate you, beat you in the chest to elicit some kind of emotional response in you. But you are completely lifeless, you are very dangerous.* And he also told me: *I can't do anything for you, Nicky! You are walking straight to prison and the electric chair. To hell. And there is no hope for you. You are lost.* And these are the most terrible words a professional doctor can say to a human being.

But by God's mercy, those words did not come true!

God became my last hope, and I was never interested in Him. I never, not even for a second, thought about Him or honored Him. So I was confused, confused!... When suddenly this man, Pastor Wilkerson, seemed to fall from the sky into our area. The police warned him: *They will kill you. This is a jungle, this is a battlefield. The only thing we will have to do is come and pick up your corpse.* Wilkerson replied to them with great conviction: *God will be with me! The police said: We hope He goes with you, because we won't!*

(Continued on page 9)

NICKY CRUZ: A STORY OF SALVATION FROM HELL

**(Conclusion.
Beginning on page 8)**

This man's life was a mess. But God used him. God Himself led him. When no one cared about me, God did. He placed great love in this man's heart, driving him to come to the largest city in the country, New York, with a message of hope.

Just two weeks earlier, my psychiatrist had said, *Nicky, you're headed for the electric chair and hell!* But Wilkerson said, *No, that's not true! There is heaven; there is God. There is Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and gave His life for you, just as you are willing to give your life for your friends, your gang members, the guys and girls around you. There is a real, living God. His name is remembered. When one of you dies, no one remembers you. You are gone. But Jesus is always here. He never dies!*

This was the most important message David Wilkerson gave me. And I went up to him and started hitting him. I didn't let him go. He didn't get rid of me easily. I attacked him like a wild animal.

I kicked him, spat on him, and cursed him with the dirtiest, most disgusting, vile words I could find. I cursed him, his God, and everything in the world. Like a beast, I leaped at him, grabbed his hair, and started slamming his head against the wall — just like my mother did to me...

But this guy, ignoring the pain and blood, in a broken voice, said in the middle of the street, in front of three hundred witnesses: *Nicky, I'm not afraid. I came here to bring you a message from heaven. I came to tell you, "Nicky, Jesus loves you!"*

When he said that, I stepped back. I looked at him. And then he said: *If you want, you can kill me. And I know you are capable of it. But even if you kill me, cut me into a thousand pieces, and scatter them on the street, remember: every piece will cry out, "Nicky, Jesus loves you!"*

That hit me hard. It was like a blow between the eyes, like a punch straight to my heart. I thought, *This guy is stubborn!*

Two weeks later, I went to hear him again. I didn't go alone — I brought seventy of my gang members for backup. To my surprise, there were already two thousand people there, from twelve gangs. We came prepared. I had a loaded .22 caliber pistol. That evening, in just seven minutes, even though I was restless, completely out of my mind, and high on drugs, something happened to me.

Wilkerson spoke about why Jesus came to earth. But what really touched me was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

At first, it seemed boring. But then, suddenly, the crucifixion of Jesus appeared so vividly before my eyes that I felt like I was there, watching Him die. That shook me to the core. I was struck by Jesus' persistence and faithfulness in friendship.

He — Jesus — is a friend, the best friend you could ever have.

He is not a lying politician who makes big promises but never keeps them. He promises you eternal life. He promised to die for you and He fulfilled that promise. I respect that kind of Jesus.

For the first time in my life, I felt respect for someone. And that respect brought me to my knees before my Savior, Jesus Christ. Praise Jesus!

In 1958, *Nicky Cruz's gang ruled the streets of New York. Today, the "Wall Street Journal" calls him the "street Billy Graham". He is a peacemaker and evangelist, touching hearts with the power of his extraordinary testimony — the story that became the basis for the film "The Cross and the Switchblade".*

Nicky, when and how did you dream of becoming an evangelist?

I never knew the meaning of the word *evangelist*. Before I accepted Christ into my life, I never thought about the future or what lay ahead. But when I went to Bible school, God began revealing Himself to me. I realized that I first needed to put

my own life in order. I worked hard, time passed, and the words of the Bible The words of the Bible became clearer to me. My time in Bible school was a time of healing for my soul. I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and my relationship with God became very close. I surrendered to His will and made the decision to follow Him wherever He sent me.



God placed in my heart compassion for people who had lost hope in this life. I felt that I could help them — the good and the bad, the kindhearted and the criminals, drug addicts and law-abiding citizens. Every heart carries pain that isn't always visible at first glance. My heart once carried that pain too. But Jesus set me free. And I became an instrument in His hands to help others find freedom from sin.

My ministry began on the streets of New York. Like David Wilkerson, I walked through neighborhoods, telling people about the power of Jesus Christ's love. At that time, no one knew me — the film *The Cross and the Switchblade* was made many years after my conversion. I was simply doing what God told me to do. And I felt I was exactly where I belonged.

Did anyone from your gang, the *Mau Maus*, come to Christ?

The day I repented, twenty-five others from my gang also accepted Jesus into their hearts.

Are you a pastor of a local church in your city?

No, I'm an evangelist. My ministry involves constant travel. A pastor can't afford that luxury — his role is to shepherd the flock. But whenever I return home, I make sure to attend services at the Assemblies of God church, where I am a member.

What are the biggest challenges evangelists face?

First, cultural differences. It's not always easy to connect with new people right away. And just when you do, it's time to leave. Then, as I sit on a plane, memories of the country I'm leaving flash through my mind. Every time, it's emotionally difficult to say goodbye to new friends.

But the most important thing is that God is truly working in people's hearts through evangelism. In my case, the power of my testimony especially reaches men. They hear my story and realize that my words are not just empty talk. I know exactly how they feel — I've lived through it myself.

Each time I step onto a stage, sharing my testimony reopens my old wounds. But knowing that overcoming my own struggles

can help thousands find real life and true joy in Christ gives me the strength to keep going. That is the spiritual beauty of my ministry.

You've mentioned that you will soon retire from evangelism. Do you plan to become a pastor?

No, I don't. I am called to be an evangelist, not a pastor. I don't want to be where God hasn't placed me or take a role that isn't mine.

Nicky, you have a wonderful wife and children! You seem to be a devoted family man. How hard is it to balance family life and ministry?

Yes, I am definitely a family man! In fact, I can confidently say that my greatest success in life is my family. I have always done my best to build a strong home. But I can't take all the credit for this success. A huge and invaluable part of it comes from my wife, Gloria, and her self-sacrifice.

She understood that being a minister's wife is also a calling. Many times, when our children were sick, she was the one sitting by their bedside. Picking up the kids from school, checking their homework — so many responsibilities fell on her shoulders. But she endured every challenge with strength. And I love her very much!

How much time do you get to spend with your family?

Whenever I'm home, I try to spend all my free time with them. Right now, for example, my wife is here with me, along with one of my four daughters, Alicia, her husband, and their two children.

Considering that you have four children, it can be assumed that you have gained substantial experience in raising them. Have you developed a specific principle that you always followed in dealing with your children?

Of course. First and foremost, I set a goal to give my children what I never had — a father. I prayed that God would bless me with a perfect fatherly love toward my children. But looking back at

for the day and placed the cookie jar on the top shelf of the kitchen cabinet, instructing my little sweet tooth to go to bed. Then I pretended to go to my room but secretly stayed back to see what she would do in my absence. A few minutes later, Nicole climbed onto a chair, then onto the table, opened the top shelf, took out the cookie jar, and at that moment, I suddenly jumped out and shouted, *What are you doing?!* To which she instantly replied, *Daddy, I wanted to bring you a cookie.*

Moments like these, shared with my children, bring incredible joy to my life! They are priceless!

It's clear that you deeply cherish every member of your family. Allow me to ask a painful question: We know that in early 2009, your brother was murdered. What happened? Was he a Christian?

This was the same brother I lived with in New York when I left home as a teenager. He always took care of me and often pulled me out of trouble. One day, while I was already an evangelist, I was preaching on one of the streets of New York. My words carried the Good News. Then I invited those gathered around me to close their eyes and pray. It was very dangerous because, in New York, you cannot afford to lose vigilance. The enemy can strike at any moment. And as I began to pray, I suddenly felt someone press against me. I thought it was an attack by gang members. But when I opened my eyes, I saw my brother, who, with tears in his eyes, embraced me. His heart opened to Jesus that day. Over time, he became a minister — a doctor of theology. My brother was a very kind man, and his heart always longed to help others.

His murderer was a 23-year-old young man from his circle of acquaintances. The deceitful attacker claimed that he had run out of gas and asked my brother for a ride. Instead of sitting in the passenger seat, he got into the back, and as soon as the car started moving, he strangled the good-hearted driver...

Did the murderer have anything against your brother's Christian ministry?

No, it was much more trivial than that. He simply wanted to steal the car. He has since been caught and is now in prison.

Did you forgive the murderer?

It was difficult, but God gave me the strength. I understood that I carried a great responsibility for the people who came to faith through my testimony. If I had not forgiven that man, it could have caused a wave of disappointment across the world. This trial was very painful. I wept for my brother for a long time; we were spiritually very close. His death was a great blow to me. But God is with me, and He gave me and my entire family the strength to forgive that man.

Given all the experiences in your life, would you like to write a book about forgiveness?

The truth is that every one of my books touches on the vital topic of forgiveness. And in my book *Satan Has No Mother*, I will add a section where I will share the story of my brother's murder. Perhaps it will help many readers overcome the barriers of unforgiveness in their hearts.

Interview by Marichka LYSUN,
ugol.org



Nicky Cruz and David Wilkerson

CAN DINOSAURS FALSIFY EVOLUTION?

(Ending. Beginning on page 8)

DINO DNA

Even more startling was the discovery of DNA in the bone cells of dinosaurs claimed to be over 65 MOY old. DNA is a very unstable chemical molecule and it has been calculated that under all sorts of varying temperatures and conditions, it simply cannot last for MOY.

CARBON-14 TESTING

And more recently was the revelation that all tested dinosaur fossils contain carbon-14 (¹⁴C). It had the evolution community in a spin, so much so that they even censored the scientific findings at a major international conference. Out of the many types of radiometric dating, ¹⁴C is used to date organic matter (not rocks etc.), and it has a very short half-life of 5,730 years. Consequently, it has been estimated that there should be no detectable ¹⁴C in anything much older than 60,000 (theoretical) years. Could there be any stronger scientific evidence that directly refutes the MOY dogma about dinosaurs?

I've just mentioned a few big picture points so you will hopefully see that dinosaurs are not evidence for evolution — they are great evidence for the Bible's timescale. Because of the corollary of MOYs and dinosaurs, such information can be startling to those who've never heard it before, but more importantly it can be life-changing. Jason W. wrote: *I discovered this site [creation.com] recently and I enjoy it and find it very informative. I have battled*

Yet another Achilles' heel!

doubt in my faith life for a long time, and most of it comes from evolution and dinosaurs and scientific stuff...

Our friend Vance Nelson is a major contributor to the creationist cause in esta-

Too true. We can start them on a clear biblical line of evidence that can be followed.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

You may be already aware of the biblical account of the creature *behemoth* in **Job**



blishing a biblical view of dinosaurs. He is the author of the book *Untold Secrets of Planet Earth: Dire Dragons*. After hearing Vance speak at a CMI SuperConference, Sharon M. wrote: *I really liked the presentation on dinosaurs and the dragons 'evidence' by Vance Nelson [It] was excellent. Dinosaurs are really the 'poster children' for evolution claims and because they soooo appeal to children I think that putting dinos on the Ark and in post-Flood history will start children on the path toward a biblical worldview.*

40:15–24. When God spoke to Job in the midst of his trials, he tells Job to consider the mighty *behemoth* which He made along with him (day 6 of creation). Then God provides details about *behemoth*. He reminds Job that it ranks first amongst the *works of God*; that it eats grass like an ox (a vegetarian); has bones like tubes of bronze and bars of iron; can stand in the River Jordan with his mouth against the surge; but the real clue that this is likely a sauropod dinosaur is the description of having a tail like a cedar tree.

Presumably, Job lived near the Middle East, so God would

have been casting Job's eyes to the impressive cedars of Lebanon. These were magnificent trees from which Solomon later constructed the Temple. One cannot think of any land creature today that has a *tree-like tail*. The indication is that this is a large sauropod dinosaur.

MULTIPLE LINES

Of course, it might be easy to dismiss one line of evidence, but as described above there are several. Because practically everybody has been exposed to evolutionary teaching as *fact*, it is necessary for us to *unlearn* such information, particularly when it is not accurate and has become a stronghold in our lives. This is particularly appropriate when trying to reach the lost who believe that evolution is a fact.

Undoing such strongholds and equipping believers is CMI's main mission. This is, in fact, a Scriptural admonition: *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).*

Indeed, the walls came tumbling down for Rich D. who emailed to say: *I can testify (and I know you have other such testimonies on file — I've read them) that CMI is not only helpful to those whose faith is floundering but to those who never had any to begin with as well. Having grown-up in a largely secular environment... I had simply taken it for granted that there*

was no logically sound case for Christianity, and that the naturalistic historical stories pushed so fervently by most of the mainstream media (as well of course as attacks on the absolute accuracy of the other historical canonical books) were basically uncontroversial fact. When, in my hour of need, the Holy Spirit led me to CMI, I found-out in a matter of weeks how wrong I had been.

I know beyond doubt that there are many more people in my former position out there and I intend to devote the rest of this leg of my life to reaching them with the sort of well-reasoned case which CMI so excels in... Praise God!

EVERYONE LOVES DINOS!

Dinosaurs are just one great evangelistic tool to open up conversations with non-believers who cite evolution as a reason for rejecting the Christian faith. But I've always been a great believer that evangelism needs to start at home. Parents and grandparents need to be aware that our young ones get most of their information about these fascinating creatures from secular sources. It's inevitable because we are bombarded with it 24/7. And left unchallenged it has the potential to create such strongholds by associating subjects like dinosaurs with MOY, and those MOY will ultimately be the undoing of many people's confidence in the Scriptures. If we want to preserve our families in the faith, we must all *renew our minds (Romans 12:2)* to conform with the correct biblical approach in dealing with this information!

Gary BATES, creation.com

Missionary held hostage by Al-Qaeda for seven years says *God was always there*

A Christian missionary who was held captive by an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group has shared details of his ordeal, where he was kept in brutal conditions that saw him face extremes of heat and cold, scorpions, and scurvy.

Incredibly, Dr Ken Elliott, who was 82 when taken hostage, would be forced to endure all this for seven years before he



would be released. But, when asked how could an octogenarian possibly manage to survive all this, and for so long, he has a simple answer — God.

They served for decades in medical missions in the West African country of Burkina Faso and were known for their dedication to ensuring that every patient who came through the door received the same quality of treatment as everyone else, no matter their faith or colour, or what they could pay.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

This earned them the respect of the Muslim majority making up their patients, and saw them accepted as belonging to their community, rather than outsiders from the West trying to impose their ideas. Hence, when they were kidnapped locals of both faiths were outraged.

Jocelyn was released after a few weeks, leaving Ken to bond with his lone fellow hostage, Julian Ghergut, a Romanian.

When I met him, Ken told the news network, ABC, he had been a captive for nine months. "How can anyone stand this for nine months?" I asked myself. I ended up being there for seven years and four months.

As well as the threat posed by his captors and the brutal desert conditions, Ken's health deteriorated due to the poor diet. With no source of Vitamin C, his legs began to swell, leaving him unable to walk and in constant pain.

I'd only seen one case of [scurvy] in my medical career and that was me, Elliott told the

UK's Keswick Convention.

Despite his pleas, his kidnappers said they didn't have any supplements they could give him, and it was only when their leader returned to discover Ken's condition that he finally received enough tablets to restore his health.

His captors also made attempts to convert Ken to Islam over the course of his captivity, but Ken remained steadfast in his faith, and never let his long, lonely time in the desert cause him to lose hope.

The Lord has been good to me. There's no way I was going to dishonour Him by converting to Islam, he told the ABC. Or even pretending to convert.

When asked by his interviewer whether he ever thought God had abandoned him, Ken's response summed up exactly how been able to emerge from seven years of brutal conditions and isolation unbroken in spirit and with his faith in God intact.

Never. No. He was always there, he said. There is uncertainty around the circumstances that led to his release and whether a deal was made, but Ken doesn't see any mystery at all.

We believe that the only reason why we were released, he said, was because there were a few hundreds, if not thousands of people praying for it. And we believe in prayer.

Christian Today

Lausanne at 50: Western Church Needs Revival; Believers in Asia, Africa, Latin America Fill Global Gap

Over 5,000 Christian leaders from 202 countries joined the recently concluded 4th Lausanne Congress held in Seoul, South Korea.

Started by Billy Graham and John Stott in 1974, this movement has connected ideas and influences from different Christian churches for global missions. It has united churches to fulfill the Great Commission for the last 50 years. In this gathering, they heard that 40 percent of the world has not yet been evangelized. Even so, about 97 percent of all

current Christian missionaries are sent to people with access to the gospel.

Studies also show that by the year 2050, the Global North will only be 20 percent Christian with the other 80 percent being in the Global South which is Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Since 1980, the number of Christians in the majority world has exceeded the number of Christians in the West. As a result, the number of missionaries sent from the West is rapidly declining with the gap filled by Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

To address this challenge, Dr. Jonas Kang of the Korea World Missions Association spearheaded the new movement, Christ Over Asia, Africa and Latin America, or COALA. Its goal is to promote polycentric missions for more effective evangelization and church growth.

Dr. Kang said, *The best mission way is for the local people to preach the gospel to the local people. The missionary is not the mother to give birth. But the missionary's role is like a midwife to try to help push somebody to produce something.*

National Director of the India Missions Association, Dr. Isac Soundararaja added, *If those churches become missional churches, probably the day will come that these churches in Asia, Africa, Latin America will take the gospel of Jesus Christ and start moving to the Western and other side of the globe.*

The church leaders believe that through the COALA movement, more missionaries will be mobilized to help hasten the spread of the gospel and bring back revival to the Global North in North America and Europe.

Reverend Hwa Yung, Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, clarified that COALA does not suggest in any way that they are now the guys who will take missions forward and the days of the West are over. He explained, *The churches in the West should be revived and the churches in the Majority World should mature. Our concern is there will be a true partnership of the church throughout the world that we may continue to obey God and proclaim the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.*

CBN News

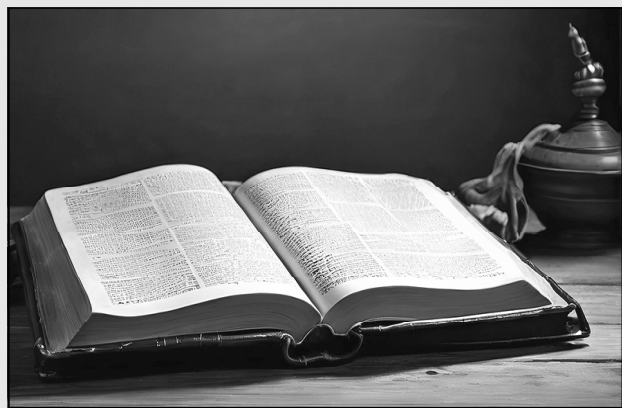
This common objection to believing the straightforward history of Genesis has, in one sense, a simple answer — *No, it's not*. Dr D. James Kennedy correctly says about the Bible, *It is not a scientific textbook. It is not a textbook on religion. It is not a textbook at all; it is a revelation from God!*

But it is a loaded question; most who ask it presume that a *no* answer means that the Bible's authority does not extend to matters related to science. This is of course illogical. A novel about apple orchards could refer to apples falling down (rather than up) in accordance with the known facts about gravity. It could be completely accurate scientifically without its purpose being to teach science.

But the Bible's not a science textbook, is it?

One reason put forward for saying that Genesis is *non-scientific* is that the account is brief. But since when does brevity equal inaccuracy? As a minister friend says, when we listen to statements about the weather, we expect them to be based on totally accurate scientific data, despite being brief. *We don't expect lengthy scientific explanations with details on the force of gravity vs the humidity and wind speed to generate rain fall. We just want to know whether it is going to rain in our area. Yet we expect extensive scientific explanations in the Bible for it to be taken seriously.*

The Bible's prime purpose certainly concerns salvation, not scientific explanation. But to use this to evade the clear teaching of origins in the foundational book of Genesis is intellectually illegitimate, if not dishonest. What if that approach were consistently applied? The Bible isn't a mathematics textbook, either. But does that mean that if the Bible were to insist that ten divided by two equals six, it would make no difference to its *message of faith and salvation*? Of course it would — a world of difference! What sense would it make to trust it as the Word of the all-powerful Creator who never lies and to commit one's eternal destiny to its promises in *spiritual* areas? As Jesus said, *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things* (John 3:12)?



Even though the Bible's purpose is not to teach history as such, the history it teaches is true. It states that Jesus was crucified at a specific moment in real history via a specific person, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. It would be bizarre to claim that it didn't matter whether these events were true or not, *because the Bible's not a textbook*.

The account of Jesus rising from the dead cannot be classified as only one form of truth; i.e. it cannot be a Christian or *religious* truth without at the same time being a historical truth (unless language loses all of its meaning); and it cannot be historically true unless it is also *scientifically* true.

The same applies to Genesis events — e.g. the statement that God took a rib and made Eve. As theologian Dr Douglas Kelly makes clear in this issue, Genesis presents such things as plain facts of history. So the question of whether the Bible is a science textbook evades the real issues, which are to do with its claim to total *truth and authority*. It is meaningless to claim that scriptural authority applies only to *religious things*, since the Christian Gospel is all about real things, the real origin, history and destiny of man and the universe. Remove its claim to authority in the realm of science, and you are actually removing it from any relevance to the real world. Sadly, this is exactly what compromise with evolutionism/long-ageism has done in many minds.

Creation magazine helps people to reconnect Scripture and reality. This is why its ministry has transformed countless lives. The less you keep its message to yourself, the more you become an ally in the spread of the wonderful Good News of salvation.

Carl WIELAND, creation.com

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH

What is the importance of the Lord's supper (Christian Communion)?

A study of the Lord's Supper is a soul-stirring experience because of the depth of meaning it contains. It was during the age-old celebration of the Passover on the eve of His death that Jesus instituted a significant new fellowship meal that we observe to this day. It is an integral part of Christian worship. It causes us to remember our Lord's death and resurrection and to look for His glorious return in the future.

The Passover was the most sacred feast of the Jewish religious year. It commemorated the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died and the Israelites were spared because of the blood of a lamb that was sprinkled on their doorposts. The lamb was then roasted and eaten with unleavened bread. God's command was that throughout the generations to come the feast would be celebrated. The story is recorded in **Exodus 12**.

During the Last Supper — a Passover celebration — Jesus took a loaf of bread and gave thanks to God. As He broke it and gave it to His disciples, He said, *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me"*. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"* (**Luke 22:19–21**). He concluded the feast by singing a hymn (**Matthew 26:30**), and they went out into the night to the Mount of Olives. It was there that, as predicted, Jesus was betrayed by Judas. The following day Jesus was crucified.

The accounts of the Lord's Supper are found in the Gospels (**Matthew 26:26–29**; **Mark 14:17–25**; **Luke 22:7–22**; and **John 13:21–30**). The apostle Paul wrote concerning the Lord's Supper in **1 Corinthians 11:23–29**. Paul includes a statement not found in the Gospels: *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself* (**1 Corinthians 11:27–29**). We may ask what it means to partake of the bread and the cup in an unworthy manner. It may mean to disregard the true meaning of the bread and cup and to forget the tremendous price our Savior paid for our salvation. Or it may mean to allow the ceremony to become a dead and formal ritual or to come to the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin. In keeping with Paul's instruction, we should examine ourselves before eating the bread and drinking the cup.

Another statement Paul made that is not included in the gospel accounts is *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*

(**1 Corinthians 11:26**). This places a time limit on the ceremony — until our Lord's return. From these brief accounts we learn how Jesus used two of the frailest of elements as symbols of His body and blood and established them as a monument to His death. It was not a monument of carved marble or molded brass, but of bread and wine.

He declared that the bread spoke of His body which would be broken. There was not a broken bone, but His body was so badly tortured that it was hardly recognizable (**Psalms 22:12–17**; **Isaiah 53:4–7**). The wine spoke of His blood, indicating the terrible death He would soon experience. He, the perfect Son of God, became the fulfillment of the countless Old Testament prophecies concerning a Redeemer (**Genesis 3:15**; **Psalms 22**; **Isaiah 53**). When He said, *Do this in remembrance of me*, He indicated this was a ceremony that must be continued in the future. It indicated also that the Passover, which required the death of a lamb and looked forward to the coming of the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, was fulfilled in the Lord's Supper. The New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant when Christ, the Passover Lamb (**1 Corinthians 5:7**), was sacrificed (**Hebrews 8:8–13**). The sacrificial system was no longer needed (**Hebrews 9:25–28**). The Lord's Supper/Christian Communion is a remembrance of what Christ did for us and a celebration of what we receive as a result of His sacrifice.

Why is church attendance important?

Simply put, the Bible tells us we need to attend church so we can worship God with other believers and be taught His Word for our spiritual growth (**Acts 2:42**, **Hebrews 10:25**).

Church is the place where believers can love one another (**1 John 4:12**), encourage one another (**Hebrews 3:13**), spur one another to love and good works (**Hebrews 10:24**), serve one another (**Galatians 5:13**), instruct one another (**Romans 15:14**), honor one another (**Romans 12:10**), and be kind and compassionate to one another (**Ephesians 4:32**).

When a person trusts Jesus Christ for salvation, he or she is made a member of the body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:27**). For a church body to function properly, all of its *body parts* need to be present and working (**1 Corinthians 12:14–20**). It's not enough to just attend a church; we should be involved in some type of ministry to others, using the spiritual gifts God has given us (**Ephesians 4:11–13**). A believer will never reach full spiritual maturity without having that outlet for his gifts, and we all need the assistance and encouragement of other believers (**1 Corinthians 12:21–26**).

For these reasons and more, church attendance, participation, and fellowship should be regular aspects of a believer's life. Weekly church attendance is in no sense *required* for believers, but someone who belongs to Christ should have a desire to worship God, receive His Word, and fellowship with other believers.

gotquestions.org

CAN GOD DO EVERYTHING?

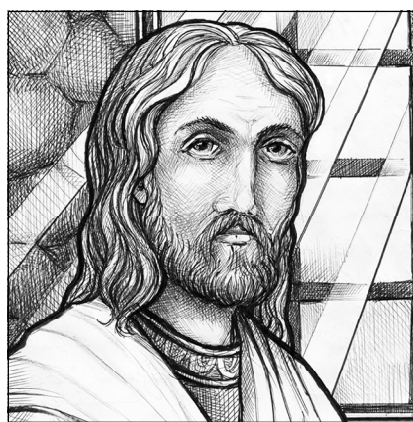
Both Christians and atheists generally have assumed that if the God depicted in the Bible exists, He can do **anything** — since He is represented as being all-powerful. However, this assumption is incorrect. The Bible does not claim that the omnipotence of God implies that He can do anything and everything. In reality, *omnipotence* by definition does not, and cannot, apply to that which does not lend itself to power. Skeptics and atheists have posed queries that they feel nullify the notion of omnipotence, thereby demonstrating the nonexistence of God. For example, *Can God create a boulder so large that He, Himself, cannot lift it?*

Separate and apart from the fact that God is not, Himself, physical, and that He created the entire physical Universe, though He is metaphysical and transcendent of the Universe, the question is a **conceptual absurdity**. It's like asking, *Can God create a round square or a four-sided triangle?* No, He cannot — but not for the reasons implied by the atheist: that He does not exist or that He is not omnipotent. Rather, it is because the question is, itself, **self-contradictory and incoherent**. It is nonsensical terminology. Rather than saying God **cannot** do such things, it would be more in harmony with reality to say that such things simply **cannot be done at all**. God is infinite in power, but power meaningfully relates only to what can be done, to what is **possible** of accomplishment — **not** to what is **impossible**! It is absurd to speak of any power (even **infinite** power) being able to do what simply **cannot** be done. Logical absurdities do not lend themselves to being accomplished, and so, are not subject to power, not even to **infinite** power.

Further, to suggest that God is deficient or limited in power if He cannot create a rock so large that He cannot lift, is to imply that He **could** do so if He simply had **more** power. But this is false. Creating a rock that

He, Himself, cannot lift, or creating a four-sided triangle, or making a ball that is at the same time both white all over and black all over, or creating a 90-year-old teenager, or making a car that is larger on the inside than it is on the outside — to propose such things is to affirm logical contradictions and absurdities. Such propositions do not really say anything at all. Though one can imagine logical absurdities that cannot be accomplished, they do not constitute a telling blow against the view that God is infinite in power.

So, no, the concept of *omnipotence* does not mean that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do. While God **can** do whatever



is **possible** to be done, in reality, He **will** do only what is in harmony with His nature. In fact, the Bible pinpoints specific things that God **cannot** do. For example, the Bible states unequivocally that God cannot lie (**Numbers 23:19**; **1 Samuel 15:29**; **2 Timothy 2:13**; **Titus 1:2**). He is a Being whose very essence entails truthfulness. Falsehood is completely out of harmony with His divine nature.

Another impossibility pertaining to God's power is the fact that He shows no partiality or favoritism (**Deuteronomy 10:17**; **Romans 2:11**; **Colossians 3:25**; **1 Peter 1:17**).

He is *open and above board* — evenhanded — with all His creatures. He can be counted on to interact with human beings as He said He would. His treatment of us centers on our own self-chosen behavior — not on our ethnicity or skin color (**Acts 10:34–35**; **1 Samuel 16:7**).

A third instance that qualifies the meaning of *omnipotent* is seen in God's inability to forgive the individual who will not repent and forsake sin (**Joshua 24:19**; **Proverbs 28:13**; **Matthew 6:15**; **18:35**; **Luke 13:3, 5**). As great and as magnificent as the mercy and forgiveness of God are, it is impossible for Him to bestow forgiveness upon the person who does not seek that forgiveness by meeting the pre-conditions of remission. God is literally powerless to bestow forgiveness through any other avenue than the blood of Jesus and obedience to the Gospel of Christ (**Romans 1:16**; **2:8**; **2 Thessalonians 1:8**; **1 Peter 4:17**; **John 3:5**).

The more one studies the Bible, examining the attributes and characteristics of the God depicted there, the more one is struck with (1) the inspiration of the Bible — since its skillful handling of such matters places it beyond the charge of successful contradiction, and (2) awe at the infinitude of God. Not one of the factors discussed in this article reflects adversely upon the reality of God's omnipotence. But it is abundantly clear that a person may so live as to render the God of heaven incapable of coming to that person's aid. It is imperative that every human being recognizes the need to understand His will and to conform one's behavior to that will. It is imperative that every individual avoid placing self in the precarious position of being in need of **that which God cannot do**.

Dave MILLER,
apologeticspress.org
Drawing by Igor OSOKIN.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Is cremation allowed for Christians?

Some churches today teach that cremation is forbidden because God will resurrect our physical bodies. However, those who hold this view overlook **2 Peter 3:10**: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

On the Day of the Lord, everything on earth, including human remains, will be consumed by fire. In other words, God Himself will cremate everything at His second coming.

Some argue that Jesus was not given a new body but instead resurrected in His original body. This is true, but why?

1. If Jesus had risen in a different body, people might have believed in reincarnation or assumed someone else was impersonating Him.

2. If His original body had remained in the tomb, His disciples would not have believed He had truly risen.

3. If Jesus had a different body after resurrection, how could He have told Thomas: *Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing (John 20:27).*

Unlike Jesus, when we are resurrected, we will receive new bodies: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).*

How should we understand Jesus' words in Luke 14:26?

Luke 14:26 — *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

Some claim that the Gospel promotes hatred, but this is a misunderstanding. The teachings of Jesus Christ are teachings of love. Many passages in Scripture confirm this:

Matthew 5:43-44 — *You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy". But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*

Matthew 22:37-39 — *"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. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself".

John 13:34-35 — *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

John 15:17 — *These things I command you, that you love one another.*

Since the Bible is filled with similar verses, how should we understand Jesus' words in **Luke 14:26**? Did He call for hatred?

Absolutely not! Let's explore why.

God cannot contradict Himself or His laws. Jesus would not command hatred toward parents, as that would contradict the Fifth Commandment:

Exodus 20:12 — *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.*

Jesus Himself quoted this commandment when asked by a Jewish ruler, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

Luke 18:18-20 — *So Jesus said to him, "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery', 'Do not murder', 'Do not steal', 'Do not bear false witness', 'Honor your father and your mother'".*

If Jesus did not mean literal hatred, what did He mean?

Re-reading **Luke 14:26**, Jesus is speaking about true discipleship. The point is not to hate one's family and life but to prioritize Jesus above all else. If someone places their parents, spouse, children, or personal interests above Christ, they cannot be His disciple.

Think about the first and second commandments: Worship God and serve Him alone. And do not create idols.

These commandments convey the same principle — God desires to be first in every

aspect of our lives. If we call ourselves His disciples but prioritize ourselves, family, or friends over Him when making decisions, we are not truly following Christ.

Were Adam and Eve Jewish?

When God created Adam and Eve, they had no nationality. Modern nationalities and ethnic groups formed after the Great Flood and descended from Noah's sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth. Adam and Eve are the ancestors not only of the Jewish people but of all nations.

The Bible states that all nations on earth originated from Adam and Eve. Each nation has its own name and history. The Jewish people, like the Arabs, are descendants of Abraham, who himself was neither a slave nor a Jew by nationality. Abraham was a Chaldean from Ur of the Chaldeans:

Genesis 11:31 — *And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan...*

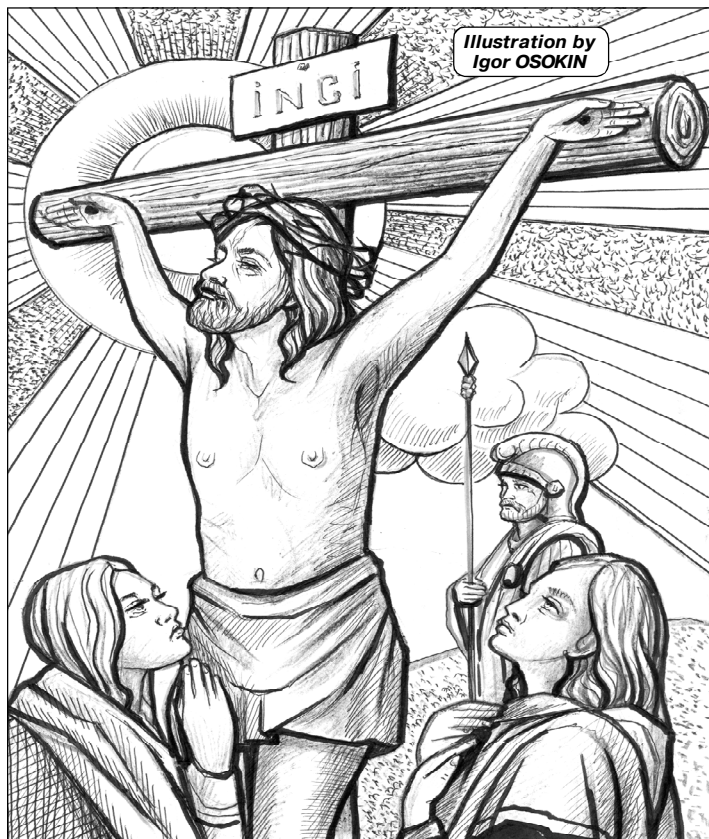
The history of the Jewish people begins in Ur of the Chaldeans around 366 years after the Great Flood when God called Abraham to go to the Promised Land. However, Jews are not merely Abraham's descendants but specifically the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was given the name Israel (meaning *one who struggles with God*). The term *Jew* comes from the Hebrew word *Ivri* (or *Ibri*), which translates as *wanderer, traveler, sojourner*. This was a term of contempt used by the Canaanites to describe Abraham during his travels in Canaan:

Genesis 14:13 — *Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram.*

As a nation, the Jewish people formed much later (approximately 400 years later) during their time in Egypt:

Deuteronomy 26:5-8 — *And you shall answer and say before the Lord your God: "My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders".*

<http://cogmtl.net/q.htm>



ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper "Prisoner" has the status of the two languages: Russian and English. "Prisoner" is printed in the Ukraine and in America. However, it is published and distributed exclusively by voluntary donations. For all those wishing to contribute to the success of "Prisoner" all the requisites are indicated in the last column of the newspaper. For those in America who wish to donate to the newspaper "Prisoner" and support the prison ministry, there is a tear off form, where you can donate and specify what you want the donation to go for. God bless you!

Our main focus is ministering to inmates in jails and prisons.

Hope of Freedom
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That you may say to the prisoners, "Go forth", To those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves" (Is. 49:9).

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"Lord Jesus, I believe you are God's Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!"



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