



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

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

John 8:32

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Among some Christians, there is such an opinion that a once repentant sinner no longer needs repentance since God has forgiven them and therefore there is no need to repent every day. They argue that if a believer repents of their sins every day, then they do not trust that God forgave them. However, I think this is not a correct relationship with God. And I'll explain why.

For example, take a typical family

and deeds. However, unfortunately, very often the conscience in a person simply sleeps soundly and awakens only in the rarest of cases, especially among unbelievers. When we come to God with repentance, then it is the conscience that begins to convict us of all our voluntary and involuntary sins. At such moments, it really wakes up from a long hibernation. And here it is very important not to put it to sleep again.

obvious that we are still, unfortunately, far from perfect. And the only thing that justifies and cleanses us from all sin is the recognition of it before God.

I'll tell you about myself. For more than a quarter of a century I am living in harmony with God, serving Him and people. However, my conscience, originally laid in me by the Creator, convicts me every time if somewhere I involuntarily sin in my mind. Therefore, knowing in advance my

before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear

IF WE CLAIM TO BE WITHOUT SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES...

consisting of parents and children. How many times can children be at fault to their parents and how many times in their lives can they ask them for forgiveness? The answer is unequivocal: quite a few times. And all this is quite normal. One or another child realizes their guilt before their parents, asks for their forgiveness and the parents forgive them despite the fact that this is not the first time. It turns out that we can ask for forgiveness from our earthly parents whenever we feel at fault, but for some reason some Christians consider it wrong to repent of their sins before God. They say, by this we express our distrust in Him, since He has already forgiven us once.

The fact that God forgives every repentant sinner is undoubtedly an indisputable fact. However, we all remain far from perfect people even after we come to God with repentance. Apostle Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Philippians: *"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13–14).

In his statement, Paul emphasized that he is an imperfect person but, despite this, striving for perfection.

Every person from birth, regardless of our sinful nature, has such a feeling as conscience. It is conscience that helps a person not to commit bad actions



Apostle John wrote in his epistle: *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8–9).

Holy Apostle John, as well as Apostle Paul, clearly emphasized that even a believer is far from perfect. Therefore, to assert that a believing person no longer has any sin in themselves is not true. Why? Because, even without sinning in some actions or deeds, each of us is still capable of sinning (even if unwittingly) in our thoughts. If we analyze our thoughts during the day or week it will become

imperfection (although I constantly strive for the opposite), every day I recite by heart before God the fifty first psalm (a psalm of repentance) along with a number of other prayers. And this psalm remains relevant today for many of us, if, of course, our conscience is awake.

Therefore, today I propose that we all read together as a prayer this psalm before God.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always

joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar" (Psalms 51:1–19).

I'll tell you honestly: I say this psalm (this prayer) every day before God and my conscience tells me approvingly not to stop doing this. After all, it is not for nothing that the Bible says to all of us: *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). This means that daily repentance will never be superfluous for anyone.

I. GORIK.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

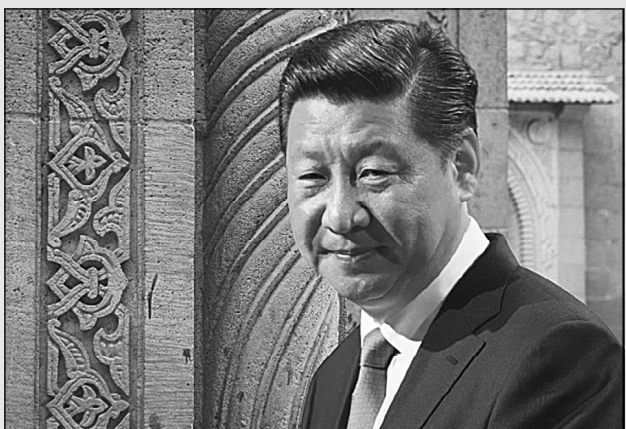
Three hundred million by 2030. Why Chinese leaders are trying to stop the church

The destruction of churches, criminal prosecution of ministers, the prohibition of gatherings that are not coordinated with the authorities and the harsh Sinification (Chinese influence) on Christianity — are all elements of the Chinese leadership's deliberate policy towards the church, according to Open Doors.

Dr. Ron Boyd-Macmillan, director of strategic research at Christian charity Open Doors, said the Chinese Communist Party, led by Chairman Xi Jinping, is increasingly concerned about the country's growing Christian population. This is precisely the reason for such harsh actions against the churches.

"We think the Chinese leaders fear that the church in China will continue to grow at the same pace and become a real threat to the regime", Boyd-Macmillan said. "If growth

continues at the same pace as we have seen since 1980 (which is about eight percent a year), then by 2030 the number of Christians in China will amount to three hundred million people.



This means that a large social group is emerging in the country that is capable of challenging the communist government, and this prompts the authorities to act preventively.

Therefore, the government is carrying out a rigid Sinification of the church, meaning it's trying to merge it with the Chinese identity — we see this throughout the country. The government has banned online Bible sales.

In addition, churches are under surveillance, they are forcibly closed regardless of whether they are underground or belong to the 'State Church'.

According to the Open Doors report, China is the seventeenth most persecuted country in the world. The organization notes that although the church is constantly growing, Christians are under great pressure.

<https://inlight.news>

PASTOR'S WORD

WHY BE A MEMBER OF A LOCAL CHURCH?

Some people ask the question: "Why do you need to be a member of a local church? Isn't it enough that I believe in God, have fellowship with Him, and try to keep His commandments?"

And really, why? One of the robbers, crucified with Christ, was saved without water baptism and church membership. So it's okay for others too?

Indeed, Christ told the thief, crucified on His right side on Mount Golgotha, that he would be with Him in paradise. But it should be noted that this was no longer a robber, but a completely renewed man, filled with saving faith and publicly confessing his repentance. The Word of God is very succinct and meaningful! It omits many small details, about which one of the evangelists said: *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written* (Jn. 21:25).

And yet, the Bible did not hide from us the repentance and confession of his guilt by the former robber, which was expressed in his words: *"We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong". Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"* (Lk. 23:41-42).

Let's analyze his words.

"WE ARE PUNISHED JUSTLY"

What is behind these words?

You can go around more than one prison, asking convicts about the fairness of their sentence, and most will say that they did not deserve the harsh sentence they received. This testifies that in their lives there is no self-conviction and true repentance.

In the example of the robber, he acknowledged that being punished in such a way as being nailed to a cross was a perfectly fair retribution for the crimes he committed. This can only be stated by a person who has realized the gravity of their crimes. A person who has felt the depth of pain and suffering that they inflicted on other people, that is, the victims of their robbery. The depth of such conviction can only be manifested in people who are enlightened, who have received their sight, and in fact, is evidence of true repentance which we see in the former robber who is repenting.

"WE ARE GETTING WHAT OUR DEEDS DESERVE"

These words testify that the repentant robber fully agrees with their sentence even if it is the death penalty by crucifixion.

I have heard the debates of human rights activists in the United States who are trying to ensure that pain medicine is given before the lethal injection of paralytic poison, administered during executions, since criminals killed without it can feel pain. We are talking about several minutes of convulsions and paralysis before death... They say: *If it hurts, then it is inhumane! It is necessary to anesthetize and make the killing process comfortable.*

So, the former robber was agreeing to be nailed for a whole day to a wooden cross for his past crimes, when he said: *We are getting what our deeds deserve.* That was the depth of his remorse. He was ready for evil to be punished with him! The robber was crucified during the period of *salvation by deeds* and with his dying sufferings paid for his crimes according to the principle of the old covenant: *Tooth for tooth, eye for eye*, and by faith in Christ he acquired salvation! But in what status he is there, we do not know. After all, besides the bride of Christ, who will have a special privileged position, there will be saved nations who will walk in the glory of Christ and His church.

THE ROBBER SAW THE LORD IN A CRUCIFIED BLOODY AND HUMILIATED MAN

What did the words uttered by the repentant robber, addressed to Christ, mean: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom?*

It is incredible that a robber, whose name was not even preserved on the pages of the Gospel, acknowledge a King who was humiliated, ridiculed spit upon man and crucified next to him. And he saw it just when the people passing by cursed Him, and the disciples stumbled on account of Him and fled shamefully. In him appeared the faith that the apostles had lost (Mk. 15:29)!

Returning to the argument that the former robber was saved without water baptism, it is important to note that the crucified one could no longer leave the cross to do that. And Christian water baptism acquired its meaning only after the death of Jesus Christ. But this exception to the norm is a vivid indicator of God's mercy, manifested in the salvation of a person who sincerely turned to Him in a seemingly hopeless situation. This example of the salvation of the thief on the cross also gives hope to others! Perhaps, besides the robber, someone else was saved or will be saved at the last minute of their life, but an exception does not cancel the rules established by God!

WHAT DOES GOD INSTRUCT

Jesus Christ, while still on earth, repeatedly spoke about the building of the church, which He endowed with certain authority and in which He promised to dwell among the people gathering in His name. He also spoke of mutual service and the love among yourselves.

Here are some of those statements:

Mt. 16:18 — *...and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

Mt. 18:19-20 — *Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three **gather in My name**, there am I with them.*

Jn. 13:34 — *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*

Mk. 9:35 — *Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.*

Christ on the day of his ascension commanded his disciples to be together and await the promised Holy Spirit, which is what they did.

Acts 1:4 — *...while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised..."*

Acts 1:14 — *They all joined together constantly in prayer...*

Acts 2:1 — *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.*

And after the day of Pentecost, when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, the believers continued to gather together.

Acts 2:42 — *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Acts 2:44 — *All the believers were together...*

Acts 11:26 — *...for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

The apostles not only themselves

were constantly in church fellowship, but they also call all Christians to this.

1 Cor. 11:18 — *...when you **come together as a church**...*

1 Cor. 14:26 — *When you **come together**, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*

Heb. 10:25 — *not giving up meeting together...*

Let's look closer at the following verse from the Holy Scriptures:

Acts 2:41 — *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

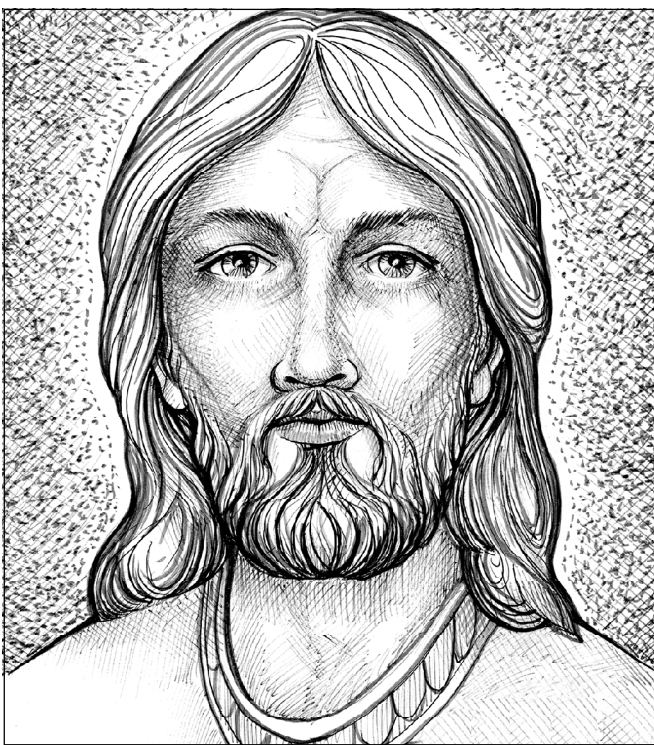


Illustration by I. OSOKIN, Russia

In this text we see the sequence of events leading to the growth of the church: people were baptized and added. That is, joining the local church in Jerusalem took place through the acceptance of the Good News, repentance and the entering into a covenant with God through water baptism. From the text in Acts 2:41 we can assume that someone kept a count of those who were saved and, therefore, was joined to the church.

PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The Church of Christ is a union of people who believe in Jesus Christ for joint service to God on the basis of the gospel teaching.

Literally, the Greek word *ecclesia* means the elect or called from somewhere and gathered together. The church is not a building, but a gathering of people who have believed, united into one organism in order to evangelize the world, spiritually give birth, nurture and lead the children of God to perfection. The Church is called to reveal Christ and His teaching to the world and by her personal example to show that there is an opportunity to live a pure and holy life among the depraved human race.

The word church has two main meanings.

• **Ecumenical Church** — all redeemed believers from different tribes and peoples of all times, baptized into one body and constituting the bride of Christ or His Body.

• **Local church** — congregations of believers in separate regions.

Local churches have ideal conditions for the development of each member and the achievement of sacrifice, harmony and mutual respect among church members. Developing these skills is essential for living together in the Kingdom of Heaven.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE CHURCH MEETINGS AND ATTEND THEM

1. Because Christ Himself promised to be present at them and to

edify His children (Acts 20:32).

Mt. 18:20 — *For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.*

2. For the service and glorification of God.

Acts 2:47 — *...praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Acts 13:2 — *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them".*

Rom. 15:5-6 — *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

3. To serve others and be edified by the ministry of other members of the church.

When we serve others, we ourselves invariably improve, grow, as we receive an additional portion of the power, wisdom and knowledge of God. Here is what Christ said about it when he compared Himself to a vine, and us to the branches: *He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful* (Jn. 15:2).

1 Pet. 4:8, 10 — *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ...Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to **serve others**, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

1 Cor. 14:12 — *So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those **that build up the church**.*

1 Cor. 14:26 — *What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? **When you come together**, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*

4. In order to fulfill in practice what Christ commanded and what he prayed to His Father, that is, for the unity and mutual love of His followers among themselves.

Jn. 13:35 — *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Jn. 17:20-22 — *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one.***

5. To offer a sacrifice of sociability that is pleasing to God.

The holding of and participating in joint meetings is not only useful and edifying for ourselves, but is also regarded by God as a sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to Him! Indeed, real communication is hard work, because all people are of different spiritual ages. And spiritual infants are characterized by selfishness, pride, pettiness and quarrelsomeness. But it is into such a body that God calls us to help others grow spiritually and become perfect ourselves.

Rom. 12:4-5 — *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

Heb. 13:16 — *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

6. In church fellowship we can learn more about others and bear each other's needs.

Gal. 6:2 — *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

(Continued on page 3)



WHAT ONE SOWS, ONE WILL REAP

Many people having come to faith, after a while are sharply disappointed and begin accusing God that He deliberately allowed suffering in their lives and that He has long predetermined everything regarding their fate. Often, such accusations simply go off scale once the so-called believers speak out angrily and discontentedly towards the Creator. Why is this aggression happening? Is God really capable of inflicting suffering and pain on people? After all, the Bible says that **God is love**.

To answer these questions, you must first ask yourself a few other questions. First, you need to search out the true reason why you came to God. Secondly, it is very important to understand how open your heart was to God so that He could control your life. And thirdly, without deceiving yourself, you must admit to yourself what you did for God so that He would take care of, protect and help you in life.

A lot of evil-speaking people, probably, did not even pay attention to what is said about them in the Scripture, *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:1-4).*

It is quite obvious that all those people who try to blame God for their troubles are simply very far from Him. They say that God does not hear their prayers and does not answer their requests. However, few of them want to understand themselves.

Today, the number of visitors to certain churches has increased significantly in comparison with the period when the church was banned by the ruling communism. Unfortunately, only the number of visitors increased, not those who with an open heart give their lives into the hands of God. Hence, it turns out that many who come to church first of all seek their own, not what is pleasing to God. And of course, how can such a person receive anything from God?

Such people have very weak faith, or rather an illusion of faith. Secondly, all the thoughts of such people are split and do not have a single basis. Thirdly, all these people belong to the category of consumers, and not those who disinterestedly sow good seed in fertile soil. As a result, it turns out that all their efforts from trying to *please* God were simply in vain. For God expects from people not an external faith, but an internal, open heart for Him.



The Bible clearly defines such a thing as faith. It says: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).* It is the confidence in the invisible that allows us to have a connection with the living and omnipresent God. The Lord Himself said: *Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed (John 20:29).* And to all this there is one more indication left to us for edification: *Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him (Heb. 10:38).*

Many people have impulses to come to God today. People are really just tired of living in such immoral and spiritless

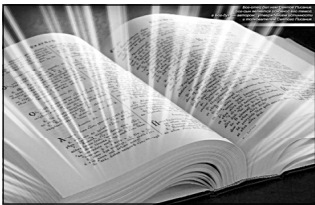
filth themselves. However, not everyone is ready to completely renounce sinful life and follow Christ according to His commandments. Jesus said: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).*

The Lord calls everyone to Him and unambiguously promises peace for every soul if a person follows Him. Why is it that only a handful of Christians manage to follow Christ earnestly? The answer in my opinion is very simple: because of lack of faith, it is very difficult for a person to completely part with the temptations of this world. The main thing that most often brings a person back to normal is selfishness and the desire for continuous consumerism. After all, many people expect everything from God at once, instead of working for Him themselves. But, as the Scripture says, *But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).* The proud are selfish people, for pride is one of the components of human egoism. So, it turns out: what a person sows in his life, so he reaps. Is it worth blaming God for your troubles if you yourself move away from Him? Did not the Lord say, *...if anyone wants to follow Me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me... (Matthew 16:24).*

About those who allegedly come to faith, and then faced with difficulties go back to the world, while in every possible way reproaching God and all of Christianity, Apostle Peter spoke well, *For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit", and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:21-22).*

In conclusion, we can say with confidence that God is never mocked, and therefore it is not worthwhile for anyone to blaspheme His holy name, presenting their claims to Him. It is very clearly stated in this regard, *What a man sows, that he will also reap... (Gal. 6:7).*

I. GORIK.



PASTOR'S WORD

WHY BE A MEMBER OF A LOCAL CHURCH?

(Continued from page 2)

MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Most of Apostle Paul's epistles are addressed to local churches. In Revelation, we also see an appeal to specific communities that were at that time in specific cities. There are no examples of Christians in the New Testament who are outside the church alone, declaring, *I am a member of the universal church.*

Joining a local church means agreeing to be accountable to other church members and ministers. For a proud and self-centered person, accountability may not seem very attractive, but what a blessing it is in times of life's trials and difficulties. Even when, under stress, it seems that you are about to break down, the knowledge that you are not alone, that someone prays and worries about you, gives you strength and helps to overcome. The involvement of friends in your sorrows alleviates suffering. It is not for nothing that it's said, *shared grief is half the grief, and shared joy is double the joy.*

By joining a church, we offer ourselves to one another for correction, criticism, and service. We place ourselves under the leadership of leaders and obey them (Heb. 13:7). We are, as it were, testifying: *I am staying here. I want to help you grow in godliness. Help me grow too.* Membership in a local church and the principle of accountability also helps a lot when a Christian's heart is overcome by coldness or sin and, as a result, spiritual blindness. Then the nearby church members and ministers can help the falling brother, support him, and if necessary, apply church discipline.

James 5:19-20 — *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let*

him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Even when you move to a city just for a few years, it is still a good idea to join a church (for example, you are a college student). Then your home church can be calm that you will be taken care of, and your current church will know that you want to be taken care of and supported in their church.

I had to see Christians who were satisfied with their righteousness and independence, who were not matched by any church in terms of their holiness (all churches were unworthy of them) until their own children grew up... Then problems and difficulties began with their children, a lot of questions arose, and the parents shed bitter tears. Say what you like, but it is much easier for children to grow and form in the circle of their peers — approved Christians! Organized Sunday schools, youth ministries, having water baptism, finding the choice of a life partner is much easier when in a church environment.

Some complain about the ritualism in the church and the lack of spiritual awakening that typically revives Christian society. Yes, it was so at all times of prosperity, of religious freedom, when unregenerate souls joined the church. After all, most revivals were preceded by a period of oppression, persecution, during which Christianity was purified and then awakened. At the time of threats to jobs, freedom and life itself, all *artificial* Christians who did not have a personal relationship with God and who served Him only by ritual, fell off. But it is also worth noting that with all the ritualism and religiosity, children are often protected from corruption and criminal experience (especially during adolescence), which is very good. And when difficult

periods come into their lives, often you see hearts awaken and rituals disappear.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH HELPS MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH IN THEIR MINISTRY

In the first letter to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:1-13), Apostle Paul teaches the church how to deal with sin in its midst. In chapter 5 verses 12-13, the words *inside* and *outside* are used to refer to the church community. The church has the privilege of judging only those *inside*, the members of the church, so that they may escape eternal judgment. How can we know who is *inside* and who is *outside* the church without official membership? There are other texts in the New Testament that indicate that the local church is a clearly defined group.

In Acts 6:3, the Jerusalem church is instructed to hold some kind of election: *...seek out from among you seven men...* The phrase *from among you* suggests a group of people separated from those who were not from among them. In other words, the deacons had to be members of the local church.

In Heb.13:17 (in the NKJV translation) it says, *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive...* This is the responsibility of every member of the church. And the church ministers were also given a command, *for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.*

The pastor is not responsible for all Christians in the world, but only for those who are under his care. In a society of free, unaccountable parishioners without church membership, how will a pastor know who his flock is and for whom he will give account to God for? Without becoming a member of a local community, a person does not give the pastors the right to

take care of them and their families. And this is very much felt in the spiritual world, when the family is not under the prayerful protection of the church.

Membership in a healthy Bible community confirms your confidence in the truth of your faith and strengthens it by confirming that your faith is not just your own personal religion, but that it is part of the *faith once passed on to the saints (Jude 1: 3).*

TESTIMONY FOR UNBELIEVERS

Another good reason to join a church is for the benefit of those who are not yet in the church or do not yet believe in Christ. We represent Christ better by being part of a committed and stable community, a local church community where we can bring others as well. *Everyone will know that you are My disciples if you love each other! (John 13:35).*

How can a believer relate to the above scripture if due to their duty of service, found themselves in places where there is no church? What should such a person do? First, they should remain a member of the church from which they came from, maintaining periodic contact with the ministerial staff, until a church is found or formed at the place of residence. The same should be done in cases where the local community is of doubtful direction and you cannot become a member of it for fear of harming your spiritual health. But it is better to have communication with spiritually imperfect people than to be left alone without socializing at all.

Heb. 10:25 — *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

THE FERMI PARADOX

If evolution really happened all over our universe, where is everybody?

In the 1950s, Nobel prize-winner and pioneer of atomic energy, Enrico Fermi, while working at Los Alamos nuclear facility in New Mexico, raised some straightforward questions: Are we the only technologically advanced civilization in the universe, and if we are not, then where are they? Why haven't we seen any traces of extraterrestrial life such as probes or transmissions? Why haven't we found their artifacts on Earth or in our solar system?

But it is not for the lack of searching. In 1960, astronomer Frank Drake commenced *Project OZMA* (named after Princess Ozma in *The Wizard of Oz*), the first organized search for intelligent extraterrestrial radio signals. He also developed a binary coded message system, with the idea that a picture could be obtained through a proper decryption of the codes. Drake constructed the first interstellar message ever transmitted via radio waves by our planet for the benefit of any extraterrestrial civilizations. This message is known as the *Arecibo Message of November 1974*. His messages have also been incorporated on the plaques on the *Pioneer 10* and *Pioneer 11* missions, and on a recording that was placed aboard the *Voyager* spacecraft — just in case alleged aliens should happen to intercept one of these craft.

about a third of the universe's assumed age. So there could well be much older planets which might therefore have even more advanced alien races.

OOOPS! SORRY, NEIGHBOUR... NOT!

Fermi (not unreasonably, based upon his evolutionary precepts) also suggested that intelligent aliens would be curious explorers just like us. In a 14-billion-year-old universe, he said, there should have been plenty of time for at least the very first advanced race to send starships to colonize planets. Even if the first colonizing expedition took a million years (assuming numerous generations of explorers), the new colony, once established, and the original civilization, could then both send out another expedition apiece to colonize other planets, doubling the number of new colonies every million years. After 10 million years, there would be 1,023 alien colonies, and after 20 million years, there would be one million. At that rate, in 40 million years, there would be one trillion civilizations. After 14 billion years, the number of alien civilizations in the universe would be tripping over each other — and this overpopulation assumes the evolution of only one race of intelligent

place. Despite looking for so many years, they might say, they've only scanned a fraction of the known universe.

AN EVOLUTIONARY PREDICTION IS WANING

This failure presents a real challenge for SETI and other scientists. If the universe is billions of years older than the earth, then intelligent life has had plenty of time to evolve elsewhere. So why aren't the airwaves filled with their communications? SETI's Shostak suggested an answer: "The usual assumption is they're some sort of soft, squishy aliens like you see in the movies — just a little more advanced than we so we can find them. But the galaxy [our Milky Way] is two or three times that age [of the earth], so there are going to be some societies out there that are millions of years, maybe more, beyond ours".

In short, Shostak believes that we may be a primitive culture trying to communicate with older, more advanced civilizations, similar to a jungle tribe that bangs on drums and is listening for return messages from yuppies who communicate with mobile phones. If this is the case, then Shostak believes it should be enough to find even the merest speck of life, past or present, on other planets.

He explains: "If another world — [such as Mars] the next world out from the sun — is proved to have supported life, that would imply that the cosmos is drenched with living things. We could conclude that planets with life are as common as phone poles (emphasis added)".

But this suggestion does not satisfy Fermi's original question. This 'lack of ETs' idea has become known as **the Fermi paradox** — in short, "Where is everybody?" Even SETI enthusiasts admit that the paradox is a difficult one to ignore, because any advanced alien race would surely have developed technology in the electromagnetic spectrum to be able to communicate effectively as humans have done, and thus, we should be picking up their communications — even if sent from distant locations millions of years ago.

THE 'POWER OF THE EVOLUTIONARY PARADIGM' BLINDS PEOPLE

There is a simple answer to why we have not found (or been visited by) intelligent, sentient life that is like, or even more advanced than, humans — there is none! There was no big bang and no billions of years, and it is no accident that the earth occupies a special position and appears unique. It is because it was uniquely designed that way by a unique Creator God. Isaiah 45:18 reminds us: *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other"*.

Gary BATES, creation.com

Lately, I have been hearing negative things about certain countries, politicians, and ministers of the church. Of course, in the current difficult situation one would certainly want to sort it out, having clarified for oneself who is right and wrong, clearly place boundaries, divide the world into friends and foes and find oneself on the right side of the barricade. But we must admit that most often such judgments are overly negative, even abusive. This is especially evident in social media where a kind of parallel reality is being created. You go out into the street after it and you are surprised — it turns out in reality people are calmer, more benevolent, responsive. People are rushing about their business, children are playing, young people are laughing. You go on Facebook — and as if a tub of dirt was poured on you. You begin to understand: if somewhere there is a notorious atmosphere of hatred, then on the Web there is.

CRITICISM OR REJECTION



It's obvious to me that there are two poles in Scripture. To the categorical, self-confident and self-righteous, the Savior and the Apostles say: *Do not judge, that you will not be judged (Matt. 7:1), ...do not judge in any way before the time... (1 Cor. 4:5)*. To those who are mistaken, uncertain, ignorant, it is said: *...the spiritual judges about everything... (1 Cor. 2:15), ...judge by righteous judgment (John 7:24)*. As usual, the greatest difficulty is to find a middle ground to maintain a balance. And here perhaps it is worth asking yourself a few questions in order to distinguish judgment from condemnation, criticism from vilification, discussion from fierce disputes.

Am I knowledgeable? It is amazing how people without specialized knowledge and competencies speak out about complex issues of geopolitics, investigations of plane crashes, military affairs, government and economics. At the same time, the media of one kind or another are used to collect information — usually those to whom they have sympathy. And then the picture of the world already created in the head begins to be projected into reality. Those who see differently are deliberately zombified by some kind of propaganda. The results of investigations and court decisions are no longer of such great importance: everything is clear anyway.

Am I fair? In other words, am I able to honestly see the weaknesses of different points of view, do I see shortcomings, among other things, in my own position? Is there room for self-criticism? Can I disagree even with those for whom I have sympathy? Indeed, in the Holy Scripture there are many warnings about the danger of partiality and the need for judgment, regardless of who you're facing (*James 2:1*).

Am I benevolent? Are my judgments dictated by love for people, and not by resentment, bitterness, or vainglory? Is my tone polite? Is the manner of speaking respectful? Is speech pure (*Col. 4:6*)? Am I constructive? Can I calmly weigh all the arguments, find common ground, propose a solution to the problem? Or is my goal to satisfy offended pride, defeat everyone in an argument, destroy relationships, build walls?

Am I specific or concrete? I noticed one bad tendency: the sins (imaginary or real) of some politicians or church ministers are transferred to the whole country or congregation. We tend to see the world stereotypically, labeling our opponents in one group or another. And now it is not the person himself with his unique opinion and character that is of interest, but generalizations are made based on the opinions of several people. At the same time, personal responsibility and personal opinion are ignored. The most popular, unfortunately, are not weighted assessments but indiscriminate generalizing and denigrating judgments.

Finally, am I able to stop? I must admit that it has always been a temptation for me to continue communicating to the bitter end, until the opponent has nothing to say. But the strength of a Christian is sometimes manifested in the fact that they will be the offended party, even suffering hardships (*1 Cor. 6:7*). I think it is not at all a victory in the dispute or the last word in the discussion that is the most valuable thing in the eyes of God, but correct, balanced, moderate and benevolent judgments that are able to reconcile enemies, build bridges and break down walls.

By Anton LEBEDEV, www.kbogu.ru



In 1995, as a result of private funding, *Project Phoenix* was launched and SETI (*Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence*) had its genesis. Since *Project Ozma*, and via 60 different projects, the SETI organization has been scanning the universe at a rate of millions of radio frequencies every second for over 50 years. And how many ETs have they caught 'phoning home' in that time? **Zero!**

The ultimate reason why so much time and money is expended on such searches is belief in evolution. If life evolved by chance here on Earth, then it must have evolved countless times given the alleged vast age of the universe. Furthermore, it is believed that at 4.6 billion years, our solar system is relatively young,

aliens. The problem would be compounded further if intelligent life had independently evolved in more than one planetary system.

This is a nagging problem for those who believe in the big bang and the evolution of life on Earth. Modern space agencies admit that they have so far failed to find even the slightest signs of intelligent extraterrestrial life. As *National Geographic* magazine pointed out, in an interview with SETI's senior astronomer, Seth Shostak, "He and his colleagues have never found proof [that] anyone... or anything... 'up there' is trying to make contact".

Of course agencies like SETI might argue that this is setting up a bit of a straw man. After all, the universe is a massive

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

My father was born in the Kalinovsky district of the Vinnytsia region. He was drafted to serve in the Northern Navy in 1944 after the liberation of Ukraine from Nazi invaders. In the city of Polyarny, where he served, he met his future wife who came from Mordovia. My mother gave birth to me in Ukraine, in the same Kalinovsky district, in the homeland of her husband, and then returned with me to the North.

When I was five or six years old my mother brought me to visit our relatives in Mordovia. There was an old wooden Orthodox church in that village. When we were passing it by my mother proposed: "Let's go in and see how people pray to God..."

This is how I first heard from my mother about God. I willingly agreed, and what I saw in the church forever engraved in my memory. I saw a blind old man who prayed in front of some icon, kissed it and cried, and tears rolled from his unseeing eyes, like drops of wax from a candle flame. I was also struck by the church monastic singing, which was filled with sadness, faith, humility, worship, hope... This was my first witness of God.

I was ten years old; it was spring the snow was melting and I was throwing pieces of ice with a stick into a river stream on the side of the street. I stopped when a funeral procession appeared in the street: a dead woman was lying in a coffin. I saw the sad faces of people and crying relatives of the deceased. And suddenly for the first time I heard a voice from Heaven: "And you will not die forever!"

I looked around in surprise — I did not see anyone anywhere and thought: "It is not clear who said that?"

"After you will understand!" answered the same voice.

When I got married for the first time frivolously and without the blessing of my parents, in the wedding hall I again heard the same voice that I had heard in childhood, which wanted to reason with me, to stop me from making a big and foolishly mistake: "What are you doing?!"

I looked around — I did not see anyone, I was frightened and confused, and with my trembling hands for a long time I could not put a gold wedding ring on the bride's finger...

In Murmansk, when I was already falling down the slippery slope of the path of lawlessness, not understanding what the meaning of life is and for what purpose one needs to live, I had another interesting occasion. I and four of my same hooligan desperate friends drank another bottle of vodka right at the entrance of the house and a young man, neatly trimmed with a young beard, walked by us carrying a case with a violin in his hands. Either he looked at us condemningly or with regret or simply with his spiritual purity, my friends did not like it and they decided to beat him for this purity and benevolence, which seemed to us to be perceived as condemnation. Out of anger they wanted to put a black eye in him, smash his nose to bloody, tear his suit and smash the violin, thereby humiliating and insulting the one who seemed to us a reproach for drunkenness, smoking, swearing...

For some reason, I protected that young man, blocking myself from the attackers.

"Do not touch him!"

And I saw in the pure and clear eyes of the young man sincere gratitude and appreciation.

"I am a believer, come to our church, come listen to the blessed singing with musical accompaniment..."

This interested me. I wanted to talk to the meek young man, but the grinning friends pulled me in a completely different direction... In

the direction where later the court and prison awaited me.

But before that, my mother came to believe — after the death of my older brother who crashed on a motorcycle. I came to the funeral from Murmansk, where I lived on my own. Mother begged me to settle down, admonished, prayed for me. She came to see me in Murmansk more than once, but she always found me drunk to smithereens, then drunk and terribly beaten with big bruises under my eyes. I still could not find the meaning of life for myself, and it remained aimless for me. I kept on rolling into the abyss...

SOLD SALVATION FOR VODKA

Sometimes my conscience woke up in a moment of sobriety.

"What are you doing? Stop! Have pity on yourself and your parents!"

"And what should I do?" I asked my conscience with bitter hopelessness. "Can't you answer? So shut up!"

To the admonitions of my mother, who continued to tell me with tears about merciful God saving the sinners, I remained deaf, considering all this to be fiction as I was taught in the Soviet school.

Mother left me the Gospel.

"Read, son, you will find the way to God, and He will save you and you will find peace in your soul and purpose in life!"

I sold the book of the Holy Scripture given by my mother for a bottle of vodka. Then I took it back. Then I went and advertised in order to sell it again: "This is a holy book, it is very expensive, it says how you ought to live!"

So, in a drunken stupor, I sold my salvation a second time...

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

When my father came to visit me in the Murmansk prison, I was very ashamed in front of him — my shame was many times greater than my moved joy...

After prison, my mother brought me from Murmansk to Vinnytsia, where my father after leaving the armed forces found another job. My meeting with him reminded me of the biblical parable about the return of the prodigal son. I was unbearably ashamed of the aimlessly lost years, my foolish behavior and criminally frivolous attitude towards life, parents and people. I asked my parents to forgive me and help arrange my future life in freedom.

I WAS AFRAID OF THE BIBLE AT FIRST

Mother opened the Bible, and I was afraid to touch this book the God's Word addressed to people. Perhaps, my many sins held me back. My mother noticed my fear and began to calm and cheer me up: "You see, this is the Book of Proverbs of Solomon. You have always loved aphorisms, catchphrases, parables, looking for a hero to follow... Everything that you were looking for, but have not yet found, is written in the Bible".

And she read: "The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding; to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young man: that the wise man may hear, and increase in learning; that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsel. ... My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching... My son, if sinners entice you, don't consent. ... My son, don't walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path. ... Wisdom calls

aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the public squares".

The word "wisdom" dawned on me, and I decided: "I must read and seek God's wisdom for myself!" I dared to take the Bible in my hands and began to read and delve into what was written every day. I had the feeling that door after door opens in front of me, and in my soul someone breaks away locks, latches, curtains, hatches, covers, and heavenly light pours into it, and the conviction grows in my head that it is necessary to believe God, to be saved.

ONLY GOD CAN HELP

I dreamed of a huge blue sea, and it was as if I scooped up a full bucket of water to drink. And someone explains to me: "I understand your thirst, but you can get a drink, fill your stomach and the thirst will remain. You also need to drink correctly, every drop, every word must be consumed and

contained correctly and not in a hurry".

I really wanted to get to know God faster, more and more, I ran day and night through the services, meetings, prayer groups, "knocking on the thresholds where wisdom lives".

Mother told me: "Calm down, do not be sad, do not fuss and know that no one will help you except God. Come with me to a meeting of believers!" When at the end of the meeting they called for repentance, my mother told me: "Go and repent!"

Through the lips of my mother, such strength and determination came over me that I stood up and boldly stepped forward.

When I turned to face the congregation, I bit my lip hard so as not to burst into tears.

The minister asked: "Do you want to repent?"

"Yes", I answer.

"Do you want to serve God?"

"Yes!"

FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

And for the first time I was filled with the Holy Spirit. This happened on the day of Christmas. Mom cried with happiness, congratulated me and said: "Now we will pray together that God would baptize you with the Holy Spirit!" And she talked about the need for spiritual baptism. I received it on March 14, 1993.

During confession, I saw a vision: mountains around us, converts, and an angelic host in white robes. And they dress me in the armor of righteousness, put on my shoes in readiness to preach the gospel to the world, gird my loins with truth, put the helmet of salvation on my head and give me the shield of faith and the spiritual sword. And suddenly an angel in white takes a black bear by the elbows and throws him into the abyss, and then turns to me, and the angel's eyes are so piercing that he sees everything through and nothing is hidden from him. And this angel speaks to me: "Place your hand on your sister, whom the enemy does not allow to confess and tell her: 'Now the Holy Spirit sets you free!'".

I obediently took the sister indicated to me by the angel by the hand with my left hand, and put my right hand on her head and repeated what the angel had commanded me: "Now the Holy Spirit sets you free!"

The sister fell to the floor as if unconscious. Everyone was scared, thinking that she was dead. Some of them rushed to leave out of fear.

I asked to bring water, my sister drank it all, opened her eyes and said: "Oh, I am good now!"

Hearing that she was alive, those who departed out of fear, returned. And my sister, smiling meekly, said: "For eight months I heard a voice commanding me to go to Vinnytsia and promising: 'There I will free you!'".

After this miraculous case of the manifestation of the power of God, in which, I, by the will of God was a small part of. I prayed even more fervently, reflecting on what had happened for several days, retiring in a quiet corner of the park. And I asked: "Christ, is this how a miracle takes place?" And I heard in response: "Yes, here I also walked the earth, heard the voice and saw the Father and I did His will. I will show you five signs so that you can be sure that you will be called to an important ministry among God's people".

I SAW THE ANGELS FOR THE FIRST TIME

When after making a covenant with God during water baptism on August 15, 1993 I came out of the water, I saw myself in a host of angels in snow-white robes. My body remained on the shore of the reservoir, and it was shown to me in a vision that my spirit dwells in Heaven among the angels who rejoice even over one repentant sinner. And so, they circled around me as if in a round dance and were happy for me.

At this moment, my sister in Jesus Christ, Galina gives me a beautiful bouquet here on earth: "I congratulate you, brother Aleksandr! Can't you hear? We all congratulate you on making a covenant with God!" And I really didn't hear at first, thinking: "It turns out that this is why Christians are blessed: the spiritual world opens up to them!"

A CUP ABLAZED WITH HEAVENLY FIRE

And here we, new converts, take holy communion for the first time. I saw that the cup was blazing with a blue flame, and I wondered why this heavenly fire does not burn those who receive the blood of Jesus Christ. My heart was beating as if it was about to fly out of my chest. As I swallowed from the burning cup, blue flames scorched me from the inside. I understood forever that the precious content of the cup is a real, true sacred thing.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

For two months I admired the heavenly beauties, enjoyed visions, wise conversations of celestials, revelations and told brothers and sisters in faith: "I see this, I see that..." One sister asked incredulously: "Do you really see that?"

"Don't you see?" I was surprised, considering that others see what I see.

"Not everyone sees what you see. This is a gift from the Holy Spirit to you".

And she read to me from the twelfth chapter of the first epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: "Now there are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are various kinds of service, and the same Lord. There are various kinds of workings, but the same God, who works all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the profit of all. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, by the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings,

by the same Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; to another different kinds of languages; and to another the interpretation of languages. But the one and the same Spirit works all of these, distributing to each one separately as he desires".

And then, during one common prayer, I saw how a man in white clothes walked at the table on which the open Bible was lying and threw five gold coins on this table. I heard the sound with which they hit the table, and then with what sound they fell to the floor and rolled in different directions. One gold coin rolled up to me, I picked it up and swallowed it, thinking: "Why are these other brothers and sisters not picking up coins?"

Sister Nina, to whom I told about this vision, explained it to me as follows: "You received the gift from the Holy Spirit, but the gift also

I FIRST WITNESSED ANGELS



requires a wonderful knowledge of the Word of God, humility and obedience, experience and practice. Always consult with pastors, ministers, heed their advice and instructions, never rush hastily...

WISE COUNSEL FROM BROTHERS-MINISTERS

I always thank God for the wise instructions of our church pastor Pyotr Krivonos and pastor Narcis Tarasov at the beginning of my ministry: "The gifts of the Holy Spirit must be used carefully, attentively. The spiritual world must be comprehended gradually, so as not to think highly about yourself, so that your head does not turn around and about..."

During my studies at Rybnitsa Bible College, I learned a lot from the instructions of the blessed bishops Viktor Belykh and Nikolay Kotyakov.

"We must highly value and cherish the received talents like the apple of an eye", Viktor Ivanovich Belykh taught me. "You need to work in the church only under the guidance of ministers. To thank God for gifts, to be sanctified, to take care of oneself. Now that God has destroyed the Iron Curtain, the Soviet Union has collapsed, you can openly preach the Good News and many want to show that they have the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They dare, fall into temptation which brings great harm. I have seen how one woman, considering herself gifted, ordered a crippled beggar: 'Get up and walk!' But he, as before, could not get up by himself".

What a shame! So that there are no failures, misjudgments, ridicule and blasphemy against God and His gifts, you need to gain experience in discerning spirits. And I will show you...

DO AS THE PASTORS SAY

Presbyter Narcis Tarasov warned me once again: "It happens that those who have received the gifts



TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

of the Holy Spirit are subjected to devilish attacks and in their ignorance about the cunning of evil spirits, show self-confidence and stubbornness, which is no good for anyone: neither the church, nor the called or gifted ones. Be vigilant, consult with us and listen. We will not give any bad advice...”

“I wish it was always like this!”
“So listen, obey in humility, and do not resist our instruction and advice”.

Once I even dreamed that brother Narcis was talking to me and he spoke: “So do you understand that you need to minister with the gifts of the Holy Spirit together with the ministers, for the good of God’s people?”

“I do not understand...” for some reason I objected.

But at that moment, a commanding voice from heaven asked: “Have you heard the wise counsel?”

DURING MY WATER BAPTISM

And I replied in humility: “Of course, I heard!”

After some time, the dream was repeated and in that dream brother Narcis asks me again: “So do you understand that for the success of the ministry, you must coordinate the most important points with the ministers, who are appointed by God and are responsible for the whole church?”

In the dream, for some reason, I again obstinately answered: “I do not understand! Would you rule over the Holy Spirit?”

But an imperative voice from heaven immediately put me in my proper place, in my sleep: “Have you heard the wise counsel?”

“Yes”.

“So do as the pastors instruct”.

Since then, I have had a complete understanding. Gaining experience, I never forget to consult with them. Once, a guest arrived with gifts and I immediately asked him: “What is your relationship with your pastors?”

“Well, you know... it can be different sometimes...”

“Then you are lost. Therefore, I advise you to quickly establish proper cooperation with them. Goodbye”.

The overconfident ones, who consider themselves smarter than the pastors are always the first to suffer from foolish civil strife. I say this: “Fear God and behave humble. Work in obedience”.

THERE IS NO GREATER HAPPINESS AND WONDERFUL JOY THAN TO BE PLEASANT TO GOD AND FULFILL HIS WILL

Sometimes, I regret that I do not perform many of God’s miracles, signs, revelations, healings from very serious illnesses, deliverances from possessions by evil spirits and demons, because there were a lot of those cases which God has done in my presence or with my very minimal participation in prayer.

I never say or do anything on my own. Everything is done only by God, and all the glory belongs to Him alone. I just diligently follow orders. God has revealed to me that my ministry is like how Jesus Christ explained during His earthly ministry: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19, ESV), “And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29, ESV).

Sometimes, I am tired and not ready, but when God asks: “Why are you sitting?” I go immediately and

carry out His command, overcoming any fatigue. Sometimes, prayers for needs pour out of my mouth with ease, but it happens also that it becomes simply impossible to pray for something. I am in constant repentant cleansing and sanctification, so as not to be guilty of anything and to be pleasing to God for specific use. There is no happier joy than to be pleasing to God for work in the edification and building up of Christ’s Church. I beg the Almighty so that He keeps blessing me until the end with this ministry. There is no more beautiful joy in the universe than having a relationship with God! He comforts us, strengthens our faith, and dispels all doubts and fears.

I HAVE SEEN THE VILE, MALIGNANT SPIRIT OF A HORRIBLE DISEASE

It’s nice when they tell me about healings, to which I can relate. Such

punishment for sin, for the purpose of disciplining and bringing forth the good fruit of repentance, and also to those who do not protect themselves from illnesses by the prayer of faith and trust in God.

GOD’S WILL AND OUR FAITH

We Christians believe in the triune God who gave us the Word of God and the bread of life which is the teaching of Christ. We comprehend God’s truth and try to fulfill His will and God strengthens our faith and hope in Him by answering our prayers, sending signs, performing miracles for us, forgiving our sins, healing, protecting, and blessing us, helping and contributing to our spiritual improvement. Thanks to the good will of God, we don’t just believe, but we firmly know that our God is alive, acting, that He never leaves us, that He is almighty, that for Him, nothing is impossible and that

he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God” (Acts 3:1–8, ESV).

But God, by His great mercy, gave me the ministry to recognize, convey and accompany God’s expression of will. God opened, spoke, and I readily conveyed and fulfilled His will. I only act by the will of God. He knows what faith we really have, how faithful we are to Him, and how well we fulfill His commandments.

HOW DOES GOD WANT TO SEE US?

Turning to God in prayer, I prepare my heart and thoughts, all of myself for communion with God, to receive His revelations and immediately fulfill His will. The revelations that God gives in answer to prayer come from the throne of grace as rays of fire. And the evil one wants to grasp it, but cannot understand it, because it is a great mystery to him and is encoded and inaccessible to his understanding.

We, Christians, constantly receive tremendous help from God, we just do not see and understand all of it. Many

are confused in the bustle of the world and do not feel God’s love and grace at work. It is a pity that often vanity, selfishness, greed, pride, resentment, and whims obscure the image of Christ for many. Sacrifice is the highest form of justice and a tremendous achievement. Many do not work on themselves, do not

Develop spiritually, do not grow, do not improve themselves with God’s help, but their own conceit, as they say, is through the roof and there is no modesty or humility.

We are all far from the spiritual level of the Apostle Paul, called by Jesus Christ Himself and who fulfilled the whole will of God, and wisely used the precious gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul said about himself: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24, ESV).

Nobody, besides God. We are all clay in God’s hands. And with what awe and trembling do we need to feel God’s hands and listen to their every movement, hasten to where God directs, and strive to become what God wants us to be! And He wants to see us as kind, honest, faithful, and hardworking helpers, capable of loving God and our neighbors.

THE SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE INTENSIFIES

We do not know the entire spiritual world, its forces and their interactions, how it influences us. Only a little is open to us. The Word of God has tremendous power and influence. But human words also have consequences. No wonder it is said that by your words, you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. What has been said does not disappear without a trace. What is spoken becomes a blessing or a wounding arrow. The spewed-out word has power: it floated around somewhere, settled on someone or on something, for some reason and will lead to certain consequences.

The spirit went out... What spirit? Where did it go? For cultivation or for damnation, villainy or destruction? It is said: do not judge! I would like to repeat: do not judge in any way! We also influence the spiritual world, but we do not know to what extent and we do not always know how the spiritual world influences us. Everything is mixed in our nature — soul and spirit. We, with our thoughts, sow good and evil, receiving corresponding fruits.

The deeper you delve into the Word of God, the clearer you see how wonderful and good the

Kingdom of God is and how it is different from the kingdom of evil. And if we live holy lives, we will still be tested like Job. The devil knows the cowardly nature of man...

In the spirit world, the war for the salvation of man continues. Once upon a time, the archangel Michael, with God’s army, defeated the devil and his accomplices. Spiritual warfare is not fought in the trenches, nor do white angels and black demons throw grenades at one another. The struggle is for the correct understanding of the Word of God, for our souls and hearts. The devil’s army sets up snares, traps, temptations to draw into sin and prevent salvation. In people, there is a struggle of choice: either to go towards God or stay in Satan’s captivity. I see a white angel who always accompanies me, like the movement of thoughts. This has been opened to me. I reason, walk, communicate with brothers and sisters, eat, sleep, and the angel always accompanies me. He focuses my thoughts on what needs to be said to God. God, Himself, focuses me on His revelations. This is often accompanied by visions.

I see the evil one as clearly as the angels. The evil one has such tempting entrances and exits, insidious and provocative questions — you have to fight, keep silent, pray and complain to God and beg: “Deliver me from this foul harassment!”

It happens that when we pray in the Holy Spirit, the wicked one taunts. And when demons and devils try to mock me and attack, I use a protective weapon: “May the Lord forbid you!” I command them: “Silence, everyone”. And the herd of black figures wishing me harm, retreats, turns around and runs away.

Often, the dark, satanic forces try to interfere with false voices in order to confuse, deceive, so that I stumble, fall for their lies in the name of God, which is what I fear most. And you have to ask strictly: “Spirit speaking to me, do you confess Jesus Christ, who came in the flesh, as Lord?” Usually, the deceiver answers: “What else! As if I need that!...” And then I order: “In the name of Jesus, get out of here!” Here, I act right away with faith and confidence.

Perhaps God allows such attacks so that I never drop my guard and always remember that without God’s help and protection, I cannot cope with the dark forces which come with great anger when God does a lot of good deeds through me, and supports many souls.

DO NOT BURY YOUR TALENTS

If a Christian fulfills all of God’s requirements, then God, at His discretion, rewards them with a gift to minister to the brothers and sisters in the church. But many bury their talents, don’t put them into action and don’t use them — either because of shyness or they just simply don’t consider and don’t understand what treasure they possess for the enrichment of the church and to serve with the received talent both the church and God.

But wisdom is also needed to accompany the gift. One should always consult with the pastors. Wisdom is not a gift, it can be asked of God and received. Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him...” (Ephesians 1:15–17, ESV).

Aleksandr MIKHALCHENKO, Vinnytsia, Ukraine.

Will God answer the player of an atheist?

First, we need to explain, of what god we are talking about.

God is very different from any other gods. There are countless many different religions in the world. And all of these religions have their own god. However, the Bible says, that these are not gods at all: **Jeremiah 2:10–11 (NKJV)** — *For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, send to Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit; Galatians 4:8* — *But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.*

It is useless to pray to such gods. They won't answer. This is well said in the Psalms: *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands, they have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them (Psalm 115:4–8).*

Based on the above, we give notice beforehand, that in answering the question asked to us, we will talk about the biblical God, about the only true God — the Creator of the entire Universe.

Secondly, keep in mind the term atheist.

The word *atheist* has two parts: *a* (without) and *theos* (god), meaning *without god*. An atheist is a person who denies the existence of God.

After we have remembered who an atheist is, it would be good to think about the question: Do atheists pray?

Prayer is a conversation with God. Based on the above definition of the word atheist, we can boldly say that an atheist cannot pray. If an atheist still prays to God, then he is no longer an atheist and, therefore, the question is asked incorrectly.

So, we come to the conclusion that real atheists don't pray to God. Now let's read the confirmation of this in the Bible. It says that *...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).*

Thirdly, will God answer the atheists' prayer?

The Bible says that God does not listen to the prayer of sinners: **John 9:31** — *Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.* Based on this verse, we can conclude that God does not listen to atheists.

However, this is not all. The Bible also has a wonderful verse that gives hope to anyone who reads it. The Lord said: *he who comes to me I will not cast out (John 6:37).* Who is this verse talking about? Whom does Jesus call coming to Him, whom He will not cast out?

Anyone who comes to God is a person who, with faith and repentance, turns to the Lord in prayer.

So, God hears the prayer of an atheist if he cries out to Him for mercy and forgiveness. The Lord will not drive such a person out. God will definitely answer such a prayer.

And you, dear friend, who considers yourself an atheist! Have you tried to turn to the Lord God in such a prayer? If not, what are you waiting for? You have a wonderful chance to test whether God really answers the prayer of an atheist. There is no need to delay this matter. Take the opportunity and turn to the Lord today!

Prayer is a conversation with God, not magic spells. Today you can devote yourself and your life to the Lord. But for this you need to tell God about it. These should be simple words spoken from the bottom of your heart. If you have never prayed in your life and do not know how to do it, then below is an example of a prayer with which you can turn to God right now: *Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I need Your forgiveness. I was created to serve You, but to this day I have served myself and my desires. Today I made a decision to become closer to You. I believe that You died for me, bearing the punishment for all my sins. I also believe that You have risen to give me salvation and life. I don't want to live in sin anymore. And so I invite You into my heart and into my life. I acknowledge You as my Lord and Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.*

The meaning of the phrase born before all creation

First off, if we read the verse from **Colossians 1:15** along with verses following it, then it becomes clear what the term is about: **Colossians 1:15–17 (NJKV)** — *He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*

Note that this passage does not tell you that Jesus is a

creature, but that He is a Creator. And who else, besides the great and almighty God, can be the Creator?

The expressions of the Apostle Paul *the image of the invisible God* and *the Firstborn of all creation*, are proofs of the divinity of Jesus Christ. If this were not so, the Jews would have stoned the Apostle Paul for preaching two gods. The expression *everything He created* is a reference to the first chapter of Genesis, which tells about the days of God's creation of the entire Universe.

Secondly, the word translated as *firstborn* in verse 15 and *firstborn* in verse 18 is translated in the Greek as **prototokos**. The word **prototokos** is a compound term consisting of two words: **protos** (*first, initial*, meaning first in seniority and position) and **tikto** (*birth, appearing*). The word **prototokos** means *the beginning and source of everything, or that from which everything came*. It would be better to translate it as *original*. And this is one of the names of God: **1 John 2:13–14** — *I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

QUESTION AND ANSWER



And this is consistent with what is written elsewhere in Scripture: **Revelation 22:13** — *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last; Isaiah 41:4* — *Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? "I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He"; Isaiah 44:6* — *Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God"; Isaiah 48:12* — *Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.*

If **Colossians 1:15** had said that Jesus is a created being, then instead of the Greek **prototokos**, the Bible would have used **protoktisis**, which translates as *the first of created*. And the word **prototokos** indicates precisely the primacy and supremacy of Jesus over all of His creation, which only the Creator can have over His creation.

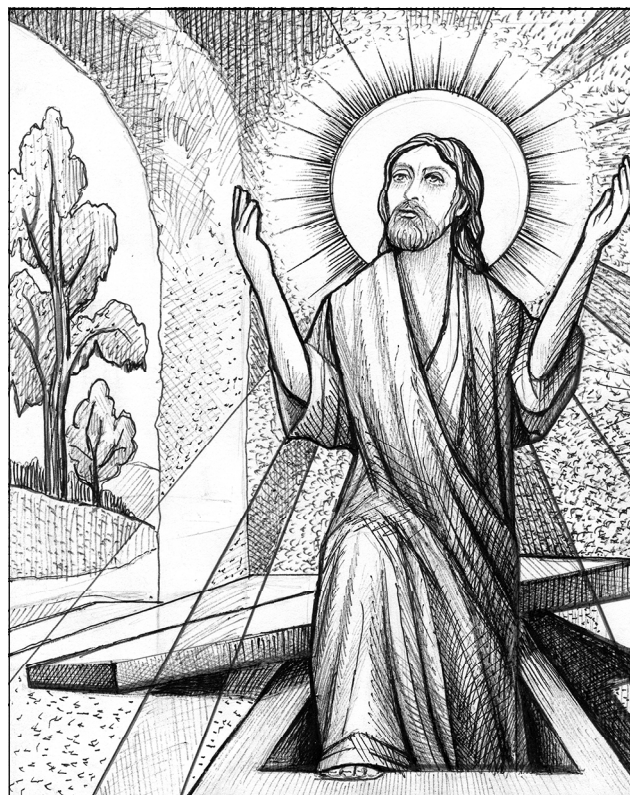


Illustration by I. OSOKIN, Russia

And, **thirdly**, it is worth looking at the verse where Jesus is called the only begotten Son of God and see what the words *only begotten* means. After all, then it will become one hundred percent clear whether Jesus is God or not. **John 1:14** — *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.* The Greek word **monogenes** is used here, a compound word that includes the words **monos** (*one, single*) and **ginomai** (*origin*). The literal meaning of the word **monogenes** is of one (*single*) origin. Thus, the expression *Only Begotten of the Father* means of the same the origin.

And finally, let us turn to the verse **1 Timothy 3:16**: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.* The fact that God Himself appeared in the flesh is a great mystery of godliness. This is a mystery that is revealed to people by the Holy Spirit: **1 Corinthians 12:3** — *...no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.* Based on this truth, we can distinguish brothers from false brothers, prophets from false prophets, and the Spirit of God from the spirit of antichrist: **1 John 4:23** — *By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

Satan has always tried to belittle and humiliate God. For the last two thousand years, Satan has been belittling the person of Jesus Christ, telling people that Christ is not God. But Jesus Himself wanted people to understand who He was. It is no coincidence that He asked His disciples this question: *But who do you say that I am?* (**Matthew 16:15**).

Why does the Bible say nothing of the seventeen years of the wanderings of Jesus?

We are talking about the segment of the life of Jesus Christ from twelve years, when He was in the Temple in Jerusalem with his parents, and up to thirty years, when He received the baptism from John and began to minister. It is strange why so many claim with such confidence that the Bible does not say anything about this segment of the life of Jesus Christ. The Evangelist Luke wrote very clearly and definitely about him: *Then He went down with them [that is His parents — authors note] and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:51–52, NKJV).*

Luke, whose works are distinguished by particular historical precision and accuracy, could not miss this period of the life of Jesus Christ and pointed out that Jesus did not wander anywhere and did not hang out, as many believe, but lived quietly and peacefully in Nazareth with His earthly parents Joseph and Mary. as well as with his brothers and sisters, developing mentally, physically, spiritually and socially, like all his contemporaries.

Satan, whose goal as you know, is to steal, kill and destroy (**John 10:10**), from time to time throws people ideas that during these years Jesus traveled to India and Tibet, where he allegedly studied yoga and Eastern wisdom. The purpose of this satanic lie is obvious — to show the superiority of Eastern wisdom over Christianity and thus lead unconfirmed souls to destruction.

Jesus lived with his family and, as the eldest son, took care of the family by fulfilling his father's responsibilities. He was well known in His country, in particular in His city and in the city synagogue. *Is this not the carpenter's Son?* the countrymen were amazed, hearing his wise teaching (**Matthew 13:54–57** — *When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house").* If Jesus had wandered around other countries for seventeen years, then hardly anyone would have recognized Him in Nazareth, the city in which He grew up and matured.

Israel has always been and remains a home country for Jesus Christ, which He had in mind when he said that there is no prophet in his own country (**Matthew 13:57**). Jesus grew up in Israel, was brought up and instructed in the Law of God, so that already at the age of twelve he amazed the elders with his wisdom and depth of thought, for *...all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers (Luke 2:47).*

The Bible does not give details about these years of Jesus' life, because it does not play any role in our salvation. The Apostle John said that all the miracles Jesus performed during His earthly ministry cannot be written down on paper: *And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25).* In other words, the Bible describes only a small part of the miracles of Jesus Christ. Why then is it surprising that it does not describe the everyday life of the child and teenager Jesus? After all, His life before the first miracle performed in Cana of Galilee was an ordinary family life, not a ministry.

In addition, answering this question, it is necessary to make it clear that in Jewish culture a man did not leave his home until he got married. And as we know, Jesus was not married, which is why he lived all those years with his family.

And why did Jesus Christ need to go to Tibet to study and teach yoga? Can pagan yoga teachings compare with the depth, wisdom, and holiness of sound Biblical teaching? Even if we were to assume that Jesus was a yoga teacher with seventeen years of practice, then why during His ministry in Israel did He teach differently? Where is the logic?

And finally, about himself, Jesus said that His mission was primarily to proclaim the truth, not to the Gentiles, but to the Jews: *...was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24).* With such a mission, could Jesus really have gone to Tibet and spend seventeen years of His life with the Tibetan pagans, leaving only three years for the fulfillment of His direct destiny and ministry? Of course not! If Jesus told the Samaritan woman (the Samaritans were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles) that he was sent to serve the Israelite people, then would He not have said the same thing to the Tibetan monks? He would definitely, if he had such an opportunity. But from the Holy Scriptures we learn that there was nothing like this, and it could not have been.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

From criminals to ministers. Richard Cifuentes on how God changed his heart in prison

Three prison terms, police chases, loss of loved ones and total powerlessness, rage and anger. Richard Cifuentes' story is reminiscent of a Hollywood thriller, but God really answered his prayers and renewed his heart.

Richard Cifuentes was on the run. Often God finds us in such a state where we try to escape, but due to our inherited sinful nature we simply cannot escape from our sins. The police were pursuing him on an attempted murder charge. To go to jail for the third time, he hid. Hiding and trying to find a way out he called his mother.

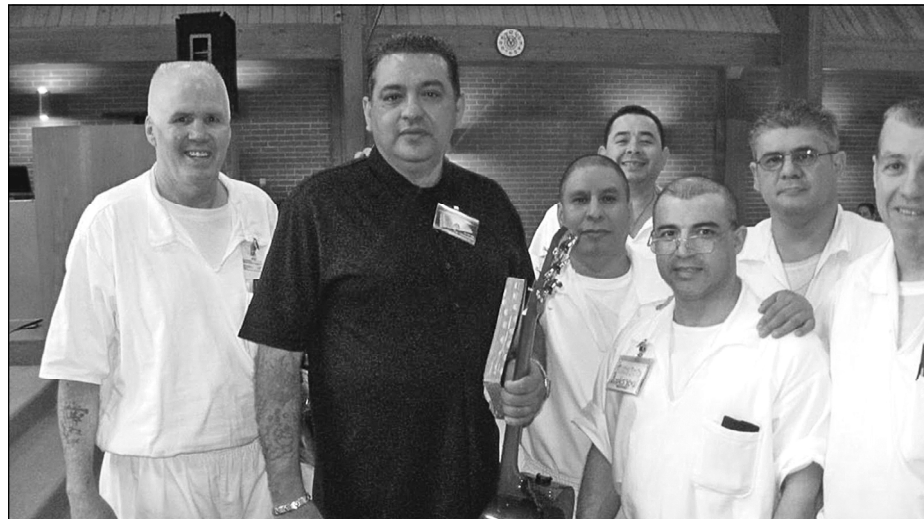
"The only one who can help you is God", she told him.

He did not pray a day in his life. But that day, Richard knelt down and said: "God, if you exist, help me change. Help me get out of this".

Thirty minutes later, the police broke down his door, handcuffed him and took him to the police station. Calling his mom from prison, Richard asked her: "What God do you serve? I'm behind bars. Your God didn't save me".

His mother assured him that the biggest thing God wants to save him from is a lifestyle that destroys everyone. It was hard, but Richard took his mother's words to heart. There were eleven years in prison ahead of him, but the words of his mother seemed to pierce his heart, he simply could not get rid of them: "God wants to save you from this way of life..." For the first time he took the Bible in his hands and began to read. He read about the love and the kindness of God that seemed to fill every word in Scripture.

To satisfy his ever-increasing hunger for God, as well as to distract himself from the



criminal environment, Richard signed up for the mentoring program of the Crossroads Prison Ministries.

And suddenly, as he began to read letters from his mentors and act as they say, he noticed that his mind and heart began to change.

"I started reading twenty to

thirty chapters from the Bible a day, and it changed my life!" exclaimed Richard.

One day, near the end of his term, Richard found out that his wife had passed away and he could not even attend the funeral.

The news came as a heavy blow. He was ready to give up

on life, faith, and God. Give up everything and disappear. Richard threw his Bible into the trash. He wanted to forget everything he read there. He tried and failed to forget God. He took the Scripture out of the trash, opened it and came across a verse: "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name'. But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not" (Jer. 20:9).

"I realized that the Word of God was a burning fire in my heart that cannot and will not be extinguished", says Richard.

From that moment on, he passionately studied and preached the Word of God. He is currently an ordained evangelist and leads the Deep in the WORD Ministries in Texas.

"It changed my life. I've been a criminal all my life, and then suddenly God changed me from a gangster to a minister. Now I am returning what I received".

<https://www.inlight.news>

A Long way to real freedom

Now I regret the wasted time that most of my life was spent on without God. Big money attracted me. In the nineties I could get about five thousand in one day (this is how much workers at a factory earned in a month) and spend everything in a restaurant. But I didn't take anything from people, I just stole from the government. I wanted to make a lot of money, drive a fancy car and be respected. Now I understand that everything I wanted and did was useless.

Today I am a retiree, I am sixty-two years old. I was born in the Bryansk region, and I have been living in Novokuznetsk since 1972. We had a large family of eight. We all went to church and had various prayers. In the Soviet era we were persecuted for this and everyone, regardless of religious beliefs, were labeled Baptists. Our church services have always been under the control of the KGB: they recorded everything and then called a meeting if someone said something wrong. I was the leader of the youth group and the orchestra. At sixteen I repented, and at seventeen I was baptized and soon after began to preach the Word from the pulpit.

Then I was enlisted into the army and was sent to the border troops on the Kuril Islands. I served there for eight months until the authorities found out that I was from a religious family. I was then transferred to a construction battalion in Ussuriisk. How did they know that I believed in God? My mom put a little New Testament in a parcel that she sent me, and they accidentally found it with me. After that, the political commander, after lights out and until three in the morning lectured me about how man originated from a monkey. In the end he asked: "Do you understand?" "Yes", I answer, "I understand: God created man".

My transfer to the construction battalion was for the better: there was a Baptist church in Ussuriisk. My friend and I were guarding a building, and he didn't mind when I departed at times.

And then I married an unbeliever. My father said: "You should marry a believer". But I believed that I myself could decide who to marry, and I was sure that through me my wife would come to God in time. In the end, she made me an unbeliever...

After getting married, I worked on the railroad and got involved with gangs. During gang conflicts, I

was seriously wounded several times with a knife, once the blade was one and a half millimeters from reaching the aorta, and I was once thrown out from the second floor...

It's amazing that while living such a lifestyle, I always thought about God. My parents, of course, did not know all the details of my life but they guessed my whereabouts and said: "Repent!" And after three years of such a life, my wife left me.

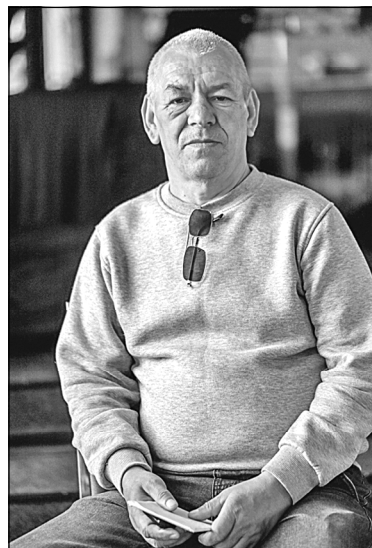
Thoughts of stopping this lifestyle came, but... My life was like a trap that I fell into and without outside help it was impossible to free myself. And there was no one that helped. Once I had a moment. I was walking, drunk. And suddenly great disappointment overtook me... I passed the house where the priest lived and decided to go to him. I knocked: "I want to confess". And I was crying. And he said: "Go away, otherwise I'll call the police!" The anger within me at the priest that he did not accept me, stayed with me for a very long time.

In 2008, I was put to prison in the Rostov region; for the first and last time. It so happened that they put me alone in a new cell, just after the renovation. And I thought: "What's next?" The lawyer assumed that they would give me fifteen years. I did not kill anyone, but six people were victims in this case. There was no priest in prison, so I began to pray and talk with God as best I knew how. Thus, the night passed. I cried, I prayed... And I don't remember how I fell asleep. And in the morning, I got up and felt such freedom, as if I were not in prison. I can't even say it in words! I felt that God gave me freedom and set me free from sin. It didn't matter to me how long my sentence would be and what would happen next.

The next day, literally, miracles began. I was transferred to another cell and there on the wall was an icon of the Mother of God and stacks of Bibles. I say: "Thank God!" The prisoners did not understand me, what I was glad about. I was happy because I asked for the Word of God, and He gave it to me. There were practically only Muslims in that cell and they did not need the Bible so they gave everything to me. I talked with them about God, but they said: "You have your own God and we

have our own, go preach to your people".

A day later, I was again transferred to another cell. And there was one prisoner sitting with candles spread out, and another one reading the Bible. So, God sent me company! We began to talk and soon after they began to repent, they knelt down and began to pray. Other prisoners were surprised: "Did a Squirrel visit them, or what?" The major came and ordered: "Leave them, they are praying to God".



After the trial, I was given seven years instead of fifteen. But it didn't matter to me how long I spent in prison because I found God in my soul. For about a year I was transferred from prison to prison from Rostov to Kemerovo Region, and I was nicknamed the "saint". They would say: "The saint has stopped by".

In the Kemerovo region, I was imprisoned in a maximum-security penal colony in Sheregesh. Here I began to preach, not hesitantly, not secretly. I read prayers before going to bed in the local area network under the lamp. Prisoners came. Laughed first. And then they began to ask to pray for their ill mother... Even the hardened prisoners became believers. We formed a small group of believers and decided to ask the prison authorities for a prayer room.

We came to the administration and submitted an application. The boss tells us: "What prayers?! What

room?! Over my dead body! Maybe when I'm not here, they'll let you do something". One of our people said to him: "Maybe God will arrange it so that we will someday pray in your office?" He kicked us out and said that this would never happen. A month later, a new boss was put in his place. We again requested a prayer room. He asked: "Who are you?" We answered: "Believers, Christians". And he said: "No, you are prisoners". "We are now Christians and that means we are free people", we said to him. As a result, he allowed us to pray in his office and asked to remember his daughter in our prayers: she had a serious health condition after an accident. And we remembered the previous conversation about this office. That's how it happens!

People began to repent and come to us. You should have seen how the prisoners fell to their knees with tears and prayed asking God for forgiveness for hours!

Once I was standing outside, admiring nature. The guard asks me: "What are you looking at? Do you want to run away?" I say: "Why? I can see all the beauty from here. I have no plans of running away. For me this barbed wire is nothing, I am a free man even in prison". For that I was sent to the isolation ward for two days.

In prison I joined a group to study at the interregional public organization "Spiritual Freedom". In this virtual course I studied the Bible for four years. Preachers came to visit us, once they even gave us a big TV...

I was released in 2015. Before that, I had a dream about my father. I saw him as a white figure, it is outwardly incomprehensible whether he was there or not, but I heard his voice. He explained the Scriptures to me all night, and at the end he quoted the Second Epistle to Timothy: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; and now a crown of righteousness is being prepared for me..." I asked him: "Father, are you dead?" And he raised his hand and walked away. No one, of course, believed my dream. Only later did my sister say that my father had died that night.

There were cases when

prisoners who boldly denied God became believers. One of them, an unbeliever, scornfully called all Christians sectarians.

One time I fell sick, my heart became ill. I was taken to Abagur, where all of us from the local prison were treated. I was brought in at night and in the morning, I woke up, and in front of me was an old grandpa whom hated all of the believers. "Oh", he says, "the Baptist has arrived!"

He had stomach cancer. I spent a month with him in the ward. He dried up so much that I could easily carry him to the shower in my arms. He weighed about thirty kilograms. Once I woke up at night, I saw him lying with a book of sermons and crying over it. "I", he said to me, "began to pray to God, and He forgave me". By morning he was a completely different person. A few days later his brother took him from the prison hospital and he lived for two more weeks, and before his death he managed to repent in the church.

Another prisoner died in my arms. One night he called me and said: "I want you to pray for me and ask so God can forgive me". After these words, he repented and died.

Another prisoner was a terrible foul speaker, he did not like me very much, and he did not tolerate me talking about God. After my release, I went to work at a construction site in Novosibirsk and they told me that a man would come to help me. He came. I saw that it was the same Sasha from Mezhdurechensk. I was thinking to myself: "I remember you; I will not bother you by talking about God". So, we changed into our working suits, and he said: "Wait, we need to pray before work". "Pray? I didn't understand". It turns out that after prison he went through a rehabilitation center and became a preacher.

Now I preach as best I can. When I was free, my old friends came to me and called me to do what I had before. I refused, saying that I only see my path serving Christ. I live near a park that I visit almost every day. Some people already know me. I come, sit on a bench and read the Bible. Some people notice, sit down, and we talk...

Vasily YASHCHENKO, Russia,
<http://мояцерковь.рф>
Testimony provided by
Alla MOZHENSKAYA.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Scott Highberger a Drug Addict and Convict Found Abundant life in Prison

A former drug addict-turned-pastor who was arrested 35 times and sentenced to prison five times for eight felony convictions has opened up about the series of events that led him to Christ and why his mission is to tell others that abundant life is possible, even in prison.

The first time Scott Highberger got arrested he was just 12 years old. Growing up in Michigan City Indiana, he was surrounded by dysfunction and substance abuse from a young age — and it wasn't long before he began to adopt the habits surrounding him.

"I was a really angry kid who learned to solve my problems through violence and fighting, and I ended up in a juvenile detention center at 12 years old", he told The Christian Post. "Around that time, I started drinking and that started a domino effect of committing crimes and abusing drugs and alcohol".

Unable to stay out of trouble, Highberger dropped out of school in the ninth grade. By the time he was 17, he'd been arrested so many times that authorities placed him in an adult prison instead of trying him as a child. From there, he became trapped in a constant cycle of drinking, drugs, and prison stints, culminating in a 12-year sentence for selling drugs.

"I lived a very haphazard life with no real target or purpose", he said.

While living in a halfway house following his release from prison, Highberger began dating a woman who eventually gave birth to their son. One time, the couple went to a movie theater to watch "The Exorcism of Emily Rose", a film about a demon-possessed girl. Shortly into the film, Highberger said he experienced the "fear of God" for the first time in his life.

"I didn't know anything about God, but I knew it was God and it was just really crazy", he said. "I ended up going out in the parking lot, breaking down, crying my eyes out. I went home and got the Yellow Pages and started looking around for a church".

But God had different plans for Highberger's life: The very next day, he was arrested on a warrant he didn't even know about and found himself in prison yet again. This time, Highberger spent two weeks studying the Bible and eventually gave his life to Christ during a church service conducted in prison.

"I thought everything would change once I got out", he said. "I thought, 'I'm born again, things are going to be different. I'm going to marry my girlfriend, and we're going to have this incredible life together'".

After returning home, however, Highberger's girlfriend told him she was leaving him and taking their son with her. Devastated, Highberger returned to his former lifestyle, looking to drugs and alcohol for comfort. He ultimately attempted to kill himself, ending up with 40 stitches in his arm.

But the lowest point of his life, Highberger said, was the night his ex-girlfriend allowed him to take care of their son by himself.

"I had begged her to let me take him for a night, and she finally let me", he recalled. "He was about 1-and-a-half years old. I got drunk and ended up driving to the ghetto to a crack house. I locked him in the car and got drugs, got back in the car, and drove home, smoking crack the whole way home with him in the backseat".

"She found out about it, and was understandably livid", he continued. "She told me I could never see my son again".

With multiple charges pending against him and nowhere to turn, Highberger once again attempted to kill himself by taking over 100 sleeping pills. When that proved unsuccessful, he fled the state and wound up homeless, traveling from Florida to Arizona.

"I would sleep in dumpsters and on the street and just beg for change to buy the next drug", he said. "I'd hit rock bottom. I was just so tired of my life".

Eventually, he returned to Indiana where he was once again arrested. But this time, things looked different.

"Jeremiah 29:13 says, 'If you seek me with your whole heart, you'll find me'", he said. "At my lowest, I sought God — and I found Him in prison, and He just began to radically change my life".

Highberger developed an overwhelming thirst for the Bible, and after his release from prison would bike through sleet and snow to attend church services, volunteering wherever he could. Determined to save others from the life that nearly destroyed him, Highberger approached church leaders about starting a prison ministry.

What started as a one-week service for inmates led to four services a week — and today, Highberger, along with his wife Danielle, ministers to thousands of prisoners, leading them to freedom in Jesus Christ.

"Looking back, I see that all those years were God setting me up for a comeback, to become desperate for Him", he said. "To the outside world, prison is a place for punishment. For me, prison was a place to be alone with God, to begin a recovery process, to be away from negative influences, and to be stripped of everything. I found freedom in prison, and I want others to, as well".

Highberger shares his powerful story in his book, *Behind the Wire: A Prisoner's Journey to the Pulpit*. In it, he details practical, biblical steps individuals can take to find true freedom.

"I've handed out thousands of books to prisoners, and I've received so many letters from people sharing how it's changed their lives", he shared.

"Freedom isn't just about a physical location; it's a spiritual condition", he explained. "There's an invisible prison that holds many in its grip, and the only way out of that is through Jesus".

Today, Highberger serves as the outreach and prison pastor at Road to Life Church in Michigan City. Now reconnected with his son, the pastor says his message is simple: New life is possible through Christ — even for a career criminal.

"What I really preach from the rooftops is that Jesus leaves the 99 for that one", he said. "He left those 99 for me and he grabbed a hold of my life in prison. There is hope for that drug addict, the alcoholic, the career criminal, the one that is so far gone that you think they can never be redeemed".

"Abundant life", he added, "can be found right there in the jailhouse".

<https://www.christianpost.com>



I had a good family that loved me. I never had a need for anything. Yet, my upbringing was quite strict. I did well in school. I played sports and didn't smoke. Everything was great until my dad passed away.

My mom couldn't control me. It got to the point that I would come to the gym's basement with my friends to not work out but to smoke. My buddies were all older than me and all had history behind bars. Back then I thought that a real man was one who was cool, thug, and so on.

At first, it seemed like everything was fun. Our group of friends was cool. Then, the scariest part came—drugs. We started off with marijuana. Then we tried poppies, raw opium, and finally heroin. I started having problems with the police: the first time in 1998 and then in 2002. In 2003, I got sent to jail.

Theft, robbery, fraud... I lacked all moral principles that a normal person would have. I was consumed by drugs. If I had a goal, I would achieve it by any means. When I was freed in 2007, I took on my old ways.

My sister had a business and would always help me. She'd protect me and take me to hospitals. Then she called and said, "How much longer?! Everyone is tired of you. Come over I'll give you all the money you need. You just inject yourself one last time... we will cry afterwards. Yet, it will be easier than to look at your life..."

I got scared and thought about what she said. Then she called and asked, "Do you really want to quit taking drugs?" I answered, "Yes!" "Well, then let's..." and she took me to a Christian rehab center. This was on December 5, 2007.

I remember thinking that this was just another hospital...

I always believed in God's existence. I would even feel His presence. He would help me when people couldn't help me like when I was in prison. I repented in the rehab center during a service. The first few phases were very difficult. And one time, Dmitriy Afanasyev pushed me, "You should go repent. You need it". And I came out.

I didn't need to tell others that I didn't live life the right way. My heart had a strong need in God. At that point I was completely disappointed in my life.

Imagine, when I was in prison I'd look at drug

addicts who'd come and would think to myself that I would never touch another drug in my life—never! And then when I'd get out, not even half a year would pass when I'd be in a horrible situation. I understood that nobody could help me. I completely destroyed my relationship with my family, relatives, and close friends. I had this emptiness inside.

Now I understand that the Lord told me, "This endless emptiness inside you can only be filled with an endless God. His endless Love. No family, no daily, no relationships with friends... only God".

My greatest dream was to have a son. Yet, how could I achieve this dream when I lived in this drug frenzy, in lies, and deceit?! Yet, the Lord miraculously renewed me and gave me not only a son but also a daughter.

When I came out and repented in that rehab center, I deliberately took a step toward God. I recited

I Deliberately Took A Step Toward God

the repentance prayer and automatically felt how God entered into my life. Even physically. My weakness (withdrawals) became better when I accepted Jesus as my Lord. I was filled by His Love. I felt such ease as if I had wings behind my back. I never experienced such bliss from drugs.

I spent three months in the first stage of rehab. I kept on thinking about going home. Then I had to make a decision. I would either continue rehab or return home. When I repented, I asked God, "Lord, what decision should I make?" And I had a dream where I came home. Everything was good. I restored my relationship with my family. I stood by the window and wondered, "What should I do?" I understood that in actuality, I did not have a desire to do anything even though I graduated from a construction school and worked in that field. I had my school hours transfer to my experience. "Well", I thought, "I'll go inject myself and then decide what to do". And then I left looking for drugs.

At that moment, I heard, "Wake up!" I woke up and felt so bad because for the past three months I restored my relationship with God and my family. I felt this genuine freedom. I understood that I could not stand up against the evil in my life on my own. So, I decided to sign up for the main program in the rehab center for one and a half years. The program was one year. It was followed by a six-month

easy money, they start to take your life to a higher level but they also bring lies and vanity.

Pastor Eli offered, "You can go to Buryatia". I agreed to go even though I knew that it'd be difficult for my wife there. I am thankful to spouses Denis and Marina Vasiliev (they also graduated from the rehab center) for going as missionaries to Ust-Barguzin. I spent a year in rehab. Then I served there for some time. I thought, "When I return, I'll be greeted with open arms".

When I returned, I was told, "You should go to Cheryomushki's rehab center". I agreed. Obedience is the best sacrifice. I had a three-month probation period. There I worked as an administrator. Then, Pastor Eli invited me to lead the enterprise "Jubilee Year".

I remember Galina and Aleksandr Ziminyh who taught me everything I needed to know in the rehab center. Now they live in Mezhdurechensk and we often visit them.

My wife also helped me in my restoration and return to a normal life. If it wasn't for her, I probably wouldn't have gone to Buryatia to continue my rehab. Now we have three children. My life is full of happiness.

We obviously encounter hardships in family or at work. Life is life. But God gives us power to withstand evil. My job is closely tied to my ministry. I also teach a course at a church. We study and discuss the beginning of Christianity.

I meet with those who know me in my past life. They're surprised.



internship. In church, I met my future wife.

I remember how after a year of the program, I came home. I came into our yard and saw my old acquaintance who I'd get high with. He said, "I haven't seen you in forever! I want to treat you to something. I got some good heroin. Let's go..." But having fellowship with God and brothers in Christ, helped me withstand. I calmly responded, "I don't need this". I now had the ability to reject the evil that once entirely consumed me. I was like a slave. I would spend all my time searching for drugs.

However, there are no easy ways. I had a breakdown when I was in the rehab center. That's probably because I had a lot of stress. My life was not about prayer. I certainly didn't seek God's ways. I lived at home and tried to earn more money. I would take any opportunity I could. The Bible says, "You cannot serve God and money". If you get

Some say, "We thought that you were no longer alive". God made a miracle in my life. I would never have changed without Him. I know this with full certainty. After all, I tried all of the possible options including hospitals. I even spend four and a half years in an exemplary prison where people from all around Russia would visit. Only Jesus Christ could change me with His Love.

Oleg SLIVCHUK, Russia
<http://moiacerkovь.рф>

P. S. As the head of the "Jubilee Year" enterprise, Oleg Slivchuk earned a medal "For Business for Creation". The company itself was awarded for its active participation in the life of the city. Behind these seemingly official words, there's a lot of work that goes into the employment center. The company helps those who find themselves in difficult life situations and are in desperate need of work. Oleg knows firsthand how important this is.

CHRISTIANS NEWS

“If He could bring me back to life after such a fall, then He can do anything”. The skydiver spoke about his near-death experience

“I knew I was falling and I knew I was falling to my death but it was an acceptance. There wasn’t anything there. There was no fear — I just accepted ‘This has happened, I’m dying and there’s nothing I can do’”. In 2011, Korey Fisher began looking for a way to gain self-confidence and learn to trust god in deeper ways. That’s when he discovered skydiving. 6 years later he was a certified skydiving instructor with 1500 jumps to his credit.

“I thought to myself ‘This is closer to what I imagine God wants us to live like’, this — experiencing this, uh being alive. It’s about being alive”, Korey says. Then in November of 2017, his life nearly came to an end when he and another skydiver collided in midair.

“I only saw the individual for about half a second before the collision, in that half a second I literally remember thinking, ‘I’m dead’. I just remember accepting it. There was nothing I could do”. The two fell over 200 feet before hitting the ground. Miraculously, both survived. Korey was in and out of consciousness. He says, “I tried to move and couldn’t, and then passed back out. the next thing I know they’re putting me in a helicopter, but it was evident I was dying”.



He was life flighted to a nearby hospital with a broken neck, twelve broken ribs and massive internal injuries. Korey was fighting for his life. His mom Ria remembers the call from the hospital. “They told us that there had been an accident that he had been catastrophically injured and that we needed to come to the hospital right away and my heart sunk”.

At the hospital, Ria, and Korey’s dad, Terry learned their son might not make it through the night. Even if he did, he might be paralyzed for life. They asked their church and community to pray for a miracle. Terry says, “God gave us the peace from the very beginning not to panic. Not to go into a circular thought process that you can all go through when you’re in a traumatic situation”.

“There was definitely prayer going round the clock for Korey in multiple places, multiple churches”, says Ria.

He survived the night. By then they learned there had been another miracle. Spinal surgeon Said Elshihabi says considering the severity of his broken neck, Korey’s spinal cord should have been severed, which would have left him paralyzed for life. He says, “It’s in my opinion honestly short of miraculous, when I initially got the call, my initial question was how bad is he in terms of paralysis. And the trauma doctor specifically said ‘you won’t believe it but he’s moving everything’. Essentially what he had done was separated the two levels and shifted the number six bone completely in front of the number seven bone. The way to present this is essentially with a quadriplegic or paraplegic type of scenario”.

Ria remembers, “When his surgeon told me that he had in all the years that he’d been a trauma surgeon he’d never seen this injury without paralysis he said he fully expected to walk into that trauma bay after looking at his MRIs and find a paraplegic and he said to find full movement that blew him away. He said this is the first time I as a physician can say I have seen a miracle”.

He still needed surgery and prayer. On the way into surgery Korey woke up and asked to speak with a Chaplin. Korey remembers, “I’m about to go into a very serious surgery and I need Jesus now. They brought me a phone and there was a loving man on the other end who quoted scripture with me, and then prayed. And I remember feeling the peace and that I was going to be all right”.

His surgery was a success, now doctors were saying Korey would need to spend months in a rehab hospital but Korey believed in another miracle. Ria says, “The first words out of his mouth to me were ‘Don’t worry, mom, Jesus has got this’. He said, ‘I’ll be home for Christmas’. And his doctors are standing on the other side of the bed behind Korey’s head where he couldn’t see them and they’re shaking their head, ‘No’”.

But just three weeks after the accident, and well before Christmas, Korey walked out of the hospital without pain and completely healed. Korey says, “Not only did Jesus save my life, but my recovery was supernaturally graced as well. It’s completely a miracle. No doubt about it. No doubt about it”.

Korey was cleared of all faults regarding the accident. He has since resumed skydiving with even more confidence that god is with him in every situation. He says, “He loved me that much to gracefully save my life and spare me all of this and all the dreams that I had that could have been taken from me in a second”.

“What it made me realize is that I can trust God. That he will answer my prayers. You know I look at it this way; he jumps out of that plane and jumps into Jesus’ arms”, says Ria.

Korey says, “If he can supernaturally save a human who fell from the sky, to not die, to not be paralyzed, to override physical limitations of the human body when striking the ground, He can handle all of the things in my life that I’m not in control of. To give me my life back completely, uninhibited by anything is overwhelming to me”.

<https://inlight.news>

WHO IS MOLEK?

Molek (related to the word *melech*, that is, *king*) is a deity of the Syrians, Phoenicians, and Ammonites, depicted as a man with a bull’s head and arms outstretched forward, into which sacrificed children were placed, burned in the fire spread out under the idol. It was called *being led through fire*. Molek personified the power of fire, and the peoples listed above worshiped him long before the Jews came to the Promised Land.

Rituals of service to Molek included the burning of children: **Deuteronomy 12:31** — *You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.*

Under the threat of the death penalty, the Lord forbade the Israelites to participate in such rituals: **Leviticus 18:21** — *Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord; Leviticus 20:1–5* — *The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him. I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death, I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molek’”.*

Despite the prohibition, the people of God turned into this idolatry, and under Solomon, in the valley of the sons of Hinnom near Jerusalem, a temple was built for this god: **1 Kings 11:7** — *On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites; Jeremiah 32:35* — *They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molek, though I never commanded — nor did it enter my mind — that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.*

This led to the fact that some of the Israelites adopted and began to actively perform the pagan ritual of sacrificing children to Molek: **Psalms 106:36–38** — *They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to false gods. They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood.*

This is how the Jewish kings Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons: **2 Kings 16:2–3** — *Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites; 2 Kings 21:1, 6* — *Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. ... He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger.*

The righteous king Josiah forbade such sacrifices and desecrated the place where they were performed: **2 Kings 23:10** — *He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire to Molek.*

WHY IS EVERY DAY THANKSGIVING DAY FOR CHRISTIANS?

Many countries and people celebrate such a holiday as Thanksgiving Day, which is also known as harvest time or harvest festival. However, for Christians, every day should be Thanksgiving Day. We should be grateful always and for everything, including when we are experiencing difficulties and problems in life. The Apostle Paul said about himself: *I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds (2 Corinthians 7:4)*. He knew perfectly well that *...in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)*.

The problems will not disappear anywhere. But the Lord will arrange everything so that each of us can grow through them as a Christian. He will allow trials to come into our lives, so that you will be strengthened deeper in God’s Word and so that our faith will be strengthened even more. The more difficulties we face, the more time we spend in prayer. And as someone once said, we see farther not when we stand on tiptoe, but when we kneel down.

One day, a young man watched a butterfly, which unsuccessfully tried to crawl out of its cocoon. Deciding to help her, he cut the edge of the cocoon with a penknife so that it could get out of it faster. Thus, he saved the butterfly from its problem. The butterfly crawled out of its cocoon but died

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



immediately. Why? Because God arranged it so that during the exit from the cocoon, the butterfly must independently break its wall. As she goes through this ordeal, her heart begins to beat faster and pushes blood into her wings. The same thing happens in our life: difficulties and trials have their own purpose — they make us stronger and teach us to trust God and His Word.

Faith and gratitude are related to each other. If you do not believe in God, then you do not feel the slightest feeling of gratitude towards Him. Conversely, if you believe in God, then you will be grateful to Him for His faithfulness, love, and mercy towards you. And it will bring you a deep sense of joy and peace in the Lord.

The Bible teaches us to be grateful in all circumstances: **1 Thessalonians 5:16–18** — *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.* Therefore, for Christians every day is Thanksgiving Day.

WHY DID JESUS PUBLICLY DENY HIS MOTHER AND BROTHERS?

Matthew 12:46–50 — *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you”. He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”.*

Jesus did not deny his mother and brothers, and he could not. He loved them. But He showed by his example that in the first-place people should have a relationship with their Heavenly Father, and not just with family and friends. That’s why He said: *“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:48–50)*.

Jesus taught: *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers, and sisters — yes, even their own life — such a person cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26–27)*. We are not talking about outright hatred of family and friends. Jesus is only trying to convey to His disciples a simple truth: love for relatives compared to love for God is like heaven and earth, like love and hate! That is why He calls love for a father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters and also for life itself, resentment.

The Lord never requires more from His disciples than He is willing to endure Himself. That is why He not only taught people, but also showed by personal example what it means to love our Heavenly Father more than anyone and everything in the world.

If we talk about Jesus’ love for His family, then Jesus really loved His mother and even before His death He thought about her. Dying on the cross, Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to His beloved disciple John: **John 19:25–27** — *Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, He said to her, “Woman, here is your son”, and to the disciple, “Here is your mother”. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

WHY DOES WISDOM SPEAK IN PARABLES?

If you remember, the Lord Jesus spoke and taught in parables. In fact, today we are concerned with the same question that worried His disciples: why did He speak in parables? Wasn’t it easier to explain everything without parables? Why didn’t Jesus thoroughly explain His parables to the people, but revealed their meaning only to His disciples when He was alone with them?

The Bible says why Jesus taught others in parables: **Mark 4:10–12** — *When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”.*

So, Jesus used parables to reveal the truth to those who seek and receive it, and at the same time to hide the truth from those who do not want to accept it. This is the principle of wisdom.

In Vietnam they spread the Gospel by motorcycle

Christianity is growing even in the face of persecution in communist Vietnam, but pastors in the fastest growing regions say this growth is not driven by an increase in the number of church buildings, but by an increase in the number of motorcycles available to ministers who open new churches.

"New religious laws passed in 2018 have tightened restrictions on Vietnamese Christians", said Dr. Hyun Suk Foley, a spokesman for Voice of Martyrs Korea. "The persecution of Christians is felt especially strongly in the north of the country, especially when it comes to planting churches for thirty-four indigenous minority groups that have not yet been reached by the Gospel. But, despite strong persecution, the inaccessibility of mountainous terrain, narrow roads and extreme remoteness, it is there that the church grows the fastest".



Foley's spokesman notes that pastors working in the area often serve hundreds of small house churches, and they use motorcycles to get to each one.

"More than three hundred thousand people from the Hmong ethnic group alone have converted to Christianity since the 1980s, but there are still no large churches", says spokesman Foley. "However, there are hundreds of thousands of small groups of believers who gather in household services that are officially banned in the country. Today, about ten thousand Hmong and Montagnard Christians from the central highlands of Vietnam are stateless because local authorities refuse to issue them identification cards — in many cases in response to their conversion to Christianity. In such conditions, the construction of church buildings is not only impractical, but also illegal. This is why Vietnamese pastors actively use motorcycles in their ministry as a kind of traveling church".

Typical is the example of Pastor Dong (name changed for security reasons). The pastor, a member of an ethnic Tao group from Caobang Province, became a Christian in 1998 at the age of sixteen when he was miraculously healed of an illness that caused him to faint frequently.

"Since 2003, God has called me to ministry", says Pastor Dong. "Currently I serve in a church of one hundred and fifty members. God appointed me to the leadership team in Cao Bang Province to provide spiritual support to more than two hundred house churches located in four Tao villages. Despite the fact that I am very busy with pastoral ministry, I still prefer to share the gospel with unbelievers. In 2020, I preached the gospel to two hundred unbelievers, sixty of whom accepted Jesus Christ. I also take time to visit new converts, especially those who are the only Christians in their area. These people are subjected to curses, physical punishment, abuse and threats because of their new faith".

Pastor Dong was one of ten pastors for whom the Voice of Martyrs Korea and other sister missions from Australia and the Netherlands purchased motorcycles in 2020.

Foley's spokesperson notes that motorcycles are most needed by ethnic minority pastors to return to their villages after graduating from Bible schools, because motorcycles make it possible to do a ministry that would have been difficult to do without.

One of the pastors who received a motorcycle this year graduated from Bible school a year ago. He was offered the position of pastor in a church in that city. However, he refused and returned to his hometown in one of the ethnic minority areas. The motorcycle gave him a vision of ministry among his people that he believed would be more rewarding than ministry in a more prestigious city church.

Voice of Martyrs — Korea lists Vietnam as one of the five remaining communist countries in the world, including China, North Korea, Laos and Cuba among others.

"Each of these countries, including Vietnam, has anti-religious legislation", said Foley's spokesman. "In countries where communism still rules, the persecution of Christians is not a thing of the past".

Foley's spokesman says the motorcycle costs one million three hundred thousand won for the Vietnamese pastor. Donations received by the CIND Foundation in January will go towards this project.

"The Voice of the Martyrs Korea", <https://bog.news>

Every eighth Christian on the planet suffers for their faith

According to Open Doors, by 2021, the number of persecuted Christians in the world has increased dramatically. A year ago, two hundred and sixty million people were persecuted, but now the number of persecuted Christians has reached three hundred and forty million.

This means that one in eight Christians in the world faces persecution and discrimination for believing in Jesus Christ.

Open Doors presented the ten most dangerous countries for Christians.

1. North Korea. The price for Christianity in North Korea has long been a death sentence. And even if you are not killed immediately, you will be sent to a labor camp as a political criminal.

2. Afghanistan. ISIL and the Taliban still have a huge influence in Afghanistan, with the Taliban controlling most of the country.

3. Somalia. Islam is considered an important part of the Somali identity, and if any Somalis are suspected of converting to Christianity, they are in great danger. Members of their family, clan, or community will be pressured, intimidated, or even killed. Women can be raped and forcibly married off.

4. Libya. In Libya, there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion, and the possibility of church life is extremely limited. Although there are about thirty-five thousand Christians in the country, only a small number of them are Libyans, while the majority are emigrants and migrant workers.

5. Pakistan. Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws are widely used against Christians, and Islamic extremist groups have fiercely defended the laws, attacking and killing those who are alleged to have violated them.

6. Eritrea. Government security forces monitor phone calls, monitor and conduct countless raids aimed at capturing Christians and curbing the activities of house churches. Christians can be arrested and imprisoned without trial.

7. Yemen. Christians in Yemen usually keep their faith a secret, because if they are discovered, they face the death penalty. It is forbidden to leave Islam.

8. Iran. The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine Iran's Islamic rule. Christians of Muslim origin



are most persecuted, primarily by the Government but also by their families and communities.

9. Nigeria. More Christians are being killed for their faith in Nigeria than in any other country. Violent attacks by Boko Haram, the Fulani Muslim

pastoral fighters, ISWAP (an affiliate of ISIS) and other Islamic extremist groups have unfortunately become commonplace in the north and middle of the country and are increasingly penetrating the south.

10. India. Hindu extremists believe that all Indians should be Hindus, and for this the country should get rid of Christianity and Islam. To achieve this goal, they use large-scale violence. Christians of Hindu origin are subjected to the greatest pressure and oppression.

As the degree of persecution in the world is steadily increasing and the number of those persecuted is getting higher, let us support in prayer those whose faith in Jesus may cost their freedom and even their lives.

<https://inlight.news>

Dear readers of "Prisoner"!

The publication office requests that you enclose your postal address with your material (testimonies, sermons, articles, etc.) for publication in "Prisoner". If you enclose photos with your material, we will be glad to publish them.

And for those of you just on the way to God, it's time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer:

"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!"



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

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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
P.O. Box 4053
Everett, WA 98208



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

MY DONATION:

☐ For prison ministry ☐ For the publication of this newsletter (Prisoner)

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