

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

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

John 8:32

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Let us carry this Good News everywhere!

"Christ is risen!" — we mostly hear this affirmative exclamation on the day of Easter, which the Christian world celebrates once a year. Oddly enough, on this day even unbelieving people say this exclamation aloud. Mass psychosis is transmitted from one to another, and therefore even the most ardent atheists involuntarily answer: "He has risen indeed!" when they hear the exclamation "Christ is risen!". What prompts unbelieving hearts on this day to confirm with their lips, the fact of the resurrection of Christ? Perhaps this is just a tradition? This is most likely the case because after a day and throughout the year, few people remember this Easter day or utter this exclamation. Even those who believe in the undeniable fact of the resurrection of Christ affirmatively pronounce: "Christ is risen!" once a year for some reason.

I really like what the apostle Paul said in the *Epistle to the Romans (10:9-11)*: "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'".

As it turns out, it is with our lips that we confess the resurrection of Christ unto salvation. Moreover, Scripture clearly tells us that "whoever

believes on Him will not be put to shame", that is, to confess the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And here questions immediately arise: why then are we so stingy with the affirmative and constant confession of the resurrection of Christ? Why only once a year do we make the devil tremble with a mass exclamation of "Christ is risen!"? Surely believing people are well aware that the devil is terribly afraid when a Christian confesses the great event — the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

The fact is that we all live in the information field, where all of our words, spoken from our lips, have a huge uplifting and destructive power. Scripture says: "Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language, Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world" (*Psalms 19:2-4*).

Knowing these biblical truths let's just imagine what would happen to the devil if all believing Christians daily said aloud to each other: "Christ is risen!" — "He has risen indeed!" instead of the usual greeting. Such daily exclamations would become not only our most striking greeting to each



other, but also our never-ending confession that Christ really lives. And of course, these words would carry destructive power against all demonic evil spirits. For there is a huge difference to exclaim in mass about the resurrection of Christ once a year or to affirm this indisputable fact every day, thereby destroying the devil. As stated in the *Book of James (4:7)*, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you".

The good news carries that endless joy, for all tribes and peoples, that Christ died for our sins and on the third day rose from the dead for the

salvation through faith of every penitent sinner. The main point of the Good News is to reveal and convey to all nations the fact that Christ conquered death and rose from the dead. "Christ is risen!" — this is precisely the good news for all who live on earth. There is no greater joy when you believe and know that the Lord Jesus Christ opened the doors to eternal life by His victory over death, for every sincerely believing Christian.

For several years now after I get out of bed, every new morning begins with the words: "Christ is risen!" The brothers with whom I live with answer almost in unison: "He has risen indeed!" Of course, after such morning exclamations, the morning becomes good in itself. In the same way, I greet other Christians who also like to affirm this truth exclamatorily not only once a year. For this is the most pleasant joy for the heart when you can say "Christ is risen!" again and again.

I heartily congratulate, with this great joy, all those who sincerely love the Lord. May the Holy Spirit so fill your inner spiritual being that one day you yourself will feel how dear and priceless the words "Christ is risen!" are.

May we carry this good news everywhere, without losing heart or growing weary!

I. GORIK.

Despite horrendous persecution, house churches in Afghanistan continue to grow

Many courageous followers of Christ have chosen to remain in Afghanistan in order to continue preaching about Christ secretly at the risk of their lives. Thanks to their selfless service, the number of Christians is growing in spite of persecution.

The Voice of the Martyrs organization, in its annual Global Prayer Guide, calls Afghanistan a restricted country. Open Doors ranked Afghanistan at the top of its list of countries where Christians are most persecuted.

Since the Taliban came to power in the country, the country's government has been extremely hostile towards Christians. The followers of Jesus are increasingly being targeted by violent extremist groups.

However, despite large numbers of Christians moving to neighboring countries to



have the freedom to pray openly, Afghan home churches continue to grow. At the same time, the number of Christians who were martyred in Afghanistan for their faith in Christ is growing every month. But their deaths are usually hidden from the public.

"Perhaps a year ago, after the fall of Kabul, you heard that all the followers of Christ in Afghanistan fled the country, were killed, or hid trying to cross the border. It's just not true", Voice of the Martyrs radio host Todd Nettleton told *The Christian Post*. "The brave believers in Christ deliberately chose to stay in the country, knowing full well that their lives were in danger, they stayed to serve their countrymen and continue to share the gospel", Nettleton added.

Muslim-majority country is about thirty-nine million people.

Afghan Christians cannot pray openly, they are forced to hide their faith or interest in Christianity, especially after a recent spate of arrests.

Bibles are only available underground or in digital format. There are practically no paper Bibles, and it is extremely dangerous to own them.

Beatings, torture and kidnappings are common among Christians in Afghanistan. But even this does not stop the courageous followers of Jesus. They remain in the country, and the number of Christians is growing due to their selfless service.

The Christian Post.

The Afghan home church network and the US-based International Christian Concern estimate that there are between ten and twelve thousand new Christians across the country.

The total population of the

The Lord has blessed me and so I want to bless those around me. Woman anonymously pays for customers' products

Dollar General customers were unexpectedly blessed by a stranger who paid for their goods.

At first, the store employees thought Pearl was just a regular customer who filled her cart with a lot of products for herself. But then a worker named Lavigne began to observe the woman's actions and noticed that she was doing something special.

What a surprise when she realized that Pearl was not buying products for herself, but for other people who came to the store. Lavigne asked if she could take a photo

of the benefactor. Pearl agreed, but asked for one unusual thing:

"Don't tell customers I'm buying this. Just tell them it's a gift from the store. I don't want them to recognize me. I feel uncomfortable when they thank me. The Lord has blessed me, and therefore I want to bless those around me".

This story influenced Lavigne so much that, despite Pearl's request, she could not restrain herself and shared the photo on the Internet.

The amazing kindness of this woman touched the hearts of many people and set a wonderful example of how we should share blessings with others.

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Christ is risen! — He is risen indeed! These are the words we have heard for many years, but today I would like to place a special emphasis on them. The fact of the matter is that very often we hear in churches of the forgiveness of sins, thanks to what Christ did on the cross, but unfortunately, we rarely hear about His resurrection from the dead. But, the resurrection of Christ is just as important as His death on the cross of Calvary.

The Apostle Peter writes: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).*

And, the first thing Peter points out is that our God is good. He is blessed and therefore He gives what He Himself possesses. He blesses because it is His essence. God has an abundance of everything: holiness, and love, and faith, and health, and prosperity, and strength, and so on. He is full of an abundance of every kind and is interested to attend to our daily needs.

Peter goes on to write that it is because of God's mercy that each of us can expect from Him something good for his life. As one friend whom we met on the plane once said about Easter: this is when everything was bad at first, and then everything became good.

The only thing that needs to be understood is that it becomes good for us not according to our merits, but by His great mercy. Friends, there is no need for us to try to appease God, all our good deeds, everything is still not perfect. God is good to us because of His love and not because of our merit or good deeds.

Should we strive to do the right thing? Yes, certainly. Should we do good and avoid evil? Undoubtedly! But, all this is part of all of us, this is the essence of the born again child of God. By doing what's right, we express who we really are and should be. Scripture says: *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1).*

And finally, the main thought of the day: He gives us a new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our human, sinful nature was thoroughly saturated with death. Sorry for the following expression, we smelled like a corpse. But, thanks to the resurrection of Christ, a true and genuine faith was born in us.

And, it is this faith that allows us to live a life of victory over all sin and damnation. Peter calls such faith a living element or substance. In talking to many people who call themselves Christians, I have asked what the resurrection of Christ really means to them.

In response, I heard about various traditions, foundations, rituals, occasions from life and so on, and only a few have said that the resurrection of Christ is the Passover that overcomes death. Only a small number of Christians focuses on the resurrection of Christ and the triumphal victory over any manifestation of death.

Last week my wife and I celebrated Jewish Passover with friends. And, they explained to us the meaning of Passover through the prism of the New Testament. As far as you probably remember, the first Passover happened in the days of Moses. In short, I want to remind you that the Jewish people were for a long time in slavery to the Egyptians and after nine plagues, the tenth was to come. Pharaoh did not want to let the Jews go, and God no longer wanted to endure the stubborn pharaoh.

That night, the Lord ordered everyone to take a one-year-old lamb, kill it and bake it at home, and then eat it, but before that to smear the doorposts with its blood. The following is written about it: *And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in*

haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance (Exodus 12:11-14).

The first Passover was a celebration

But, note: Eve was seduced by the serpent, but Adam was not, he made a rational decision. Since the husband is the head of the family, the responsibility for decisions in the house was entrusted to him.

What's strange is that Adam and Eve didn't die after eating the forbidden fruit physically but death spread much further. It penetrated into the earth, into nature, into human life and so on. Curses and diseases, wars and famines, debauchery and murders filled the whole earth.

Scripture tells us that God ultimately delivered judgment, and rendered a verdict on all mankind:

And, he said to Adam: *Because you*

with Him those who sleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

So, the resurrection of Christ is a victory over death in all its manifestations. For example, if relations between spouses have died or dissipated we have hope for the resurrection of these relations. If the hope for a happy future has died, then God is able to resurrect it again. If death crept up in the form of sickness, remember: Christ is our Passover Lamb who heals any disease. If death comes as a business failure, remember that the resurrection of Christ is also a victory in the financial sphere. Wherever you look: relationships or health, the future or career, your future or eternity — anywhere and everywhere the resurrection of Christ gives us faith in victory.

Scripture says: *O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).*

Everyone who truly believes in the resurrection of Christ has been granted a great victory over death. And, not to use it would be a huge folly. Friends, learn how to use Jesus' victory over death.

Apply knowledge from the Bible to resurrect or restore what is broken and destroyed by the devil. God did this for us because He is good. He dreams that every person could live the resurrection of Christ. The Bible says: *...to know Him, and the power of His resurrection... (Philippians 3:10).* In fact, this is the purpose of our life.

Resurrection is life, giving its surging energy to everything around. Proclaim the victory of Christ over your mind, by renewing it. Proclaim the victory of Christ over your life by changing it. Proclaim the victory of Christ over your family by transforming it. And, proclaim the victory of Christ over your country, in an act of a blessing.

The Resurrection of Christ is the music of glory, it is the song of victory and triumph. This is the power to the rebirth of mortal and fallen man. This is power over evil and the devil. Celebrate the resurrection of Christ every day as well as several times a day.

Scripture tells us: *...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was, foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:18-21).*

I want to end on a happy note. The resurrection of Christ should be celebrated not once a year, but every day. God's dream is that every person not only hears or even knows about resurrection of Christ but, would also experience it in the daily life.

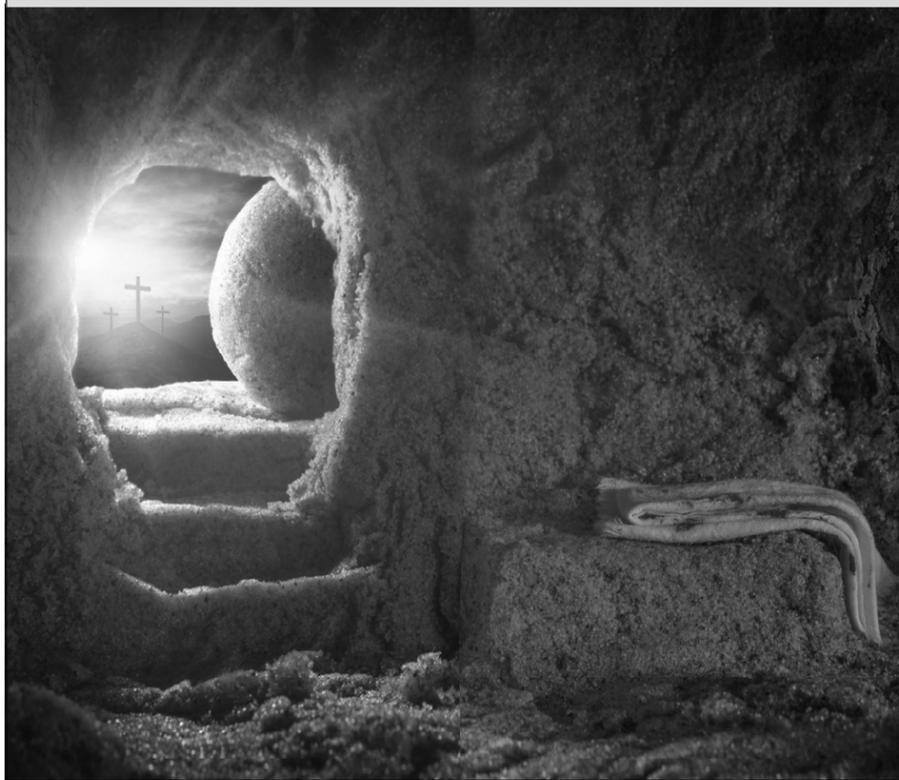
The Passover (Easter) holiday is meant to remind us that Christ rose from the dead. He did not remain hanging on the cross, He rose again for our faith and hope. He gave us a chance to live a life of victory.

The resurrection of Christ is the manifesto of His coming glory. He will come to take His people to heaven and condemn those who did not believe in Him. That is why I want to invite you today to prayer based on the following Bible verses: *...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9-10).*

To confess is to say what God has already said before. Our verbal consent establishes faith in God's salvation in our hearts and makes us His children forever.

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RESURRECTION OF CHRIST!



of victory over slavery and death, where in every house a lamb without blemish was killed and its blood turned away the wrath of God. These lambs were as a prototype or typified by the Lamb of God — Jesus.

John the Baptist said of Him (Jesus): *Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).*

Jesus, like a lamb, was sacrificed in order to conquer not only power of sin, but also death itself in all its manifestations. Jesus said: *I am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live (John 11:25).*

Death has always been an invincible enemy. If you notice that people are afraid of death, they worry that they will suddenly fall ill and die. Many are afraid they won't be able to find the right medicine or treatment, others worry about a short-term demise or catastrophe, and so on.

Death is the absence of any manifestation of life; therefore, it gives rise to fear, it excludes faith and leads to destruction. But what is the root cause of death? Where did it come from? The Bible talks about it this way: *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).*

We see here God's first mention of death. The Lord allows Adam to make his own choice. But, as you and I know, Adam made a conscious decision to do it his own way: *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).*

Some people blame everything on women. Even here they say the evil came from Eve.

heeded to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying: "you shall not eat of it": cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:17-19).

Damnation in the earth, sorrow and pain, backbreaking and thankless work, and in the end death. This went on for centuries, until the moment when Christ took upon Himself all the curses of the world and died on the cross as the sacrificial Lamb.

He was not killed by the arbitrariness of the Roman and Jewish authorities, He was crucified for the sins of all mankind to redeem us from eternal death. He rose from the dead to shame death in all its manifestations.

Let me read a few passages in the Bible about this:

...Who (Jesus) was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:25).

...Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him (Romans 6:9).

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

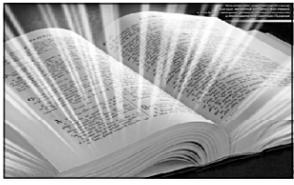
...Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise up with Jesus and will present us with you (2 Corinthians 4:14).

...Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring

PASTOR'S WORD

THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN LIFE



PERSONAL LIFE OBSERVATIONS

Having lived for more than thirty years in a Western capitalist country and observing the lives of many immigrants, I saw a certain picture. At first, all those who come to another country work hard to create the desired living conditions for their families. Here you need to learn the language, purchase transport, and at work prove yourself as a hardworking and honest worker. It takes a lot of energy, strength and health. And that's reasonable...

But then comes another stage in life, when the language is relatively learned, life has stabilized, and income has increased... some changes start to occur in the worldview and life of former immigrants, which I want to use as an example, although similar changes can be seen in people regardless of immigration status or country of residence. Some people move from difficult conditions of life to being well-off; seriously ill — to absolutely healthy. This makes a person happy, but not for long... They quickly get used to better conditions, and after a while the feeling of gratitude to God or fate becomes dull (depending on whether they are a believer or an unbeliever) and a state of dissatisfaction with something comes again. Such is human nature.

This is what happens to Christians in the spiritual life. At first, after turning to God, a person sees how much spiritual work they need to do on themselves: you need to eradicate old sinful habits, change your thinking, overcome negative emotions, learn to make the right decisions. Later, a Christian who works on themselves noticeably changes. With God's help, the habit of obedience to the truth is developed, the intensity of the struggle with temptations goes away. Sedateness, endurance and wisdom appear. God's blessings and arrangement in life come, as well as recognition from others. And with this, gradually and imperceptibly comes relaxation and carelessness, which are the prerequisites for the subsequent spiritual fall of a Christian. It is much easier for the devil to strike a complacent, drowsy, self-confident Christian... But how do we avoid this?

If a Christian resists the temptation to compare themselves with the people around them, but continues to delve themselves into the doctrine and ask God to show who they are in His light, then they will always have something to work on. It is the vision of God's purity and holiness that reveals human imperfection.

2 Cor. 3:18 — *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

There is no limit to spiritual growth and sanctification, so long as we do not change the example of imitation from the perfect God to human ideals. Christ said: *Be perfect as your Heavenly Father.* Having as an example Christ Himself, we will always have an incentive to grow, to improve. But if we start to look around and compare ourselves with imperfect people, then our growth and striving for perfection will stop due to lack of motivation... In this case, we will always see the shortcomings of good Christians, against the background of which we will look much better in our eyes. Besides everything, we have a natural spiritual blindness and short-sightedness, which constantly hinder our spiritual growth in Christ.

Rev. 22:11 — *He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.*

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Every person wants to be happy, but the definitions of the word *happiness* for a worldly person and a Christian faithful to God are completely opposite. If the indicator of happiness for worldly people is the material well-being of this temporary earthly life, then for a Christian who has a living communion with God, the meaning of the word *happiness* is completely different. There are two main views on whether a certain person is happy or not.

☉ The first (and most common) view is how a person's life looks like from an earthly point of view: does a person have sufficient income, are they successful in business and achieving goals, do they have a prosperous family.

☉ The second way of assessing is from the point of view of eternity: the spiritual level of a person, what have they done for God and for the Kingdom of Heaven, whether their life is pleasing to God, where will they spend eternity?

Indeed, one can live a short earthly life for oneself, in abundance and prosperity, and then suffer eternally in hell... Therefore, it would be more fair to define happiness not by a temporary, fleeting life span, but by eternity. For Christians, happiness is the fulfillment of the will of God in their lives and the eternal presence of Christ in eternity.

Once a boy, who was in thought after hearing the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, was asked about who he would like to be — a rich man or Lazarus. After a little thought, he replied: *On earth I would like to be a rich man, and in heaven Lazarus.* Not all Christians realize that they have the same worldview. Yes, indeed, who doesn't want to have a comfortable, calm earthly life and good health? Who would like a life like that of the Apostle Paul: to be beaten with sticks, stones, to be imprisoned or shipwrecked? I think that the apostle Paul did not burn with the desire to have all this. The question is not what is better for oneself, but it is a matter of priorities. A Christian must choose one of two things, which would be most important for him: what's temporary or eternal.

The temporary is closer and more real, but the eternal is far away and real only for those who have faith. Without faith, the eternal looks vague and doubtful. If a person chooses to please God even to the detriment of themselves, then, with the support of the Holy Spirit, they will be one of those overcomers who inherit everything. At certain periods of earthly life, God necessarily tests candidates for receiving the crowns of eternal life. These tests are short-lived, but the results when passing through them are worthwhile!

Rom. 8:18 — *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

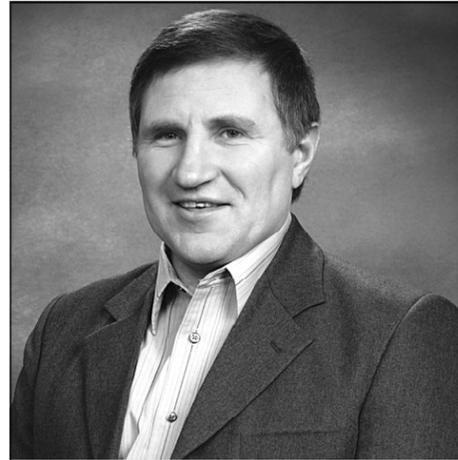
Happiness does not depend so much on the events taking place around us or how we relate to them. Happiness is a state of peace with God and with oneself, when a person is satisfied and grateful to God for everything that they have.

MOTIVATED BY A DESIRED FUTURE

One of the most common mistakes is when people lose the present in anticipation of the future. In fact, it starts from childhood, when a child dreams of being an adult and anticipates the life of an adult through the prism of a child's mind. A child may dream that when they grow up and make money, they will buy a tub of ice cream from the first paycheck and eat it all themselves. But maturity comes and with it the opportunity to bring childhood dreams to life, but childhood desires have already passed... Yes, and now they seem painfully funny for an adult. Such euphoria of the expected future keeps many people afloat, but when their desires come true or their worldview matures, there is no more motivation that stimulated them and gave them the strength to overcome difficulties. When you don't have, you want to have, but when you get it, it doesn't bring the long-awaited happiness but deprives you of an incentive, since there is nothing to strive for. That is why there is a phenomenon of the unfortunate rich. The state of material well-being, which most people aspire to, when it is achieved, makes people unhappy. In fact, it is not well-being or wealth that is to blame, but the loss of stimulus and aspiration. And when people who have achieved what they were striving for have new, inflated goals, this saves them from disappointment for some time, but in any case, leads to the same results. Who does not know the saying

Happiness is not the one who has a lot, but the one who desires little! We can say that the level of happiness does not depend at all on material well-being, on good health or possession of freedom. As with physical maturation where a person loses the desire to play childish games, so with spiritual maturation, material things usually lose their dominance over them. True, just as some adults remain with a childish mind, so long-standing believers remain carnal... Carried away by worldly goals, materialism, acquisitiveness, fame and influence.

But for the grown-up Christian, being in the will of God and in the fulfillment of His plans brings the greatest joy and happiness.



Pastor Aleksandr BORISENKO

The torment of supposed unfulfilled possibilities disappears. Life is filled with peace, joy and focused on the most important thing, on God's purpose, which is the best thing a person could ever have.

WORKING NOT FOR ONESELF

Let us give an example of how people sometimes do not fulfill their destiny. Suppose a fine talented musician works as a bricklayer at a construction site. After some time, he will take an expensive violin with him to work, to a construction site, and for many hours virtuously perform such musical works that would be envied by world-famous musicians. How long will a construction site tolerate such a builder who, instead of the assigned task, will perform outstanding musical works? Who needs it at a construction site? Distracting others and creating a dangerous situation?

Who needs a canteen chef who knows how to repair shoes, but who doesn't know how to cook food? Will such a shoemaker be appreciated in the dining room?

The same is true for life purposes. What kind of fruitfulness in life can we talk about if God created us for one purpose, giving us the appropriate talents, but we, neglecting this, will do something else, for which we were not intended for? It is not surprising if, at the same time, depression and disappointment will overcome us, which are often natural signals that offer corrections in the direction of our life.

The conclusion suggests itself: it is necessary to find the sphere of activity for which we are destined by the Creator and in which we will flourish and bear much fruit for God and people in the few days of our earthly life.

1 Cor. 7:17 — *But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.*

But what if I don't know my purpose? you say. Then you can start with the general will of God as reflected in His Word. Try to do what you clearly understand, and then the personal will of God will be revealed to you.

1 Thess. 4:3 — *For this is the will of God, your sanctification.*

Rom. 12:2 — *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

And also, each person has the opportunity to ask the Lord to show them the area of service in which He wants to see them in. He will answer you!

Eph. 5:17 — *Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

Why does a person live on earth? What is the purpose of their life? Let's try to briefly answer these questions, even though the answers to these questions lie outside of the visible world.

The human soul was created for eternal existence, and only a small segment of its life takes place on earth, which is connected with material reality and during which we choose our destination in eternity.

The Bible does not say much about the period before the creation of our planet. And yet, from some short biblical texts, the picture emerges that sin appeared even before the creation of people and was brought to earth by a fallen angel, whom we today call Satan (**Is. 14:13–15; Ezek. 28:13–17**).

1. One of the first tasks of man is to restore lost communion with God

Immediately after his creation, man in the Garden of Eden communicated easily and simply with God, and this communication gave pleasure to both. After the fall, it was lost and its restoration is possible under certain conditions (**Gen. 3:8–10**). Communication with God contributes to the transformation of a person into the image of God, which is very valuable and expensive. It is not surprising that a person who has a close relationship with God is very noticeable in their character and attitude towards other people. They become like the One with whom they communicate.

1 Cor. 1:9 — *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

2. To be like the image of His Son Jesus Christ

Rom. 8:29 — *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

A person who has the character of Christ draws people first to themselves, and then to Christ Himself, who perfects people.

1 Cor. 15:49 — *And as we have borne the image of the man of dust (Adam), we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (Christ).*

1 Peter 1:15–16 — *...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy".*

There are many examples when Christians, being in extreme conditions (prisons, concentration camps, during natural disasters and with incurable diseases), showed sobriety, calmness and cheerfulness and thus attracted people to Christ, saving many lives.

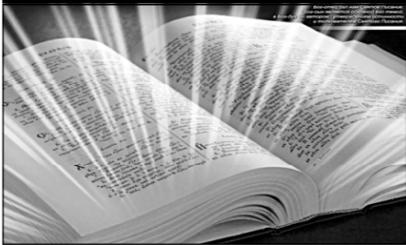
3. Fulfill the will of God He has for each of us individually

As we said above, there is nothing better than to fulfill the purpose of our Creator. Doing the will of God will surely lead to a fruitful and glorious human life! How wonderful it is to realize that you are in the right place at the right time and doing what the Creator intended for you!

In this regard, it would be appropriate to give an example from my personal life. When I came from the army in 1983, the question arose of where I should go to work and in what profession. I began to pray to God to reveal His will for me, where He wants me to be. In a personal prayer, I was told to go to specific street and ask the HR department: *What kind of work do you have for me?* I did so. The next day I went to the HR department of this factory and asked this question, to which they said: *We need toolmakers.* It was the first thing they said. I agreed to master this profession, although by that time I had the fourth rank of a repairman and had managed to work for a year as a truck driver before the army. I started as a student toolmaker here, but after three years I was given a personal brand, and my photo as a production leader hung on the honor roll. I was then asked to work as a foreman. I really experienced God's blessing in that field. By the way, the teacher who taught me when I first came to work became one of the subordinates on my team. It was a wonderful productive time in my life. It also determined my profession for my entire working life, for which I am immensely grateful to the Lord. A similar thing happened with the choice of a life partner, with whom we have already lived happily for thirty-seven years and have fifteen children and many grandchildren. Praise God!

(Continuation on page 4)

PASTOR'S WORD



THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN LIFE

(Ending. Beginning on page 3)

1 Cor. 7:17 — *But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.*

1 Peter 4:2 — *...that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

THE GENERAL WILL OF GOD FOR ALL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

Now it is necessary to talk about the general will of God for all people, which is set forth in the Holy Scriptures. There are cases when a person who has not prepared their heart before seeking the will of God, may think that they have correctly understood God's purpose. Such people begin to assert or do things that are completely inconsistent with Scripture. In such cases, we should be led by the spirit of the bible by which all of today's revelations need to abide by.

1. Lead a holy life

1 Peter 3:16 — *...having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*

1 Thes. 4:3-5 — *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God...*

1 Thes. 4:10-12 — *and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*

2. Glorify God

Rom. 15:6 — *...that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Rom. 15:9 — *...and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name".*

3. Spread the Gospel message to all nations

Acts 1:8 — *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

1 Peter 2:9 — *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...*

4. Spiritually birth, nurture, and lead to perfection the children of God on the basis of the teachings of Jesus Christ

Eph. 4:11-13 — *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...*

Colossians 1:28 — *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus...*

May the Lord help all of us, and if necessary correct the direction of our lives, to follow Christ so that we can spend eternity with Him!

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

JESUS HAS RISEN INDEED IN MY LIFE

One time at the age of five or six, I had a dream where a struggle was occurring for my life between the forces of good and evil. My grandmother, who attended a Baptist church, said:

Granddaughter, you need to go to God. Satan will have great power in your life, but God will help you.

Time passed, fears subsided, the dream was forgotten, and I did not go to church. Everything was going well so why would I need God? I grew up, entered medical school, then got married, and gave birth to a daughter. Life was good. I didn't know when trouble would creep in. When our girl was four years old, my husband and I separated. Shortly after, my life spun and whirled: restaurants, wine, cigarettes, new friends. Not a life, but pure fun.

At that time, I had many acquaintances who were addicted to drugs. As a health care worker, I helped them by administering blood IV. Then one day I also decided to try the effects of drugs. I liked it and I started using them, first occasionally, then more and more often. I sank into depression which only large doses of drugs temporarily took me out of. I thought I would never become addicted. The doses were increasing, I already needed the drugs several times a day.

Life soon ceased to be fun, and I began to look for a way out. There was an opportunity to go to the sea, to get rid of my drug addiction. But even there I met people who constantly



supplied me with drugs. When I got home, I quit my job as it was hard for me to work at the hospital anymore, and life began to go downhill: I started making the drugs and selling them.

And then for the first time in my life, I faced the authorities. I remembered a saying my Christian relatives would say: *When in trouble, then you seek God.* I repented of my sins but was in no hurry to say goodbye to drugs, for which I received a three-year suspended sentence. But that didn't stop me.

Thank the Lord my daughter came to God. She was fifteen at the time and she started praying for me. She constantly talked about God's love and how many people at the church found

freedom from drug addiction. I listened and even believed, but I continued to use drugs. Then I had another run in with the law which made me run to church. Once again, God helped me: I was miraculously cleared of a criminal case for the distribution of narcotic substances. I began to frequently go to church services thinking that in this way I would be protected from the authorities and other evil. I did a lot of things as a ritual, even when praying. Six months later I went back to my old ways of using drugs. This time it was worse than ever. I was stuck- there was nowhere else to go! Due to lack of finances, I ended up in the drug business. But one day, a serious raid affected my whole life. I suddenly realized what a swamp I was in and that I couldn't make it out on my own. I fell to my knees, praying to God to lead me out of this impasse, promising to leave my addiction to drugs.

Thank God that He is so long-suffering and merciful: He intervened in my life with His love and freed me from the bondage of sin. It was my day of sorrow on which I cried out to Him, and He heard me.

I am eternally grateful to my Lord and Savior for His faithfulness, for the fact that everything is in His hands, including me.

I have a wonderful spiritual family. I serve my Lord by glorifying His great name. I love to sing to Him. He truly resurrected me.

Oksana RUDENKO, Ukraine, gazetasp.net

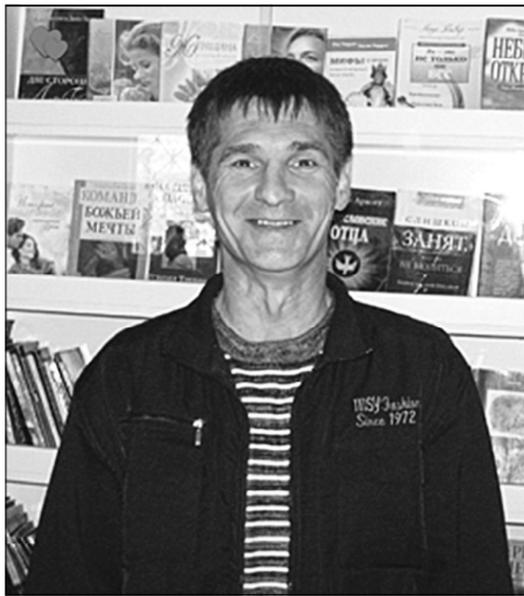
GOD CHANGED MY MINDSET

I was born and raised in Ordzhonikidze (now Pokrov) in a normal Soviet family. My parents were good people and respected by others, especially my mother who believed in God. At that time, they could not even imagine that their son would become a drug addict. Since childhood my parents paid a lot of attention to me and taught me to distinguish between good and evil. In school I studied well, you can say, but my attitude wasn't good.

After graduating from the eighth grade, I entered a technical school in another city. Life in the student dormitory gave me new, interesting friends. It was at the age of sixteen that I tried the opium drug for the first time. At that time it was even prestigious, fashionable, interesting and romantic to use drugs and without much financial cost you could buy what your soul desired. Poppy and cannabis grew in accessible places, and the problem of drug addiction did not exist then.

Ten years flew by in which I periodically indulged in drugs, slowing myself down a little, but I was not going to give it up forever. I didn't even know that everything could go so far.

The next fifteen years became a real nightmare, just hell on earth. Everything that was dear to me fell apart: family, work, and my friends. Everyone had enough of me. My relationship with my parents became strained. My life was heading into the abyss, I began to sink lower and lower. A lot of money was already spent on buying this drug. I could no longer earn money in an honest way, and this led to theft, to deceiving people and, as a result, to repeated convictions. In prison, I continued to use drugs, for which I received another sentence before even being released.



My health was getting worse and worse. The doctors said that with such a liver I would not last long, and the disease in my legs progressed. Everyone around me wanted nothing to do with me.

Fortunately, I knew people of faith whose lives were once no different from mine. But now they lived a very different life: they sincerely believed in the mercy of God and said that the Lord is able to do a miracle in my life. I was faced with a choice: go to prison once again or go to a rehabilitation center.

With God's and Christian acquaintances help, I found myself in the rehabilitation center *Ark of Salvation* in the city of Alexandria, where the parable is written in large letters: *Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter (Prov. 24:11).* There I repented of all my sins and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart. After that, big changes began to happen in my life. God began to change my

mindset, my eyes opened, both physical and spiritual. I looked at life differently, the world began to open to me with His mercy and love.

The Lord worked on my character, changed my hardened heart to a loving and compassionate one. I had a great desire to help people who are caught in the quagmire of drugs that tries harder and harder to destroy a soul that's dear to God. In the Holy Gospel of John, it is written that the thief, that is, the devil, comes only to steal, to kill, and to destroy, and Jesus came to give you life abundantly. I learned that addiction is a real slavery, from which only Jesus Christ can give freedom, because only He voluntarily went to the cross to save people from their sins and became the Intercessor for wrongdoers (Is. 53:12).

While serving in the rehabilitation center *Manger* in Dnepropetrovsk (now Dnipro), I helped people know the living, loving, and merciful God by personal example of what the Lord can do to a drug addict and a criminal. The cross that people once put on me turned into the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, who saved me, justified, cleansed and instilled hope in my heart.

I currently live in my hometown of Ordzhonikidze, I am a minister of the Church *Word of Awakening* and I see God's hand and His favor in my life.

I want to appeal to all people: whatever state you are in, put your life in the hands of God, trust Him, as I once did, which I do not regret at all. And if the Lord was able to change and heal me in this way, then I am sure that Almighty God will help you if you allow Him to do so.

I thank God for every person He sends into my life to help them meet a true Friend, Helper, and Comforter. Now I rejoice in every day given to me by the Lord, His presence in my life, His power, His grace. To Him all glory, He alone is worthy of all praise.

Volodymyr YAKOVLEV, Ukraine, gazetasp.net

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Volodymyr GAVRILENKO: I WENT TO JAIL PER MY FATHERS' REQUEST

I grew up in a safe environment, which my father created for me. He held a managerial position; made good money and I could live well without denying myself anything. I didn't have to work hard and achieve something. I had everything just because I had a loving father who could always come to my aid.

I was an average student at school but I didn't have a special desire for education. I went to college and at the age of nineteen I got into a car accident. I was hit by a car, breaking my entire right side...

I was in a coma for two days and when I came to myself, for a very long time I was tormented by severe pains all over my body. After the operation, I was injected intramuscularly with strong painkillers, but after some time they stopped the injections, and, feeling the same severe pain I realized that I simply could not live without such drugs and I could only save myself from them with alcohol. So, alcohol became at that time my lifesaver.

So, during two months in the hospital and a few more months after being discharged, I became so addicted to alcohol that after six months it became quite natural for me to drink it every day.

I recovered; life again sparkled with all its colors... And the addiction, in turn, began to strengthen. From my youth, I got used to getting everything easily, without effort, and after this addiction I became a person without a goal, without plans, without striving to achieve something in my life. My father still provided me with money. I, as before, did not need daily bread and it is quite understandable that, like any guy at my age, I liked to take a walk more than look for a job or something like that. So, without straining in life, I, as they say, slowly descended. I was only twenty-three...

Earlier, my mother having divorced my father, went abroad to work and my father married a believing woman. He tried with all his might to bring me to God, trying in every possible way to introduce me to life in the church, which he himself attended. I financially dependent on him, in turn, tried to do at least something good to thank my father. I tried not to miss meetings on Saturdays. At every service I was in the house of God, attended a prayer group. At that time for all his prayers and petitions his patience and sacrifice for me, there were people who told him, sympathizing, that I was a lost person and there was simply no point in fighting for me already...

Now, years later, I am infinitely grateful to both the Lord and my father for not stopping halfway then. Perhaps without understanding his choice, he did everything with his faith and patience for my awakening, salvation and rebirth.

It can be said that I was directly related to the church, visiting it, approaching the youth, communicating with them but at the same time I remained blind and deaf too much. I couldn't consciously understand why I came there and what it can give me in life, how my life can change thanks to a real meeting with God, I did not imagine and could not imagine. Until when it happened...

While my father was praying for me all this time, while attending church, I continued to lead the way of life to which I had become accustomed: I drank, smoked... accepted, I still could not overcome it in myself. People in the church saw and understood my problems, at the request of my father and on their own initiative they prayed and for a long time continued to accept me as I am, I felt their disposition towards me.

My peers from the church also received me well, although I then and now perfectly understand that there was so little in common between them and me!

But why did I keep attending meetings? Looking back, I now remember how, despite my outward rebelliousness to the Christian way of life, I still really wanted to change my way of life inside myself. And I was increasingly drawn to the youth in the church. But at the same time, thoughts came to me that the moment would suddenly come when I would cease to suit them, my presence would become something superfluous for them, a burden. Fortunately, this was only my fear, and in reality, this did not happen, which supported me a lot.

A few years later I visited one of the evangelistic programs in Poltava, and after it I was offered to be baptized. I agreed. But I didn't have a conscious understanding of what I was doing and why I was doing it, and most importantly, what would happen after. Then I believed that after my conversion, that is, the solemn moment of baptism, the Lord would immediately begin to do something in my life. And on my part, all that is needed is this consent and a signature under the baptismal document...

How deeply I was mistaken, my life later showed.

Six months passed after the baptism, and my father had to leave Ukraine for several months for work. And this meant that I had to remain unattended by him, which my father, knowing my weaknesses and understanding the risks associated with them, tried to prevent.

At that moment, despite my already full membership in the church, I still could not overcome myself and leave my former way of life. I continued to smoke and drink just as before... This only aggravated my situation, bringing me to a state of complete helplessness in front of any life circumstances where responsibility was necessary, at least for myself.

At that time, I was so chemically addicted that with even a slight abstinence from alcohol, I had bouts of alcoholic epilepsy. The body constantly demanded its doping and no matter how hard I tried; I could not do anything with myself.

My misfortune was seen, of course, by those around me. They prayed for me, worried, communicated with me, supported me in every possible way, but, unfortunately, they could not do anything about it. Father also prayed for my condition, which, at that time, was simply unviable in the full and spiritual sense of the word.

My condition at that time was deteriorating more and more, there was no relief, and my father saw the inevitability of my imminent end.

...And just before that very planned two-month trip, after much hesitation and reflection, my father shared with me his thoughts that he did not know what to do and how to act, because he was afraid that when he returned home, he would no longer find me alive.

Seeing my increasingly deteriorating condition, which was the same before and after baptism, he was simply afraid for me. For the fact that at the next moment, when I don't get drunk and an attack of alcoholic epilepsy occurs, no one will be next to me and no one will be able to help.

After long worries and questions in

communion with God, my father decided the following: while he was on a business trip, he would place me... in a place of deprivation of liberty.

Before that, I had repeatedly taken a course of detoxification in various hospitals and without success. I was uncontrollable and could leave the place at any moment, because, apart from strength I did not recognize anything. Therefore, probably at that time the only possible way out of the situation was to place me in a place where the prisoners were and thereby provide me with complete, and most importantly, strict supervision.

When my father told me about his decision, I took it normally — his authority was so significant to me and I trusted him. Although, of course, not every parent will find the strength to go for something like that.



So, I ended up in a kind of medical-labor dispensary, a medical correctional institution intended for those who, by a court decision, were sent for compulsory treatment for drug addiction and alcoholism.

The first days were the most difficult for me, as I found myself in conditions that I was not ready for and had no idea about. There was nowhere to go. Nearby was not a dear loving father who was always ready to support and help. Strangers and an unpleasant environment, where behind a high fence there was freedom and the former, such a familiar life. And the church, to which I had time to get used to.

A few days later, I learned that my brothers in the faith were engaged in missionary service in this dispensary. My joy knew no bounds! I began to look for meetings with them, to ask questions. From them, I learned what I need to change my life, how I can change myself and free myself from painful addiction.

Communicating with them not just for a long time, as in freedom, but at the call of my soul and heart, I began to hear and understand, I realized how to truly get to know God, to find a new life. I learned that it is necessary to sincerely ask for forgiveness for the sins committed and receive sanctification by the Holy Spirit. On that day, my repentance was as never before, sincere.

After a few days, I felt a unique sense of freedom. And I perked up because someone appeared in this closed and alien institution for me, who understood and loved me. It is difficult to convey in words the feeling of freedom that visited me there, in prison, far from the outside world and my relatives, I felt freer and felt the taste of real life — more real than before being at large. It's hard to put into words, but I felt it very well.

I had no doubts that the Lord Himself heard me, that He forgave me, that I was born again and that I am now His child, I had no doubts.

As a sign of truly making a covenant with the Lord, I suddenly had an amazing ability to write poetry.

Before that, I didn't like to read or write.

After two months of being in this dispensary, when I returned home to Poltava, I found myself a completely different person. If earlier I came to services just to come, to be noted or to pay tribute to my father, now I just ran to the same meetings!

I was eager to tell everyone, to whom it was possible, about how the Lord saved me, how he led me to a new life, how I want to share the Good News with the whole world, and how I want to serve Him now...

The drastic change in me surprised everyone, although I was baptized in full and was a member of the church. But I didn't have a real dedication and a full-fledged Christian life until that time, until I found myself on the other side of the high fences with which I was protected from the outside world, the influence of friends and the street and most importantly, alcohol and tobacco...

Returning back to my native community after my release, I was literally in seventh heaven with happiness. Many brothers and sisters even said that I seemed to glow. And this was despite the fact that at that moment I actually had nothing: no job, no family, no confidence in the future... I believed and lived only in the Lord!

In addition, thanks to the revival somehow, I have improved relations with those people with whom I had previously been in conflict... I have no enemies now; I try to treat everyone the way the Lord treats each person — as His own creation. And I understand that no matter how fallen and hopeless a person is in people's opinion, God looks at them completely differently than we, people, and He is ready at any moment to lend a helping hand to pull them out, to wrest them out of any webs and break any chains of slavery!

Remarkably, I did not have any methods of treatment as such in the institution where I stayed for two months. Haloperidol and some other medicine for spasms, spasmodic attacks I didn't accept. I managed to secretly throw them away, despite the fact that I was chemically addicted and could not live without drugs and alcohol.

During these two months, I completely freed myself from alcohol addiction.

In the lives of many people, the Lord manifested Himself and did some kind of miracles, but I don't know of examples of such a drug-free cardinal change, as what happened with me.

In the course of my further ministry, having direct contact with former drug addicts and alcohol addicts who were undergoing treatment in rehabilitation centers, I was interested in their experience of liberation. Today in Ukraine there are various programs, methods that are used in rehabilitation centers to get rid of addiction, and people really get freed of this with the help of the same addicted people, with the help of group leaders, with the help of trainers, various methods... And I became free only thanks to the Lord without any methods or anything else! Heavenly Father Himself set me free! Praise the Lord for everything!

When I consumed alcohol, it seemed to me that I knew how to live and enjoy life. I used to see pleasure in this, and I didn't want to know anything else, and I couldn't even imagine that without it one could be happy and contented. But today I really truly live and enjoy life. Only God Himself does this!

Written by Natella MOSINA,
www.asd.in.ua

GENESIS: BIBLE AUTHORS BELIEVED IT TO BE HISTORY

Ever had someone tell you, *You're missing the whole point! The purpose of Genesis is to teach that God is our Creator. We should not be divisive over the small details. Genesis teaches the theological truth of "Who?" and "Why?" not about the "How?" and "When?".* Or else they say that the Bible is a book for faith and morality, not history.

An obvious answer is, why should we trust Genesis when it says God created if we can't trust it on the details? After all, Jesus told Nicodemus, *I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? (John 3:12).* So if Genesis can't be trusted on an earthly thing, such as Earth's age, the sequence of creative acts upon it, or the Flood that covered it, then why trust it on a heavenly thing such as who the Creator was? Also, if Genesis 1 were merely meant to tell us that God is creator, then why simply not stop at verse 1, all that's necessary to state this?

However, the critic has overlooked something even more important — Genesis is written as real history. This is why the rest of the Bible treats the events, people, and time sequences as real history — not parables, poetry, or allegory.

WHAT DOES THE REST OF SCRIPTURE SAY?

The age and unique creation of Adam and Eve mattered to Jesus

When teaching about marriage, Jesus said: *But at the beginning of creation God "made them male and female. ... For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh". So they are no longer two, but one (Mark 10:6-8).*

Here, Jesus quoted Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 about a real first man and first woman who became the first couple, and this was the basis for marriage between one man and one woman today. Not a man and a man, or a woman and a woman, or more than two people. Evolution teaches instead that a whole population of humans evolved from a population of ape-like creatures.

Also, in the context of what Jesus quoted, the two become one flesh because Eve was taken from Adam's flesh, and a man leaves his parents because Adam had none. Furthermore, Jesus said that Adam and Eve were there *from the beginning of creation*, not billions of years later.

Far too few Christians defend the foundation of marriage — the recent creation of Adam and Eve as Jesus taught. Then they wonder why sinful deviant acts such as adultery, fornication and homosexual behaviour are increasing, even within the church.

The timeframe of Creation Week matters to God

God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments with His finger. The 4th one is: *Remember the Sabbath day by*

keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

The reason he gave is: *For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.*

Clearly the timeframe is important, otherwise this Commandment is meaningless. And if the creation days were really long periods of time, then logically the days of the working week would have to be as well. But *Work for 6 billion years and rest for one billion years* doesn't quite have the same ring to it...

Adam's sin bringing death mattered to Paul's preaching of the gospel

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains the Gospel he had taught these people, and how central Jesus' Resurrection is. And he explains why Jesus came to die: *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ... So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45).*

Paul explains that the Gospel (*good news*) is necessary because of the bad news that our ancestor Adam sinned and brought death to all people (Romans 5:12-19). Thus, the last Adam, Jesus, cured this by living a sinless life, dying for our sin, and rising from the dead. Also, Jesus rose *physically* from the dead [rising from an empty tomb with flesh and bones (Luke 24:39)]. So the death Adam brought must also have a physical component, as shown by his return to the dust from which he was made (Genesis 3:19).

All compromise views place death before Adam's sin, thus undermine the Gospel.

Jesus' ancestry mattered to Luke

In chapter 3 of his Gospel, Luke traces Jesus' lineage from Mary all the way back up to Adam. There is not the slightest hint of a break showing where historical characters end and mythical figures begin — all are treated as equally historical; none are mythical. This includes Adam himself, who was created directly by God, not through a long line of ape-like ancestors or pond scum (Luke 3:38).

This is important for Paul's teaching in the above section. It is also vital for the Atonement. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah as literally the *Kinsman-Redeemer*, i.e. one who is related by blood to those he redeems (Isaiah 59:20, which uses the same Hebrew word אֵלֶּיךָ (*gō'ēl*) as is used to describe Boaz in relation to Naomi in Ruth 2:20; 3:1 — 4:17). The book of Hebrews also explains how Jesus took upon Himself the nature of a man to save mankind, but not angels (Hebrews 2:11-18). So only Adam's descendants can be saved, because only thus can they be related

by blood to the Last Adam.

So if anyone thinks that Genesis history doesn't matter, then ask how they should preach to the Australian Aborigines. If they have really been here for 40,000 years (according to carbon-14 dating that old-earthers accept), then how could they come from Adam, and how could they be related to Christ, so how can they be saved? Indeed, a compromising clergyman of Darwin's day claimed that Aborigines had not evolved enough to preach the Gospel to them!

Cain and Abel's reality mattered to John

The Apostle John taught: *Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:12).* Thus, in teaching the church about good and evil, John accepted the real history of Cain murdering Abel, as an example of real evil.

Jesus also believed that Abel was the first man whose blood was shed. And He taught that Abel's blood would come upon that unbelieving generation as surely as that of the other martyred prophets throughout Scripture (Matthew 23:35).

Also, Hebrews 11 lists Abel, Enoch and Noah as heroes of the faith, without any hint that they were less real than any of the others listed.

The order of creation mattered to Paul

Paul taught much about the role of men and women in church. Paul justified it by citing the real history of Genesis. He wrote: *For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).* Thus, Paul accepts the Genesis history that God created first Adam, who then named all the land vertebrate animals that God had previously created, then God made Eve from Adam's rib — she was not an evolved apewoman! However, later on Paul points out: *In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).* Here, Paul is following Genesis as well, for Adam named his wife Eve because she would become *the mother of all the living (Genesis 3:20).*

Jesus taught about the sudden reality of His future judgment by comparing it to the time of Noah.

Paul repeats this even more directly in his instructions to his pupil Timothy, *For Adam was first formed, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:13).*



Next verse, Paul teaches that Genesis 3 is also real history, *And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*

Noah, the Flood and Ark mattered to Jesus and Peter

Jesus taught about the sudden reality of His future judgment by comparing it to the time of Noah: *Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the Ark. Then the Flood came and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27).* Here, Jesus treats Noah as a real person, the Ark as a real ship and the Flood as a real event that destroyed all people outside the Ark.

Peter likewise warned of a coming Judgment by comparing it with the Flood. He even said that one characteristic of *scoffers* was a willful ignorance of two things: the reality of special creation of the world out of water, and its destruction by water (2 Peter 3:3-7).

But if we deny that the Flood was a real event, then logically the future Judgment must be denied as well. And if the Flood was merely a local Mesopotamian flood, then people could have escaped simply by emigrating. Logically, sinners could escape the future wrath of the Son of Man just by keeping out of Iraq!

SUMMARY

These are only a few examples of where other Bible writers take Genesis as history. Indeed, the inspired writers treat the people, events and times as real, not merely literary or theological devices. And the reality of the history is foundational to crucial teachings about faith and morality.

Jonathan SARFATI, creation.com

P. S. Jonathan Sarfati obtained a B.Sc. (Hons.) in Chemistry with two physics papers substituted (nuclear and condensed matter physics) in Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. He is the author of a number of popular books: "Refuting Evolution", "Refuting Evolution 2", "Refuting Compromise". Former New Zealand chess champion, now he devotes all his time to work for the Creation Ministries International in Brisbane (Australia).

HAPPINESS AND GOOD

There lived a king. Both his people and neighboring kings considered him very greedy. He levied huge taxes from his subjects, he was ready to take the last piece of bread from the poor. But somehow the king decided that he needed to learn how to do good, so that his neighbor kings would respect him. But I have no desire to do good, he thought. *Perhaps those who do it have some-*



thing that I don't have yet. He summoned his wise advisors and asked them:

Who does the most good for people?

The happy one does the most good, the wise men unanimously answered. Hap-

piness overwhelms him, and he cannot but share it with people.

But I am unhappy, the king thought, because I lack something... I lack wealth. When I accumulate enough, I will become happy and start doing good.

And increased taxes to his subjects. True, after that he did not become happier, although he became even richer.

It turns out that a happy person does good, but someone else's good cannot make a person happy.

BUCKET OF APPLES

A man bought himself a new, big, beautiful house, and a garden with fruit trees — everything was perfect.

Nearby, in a crooked old house, lived an envious neighbor who constantly tried to spoil his mood: either he would throw garbage under the gate, or he would do some other nasty things.

And one day the man woke up in a good mood, went out onto the porch, and there was a bucket of slop.



The man took the bucket, poured out the slop, cleaned the bucket to a shine, collected the largest, most ripe and delicious apples and went to his neighbor. The neighbor, hearing a knock on the door, gloatingly thought: *Finally, I got Him!* He opens the door in the hope of a scandal and the man hands him a bucket of apples and says: *Whoever is rich with what he has shares it!*

www.smisl-zhizni.ru/pritchi

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

The gang member, who people feared to come across, gained faith through a fearless chaplain

Gang member Isaiah Blancas, nicknamed Stabber (*who kills with a knife*), dreamed of becoming the most terrible and stoic member of the gang in his city, and achieved his goal. Coming across him was terrifying, but one Christian woman was not afraid to catch his glance.

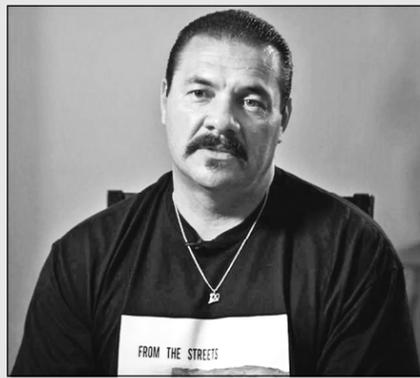
His street life began in El Paso, Texas, in 1991, just weeks after Isaiah's father ran away with another woman, abandoning his family.

I loved my father very much. And to me, he was everything, so when he left, it broke me, Isaiah says.

Soon, his mother threw him out into the street, where he had to find his way alone in gang-infested neighborhoods. Isaiah was only nine years old at the time.

I was terrified. I was filled with anger, but somewhere inside I didn't care, my heart became cold, Isaiah recalls.

To survive, he slept wherever he had to and ate from garbage cans. For a time, Isaiah avoided meeting street



gangs, but one night they caught him, beat him with a bat, and threw him in a pool of blood.

That's when I decided I was going to be one of the most violent gang members El Paso had ever seen, Isaiah recalls.

Five years later, when he was fourteen, he joined a gang whose members nearly killed him.

His new life turned into a vicious circle of violence, fights, robberies and substance abuse.

We were all like family. Even though there was betrayal and, you know, even your friends could stab you in the back and all that, we still thought of each other as family and were ready to die for each other, Isaiah says.

The next five years were a series of crimes and violence, Isaiah became one of the most evil members of the gang, for which he received the nickname Stabber.

Then I became who I really wanted to be, that is, a gang member that everyone feared, someone who was really respected, Blancas recalls.

By the age of nineteen, after serving time for stabbing six members of another gang, Isaiah felt that he had fallen into a trap from which he would never escape.

Then my hope disappeared. I have already resigned myself to the fact that I will die in prison or on the street, the former criminal recalls.

When he was once again imprisoned in 2001, his anger literally destroyed everyone who came his way.

I beat people, broke their ribs, incited them to fights, riots and did many even more terrible things than this, Isaiah says. *For this, I was sent to solitary confinement for a year. They allowed me to go out one hour a day, and I had to spend the other twenty-three hours in my cell. I found myself alone again.*

The only extra time he could leave his cell was to attend religious services every two weeks. Isaiah decided not to miss this opportunity to get out of the cell.

I didn't believe in God then. If there was a loving God, how could He allow all of this to happen to my life? Isaiah recalls.

But what he met at the worship service surprised him. There was a female chaplain named Gina, also hardened in the fires of gang life. She addressed him with the word *vedo*, a street nickname for a man with fair skin.

I remember Gina coming face to face with me, so close, and she started screaming, "You're ready to die for what you believe in, vedo? I want to die too, but for God's gang". That day I left thinking, "She's somehow different".

A few weeks later, one of the inmates overdosed in his cell. As the guards began to carry the body, Gina appeared.

She hugged this guy, cried, prayed for him, and it really shocked me because I'd never seen such love for a man with an "overdose", he recalls.

When Isaiah returned to solitary confinement, his thoughts raced: *What kind of person have I become? I was a terrible man, someone who did not deserve grace after all the evil I had done. Can this God really use someone like me who was broken?*

At the next service, Isaiah asked Gina the same question, and she replied: *Yes, he can. He will use you for His glory. He came for people like you, for the worst of the worst.*

Then, at that very moment, I opened my hands and said that if this God she is talking about really loves me, then here I am giving my life to Him. And I gave Him my life that day.

Isaiah the Stabber became Isaiah a transformed, forgiven child of God.

As he grew in his faith, he was able to forgive his parents. Now, more than twenty years later, Isaiah is married, has four children and leads a ministry that helps those caught in a vicious cycle of anger, addiction and violence find a better life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah explains why his ministry is so important to him: *I want them to know how great my God is and that there is hope for them in Jesus Christ.*

CBN NEWS.

Easter. What do you associate this holiday with? Spring, painted eggs, cakes, fragrant vanilla cottage cheese with raisins and the traditional "Christ is risen!"? Like most people, I was sure that Easter was a holiday in honor of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is celebrated on Sunday, in the spring, when all of nature comes to life. Everything comes together!

But one day I pick up a Bible, and as I skim through it, I come across an episode in the life of Jesus Christ described in the Gospel of Mark: *Now on the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare? That you may eat the Passover?" (Mark 14:12).*

Let me tell you, here we are talking about Easter, and Jesus Himself celebrates it! It turns out that this holiday was celebrated during the lifetime of Christ. And the treat at the Easter table is significantly different from the modern one: unleavened bread and baked young lamb.

What difference does it make to you? You might say. It's just a tradition, a pleasant one at that. Going to grandma's house, eggs, cakes, pancakes, and all that's so delicious...

What can I do? That's my nature: grandma is an authority, tradition is good. But when it comes to religion, it is better to consult with its founder, namely With Jesus Christ. I am patient and read the Gospel of Mark to the end. Shocking in their injustice scenes of the crucifixion of Christ, mournful funerals, then the triumph of His resurrection, the last instruction to the disciples, the solemn ascension to heaven... All! Not a word about cakes and painted eggs. I flip through the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John — the same picture, but some details are noted.

1. Easter was celebrated long before the crucifixion of Christ. For example, His parents celebrated this feast when Jesus was still a boy (Luke 2:41).

2. Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples on Thursday (Matthew 26:17), and He was crucified on Friday, and this day was also called Easter (Matthew 26:2).

3. Easter days were called desolation days, and at this time not only were cakes not baked, but nothing of yeast dough was prepared — only dry freshcakes (Luke 22:1).

4. Easter was not called cottage cheese with raisins, but a lamb brought to the altar — a lamb (Luke 22:7).

My Easter



I intuitively feel that in this lamb lies the solution to the Easter puzzle.

The TV helps out. On the eve of the holiday, the announcer tells in detail a story from the Old Testament, according to which the Jews escaped from Egyptian slavery. For the oppression of His people, God condemned the Egyptians to a terrible execution: in every family the first-born was to die. But God warned those who believe in Him: sacrifice the lamb and anoint the jambs of the doors with his blood, then the angel-destroyer will pass by and none of you will perish. And so it was in every house: where the lamb died, the son remained alive. And while in the homes of the Egyptians wept, mourning the dead, the Jews came out of Egypt. Easter is a celebration of the deliverance of those who believed God's words, those whose death the innocent lamb took upon himself.

Wait, I've read something similar somewhere. Yes, there was a scene in the Gospel of John: John the Baptist sees... *Jesus coming towards him and says, "Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).*

The biblical texts, like the details of the constructor, add up to a clear logical chain: *For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).* I understand that by calling Jesus the Lamb, John predicted that He would be the sacrifice through which people would be saved.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). This is what death the Lamb Jesus saves from! From punishment for my sins. To be honest, there were

a few moments in my life when I seriously thought that for everything that I had done wrong in life, I would one day have to answer. Clearly, with sins, the way to the kingdom of God is closed. It becomes scary, but how do I avoid punishment? And then, from the realization of this new information that has flooded over me, a prayer was born by itself: *Lord, save me! If You sent Your Son to save sinners, may He also save me!*

And as an affirmative answer from heaven, the words of the Bible are again heard: *Our Passover, Christ, is sealed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7); Do not be afraid, only believe (Luke 8:50).*

It turns out that Easter is not *Christ is risen!* Easter is that Jesus died for my sins, died in my place, saving me from eternal punishment. By repenting before Him, I can start my life with a clean slate. It's an inspiring thought!

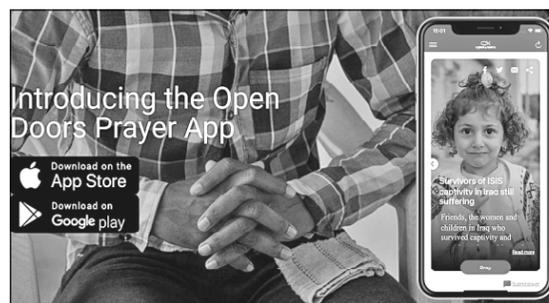
What a chasm lies between the sublime news of the Savior Jesus and the annual merry feast, in which His name is mentioned between kisses more as a cheerful tale! But where, then, are the cakes and eggs coming from? Answering the question about the snack accompanying the holiday was easy. Not a word is written about these attributes of the holiday in the Bible, because they came to Christianity from various pagan cults. This is not a command of the Word of God, but a human tradition. Good or bad, it's not for me to judge. The main thing in my heart is that the word *Easter* is now forever connected not with what saturates my stomach, but with the love of God and hope that warms my soul.

Taisiya ALEKSEEVA,
<https://proekt7d.ru>

CHRISTIAN NEWS

New Open Doors prayer app connects american believers with persecuted christians around the world

U. S. Christians now are able to send prayers, encouragement to millions of believers suffering for their faith via a new app. A new mobile prayer app developed by Christian persecution watchdog, *Open Doors*



USA, gives users the ability to connect with persecuted Christians suffering for their faith. Available for free in the *Apple App Store* and *Google Play Store*, the *Open Doors Prayer App* was created to help strengthen and support Christian communities facing high levels of persecution with prayer and encouragement.

Prayer is the most powerful way to support our brothers and sisters worldwide who are suffering for the sake of the gospel, said David Curry, *Open Doors USA* CEO. *Through this app, we are excited to provide a simple and accessible way to pray for urgent requests from*

our persecuted family living in the most dangerous countries in the world for Christians.

The app highlights real stories of Christians in countries where persecution is most intense and information is ordinarily limited, including Afghanistan, North Korea, Nigeria and others. Users can watch videos, scroll through prayer requests and click *pray* to let persecuted Christians know fellow believers are supporting them. A *prayer wall* gives users the opportunity to write out their prayer, seeing other prayers in real time. Prayer requests can be shared via social media, email or text with one click.

Those who download the app can also access *Open Doors'* highly cited World Watch List, an annual ranking of the 50 countries where it is most difficult and dangerous to be a Christian. Users can explore country profiles to find information, stories and prayer requests for each of the countries listed, along with ways to support persecuted Christians.

More than 360 million Christians live in places where they experience high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. Operating in more than 60 countries, *Open Doors* supplies Bibles, training for church leaders, emergency relief and support to followers of Jesus facing persecution.

Open Doors USA, christiannewswire.com

It is unlikely that today there is a person among us who has never heard of Jesus Christ. There was a time in history when some people doubted His existence, but today no one doubts that. Now people are tormented by another question: *Who is Jesus?*

Let's look at how the Bible answers this question. And let's start with *who did His contemporaries revere Jesus for?*

I. FOR WHOM THE PEOPLE REVERED JESUS

1. Some revered Him as a teacher of the good

John 3:1-2 — *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

Matthew 19:16 — *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"*

2. Some revered Him as a prophet

Matthew 16:13-14 — *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

John 6:14 — *Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world".*

3. Some revered Him as the son of David

Matthew 22:42 — *saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David".*

4. Some saw Him as a role model

Luke 9:57 — *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go".*

Luke 9:61 — *Another said, "I will follow You, Lord!"*

Mark 10:28 — *Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You".*

5. Some revered Him as a deceiver

Matthew 27:62-64 — *On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise'. Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead'. So the last deception will be worse than the first".*

6. Some revered Him as possessed by demons

Matthew 9:34 — *But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons".*

Matthew 12:24 — *Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons".*

John 7:20 — *The people said in response, Is it not a demon in you?*

John 8:48 — *Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"*

John 10:19-20 — *Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, "He has a*

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST

demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?"

7. Some venerated Him as a spirit (ghost)

Luke 24:36-37 — *Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you". But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.*

Pay attention to who Jesus was considered by His contemporaries: a teacher, a prophet, the son of David, a role model, a ghost, and even a deceiver and possessed by demons. It's a pretty nondescript picture.

But the worst part is that people are thinking the same thing about Jesus today. Some consider Jesus just a man, others consider Him a prophet or religious leader of his time, and still others a deceiver and possessed. So many people, so many opinions.

Let's look at what the Bible tells us about who Jesus Christ really is. And to do that, let's turn to both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

II. WHAT THE WORD OF GOD SAYS ABOUT WHO JESUS IS

The Bible gives an exhaustive description of the person of Jesus in **Isaiah 9:6**: *For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

1. Jesus is the God-man (God in the flesh)

Philippians 2:6-8 — *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it [a]robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

1 Timothy 3:16 — *And without controversy great is the [a]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.*

John 6:69 — *...and we have believed and come to know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (in the original, Peter's words sound like this: "...and we have believed and come to know that You are a holy God).*

John 20:28 — *And Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

2. Jesus is the King of Kings, lord of lords

Psalms 29:10-11 — *The Lord has sat enthroned at the flood, and the Lord sits as king forever.*

Revelation 19:16 — *And he has on his robe and on his thigh a name written: "King of kings and Lord of lords".*

Revelation 1:5 — *...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.*

3. Jesus is wonderful

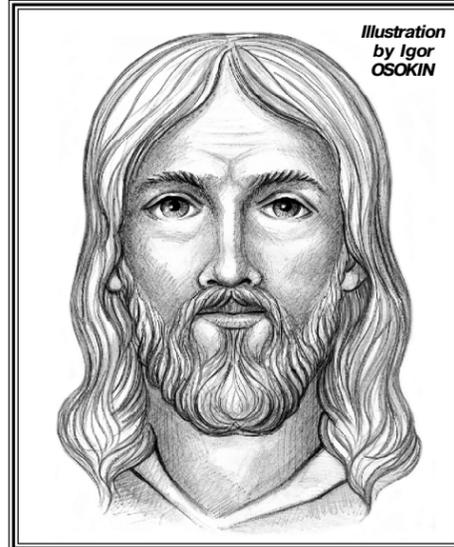
He works miracles and miraculously gives us salvation and life.

John 10:10 — *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

Matthew 21:15 — *But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant.*

Luke 13:17 — *And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.*

1 Peter 2:9 — *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim*



the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

4. Jesus the Counselor

He helps us make the right decisions in life.

John 6:68 — *Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

Psalms 16:7 — *I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.*

5. Jesus is a powerful God

He takes care of us and our needs and wants.

1 Peter 5:6-7 — *Therefore humble yourself under the strong hand of God, that he may lift you up in due time. Place all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you.*

Matthew 11:28 — *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Matthew 28:18 — *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth".*

6. Jesus is the Father of Eternity

He is the Creator of everything. Both time and our lives are in His hand.

Isaiah 46:10 — *Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, "My*

counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure"...

John 10:30 — *I and My Father are one.*

John 14:9-10 — *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works".*

Colossians 1:16 — *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.*

Revelation 22:13 — *I am The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the First and the Last.*

Revelation 1:7-8 — *Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End", says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty".*

7. Jesus is Prince of Peace (giver of peace)

He gives us peace and quiet.

Philippians 4:6-7 — *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

John 14:27 — *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

8. Jesus is the Shepherd, the Guardian of Our Souls

1 Peter 2:24-25 — *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

John 10:11, 14 — *I am a good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for sheep. <...> I am a good shepherd; and I know My sheep and am known by My own.*

Psalms 23:1 — *The Lord is my Shepherd.*

III. FOR WHOM DO YOU VENERATE JESUS CHRIST?

Today Jesus asks each of us, *Who do you say I am?* (**Matthew 16:15**).

How do you answer that question? Who is Jesus to you: just a man, a teacher, a prophet, a deceiver, an abnormal, an obsessive, or a great all-powerful God — the Creator of heaven and earth?

As you answer this question to yourself and to God, remember that your entire subsequent life and eternity after death depend on your answer. Accept Jesus Christ as your God and Savior, and He will forgive you your sins and give you eternal life.

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" was kindly provided by Bible Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada

<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/060.htm>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does the Bible say about Christian tithing?

Many Christians struggle with the issue of tithing. In some churches giving is over-emphasized. At the same time, many Christians refuse to submit to the biblical exhortations about making offerings to the Lord. Tithing/giving is intended to be a joy and a blessing. Sadly, that is sometimes not the case in the church today.

Tithing is an Old Testament concept. The tithe was a requirement of the Law in which the Israelites were to give 10 percent of the crops they grew and the livestock they raised to the tabernacle/temple (**Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:26; Deuteronomy 14:24; 2 Chronicles 31:5**). In fact, the Old Testament Law required multiple tithes — one for the Levites, one for the use of the temple and the feasts, and one for the poor of the land — which would have pushed the total to around 23.3 percent. Some understand the Old Testament tithe as a method of taxation to provide for the needs of the priests and Levites in the sacrificial system.

After the death of Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law, the New Testament nowhere commands, or even recommends, that Christians submit to a legalistic tithe system. The New Testament nowhere designates a percentage of income a person should set aside, but only says gifts should be *in keeping with income* (**1 Corinthians 16:2**). Some in the Christian church have taken the 10 percent figure from the Old Testament tithe and applied it as a recommended minimum for Christians in their giving.

Although no tithe is demanded of the Christian, the New Testament talks about the importance and benefits of giving. We are to give as we are able. Sometimes that means giving more than 10 percent; sometimes that may mean giving less. It all depends on the ability of the Christian and the needs of the body of Christ. Every Christian should diligently pray and seek God's wisdom in the matter of participating in tithing and/or how much to give (**James 1:5**). Above all, offerings should be given with pure motives and an attitude of worship to God and service to the body of Christ. *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (**2 Corinthians 9:7**).

What does the Bible say about interracial marriage?

The Old Testament Law commanded the Israelites not to engage in interracial marriage (**Deuteronomy 7:3-4**). However, the reason for this command was not skin color or ethnicity. Rather, it was religious. The reason God commanded against interracial marriage for the Jews was that people of other races were worshipers of false gods. The Israelites would be led astray from God if they intermarried with idol worshipers, pagans, or heathens. This is exactly what happened in Israel, according to **Malachi 2:11**.

A similar principle of spiritual purity is laid out in the New Testament, but it has nothing to do with race: *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?* (**2 Corinthians 6:14**). Just as the Israelites (believers in the one true God) were commanded not to marry idolaters, so Christians (believers in the one true God) are commanded not to marry unbelievers. The Bible never says that interracial marriage is wrong. Anyone who forbids interracial marriage is doing so without biblical authority.

As Martin Luther King, Jr., noted, a person should be judged by his or her character, not by skin color. There is no place in the life of the Christian for favoritism based on race (**James 2:1-10**). In fact, the biblical perspective is that there is only one race — the human race, with everyone having descended from Adam and Eve. When selecting a mate, a Christian should first find out if the potential spouse is born again by faith in Jesus Christ (**John 3:3-5**). Faith in Christ, not skin color, is the biblical standard for choosing a spouse. Interracial marriage is not a matter of right or wrong but of wisdom, discernment, and prayer.

A couple considering marriage needs to weigh many factors. While a difference in skin color should not be ignored, it absolutely should not be the determining factor in whether a couple should marry. An interracial couple may face discrimination and ridicule, and they should be prepared to respond to such prejudice in a biblical manner. *There is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him* (**Romans 10:12**). A colorblind church and/or a Christian interracial marriage can be a powerful illustration of our equality in Christ.

www.gotquestions.org

Ex-Mob Boss Michael Franzese Gets Born Again, Preaches About Jesus

Michael Franzese, a former mob boss, preached the sermon on Sunday at *Pastor Greg Laurie's Harvest Christian Fellowship*, insisting Christians should have a fear of hell and eternal damnation, but should also share the good news of Jesus to nonbelievers in a gentle way.

Franzese, 71, a one-time member of the Colombo Italian-American Mafia crime family in New York, is now a Christian author and speaker.

The son of former mob underboss Sonny Franzese, he was arrested 18 different times for various criminal activities.

At the age of 29, he was named to the rank of *capo-regime*, overseeing a crew of 300 mob soldiers. His influence in the family continued to grow, and in 1986, *Fortune Magazine* listed Franzese as number 18 on its list of the *Fifty Most Wealthy and Powerful Mafia Bosses*.

Franzese was released from prison in 1994. It was while he was in prison that he discovered the gospel of Jesus Christ when a guard gave him a copy of the Bible while he was in solitary confinement.

He told *Laurie's Harvest Christian Fellowship* in Riverside, California, he developed a *healthy fear of hell* during the time he spent behind bars.

When I was in prison, I spent 29 months and seven days in solitary confinement in a six-by-eight cell, 24/7. Me and God. ... That's not easy. We weren't meant to be solo creatures. We were meant to be social. When those lights went out at night, a lot of guys did not do well; a lot of moaning and groaning, Franzese recalled.

I dove into my Bible. I prayed every day. It was my closest time with the Lord because I had no choice. That was it. ... And thank God, I turned to Him and nowhere else. ... But you know what happened in that hole? I developed a healthy fear of Hell, he admitted.

Franzese reassured the *Harvest* audience that hell was a real place that would last through eternity.

I want you to stop for a minute and think of the worst thing that you've ever encountered in your life and realize that that worst thing will never go away. ... This is your constant thorn in your side forever. And now put yourself in Hell, which is a million times worse and will never end. That's Hell, he said.

(The) Bible is very descriptive. I'm not bringing you bad news. I'm just telling you the truth. The good news is we



don't have to go there. There is a Heaven, and there is a Hell, Franzese noted.

Continuing his message titled *How to be a Man's Man in 2022*, the former Mafia boss emphasized that believers should look to Jesus as an example when dealing with people.

Jesus was direct when He had to be, but He had a knack for communicating with gentleness, Franzese noted. *Today, our culture seems to celebrate men who speak their mind and pull no punches as if being a bully is an admirable trait. On the contrary, Jesus himself said,*

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God".

He also explained Christians should use gentleness when approaching non-believers about their salvation.

Gentleness, Franzese said. *Every time I {share} my testimony, I always go into the back room and I pray and I say: "Lord... give me the right words. Let me be effective. Let me be passionate enough in delivering this message so that You can reach out and touch the hearts that You want to touch in this room".*

Gentleness, he continued, *because we're not here to impose our faith on anybody. We're not here to turn you into a Christian. We can't do that. None of us can do that. That's God's deal. We want to be effective in delivering the message. We want to be gentle in delivering the message, because it's our obligation as Christians to share, not impose. And not direct. Share what the Lord has done in our life.*

Franzese also reminded the congregation about the importance of prayer.

One of my favorite traits of Jesus is his commitment to prayer, he said. *Before anything major was about to take place, Jesus spent time alone in prayerful conversation with the*

father. He would withdraw to desolate places and pray, Luke 5:16.

We need to pray. Jesus told us that he prayed all the time, Franzese added. *And that was God the Son praying to God the Father. How much more do we need prayer in our life? It's our way to communicate with the Lord. That's it.*

The former Mafia prince also reflected on the way his life turned out.

As I stand here today, I'm probably the most blessed, most fortunate person that's ever going to walk up on this stage and talk to you about anything. The reason I say that is that, had I been left up to my own to do what I wanted to do with my life, I'd either be dead or in prison for the rest of my life. And quite honestly, that's what I deserved. That's what I earned for myself having spent over 20 years on the street, every day in violation of both God's laws and the laws of man, Franzese said.

And I realized, God made it crystal clear for me, that if he didn't have a different plan and purpose for my life, I wouldn't be here today, he continued. *You know what, he's got a plan and a purpose for every one of your lives.*

CBN News.

Anthony Ray Hinton: I spent thirty yearson death row for a crime I didn't commit. But God had a plan...

Sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit, Anthony Ray Hinton spent thirty years in an Alabama jail awaiting execution. He went from despair and bitterness to hope and forgiveness.

Death row is designed to mentally destroy you. This statement is made not by a researcher or activist, but by a man who has spent most of his lifelocked in a tiny cell, awaiting death.

An ordained Christian, Anthony Ray Hinton, is not one to use the word *hell* flippantly, yet this is what three decades of solitary confinement at the Holman Correctional Facility in Alabama have looked like.

At the age of twenty-nine, Hinton was found guilty of the murder of two managers of fast food restaurants and sentenced to death. There were no fingerprints or testimony to convict him, and the guy's boss testified in court that at the time of those murders, Hinton was working in a warehouse fifteen miles from the crime scene.

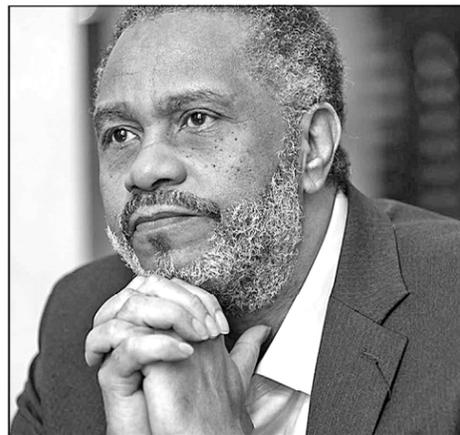
He also had no history of violent crimes, and a polygraph test indicated his innocence. So how could such a serious miscarriage of justice have occurred?

Once locked up, Hinton threw what he calls a three-year *party of pity*, but then he found a new purpose, managing to revive his Christian faith in the face of unimaginable pressure.

While in detention, he witnessed fifty-four of his cellmates being led to the electric chair. Hinton could smell burning flesh, the stench of death coming to him down the hallway. He knew he might be following, but he decided to believe that *the God I loved*

would never let me die for something I didn't do.

"I had the privilege of a wonderful life. I loved to play sports and was looking forward to one day starting a family", said Anthony Ray Hinton. "And so the police came up to me and said they had a warrant for my arrest. I said, *What charges?* And they said, *We'll explain it to you later.* They



handcuffed me and charged me with two counts of first-degree murder.

Like most African Americans, I still had a glimmer of hope that they would come to their senses and realize they had taken the wrong person.

I honestly answered their questions. But they were so fixated on getting someone to pay for the crime...

I didn't have the money to hire a decent lawyer, and in the United States, the justice system is built around someone you can afford to hire.

In America, you are treated better if you are guilty but rich than someone who is innocent but poor. I was poor and innocent.

The police told me, *There are five things that are going to convict you of. You're black. A white person will say you shot him. You're going to have a white prosecutor. You're going to have a white judge. And you're going to have a completely white jury.*

The system can come and pick you up at any time, and it came and picked me up at twenty-nine.

My mother was devastated and I worried about her more than anyone else. I didn't know if she fully understood that they had just sentenced her little boy to death.

I think my whole family was shocked because I was raised to believe that if you haven't done anything wrong, then you have no reason to be afraid of the police. I told the truth that day, and that truth cost me thirty years. And if it were not for the grace and mercy of God, it was worth it for me and all my life.

After so many years of being raised in a religious family, after steadfastly believing that only God can rain, only God can make the sunshine, I believed God's Word and knew that God would have the last word. So when I was arrested and found guilty, I was angry with God. I couldn't understand it.

When I was on death row, the only book I was allowed to carry was the King James Bible. I remember throwing her on the bed in despair. I wasn't going to read it. For three years, I refused to talk about God or even mention His name.

That's when I truly realized that God doesn't need me, but I need Him. I realized that no matter what, God loved me. And God is going to protect me. So, I overcame my *party of pity*, came

to my senses, and began to pray. I asked God to forgive me, and I began to say, *Lord, if it is Your will, please free me from this place.*

My faith grew stronger and made me realize that if you believe in God, what are you worried about? Just wait for God, He will come and deliver you.

I truly believe that God brought me on death row to meet people who needed to see that love has no color.

Today, I truly believe that many of my interlocutors are seated in Heaven.

Over time, I stopped thinking about myself and realized that God had chosen me to fulfill a mission. I am proud that He took me to meet these people and show them what true love is.

You must sincerely believe that God has taken you out of point A and He is not going to abandon you. He's going to walk you through it.

I'm dealing with post-traumatic stress syndrome right now. No one treated me. But I often tell people that I have the best psychiatry in the world — my heavenly Father, who guides me and guides me every day and who continues to give me strength".

After thirty years of support from family and friends and a decade of the *Equal Justice Initiative* campaign, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously overturned Hinton's conviction in 2015.

After not seeing daylight for years, his first words when he came out of prison were: *The sun is shining!* This phrase became the title of his best-selling memoirs, which received the approval of Oprah Winfrey, Desmond Tutu and Sir Richard Branson.

Based on *Premier.Christianity*, <https://inlight.news>

PROVERB FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One day, a man had a dream. He dreamed that he was walking on a sandy shore, and next to him was the Lord. Pictures from his life flashed in the sky, and after each of them he noticed two sets of

footprints in the sand: one from his feet, the other from the feet of the Lord.

When the last picture of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand, and he saw that often there was only one chain of footprints along his life path. He also noticed that these were the most difficult



and unfortunate times in his life. He was very saddened and began to ask the Lord:

Didn't you tell me, If I follow Your will, You will not forsake me? But I noticed that during the most difficult times of my life, only one chain of footprints stretched across the sand.

Why did You leave me when I needed You most?

The Lord answered: *My sweet, sweet child. I love you and I will never leave you. When there was grief and trials in your life, only one chain of footprints stretched along the road. Because in those days I carried you in my arms.*

<http://www.smisl-zhizni.ru/pritchi>

DOES FOLLOWING CHRIST GUARANTEE A PROSPEROUS LIFE?

Living in the material world, people strive to achieve material values. Many people want to have good health, be financially secure, have a calm and measured life. And a person tries to achieve his goal using various means. Those who have rich parents, useful connections, good abilities in some kind of activity, can achieve the desired material benefits and a serene life faster. Others can be striving for this all their lives.

When we talk about religion, about serving God, it should be noted that some people use this sphere to achieve a secure life. Man does not want to serve God, but wants God to serve them. In some religious groups, preachers from the rostrum call people with words like this: *God does not want you to suffer. Accept Christ and you will be healthy, you will have a good job, all your problems will be solved at once!* Doesn't that sound tempting? Add two or three more testimonies to this call and consider the goal achieved.

Unfortunately, in the minds of many people, sometimes even among Christians, the stereotype is firmly entrenched, which is that God supposedly has a desire that people in their physical life not have sorrows and sufferings. But those who teach this are either mistaken themselves or consciously try to use other people's delusion for shameful self-interest. The Bible gives us the basis for this statement: *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:19-21).*

As we can see, God calls us to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and

this is the path of suffering, sorrow, and patience. This passage makes it very clear that following Christ does not guarantee a materially prosperous life devoid of various problems.

We must be clearly aware that the spiritual aspect of human life is important before God. Therefore, the spiritual state does not determine material and physical well-being. This is evident from the following examples: Faithful children of God have experienced material and health problems. As well as examples where the wicked thrive (Ps. 72:1-20).

Does God really guarantee us that if we obey Christ and obey Him, we will have a prosperous life? What does the Bible say about this?

From the very first pages of Scripture, we see that the first created human beings, Adam and Eve, truly enjoyed a carefree life. They were healthy and could live forever physically on earth, they had a wonderful place to live — the Garden of Eden. They had food, they had the work of cultivating and guarding the garden (Gen. 2:15). From God's point of view, all of His creation, including human beings, was very good (Gen. 1:31). When God created man, he wanted him to live well. And so it was, until Adam and Eve sinned. Then we see big problems in their lives. They begin with this, that people died spiritually and were cast out of the garden (Gen. 3:24), even to the point of hard physical labor, the birth of a person in sickness (Gen. 3:16-19), the beginning of the killing of their own kind (Gen. 4:8), and so on.

Later in the Old Testament, we see how the people of Israel already had a time when they were doing well. And this continued as long as they obeyed God. Part of Job's life was spent in well-being (Job 1:3-5; 42:10-17). And even in our time, everyone can probably remember moments in their lives when we think it was favorable.

That is, there is nothing surprising in the fact that a person's life is going well. There is nothing bad or sinful about this. Well-being is possible. But it doesn't show that the children of God have no problems, that they never get sick and are always provided for everything? Let's look at some examples, first about health.

Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30), Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23), Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20) — all of these faithful children of God had health problems. These Bible passages clearly indicate their illness. It would seem that the apostles should never have had any health problems. However, the example of apostle Paul shows otherwise. He had a sting in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Righteousness before God does not guarantee that a person will not have difficulties with health.

Now about material goods. There was a time in Job's life when he lost everything he had, even his health (Job 1:13-21). Lazarus was a righteous man because only such people could enter the bosom of Abraham, but while living in peace, he was poor and sick (Luke 16:19-21). Many first-century Christians living in Jerusalem were poor (Rom. 15:26), also in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1-2), and in the Church of Smyrna (Rev. 2:9). These examples are proof that faithful children of God can experience material deprivation.

What about a calm, serene life? Here are some examples. Because Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted, they left their homes and scattered to different places in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-4). Imagine how at ease we would feel if we had to leave our possessions, homes, and flee persecution to other places? Paul and Silas were imprisoned for preaching the Word (Acts 16:16-34). These examples are an indication of the opposite: that the lives of Christians, the children of God, are by no means serene and measured. Are all the examples considered what hap-

pened in the lives of unfaithful children of God? No! But it is proof that faithfulness to God does not guarantee well-being.

The reasons for this may be different: personal incorrect choices, wrong choice of others, wrong choice of previous generations, natural disasters. However, we must remember that everything that happens to us in life happens according to God's will: *Is it not from the mouth of the Almighty that calamity and well-being occur (Jer. 3:38).*

Days of both prosperity and adversity are good for us: *In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing that will come after him (Eccl. 7:14).*

God allows for hardship, adversity, and prosperity. He's in control. And all this is happening for our own benefit. In 2 Cor. 12:7-12, we read about Paul that God did not remove the stinger from his flesh. But that had a purpose: that the apostle not be exalted by the extremity of revelation (2 Cor. 12:7). Here's a principle that can be seen from these verses: God allows some problems in a person's life so that he is not proud, but relies more on God. In Deut. 8:2-5 we read how God led Israel through the wilderness for forty years. There they met many difficulties. But these difficulties had the purpose of humbling the Israelites, testing their hearts, showing them that *...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3).* And in Deuteronomy, all of God's actions in the wilderness toward the people of Israel are written: *You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you (Deut. 8:5).*

So it is in our lives now: if God allows some difficulties, adversities, deprivations, problems, then

their purpose is to humble us, to test us, to teach us. And we must therefore trust God in everything meekly, without grumbling, and accept everything that happens to us in life, because God has intentions for good in his children, not for evil (Jer. 29:11). Moreover, no matter what happens to us, with the right attitude to events to the faithful children of God, *everything contributes to the good (Rom. 8:28).* The examples of Jesus, the Apostle Paul inspire us to have the right attitude to life and everything that happens.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Phil. 4:12).

If it is hard and difficult for us, we have a powerful weapon that will help us endure difficulties — this is prayer.

So, does following Christ guarantee well-being in life? No! Of course, God has promised to care for those who put Him first in their lives: *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matt. 6:33).* God cares about what is necessary for man. But these words also teach that man should not seek a prosperous, financially secure life, but God. Jesus calls those who wish to follow Him to take on their shoulders not a refrigerator stuffed with groceries, and not a suitcase with money, but a cross. This cross includes a willingness to endure all of life's difficulties with gentleness and patience and even to thank God for them (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

May the Lord bless all His saints to do so!

Sergey BOIKO,
www.rubible.com

HIERARCHY IN MY HEAD

Don't utter the name of God in vain, or else God will punish you, anxious grandmothers tell frivolous children. Where did this come from? Is it true that the name of God cannot be mentioned? And most importantly, why?

On the bus across from me sat a guy, a regular guy. I would have forgotten it right away if it weren't for one thing. As we drove past the church, he crossed himself sedately and with feeling. I am calm about religious buildings, but I immediately respected the guy. I remember another young man. He walked into the university cafeteria, bought lunch, sat down at the table and... Prayed. No, not out loud. He just bowed his head and sat like that for a while. Then it turned out that it was a foreigner.

If an old woman crossed herself in public transport, it is unlikely that this would surprise anyone. If a prayer were made in the church refectory before eating, it would be natural. But these were modern young people, and their behavior seemed out of the ordinary to me. I began to wonder why.

We live in a society where it is customary to hide God somewhere very deep in the soul — so deeply that His existence is completely forgotten. It is impossible to discuss questions of faith, of being. It's personal. But for some reason, other secrets are not in a hurry to hide: sometimes it becomes awkward on the street when couples in love behave as only family people should be behind closed doors. The paradox turns out: it is not customary to talk about God, but sins have become the norm of things and they are not ashamed.

The Bible teaches that one must be able to distinguish the holy from the ordinary. People who have lost the ability to do this are sometimes said to be without a king in their heads, that there is nothing sacred to them. And what in general should be holy for a person? Family, homeland, honor?..

As a believer, I am convinced that God is holy, like everything connected with Him. The third

commandment of God's law calls for us to remember this: *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7).*

God's name is holy, but lately it has increasingly seemed that the King has abandoned the heads of



Illustration by
Igor OSOKIN

the people. When someone visibly expresses their reverence for God, it can even be shocking — so rare. But the thoughtless use of the words *God, Lord,* does not bother anyone anymore. God has become the hero of jokes, obscene motivators and demotivators, frivolous songs...

Why did the guys I talked about at the beginning become a mute rebuke to me? I saw that they had a King in their head and that they were not ashamed of it. They do not impose God on anyone, but they themselves do not bend under a changing world where the holy God is not very accepted.

If we talk about Him and mention Him, it is only meaningful and respectful. Try?

One more thing. This is not just a superstition, as with a cat: a black animal has crossed the road — there will be no way, you say the name of God in vain — God will punish. If I, after reading this article and remembering the third commandment, reprimand a friend for saying, *God knows,* or exclaimed with exasperation, *Lord!* — and if I myself refrain from such phrases, but at the same time I will be very far from God both in thoughts and deeds, then a penny is the price of my attempts.

To form the right attitude towards God, it would be nice to get acquainted with Him first. Think about it. And find time and an island of silence. What for? To begin with revealing to the Lord your pains and joys, doubts and plans, to ask forgiveness for the bad and guidance in the good. In their own words, without memorizing correct phrases. Just come to God for real, as you are. And build relationships. Reciprocity is guaranteed! On the other end of the line, they have been waiting for your call for a long time... Or maybe they called you for a long time, but you refused to hear...

Build your most important relationship! Do not be ashamed of God if He is your Friend. And do not betray the Lord with thoughtless references to His name. Bear the name of a Christian with dignity! I sincerely wish everyone the King that's in my head and heart!

Aleksandra TRETYAKOVA, <https://proekt7d.ru>

Among many, believers and non-believers alike, there is this view about tithing: *Tithing is part of the Old Testament Law. It doesn't have to be observed today.* Today we have to find out how true this view is.

The doctrine of tithing is described in detail in the Old Testament Law.

I. TEACHINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TITHING ACT

1. What was considered tithing
Leviticus 27:30-32 — *And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord. If a man wants at all to redeem any of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord.*

This passage indicates that tithing from the earth includes:

- a tenth of the fruit of the earth,
- a tenth of the fruit of the trees,
- a tenth of the fruit of the cattle.

2. What was the purpose of tithing
Numbers 18:21-32 — *Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting. Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, "Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance". Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the Lord, a tenth of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress. Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the Lord from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the Lord's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest. Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the Lord, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them'. Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then the rest shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress. You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it is your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting. And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die'".*

This passage testifies about the purpose of the tithes of the people of Israel. The tithe was to go to the needs of priests and Levites — ministers in the tabernacle of the assembly, and later — the Temple of God. **Ezekiel 44:29-30** testifies as well: *They [the Levites] shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering; every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs. The best of all first fruits of any kind, and every sacrifice of any kind from all your sacrifices, shall be the priest's; also, you shall give to the priest the first of your ground meal, to cause a blessing to rest on your house.*

So, the tithes of the Israelites went to maintain the existence and service of the Levites. The Levites, in turn, were called to give God a tithe from the tithe they received. The Tithe of the Levites was subsidized by the priests: *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the Lord, a tenth of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress. Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the Lord from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the Lord's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest. Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the Lord, from all the [a]best of them, the consecrated part of them'" (Numbers 18:25-29).*

3. Why tithes were collected from the people for priests and Levites

When the people of Israel came to the Promised Land, the Lord divided all the land among the tribes of Israel. To each tribe He gave His lot. But not all twelve tribes received

land, but only eleven. The Levites, that is, the descendants of Levi, did not receive a land plot in the Promised Land, because the Lord chose them and separated them to serve God: **Numbers 18:22-24** — *Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, "Among the*

according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God and have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, 'a land flowing with milk and honey'". This passage testifies that every third year was considered the year of tithing. In this year the tithes were gathered at the place of residence and formed into a

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children of Israel they shall have no inheritance"; Joshua 18:7 — *...and to the Levites there is no part between you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their destiny.*

4. Where tithes were surrendered

Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 11-12, 17-18 — *But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. ... Then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. ... You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all to which you put your hands.*

This passage testifies to the fact that the Lord commanded the Israelites to bring their tithes to the Jerusalem temple, the dwelling place of the Lord God.

The prophet Malachi exhorted the infidels, in tithing and offering the Israelites, to bring all that they owe to God into the house of repose — the house of God: **Malachi 3:8-12** — *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this", Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field", Says the Lord of hosts; "And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land", Says the Lord of hosts.*

5. Year of Tithing

Deuteronomy 26:12-15 — *When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year — the year of tithing — and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God: "I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow,*



local tithe storehouse, to feed local Levites, aliens, orphans and widows.

Additional scripture passages on tithing:

Nehemiah 10:32-39 — *Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings, to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as it is written in the Law. And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the Lord; to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God.*

Nehemiah 12:44-45 — *And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered. Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David and Solomon his son.*

Old Testament tithing was a way of expressing gratitude to God for all that man had, as well as acknowledging that the Lord was the owner of everything.

The veneration of the Lord with material goods in Old Testament times was an integral

part of worship that did not go unnoticed and uncorrected by God: **Proverbs 3:9-10** — **Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the first fruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.**

II. TITHES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The New Testament on the Old Testament Tithe

Matthew 23:23 — *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone (the same is said in Luke 11:42).*

Luke 18:11-12 — *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess".*

Hebrews 7:5 — *And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham.*

These three passages from the New Testament relate to the Jewish practice of tithing, which was intended for Levites and priests who are ministers of the Old Testament.

2. New Testament on Material Support for Ministers

There is not a single verse in the New Testament that commands Christians to tithe ten percent of their income. However, the New Testament does not deny the Old Testament principle of sponsoring ministers. Just as in the Old Testament times, when God's ministers had the right to exist by tithing, so too do New Testament ministers have the right to live from the gospel: **1 Corinthians 9:7-14** — *Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain". Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

The Lord Jesus Himself, when He sent His disciples to preach, commanded them the following: **Matthew 10:9-10** — *Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.*

How can a preacher of the gospel live from evangelism?

This is only possible if he lives off donations. And the Word of God calls us to share: **Galatians 6:6** — *Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches; 1 Timothy 5:17-18* — *Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain", and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages".*

Notice that the apostles, as ministers of the New Testament, referred to the financial issues of ministry and quoted the Old Testament principle: *Do not shield the mouth of the threshing ox (1 Timothy 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:9).* Have you ever wondered why the apostles were guided by the Old Testament principle in this matter? The answer is simple: No one has repealed the law. The Lord Jesus Himself said the same thing in **Matthew 5:17**: *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

3. The New Testament on Giving

Giving in the New Testament is not limited to tithing from income. Since everything we have belongs to God (as well as to ourselves, according to **1 Corinthians 6:19**), we must be faithful and prudent stewards of all that the Lord has entrusted to us.

(Continued on page 12)

**FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS**

**What does
the Bible
say about
healing?**

Isaiah 53:5, which is then quoted in 1 Peter 2:24, is a key verse on healing, but it is often misunderstood and misapplied. *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* The word translated *healed* can mean either spiritual or physical healing. However, the contexts of Isaiah 53 and 1 Peter 2 make it clear that it is speaking of spiritual healing. *He*



Illustration
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himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24). The verse is talking about sin and righteousness, not sickness and disease. Therefore, being *healed* in both these verses is speaking of being forgiven and saved, not physically healed.

The Bible does not specifically link physical healing with spiritual healing. Sometimes people are physically healed when they place their faith in Christ, but this is not always the case. Sometimes it is God's will to heal, but sometimes it is not. The apostle John gives us the proper perspective: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of Him (1 John 5:14-15).* God still performs miracles. God still heals people. Sickness, disease, pain, and death are still realities in this world. Unless the Lord returns, everyone who is alive today will die, and the vast majority of them (Christians included) will die as the result of a physical problem (disease, sickness, injury). It is not always God's will to heal us physically.

Ultimately, our full physical healing awaits us in heaven. In heaven, there will be no more pain, sickness, disease, suffering, or death (Revelation 21). We all need to be less preoccupied with our physical condition in this world and a lot more concerned with our spiritual condition (Romans 12:1-2). Then we can focus our hearts on heaven where we will no longer have to deal with physical problems. Revelation 21:4 describes the true healing we should all be longing for: *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

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TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

T I T H E

(Ending. Beginning on page 11)

The New Testament calls for Christians to not only support ministers, but also to be generous to those in need, especially brothers and sisters in the faith. According to New Testament teaching, giving is to be voluntary and generous: 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 — *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*

Details of donations to the saints (that is, Christians and their churches) are discussed in 2 Corinthians 8:1 — 9:15. We advise you to read these two chapters carefully. We want to draw your attention to the following verses from these chapters: 2 Corinthians 8:12-15 — *For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack — that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack".*

Donating to churches, according to New Testament teaching, is proof of Christian love: 2 Corinthians 8:24 — *Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.*

The Word of God calls us to be generous and kind in our giving: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 — *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever". Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.*

Today, some argue that since the New Testament has no command to tithe, it abolishes old testament tithing. But the very fact that there is no commandment to tithe in the New Testament should make us wonder if this is a coincidence. No, not by chance. The Lord just doesn't want to limit our generosity.

A Christian said in this regard: *What matters to God is not the amount we donate, but the state of the heart with which we do it. Take the example of the early church, when people happily sold everything they had!*

ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper "Prisoner" has the status of the three languages: Russian, Ukrainian 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!

And you know why? Because they had something more. They were not sorry to part with their possessions. This was not done under penalty of punishment. But from the fulfillment of God's kingdom within. We, when we count ten percent of the income, so as not to accidentally give away more, insult God.

Of course, God personally does not need tithing. Moreover, He does not need anything at all, for He has everything: The whole universe belongs to Him. Tithes, first, are needed by us ourselves: to test and strengthen, to cleanse our hearts of greed and greed (2 Corinthians 9:7 — *...for God loves the giver kindly.*)

Secondly, tithes are needed by the church to maintain ministers. Come to think of it, couldn't God have fed the Levites supernaturally, with food like manna, in Old Testament times? Nothing is impossible for the Lord. However, he said that Israel would be their lot. The Levites lived on the tithes that the Jews brought to the temple. Similarly, from the New Testament tithes and donations, there are ministers and missionaries today.

III. TITHING OUTSIDE THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Tithing is not an innovation of the Old Testament Law, as many people think and claim. The practice of giving a tenth of the income to God existed among many peoples of the ancient world. This is evidenced by the fact that Abraham (by nationality Chaldeans) gave a tenth of his gatherings to Melchizedek, the king of Salem and the priest of God the Most High. This is stated in Genesis 14:17-20: *And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the [a]defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. Abram and Melchizedek Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand". And he gave him a tithe of all.*

Later, Jacob vowed to give God a tithe of all that he had, if God would be with him on all days, give him food, and in peace bring him back to his father's house: Genesis 28:20-22 — *Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You".* Notice that this was long before the Law that God gave to the people of Israel through Moses. So we see that the doctrine of tithing is not limited to the command of the Old Testament Law. And therefore the doctrine of tithing cannot be abolished by the New Testament.

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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!"



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Our contacts:

redakciya.uznik@yahoo.com
tel.: +380645225707
+380661395801

**Mailing address in U.S.
for the newspaper
"Prisoner":**

Hope of Freedom, P.O. Box 4053 Everett, WA 98204

**Editor Trubitsin
Igor Evgenyevich
(pseudonym Igor Gorik)**

Responsible for the issue
Irina Dolgushina.

Design and Desktop Publishing
Pavel Vladimirov.

Translation services

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