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## Foundations of Faith

This booklet is a collection of sermon extracts and articles. Its purpose is to help us reflect on the very foundation of our Christian faith. In short, it takes us all the way 'back to the roots'.

We will be looking at such crucial questions, as: what really is faith and conversion? What is the significance of getting baptized? What is characteristic of a Christian congregation? What does the Bible say about prayer and the Lord's supper? I'm afraid we cannot deal with all the questions of faith in this booklet; but then, this is not so much a piece of theological literature for scholars. It is rather a brief compilation of the most important nuggets of information and a hands-on guide on issues like how to get your faith started, developed and fed by the Spirit for a lifetime.



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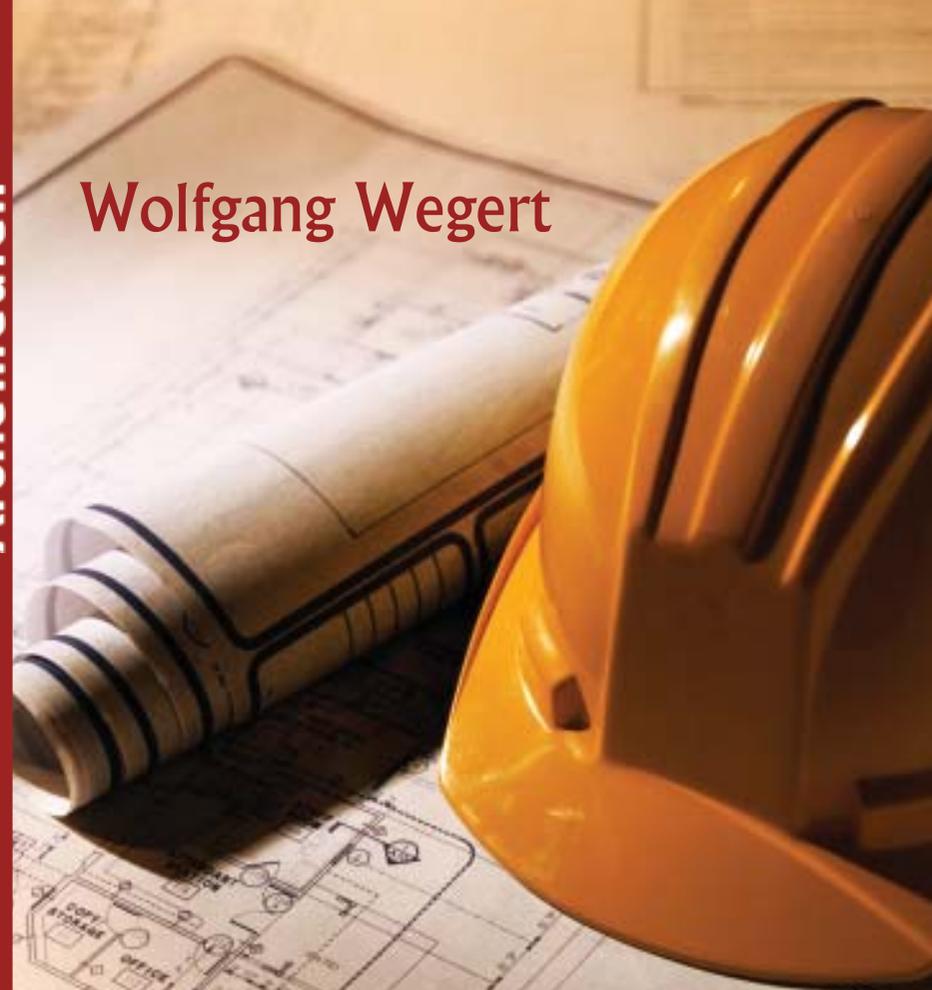
Arche medien

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# **Foundations of Faith**

**by Wolfgang Wegert**

**arche-medien Hamburg**

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## Foreword

“Foundations of Faith”. That’s the name of the book you are holding in your hands. Often, when you talk about the building blocks, or more specifically, the fundamentals of faith, people tend to confuse it with so-called religious fundamentalism, a movement that has become popular because of its ruthless fanaticism. This is not what this publication is all about. This book is simply about the basics of Christian faith, and it concerns our faith in Jesus Christ.

Our society is different from what is used to be; it has become pluralistic. Although we still seem to uphold certain Christian traditions and holidays, just a few of us remember the building blocks of a living faith, the heart of the gospel. May I be ask you a candid question, dear reader? Do you really know what the Christian symbol of the cross stands for? There are countless numbers of them all over the place – on a steeple, at the altar, in public buildings; you can even find the cross worn on a chain dangling from your neck. But who truly knows that the cross of Christ bears a message that is pertinent to each one of us, and in a very personal way?

Are you aware that the teachings on the “righteousness by faith” have to do with the destiny of your life? Perhaps you don’t have a clue of what I mean. Then, for you, it would be like for a million other churchgoers or so who got baptized at some point without ever discovering the true meaning of their faith. That’s just too bad because the Christian faith explicitly aims at bringing light and hope into our lives. Funnily, we have little concern about this fact; even more so, in view of the many burning questions we have and in light of our unsuccessful efforts to find a way out of our human entanglement in sinfulness. So this little compilation of extracts from sermons and articles is meant to serve you in contemplating the fundamentals of our Christian faith once more.

In a nutshell, back to the roots, the building blocks of a living faith! We shall, therefore, address major questions such as, what really is faith and conversion?, what does baptism truly mean?, what are the characteristics of a Bible-believing church?, what does the Bible teach regarding prayer and the Lord's Supper? I'm afraid not all questions pertaining to faith can be answered in this book alone. But then, it is not so much of a theological textbook but more of a practical guideline on how faith in your heart can get started, can deepen, and can continue to revolve around Jesus for the rest of your life. So, it's not only about sound doctrine but also its practical application – even at dull times like these, you can nevertheless experience a life, abundantly filled with hope and joy. Because of sin, humans face misery and experience great personal suffering; our souls are hurt. The gospel is still God's answer to these problems.

That's why I pray Christ will use this book to bless and heal you.

Wolfgang Wegert

Hamburg, January 2000

### ***Foreword, related to the second printing in German***

Faster than expected, the first edition of this book was out of print. This is positive because it shows that people today still want to enquire about the gospel. I firmly believe that many more people will have a sincere interest in finding out about the foundational concepts of the Bible. So, no time to lose, we said, and went right into printing again. May this edition also help numerous others on their way to eternal life.

Wolfgang Wegert

Hamburg, January 2001

## The Righteousness Of God

*“And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”*

*(Romans 3:24-26)*

The Bible teaches that God is not only our Creator but also our Judge. Therefore, the most important question you could ever ask is this: **“How can I become righteous before God?”** Owing to our fallen nature, it should be self-evident that not one of us could ever become righteous based on our own efforts and deeds. Let me be frank with you, dear reader: What I just said, includes you as well. That’s why we all face judgment – God is just and incorruptible. In view of this, our situation is most miserable indeed.

Here is the good news, however. God is also full of compassion. In His great mercy, He worked out a way to make us righteous through His Son Jesus Christ. What our *own* righteousness cannot accomplish, Jesus can! Through Him we can receive righteousness, free of cost and as a gift. This wonderful news is what the gospel is all about and where it derives its name from. Turning to the book of Romans, we can gain a clear-cut understanding of this important message.

### **God makes Jesus a place of reconciliation and atonement**

This biblical truth is unique. All heathen religions, on the other hand, share the idea that reconciliation must be brought about by man; he needs to make atonement with a displeased god or even a number of gods by offering sacrifices.

Perhaps you remember “The Iliad”, Homer’s well-known story of Greek mythology. According to that piece of literature, a virgin named Helen was kidnapped by the enemy, Paris, during the battle of Troy; subsequently, Greek commander Agamemnon tried to set her free. He didn’t succeed though because a strong wind allegedly caused by the gods, kept him from pursuing the evildoer. So Agamemnon killed his own daughter in an act of making the gods grant him favor in sailing. Apparently, things worked out. With the wind dying down, he could head out and recapture Helen.

This myth exemplifies what most religions teach: God is supposedly bad-tempered and jealous, angry and grumpy, and has no other intention than making life difficult and troublesome for you. Hoping that you can somehow change his mind, you offer sacrifices to him. Chances are that he might be more inclined then to make reconciliation.

The God of the Bible is the complete opposite of this. Who offers the sacrifice? Not man but God Himself. He initiates reconciliation. Paul informed us that “*God presented him [= Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement*”. So God made the first move. Let us also check out 2 Corinthians 5:19 where we can find the same message, “*That God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*” God Himself presents Jesus before us, stating “It is in Him that you will be reconciled with me”.

Sometimes people suppose Jesus actually had to beg His Father to please have mercy with us. Such opinion has no basis in Scripture. The fact of the matter is that it is God’s explicit will to give us the gospel, to grant us salvation, to offer us reconciliation. The Father’s will and the Son’s will are in perfect agreement. We do not believe in three gods but in the triune God who has but one will. It goes without saying that the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are different in person but one in their plan to make reconciliation possible for mankind.

This entitles us to approach the Father although He is rightfully angry because of our sins and transgressions. God, however, reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus Christ; this is the teaching of the apostle (2 Corinthians 5:19). God presented Him, making the cross of Calvary the Father's symbol of reconciliation. He sacrificed His beloved Son to make atonement for us, "*To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past*" (Romans 3:25, KJV). The worst thing that God faces is our sins and disregard of His commands. He cannot turn a blind eye to it and accept our wrong behavior. Instead, God stands up against the injustice that all of mankind has committed against Him.

In a conversation about God, somebody once remarked, "You know what, pastor?! God is gracious. We'll all make it to heaven anyhow." I couldn't help it but replied, "Heaven must be pretty much of a pig-sty then." Admittedly, my statement was rather blunt but nevertheless true. God's grace is not about turning one or even two blind eyes to our misbehavior. He can very well differentiate between justice and injustice. God is a just judge who doesn't leave our trespasses unpunished. He demonstrates His perfect justice, as Romans 3:25 so aptly describes.

### **Righteousness declared on the cross of Calvary**

What does it really mean that on the cross of Calvary, God "*declares his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past*" (KJV). Didn't God demonstrate His justice already when He brought about the Great Flood? Not quite. Then, all men had sinned and God punished most of them by putting them to death. Despite the fact that they were sinners also, He did spare Noah and his family. The Biblical accounts abound where God showed His mercy many other times as well. Think of the

Israelites who had sinned against Him. Yet, only the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea. And what about that great sinner named Lot? That man didn't deserve God's grace either but unlike the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were swept away, he could escape God's wrath.

By now, you might have got the impression that prior to the time when salvation was granted through Jesus Christ, God wasn't quite just. God somehow didn't seem to treat all people equally and apparently made exceptions, even overlooked sin. It is the apostle Paul who addresses this question. He states that God now shows His righteousness in the cross of Calvary in that He no longer allows sins to go unpunished; He does, however, not hold the evildoers of times long gone by, accountable but puts all those sins on Jesus Christ, the One who bore all the sins in man's place. God is an incredibly just God. He permitted sin to go unpunished for a very long time. That permission was merely a delay, never an acceptance of sin. Finally, sin had to be punished. Jesus Christ became God's chosen sacrifice for that purpose "*in his forbearance; to demonstrate his justice*".

Declaring His righteousness on the cross of Calvary does not only refer to the past, it also holds for the future. Therefore, Christians, who are God's saints, are in no way better than the world. God does not make any difference here. We all must be judged. So what is the difference then, you might ask. The crucial difference is based on the fact that God's saints are made righteous in that Jesus paid the price for their sins when He was crucified. Unbelievers, however, will have to bear the punishment for their sinful behavior themselves, unless they turn to Jesus as their Savior beforehand.

All of God's judgments in this world are manifestations of His righteousness. Nowhere else, though, does God show His righteousness as perfectly as in Christ crucified. It is on the cross where the Father avenges Himself for the transgressions of His saints. Jesus, His Son, bears their punishment – He is

beaten, suffers under the burden of fear, wrath and separation, and remains obedient until He dies. This declaration of God's righteousness on the cross of Calvary is necessary because God is entirely just. He cannot allow any sin to go unpunished. That's why His Son Jesus had to pay our sin debt. In Christ, we can witness God's righteousness. This is the one aspect of His righteousness.

### **God can justify**

The other aspect of God's righteousness is that He can offer justification, actually to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ. How does that work? Romans 3:21 tells us that, "*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets*" (KJV). We all are justified, free-of-cost. A multitude of reasons underpin this statement. It is because our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated God's righteousness; because God made Him an acceptable sacrifice of atonement; and also because God reveals Himself as a just judge when He punished Jesus in man's place. Verse 24 relays this message perfectly well, "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (KJV) All people on earth are entitled to receive God's saving grace if they believe in Jesus Christ. There are no boundaries. God freely gives His grace to everyone, regardless of a believer's nationality.

I once read the biography of a Japanese gentleman. Many years ago, when he was still young, he used to live in a remote little village that no missionary had ever visited. Nobody there had heard of the gospel either. So one day the man sets out to go to the market in some far-away big town. Upon his arrival, his attention is drawn to a Bible-selling vendor who proclaims Jesus Christ. Many people are listening to his message. The villager, however, doesn't really understand what this man is talking about. Eventually, he decides to purchase a Bible from

him and goes back home somewhat later. There, he immediately picks up his newly-acquired book and starts reading. Lots of questions pop up in his mind but answers seem to be found nowhere. Weeks pass. More and more, he feels he should go back to the vendor. Perhaps that man could answer some of his questions. So one day, he sets out once again. To his great disappointment, he has to acknowledge the fact that the corner where the vendor used to run his business at is deserted. Questions about the vendor's whereabouts add to his frustration: The Christian businessman seemed to have come from a distant city himself and rarely happens to drop by at this town. The young Japanese feels sad but can't help it. He has to return, without having accomplished anything. Back home, he continues his Bible studies. Alone. It takes some time until he gets to the book of Romans. There, he reads about God's righteousness and His justification. And what happens now? The miracle takes place! The Holy Spirit gives the man understanding; God in His great mercy illuminates the man's mind so that he can comprehend that he has been justified freely by God's grace through believing in Jesus Christ. His heart rejoices once he can discern this Biblical truth! He delights in His Lord and Savior, the One who gave Himself for the man so that he could be saved.

This young Japanese is a living example for God's wonderful grace that makes it possible that a person can access eternal salvation by reading the Holy Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit only. Let this young brother-in-Christ be an example for all of us. He got the message of Christ, which states we are justified by faith, freely, and without having to add something to it.

Don't we, however, all too often act contrary to this? After having sinned, we try to justify ourselves, particularly before other people so that they can all see how righteous we are, and in an effort to calm down our own feelings of guilt. Wait a

minute, please. Remember, that we stand guilty before God, not man. My heavenly Father knows me in my sinfulness, warts and all. He has known me like that ever since and even before the creation of the world. If He nevertheless chooses to justify me in His grace, I don't stand guilty before others. I may live because God made me righteous in Christ Jesus.

Naturally, this righteousness that God gave us in Jesus Christ, will automatically trigger a practical righteousness also. Good deeds and works are the results of a living faith and a righteousness we received from God. That should go without saying. If the Holy Spirit indwells us, it is His assignment and goal to conform us to the image of Christ. Therefore, please make no mistake about this: All our good works are a result of our justification in Christ but never ever the reason for it! If you understand this message, you no longer need to justify yourself. Your righteousness is neither in you nor in your alleged sinlessness – something that cannot be accomplished anyway as long as we live on this planet. Your righteousness is a gift and you became the owner of it when you placed your trust in Jesus Christ.

Whosoever suffers from that complex of guilt, let him now declare, "I believe in Jesus Christ, my righteousness." The devil or other people might stand ready to accuse you. You don't owe them anything. *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies"* (Romans 8:33). So believe in Jesus, saying, "Father, I praise You because You presented Christ to declare Your righteousness. I lift up Your name for the gift of Christ in whom I'm justified." Nobody can accuse us on account of our failures; instead, we may thank God that we are justified freely and by His grace in the blood of His Son. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## **Prayer**

*Our Father in heaven, in light of Your Word I can now see that You are a just God but I'm a lost sinner. I could never ever stand before Your holiness. Please, have mercy with me. Give me faith so that I can believe in You. Forgive me my sins and trespasses. Lord, have mercy. Amen.*

## Justified By Faith

*“It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”*

*(Romans 4:13; please, also read Romans 4:13-21)*

In the Bible, Abraham is the classic example for the fact that we attain God’s righteousness by faith alone. You cannot be justified by good deeds. So let me take Abraham as an example to illustrate to you what God means when He says “righteousness comes by faith”.

According to our Scripture passage, Abraham can be regarded as a “father of all believers” (Romans 4:11-12) because “*against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations*” (Romans 4:18). The Bible provides additional evidence of this testimony in the book of Galatians, e.g. in chapter 3:7, where it says, “*Those who believe are children of Abraham*”. Or have a look at verse 9, if you will, “*So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*”.

### Abraham’s fatherhood

Abraham is called “father”. There must be a significant reason for this title. Is it because Abraham is a shining example for the believers? Surely not, even though we should see him as an example. Why doesn’t the Bible call him “brother”? After all, he was the first to believe God, and we are his brothers and sisters in Christ.

What I’d like to relay to you is that the Bible – being God-breathed and authored by the Holy Spirit – has a specific reason for calling Abraham “father”; the answer centers on the idea what believers really are. Believers are not a group of people who happen to share the same belief system and have a common agenda for life. When the Bible calls Abraham “father”, it

drives home the fact that believers are born-again children of God who are the offspring of one seed, making Abraham's fatherhood as real as can be.

So believers are not just people of the same conviction but an offspring, members of a dynasty. Peter informs us about this some more, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1Peter 2:9).

We have now learned that we are Abraham's descendants whose faith makes him our spiritual father. His fatherhood is based on a divine seed, as the apostle Peter explains, *"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God"* (1 Peter 1:23).

A person will therefore not succeed in becoming a believer if his faith is based on educational programs or training or any other efforts. If you want to become a member of God's people, you must be born again by the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Clearly, membership of God's chosen people can only be attained by the grace of being born into it. We can thus feel free to call other believers brothers and sisters, for we are all children of God, as the gospel of John explains, *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1: 12-13, KJV)

### **Inner condition of the heart of the spiritual offspring**

What does the inner state of the heart look like that a spiritual child of God is supposed to have? Or, to put it another way, how do believers behave? Once again, these questions can be answered quite plainly if we take Abraham, the father of this people of believers, as an example. The very name "father of all

believers” indicates that we are talking about people who believe.

**Abraham received the inner state of faith by revelation**, when he was already seventy years old. He grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans, an area where paganism and idolatry abounded. Abraham must have been serving idols, until God revealed Himself to him as the one and only true God. Stephen recounts those facts when he delivered his speech, *“Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran”* (Acts 7:2). That was the opening of a series of revelations of the living God that altered Abraham’s life fundamentally. Abraham would never be the same again.

God showed him righteousness that comes by faith. The apostle Paul details us on the full meaning of this. God also gave Abraham several promises; one of them said that he would become the father of many nations, a “father of many believers”. So God actually made an eternal and irrevocable covenant. This revelation certainly implied Christ as the Savior. Along with it, God put a living faith in Abraham’s heart. The book of Genesis describes how Abraham reacted: *“Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness”* (15:6). God’s revelation yielded faith.

It’s still the same today. All the believers who now belong to God’s chosen people were born again of imperishable seed. The only way to bring this about is by revelation. Paul tells us basically, “when God was pleased to reveal His Son in me, my life changed and I started serving Him” (paraphrase of Galatians 1:15ff). This experience is generally called “conversion”; we might as well call it “God’s revelation”. Why? Because it is the Holy Spirit that convicts a person and draws him to God.

The seed for becoming Abraham’s spiritual offspring is practically like an anchor that God put in the heart of a person. So you will find that person go look for God because God

looked for him or her first. One day then, the person starts loving God because God loved the person first. If you aren't a member of God's people yet but feel a hunger for Him and His word, you may know that it is the Holy Spirit who reveals all this to your heart also. Every single born-again Christian can testify to such revelations by God because without them and the convictions of the Holy Spirit, no living faith can be produced.

**Abraham's inner state of faith brought about hope:**  
*"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith" (Romans 4:18-20).* From a human viewpoint, Abraham could not have any hope. He actually believed against all natural hope, based on hope that God gave him.

This becomes very obvious when we reflect on Abraham's name. You might know that initially, he was called "Abram", which the NIV Bible translates as "exalted father". Abram had that name, grew in age – but remained childless. Eventually, his wife Sarai thought she had to do her part in order to make the promise come true. So what she did was, she talked Abram into taking her maidservant Hagar. As a result, Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael, a son. Abram's name must have sounded pretty odd. Imagine what he had to go through in normal day-to-day encounters. If somebody visited him and he introduced himself as "exalted father", he had to admit upon being asked, that he didn't have any descendants: and even later, when he had a son, Ishmael happened to be his one and only child. For us, things are different today. A name usually doesn't carry any meaning anymore. In those days, however, when someone was called "Miller" or "Smith", the name had significance, giving

away the person's job, for instance. Abram, on the other hand, was called "exalted father", but happened to be none. So he pondered the question of making his nephews his heir – first Lot, then Eliezer of Damascus.

At ninety-nine, Abram met God once again. Subsequently, he told his family that God had given him a new name. They probably assumed that God had kind of modified Abram's name so as to fit better to the actual situation. There must have been quite a bit of commotion when Abram stated, "From now on, I shall be called Abraham". The NIV Bible offers this translation for the name, "father of many" or "father of many nations". The Bible does not hide from us how Sarah reacted to this idea; it must have sounded not just incredible but simply preposterous to her.

Abraham, however, hoped and believed. He had no reason to hope but he hoped against all hope, based on God's hope. He did not falter or grow weak. Instead, he held on to the promise that God had given him. We have a song that expresses Abraham's attitude quite accurately. It goes something like this, "God's promises stand, they never sway. Heavens and earth may burn, mountain and valley will pass away. But the one who believes will say, God's Word will remain true till the very last day."

Paul picks up that very idea in his letter to the Romans; Abraham did not look at his own body that was virtually dead nor did he "*waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God*" (Romans 4:19-20). Instead, he believed that God would fulfil His promises – even though all human reasoning spoke against them. God literally took Abraham by the hand and said to him, "Abraham, come out of your tent. Look up at the heavens, and count the stars. Then, let's go to the seashore. Go ahead and count the number of sand grains. That is how many children you will have" (paraphrase of Genesis 15:5; 22:17). And then, we can read, "*Abraham believed the LORD, and he*

*credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).* In the New Testament, Paul refers to this very passage of Scripture, and does so word-for-word (Romans 4:3). Abraham believed in the seed of the promise, in the spiritual offspring, in the people of a pure heart and in the coming Savior. He believed all that and God’s grace ensured that he could hold on to it although there was no hope at all.

Today’s believers are full of hope as well; they build on God’s promises. We don’t deal with a worn-out or dead body but with our old nature. Despair might settle in if time and again, we have to face the fact that our flesh wants to dominate us and we sin. Our sins could be big or small. To God, this is not relevant at all; any kind of sin is a crime. And yet, we have the right to go to our heavenly Father and ask Him, “Precious God, can You accomplish making a sinner like me not only righteous, but actually bringing the work in me to completion, ultimately?”

I am so grateful that we can read the answer to this question in the book of Romans, “*And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (8:30).* Hallelujah. He did it – and I may hold on to His promise. Even if I don’t see a thing yet and commit a number of sins on this day alone; even if I fail the Lord manifold; I may still hope although human reasoning tells me there is no basis for hope at all.

As long as you focus on yourself and your sin and your failure, you won’t make it. The moment you concentrate on Jesus, however, and trust in His promise, you may believe, based on hope against all hope. Then, you will be a person who is never without hope. A truly born-again Christian has this living and glorious view for this life and the one thereafter. Without a doubt, Abraham sinned a lot, and the Bible reports on it. Nevertheless, he held on to the promise, and that is why even Abraham could already rely on what Paul much later expressed

in the book of Philippians, *“That he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it”* (1:6, KJV).

These promises concern other questions as well, like the one about a revival and a conversion of the peoples of this earth. I’m so excited about how God will bring these promises to pass! We also have a promise that deals with the perfecting of the saints; another one states Israel’s conversion. The Bible also informs us that the nations will turn to God. We can touch upon this promise in psalm 2:8, for example: *“Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession”*. Somewhat later, we can read, *“All who see me mock me”* (Psalm 22:7). *“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before Him”* (Psalm 22:27). The book of Acts gives us insight into the future of this world, *“That the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things”* (15:7). Certainly, the world doesn’t look as if it is getting any better but God is still able to fulfil what He promised in His Word. Let us believe Him and testify to it. And let us hope against all hope.

This also applies to your personal life. God promised that He would bring His wonderful work of sanctification to completion in you – and what He promises, He definitely keeps. You may believe that personally. For that reason, you have a right to rejoice in hope. May the Lord bless you!

### ***Prayer***

*Abba, heavenly Father above. I’m grateful to You that Your word presents Abraham as a model of faith to us. I don’t have anything either that I could offer You so that You would have mercy on me. Just like all the other ones, I depend on Your grace, freely given, for producing that faith in You that can justify me. That’s what I’m asking You for, in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.*

## Jesus Christ, Your Personal Savior

*“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

*(Matthew 1:21)*

When God announced the birth of His Son, He chose His name intentionally, indicating the plan He wanted to accomplish through Him. For this reason, the angel revealed to Joseph in a dream this message, *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). So Jesus came for that one big mission: To save people from their sins.

Why from our sins, you might wonder. Why not from poverty, hunger and unemployment? Why does He want to save us from our sins but not from wars and catastrophes the world faces? If you broach the subject of “sin”, most people shrug their shoulders, stating, “That is not the kind of problem I have to deal with”. To them, other issues matter – their tiny apartment, their lack of money. According to them, the real problems don’t revolve around sin but their superior at work or the government. Some people don’t want to get redeemed from sin but their wife. *Sin*, the very expression, is fairly outdated anyway.

Billy Graham tells the story of a church administrator who wanted to have a word with his pastor regarding his sermons. This is what he said, “Pastor, most people in the congregation feel that you should refrain from speaking about sin so frequently and plainly. Why don’t you just call it mistakes or errors instead of bluntly calling it sin?” The pastor didn’t answer at once; he went over to a nearby set of shelves. He stretched his hand way up to the top shelf and reached for a little bottle that contained poison. Then, he showed it to his visitor. The bottle had big fat letters on it, all in striking red; they said, “Poison! Don’t touch!” “So what am I supposed to do

here?”, the pastor asked. “Do you think I should remove this label and put something else there? Say, peppermint essence? Don’t you realize that poison becomes even more harmful if you play down its effect?”<sup>1</sup> I have a feeling the church administrator got the point. For the very same reason, the Bible sticks to the term “sin” and tells us plainly that we must be saved from it – for, mind you:

### **Sin is the root of our misery**

Why is there so much violence, terror, and war? Why is mankind plagued by crime, rape and murder? Why do literally, billions of people starve while others are so rich that they can afford bathing in champagne and feeding their dogs lobster and caviar? Why don’t we succeed in creating a planet where peace, freedom and justice are available to all? Why must we still put up with drug trafficking, bribery, and secretive arms deals? Why do we apparently see to it that our environment is getting more and more polluted? Why are so many marriages beyond repair, so many families broken? Why does a man kill his own wife and a mother her children? Why does a sales clerk lie to his or her customers? Why, why, why?

No, it is not God who is responsible for the mess we are in. It is us. We are responsible for our decay. And the cause is obvious. It’s our sinfulness. That is the root of our misery. Sin is a devastating curse for mankind. But beware, sin lives inside all of us, including you. The Bible teaches, “*Even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood*” (Genesis 8:21). The book of Romans has this truth for us, “*There is no-one righteous, not even one; ... All have turned away, ... There is no-one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their*

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<sup>1</sup> Billy Graham: „Friede mit Gott.“ R. Brockhaus Verlag: Wuppertal, 1970, 8. Taschenbuchauflage. p. 40 (“Peace With God.” 1953, 2002)

*feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. ... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10-18,23).*

Sin is a terrible reality – no matter, if we want to take heed of it or not. Sin is a fact. Just open any newspaper or magazine you want. You will find ample evidence for how real sin is. Sin is like a horrible disease that never gets any better – hatred, selfishness, lust, quarrels and bickering, fraud, murder and so forth. The mere fact that we have institutions like the police or the army and places like courts, jails or correction centers bears witness that something is wrong.

Ultimately, sin is not just the cause for our human misery but also for death. Think about this: Without sin, there would be no death. Here is what the Bible tells us in this regard, “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23). Surely, we have seen it more often than not that indeed, the wages of sin is death, in a very real sense. How many people have taken sick and eventually died from sleeping around and committing all kinds of perversions? How many have already died from excessive drinking and alcoholism? I heard of a story where a commercial plane was on its way from Zurich to Beirut.<sup>2</sup> Suddenly, one of the passengers, a man called Josef Pasatour, started groaning with pain. Before long, he cried out he couldn’t breathe properly anymore. The individual’s condition worsened to such an extent that the plane had to make a detour to Athens for an unscheduled stop over. There, he was rushed to the hospital. Too late, as it turned out. Upon his arrival there, the poor man had already been pronounced dead. When they undressed him, they discovered that Mr. Pasatour had been a smuggler. He had

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee Tan: “Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs Of The Times.” Assurance Publishers: Rockville, 1979, 1988 (10th printing) No. 5713

about 1,500 expensive Swiss watches strapped around his body that made proper breathing virtually impossible. And that is exactly what sin does to you: Sin renders breathing the happy and meaningful life that God wants us to enjoy in His presence, impossible. Therefore, we urgently require a Savior who can redeem us from our sins.

There is another reason why we need to get saved from sin:

## **We are unable to help ourselves**

Sin is an awful law in all of mankind. We can't shake it off although we wish to do so. The Bible doesn't use the expression "original or inherited sin"; we do find, however, passages like this, "*Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No-one!*" (Job 14:4). As long as children are fathered, it will be impossible for any human to be born without his or her sinful nature. The truth of this law drives Paul to this statement, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*" (Romans 7:18-24). We have seen it all and been everywhere already to testify that no matter how hard we might try, we always fail in becoming a better person.

A husband and his battered wife came for counseling to me. Her face was all black and blue; the man was sobbing, until despair suddenly overtook him, and he cried out, "Pastor, I don't want to do it. I really don't want to do it. I have such a

loving wife. But then, when anger grips me, I just lash out and beat her up. I'm so sorry!" I learned that this had been going on for years already. The brutal law of sin is like gravity; it can't be overcome, it always pulls you down. How many tears have been shed, how many hearts have been broken, how much war and mishap been caused because of sin – the evil that has plagued mankind ever since.

One of the very well-known pastors of Germany, Wilhelm Busch, had his ministry in the city of Essen. He often dealt with young people. Once he tried to illustrate the power of sin to them. "Picture this. By nature, we are born with an iron chain around our neck. Every time I sin, another chain link is added onto the chain. For instance, I entertain a dirty thought; boom, a chain link. I just slandered someone: there you go, another chain link. Dishonesty and lies; one more chain link."<sup>3</sup> Can you fathom the length of the chain that is around our neck? The chain is so long that we have to drag it behind us! We might call that chain a chain of guilt. Guilt is very real and visible before God, unlike that chain in our illustration. And that is precisely the reason why we can't get happy. We seem to have it all but suffer from depression and unhappiness. It is this hidden chain of guilt that produces sadness and dissatisfaction. We are unable to help ourselves. We are sold to sin and enslaved by it. Just as the leopard cannot change its spots, we can't get rid of our sinful behavior. Try as you might, you will not succeed. In fact, it's a fruitless endeavor right from the beginning. A mouse should not attempt to fly. It's futile, unless it is changed into a bird. That's the same for us sinners.

We need someone who transforms us; who gives us a new nature; who saves us from sin. This someone is Jesus Christ. He is our cure against sin. A number of people presume they

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<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Busch: „Jesus unser Schicksal“. Schriftenmissions-Verlag: Gladbeck, 1971<sup>5</sup>. p. 13 (“Jesus, Our Destiny.”)

can manage the evil state of human nature without Jesus. So they'll try this and that. Some believe in psychology, others in hypnosis or will power. Regardless of the method taken, people only succeeded in repressing those emotions of guilt. Guilt could not be deleted or canceled. Say, there was a leaking gas pipe somewhere in the house. Would a smart housewife really use a pleasant fragrance to cover the terrible smell of gas? She'd better tackle the problem at its root and turn off the gas supply altogether. This is exactly what Jesus did. John the Baptist said, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29). God in His love became the man Jesus Christ when He visited us. This Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was without guilt or sin when He gave His life for us as the lamb of God on the cross. He hung there in my and in your place. We should have received the punishment because those sins you and I had committed. We should have been held accountable but the Bible says, "*And the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7).

## **Eternal separation from God**

There is another reason why we need salvation from sin. It's being separated from God forever. God is holy and without sin. He cannot allow or accept any sin. The only thing God cannot do is sin. His nature is truth. If He lied, He would no longer be God. Thus, only truth can stand in His presence.

The first people were without sin initially. So they could enjoy perfect fellowship with God. Life then was a true paradise in its full meaning. The people could benefit from peace, health, prosperity, even immortality. When that old serpent came along, the one that the Bible identifies as the devil, things changed dramatically. The devil was successful in injecting sin into our system, so-to-speak. Ever since, mankind of all races and complexions have been suffering from blood poisoning – the poisoning of our minds. All on a sudden, mistrust and open

rebellion against their Maker entered the hearts of the people. They started sinning and lost their holiness and purity. Immediately, Adam and Eve hid before God. Their fellowship with God was broken, their peace was gone. Adam and Eve were banned from the garden of Eden. Since then, man has been living disconnected from God, without peace or rest in this world until the day of his death, apart from God and separated from fellowship with Him eternally. The Bible calls this hell. That's why we need salvation from sin. That is the reason why Jesus came to look for the lost ones and to redeem them. Of course, the most significant question, therefore is this:

### **How does Christ save us from sin?**

My first answer is this: **through His sufferings and His death on the cross.** The Bible refers to Christ also as the second Adam. The first one failed; the second was the Son of God who succeeded. When the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the desert, the Son of God was tempted by the devil. Jesus, however, did not fall prey to the devil's schemes. He remained holy and never ever sinned. Though we would have rightfully had to pay the price for our sins and die, Jesus went to the cross for us. He was innocent and laid down His life voluntarily and in our place. He bore the punishment of God's just judgment. God must punish sin because He is a just and holy God. When Christ took our guilt upon Himself, He had to suffer under His Father's hand and bear our inequities. That's why He cried out on the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46). And that is also why the Bible teaches, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Another passage in Scripture makes us aware that *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace "* (Ephesians 1:7).

It is because of the blood Christ shed that Jesus gives everyone who believes in Him as his or her crucified Savior **forgiveness of sins**. Make no mistake here. Christ's death on the cross does not save all people from their sins automatically but only those who believe in His name. Accordingly, Matthew 1:21 declares, "*Because he will save his people from their sins*". "*His people*" – that term covers all people before or after His redemptive act at Calvary who have put their faith in Jesus as their Savior, being enlightened by the merciful leading of the Holy Spirit.

The first member of His people was Abraham. He lived a long time before Christ but believed in Him anyhow. He put his trust in Him because he was chosen to be the first one to see the day of Christ, as Jesus Himself tells us (John 8:56). The last member of His people will be the person who is last in putting his faith in Christ as his Savior and Redeemer. Then, the number is complete, and the day of the Lord has come. This is basically what the term "ekklesia"<sup>4</sup> means, the called-out ones, the believers in Christ whom God credited their faith as righteousness. Paul describes this people in these words, "*Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own*" (Titus 2:14).

My friend, are you a member of this people? You will not belong to His people unless you ask the Lord His forgiveness. You need to turn to Him in order to have Him save you from sin. He is the only One who can cancel your debts and take away your guilt. I'd like to encourage you to repent and confess your sins. You may rest assured that the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse also you from your sins. "*If we confess our sins, he*

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<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament, the Greek word "ekklesia" is usually translated to mean "church". It derives from the verb "ek-kaleo" = "to call out".

*is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus Christ, I am also a lost one. My life is full of sin. I wasn't aware of it for the greater part of my life. Now, however, I realize how lost I am. I want to get up from here and turn back to You, o Savior of my life. Thank You, Lord, for not turning me away. Amen.*

## Born To Believe

*“In reply Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:3)*

The husband of a very faithful servant of the Lord was asked if he didn't want to join his wife in putting his trust in the Lord. He answered, “Well, I certainly admire my spouse. There have been moments in my life where I even wished I could believe in the way she does. I do think, however, that I don't possess the disposition required for it.” This man did not argue against the Christian belief; he simply thought it would demand a certain inner predisposition to accept it. His wife seemed to have that special condition, while he did not. You might be dumbfounded if I tell you the man is right. Yes, indeed you need a certain inner disposition to have faith.

Make sure you understand that we are not talking about general talents here, such as a gifted musician, painter or mathematician will reflect. The gift of faith is of an entirely different type. According to the Bible, the gift of faith is not a natural phenomenon that man can induce by will. It is the Spirit of God that imparts that gift with man. Thus, you find Jesus telling us about a new birth that must happen. That birth is spiritual, not biological. In particular, He teaches that, *“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6)*. To sum up then, general gifts and talents come about by natural birth; the gift of faith is a result of someone's spiritual birth and cannot be evoked any other way.

### A spiritual birth

Maybe you wonder how faith can be put in your heart. The answer is precisely this: You must be born first because it is by this act that the gift of faith is imparted. Jesus taught this truth the famous scholar and pharisee Nicodemus. The man was so perplex that he immediately came up with a follow-up question;

he tried to find out how someone could return to his mother's womb in order to get born again (John 3:4). Jesus explained to that theologian that it was the Holy Spirit that gave birth to gifts and abilities that nobody could receive the natural way.

The average achiever might try as hard as he wants – becoming a second Albert Einstein is simply impossible for him. A genius is a result of natural creation. In a similar fashion, a believer is the product of a new birth. The Bible actually calls this new birth a new creation. Therefore, you cannot bring about a living faith by educational programs, training, or your own efforts. Look at a newly-born bird. It gets born, wings inclusive. When a newly-born Christian sees the light, he gets his faith to believe right then and there. God in His grace creates a new life in the believer, which in turn triggers a living faith.

### **What happens when you “get born again“?**

Let us have a look at Scripture together so that we can understand what truly happens when we experience the miracle of what the Bible calls “*rebirth*”<sup>5</sup> (e.g. *Titus 3:5*). Make no mistake: We certainly remain the same person but God does something life-changing to our nature and personality; it's like undergoing hidden surgery. By the power of His Holy Spirit, God changes our basic attitude towards Him. When we fell and sin entered the world, our nature became hostile towards the divine, for the Bible clearly says so, “*The sinful mind is hostile to God*” (*Romans 8:7*).

Being at enmity with God is our natural predisposition. Consequently, no human is able to keep God's laws and to return to Him. Such behavior is contrary to man's nature. So God in His grace reaches down to man and changes our natural

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<sup>5</sup> This expression should not be confused with another one, “reincarnation”. The Biblical meaning here is entirely different from that notion.

way of thinking and acting. No longer do we need to gravitate towards sin. From that moment on, we have the ability to lean on Him. It's as if someone secretly altered the compass, an instrument that usually points towards the cold north. We might put it this way: The inner magnetic forces of an unrenewed person will always point to where sin is; no matter where – on the top of a mountain or in the valley, in the forest or in the desert, in rain or under blue sunny skies, at day or at night – his old sinful nature focuses on evil.

As we can see, it takes a miracle to readjust the natural forces of gravity of fallen man. Once that happens, suddenly the compass needle points to the opposite direction, where God and His truth is. This is a life-changing process that affects man completely. A new will is born; a new way of thinking is set in place; Scripture puts it this way, "*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace*" (Romans 8:6).

### **A changed view on sin**

After God, the great Surgeon, operated on you, you aren't set free from sin. What changes is your attitude, your view on sin. Surely, even as a born-again Christian you can still sin but you no longer love that sinful behavior. Sinning doesn't give you pleasure anymore but rather grief. God gave you new interests and preferences. All on a sudden, you start asking for God. This is more than mere religious motivation; you simply long for Him. He is important to you. You received discernment so that you can see how wrong your life has been up to this moment. As a result, you will repent and give your life to Jesus. Previously, you loved sin and chased it. Now, however, you hate it. You avoid all evil and desire truth and purity. In the past, your mind was clouded and you simply, couldn't believe the Bible. And now? Reading the Bible has become your daily bread. Trusting the Word of God has become as natural to you

as flying to a bird is. This is all the result of your new birth, your rebirth.

Please, bear in mind that God's operating tool is His divine Word. The Bible clearly says, "*For you have been born again ... through the living and enduring word of God*" (1 Peter 1:23). So don't delay, but seize every opportunity you can, to hear the word of God and to be exposed to the gospel because "*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). Any effort to start a new life based on your own power will turn out futile. It simply won't work. Instead, go talk to God about it. Ask Him to renew your life. It is my conviction that He is working on your heart right now. Please, allow me to boldly encourage you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, you will not only be gifted to believe but actually get born again so as to put your faith in Him. You may rest assured that your life with Him will be fulfilling and your hope safe and sound!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for giving me Your life. Please, help me so that I can receive that gift of faith. I know that I cannot do it on my own. That's why I come to You: Help me shake off my unbelief. I praise you for answering my prayer request. Amen.*

## Return To God

*“So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”*  
(Acts 11:18)

When God starts working on our hearts, it doesn't go unnoticed. One of the consequences is that we turn from our old way of life to Him. The Bible calls this phenomenon „conversion”.

You have probably heard the expression “turning from Saul into Paul”. When Saul was converted into a new man, i. e., Paul, God said to him, *“I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light”* (Acts 26:17-18). It is quite evident what God wants: He wants us to turn, to return to Him. There are people out there who rebuke our ministry at the “ARCHE”, for calling people to return to God. This is, however, not so much of a reprimand but rather an honor for us. The Bible is a book of return from cover to cover!

### Taking a brief tour through the Bible

As early as in the days of the Old Testament, we can see how the prophets admonish the people, *“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD”* (Isaiah 55:7). In the New Testament, we hear a very similar call, *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out”* (Acts 3:19). If you open the book of Acts, you will read this joyful account of the apostles who asked the people to turn from their sins, *“The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord”*(Acts 11:21). According to his divine assignment, Paul pursued nothing else but converting his listeners into believers. Have a look, for instance, at how king Agrippa reacted after being exposed to Paul's teachings for a little while, *“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”* (Acts 26:28). What was Paul's answer? Did he apologize for having drawn the line all too quickly when he

brought up the name of God and Jesus? Did he perhaps tell the king accepting Jesus as his personal Savior wasn't really that important? Or that the king could very well simply stick to his old religion? All the questions yield negative answers. This is how Paul really responded, "*I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am*" (Acts 26:29). Who was Paul anyway? A believing Christian for sure!

Those pastors who oppose sermons on conversion seem to forget that they owe their ministry to these very messages. The Christian church came about by bringing unbelievers to Christ. The Bible commands its ambassadors and heralds to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). That is why our ministry takes up this assignment as well: We are inviting everybody to ask Jesus into their hearts.

### **Conversion, turning to God – what do these terms really mean?**

Please, allow me to explain to you how you, too can return to God. You will recall when God said to Paul, "*I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light*" (Acts 26:17-18). You could very well call this process a change from lies and deception to the truth. Nobody, however, will become a believer as long as he regards lies as the truth and darkness as light. Consequently, his eyes need to be opened first.

Some time ago I heard about a man who had to be operated on immediately; but even that turned out to be too late because all of his body had been attacked by cancer already. He didn't even know about it! Four weeks later, he was dead. Somebody else suffered from the same type of cancer. It was spotted on a routine physical. The cancerous tumor could be successfully removed. Owing to this, he's been able to live on. How come that one guy had to die and the other one could live? The second man was enlightened on his medical condition early, while

the first man had no clue about how bad things looked. He believed he was perfectly alright.. Sadly, he was dead wrong – and it cost him his life. To put it in the language the Bible chooses: That man stayed in the “darkness” for too long and had no chance to get out of it anymore. If his eyes had been opened, as the second man’s experience so clearly shows, yes, he could have moved from error to the truth still, and his life would have definitely been spared.

There is a lesson for the unbelieving person here. Such a person is fully convinced that he is doing fine. Consequently, it sounds foreign to him or her that they need to convert into believers. “Why should I?”, they ask. “Am I not a law-abiding citizen with no intention to harm anyone?” Millions share this viewpoint and live a life without God. Perhaps you, too. The Word of God says something else. We are told that this perspective of life is wrong. So don’t just go for early scanning tests on cancer. I urge you to have your soul checked as well. No, I’m not talking about a psychologist. In fact, no man can give you a proper diagnosis of your heart and soul. Only God can. He looks beyond the things that meet the eye. Once you allow the Bible to shed life on your life, you’ll be shocked to see how much that cancerous disease called sin has already spread and caused your soul to get sick. That’s when you understand your inner misery, the true condition of your heart. What is the reason for this dreadful state you’re in? The answer is clear: Your broken relationship with God.

In Germany, a remarkable event has taken place lately and on an annual basis. It’s called “chaos days”, where lots of young people roam all over the country, get together in order to vandalize their meeting places, and rip or break apart anything they can lay their hands on. On one of these occasions, the day after, a pastor asked a young man who attended the event “What’s the sense of demolishing everything?” The young man’s answer was sobering: “Sense? Oh well, it’s mere de-

spair!” Young people aren’t the only ones who feel desperate. And please, don’t assume either, it’s just the poor and unemployed. The same holds for the rich and famous. Of course, they all think it’s just because something’s missing. Truth is they’d still be unhappy even if they had it all.

Once your eyes have been opened and the light of the Word of God shines upon you, you know that it’s sin that breaks you down. You do realize, however, that God grants forgiveness in Jesus Christ and peace of mind. John, the apostle, writes in one of his letters, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). Once you have received eyes that can see the love of God, revealed to us in Christ crucified, you will believe, repent and return to God. It is my prayer that God will use these words to illuminate your mind so that you’ll behold God’s gospel and start believing. Please, don’t get me wrong. We are not out there to make you a convert to any particular church or denomination nor do we intend to turn you into a contributing member of a certain church. Let those be warned. No, this piece of information is about you, the healthy condition of your heart, and your eternal life.

### ***Prayer***

*Father in heaven! I sinned against the heavens and before You. My sinful behavior has caused a lot of suffering and misery. I feel outright dirty. I come to You, laden with my guilt. Please, look at me with grace and forgive me. Amen.*

## The Assurance Of Being Saved

*“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”*  
(Romans 8:16)

Does this verse say that the Spirit of God testifies something to our spirit that we don’t know yet? Absolutely not; the Spirit of God testifies something, along with our spirit. What is this “something”? It is the fact that we are God’s children.

Imagine a poor citizen whose only property is his little house. A rich guy claims he is the rightful owner of it and wants to take possession of the building. The poor man knows for a fact that the house belongs to him. And yet, the wealthy person wants to erode that certainty. Then, a well-known and reputable man shows up who testifies to the poor man’s statement. “Honorable judge, I can assure you that this man’s house has been his for ages. He is the rightful owner of it!” The testimony of this respectable witness confirmed what the penniless man maintained all the time. They have both testified to the same fact. And that’s what the Holy Spirit does with us.

At all times, the devil acts as *“the accuser of our brothers”* (Revelation 12:10). He claims that you cannot be sure of being God’s child. Heaven does not belong to you, he whispers. In your heart, you know better than that. You are certain that you have already become the rightful owner of your heavenly dwelling. Still, the evil one or present circumstances in your life put so much pressure on you that you get utterly confused. Praise the Lord for His heavenly witness, the Holy Spirit. He is the third Person in the triune God who testifies with you that you are heir of eternal glory.

How does the Holy Spirit testify with our spirit that we are God’s children?

## Through the Word of God

The greatest testimony on earth that the Spirit gives is the Bible. He is the author of it and we believe in the fact that all of Scripture is God-breathed. *“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”* (2 Peter 1:19). Peter refers to the transfiguration of Jesus he witnessed on the high mountain: *“For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain”* (2 Peter 1:17-18). That event was real, the voice they heard authentic and reliable. And yet, the apostle tells us today that the prophetic word we have is even more certain. The Spirit conveys assurance of being saved and does so through the Bible. A healthy principle puts it his way: If you want to be sure of your salvation, start with the Word of God. When you feel doubt casting its shadow on your sonship and God’s love for you, go right back to reading the Bible again, and with a renewed intensity. Scripture testifies to your redemption and your eternal salvation. The books of the Bible relay eternal life to us, *“And they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39, KJV), says the Lord. I’d like to call this our fundamental certainty or **our assurance of being saved**. *“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water”* (Hebrews 10:22). *“Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart”* (1 John 5:10).

## The work of the Holy Spirit in us

The Holy Spirit testifies to our sonship through His work in us. We can feel free to look for evidence of God's work in our lives. The various letters that John wrote are particularly helpful in this respect. He mentions specific features of God's grace in our lives.

One such feature is **our attitude towards sin**. Surely, even a true child of God keeps on sinning – claiming the opposite would be self-deception (1 John 1:8) –, but not without feeling grieved about it. *“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9, KJV)*. We may conclude that one of the marks of the children of God is their sincere desire to be set free from sin.

Another distinctive feature is **our attitude towards other Christians**. Anyone who follows Jesus will love God's people. *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14, KJV)*. *“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” (1 John 2:9, KJV)*. Everything revolves around our love. Paul teaches us this truth in chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians. If we want to be effective witnesses of Christ, we need to love each other. I'm not implying that you've got to be perfect in love but you should definitely have the desire to be perfect in it. Your love is a wonderful sign for the Holy Spirit to operate in your life. It is evidence of the fact that you were born by the Spirit and are a child of God.

A third characteristic is **our attitude towards God's truth**. *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well” (1 John 5:1)*. As a born-again believer, you will affirm the truth that God has come in human flesh when Christ appeared on earth. Do you have a hunger for the Bible? Is it your greatest

desire to see the truth in light of Scripture? If you have a resounding “yes” to these questions, you can know for sure that the Spirit of God works in you.

One other mark we have as testimony of God’s grace in our lives is **our longing for prayer**. When you pray, you have fellowship with God. If you don’t pursue fellowship with Him in prayer, you should ask yourself if you truly received the Spirit of sonship. Without our cry for “*Abba, Father*” (*Romans 8:15, KJV*), we are still slaves, and it is this spirit of slavery that indwells us then. Of course, I don’t mean to generalize too much here. Certainly, there are differences in this area also. Not always our prayer life is what it is supposed to be. Nevertheless, I’d like to point out, that where there is no prayer, there is no Spirit and no sonship either. True sonship is based on the fact that “*The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will*” (*Romans 8:26-27*). It is in this way that the Spirit testifies with our spirit and conscience that we are God’s children. Being certain of experiencing such signs and features in our lives that testify to the work of the Holy Ghost in us, is something I’d like to call **assurance based on experience**.

### **Personal knowledge of God’s assurance**

There is another source of being assured of our salvation; you might call it the **encouragement we get when we gain personal knowledge of God’s assurance**. This comes about when the Spirit of God speaks to us personally. Thus, a child of God experiences God in a very real way. Such knowledge of God is not the objective testimony we receive through Scripture and God’s promises there; its nature is more personal and

subjective, and it involves the heart of God and the heart of man.

When Jesus was baptized, such a testimony was given, “*And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17, KJV). Similar occurrences of personal encouragement and assurance we find throughout Scripture; think of the transfiguration and God’s confirmation on the mountain. Or consider the messages the apostles received – messages that reinforced their calling and supplied them with support and upliftment for their service, e.g., “*One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent”*” (Acts 18:9).

Let me try to illustrate this kind of personal assurance with a parable. A kind-hearted man adopts an orphan. The child is taken to his new home but can hardly believe the grace he experiences. His new father definitely told the orphan before that he could always stay in this beautiful home. Maybe he even showed the child the court order that testifies to the fact that he is now the man’s son forever more. Without a doubt, the boy rejoices. Still, he feels somewhat uncertain. “What if they’ll send me back to the orphanage again tomorrow, or simply leave me out there on the street?” So the boy has mixed feelings; on the one hand, he is happy, on the other hand, he is scared that he might get rejected. Paul knew about this state of mind when we are not entirely sure. Having a precise understanding of this condition, Paul writes, “*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”*” (Romans 8:15). Addressing God in this familiar way of calling Him “*Abba, Father*” doesn’t come easy to a former slave or the orphan in our parable. Legally, he has been made God’s child – without any qualifications or reservations. He is justified by the blood of Christ. The child is the Father’s son, even heir, but something still drives fear into him and doesn’t

allow him to enjoy his sonship. Something happens then. The family that adopted the little orphan boy shower him with love. They hug him, pamper him and reassure the child of what the judge already pronounced when he made the boy the son of his new parents. So they don't really tell him anything new but they let him know and feel, "You are our child. Please, feel free to call us "Mommy" and "Daddy". That is the essence of what Paul means when he says, "*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*" (Romans 8:16). Such are the manifold confirmations of our sonship. The Holy Spirit fills us with His love, sends us kisses and tender mercies from heaven, gives us fulfillment and anointing. By this, we receive comfort and encouragement in our faith.

You might be in a position where you have just become a believer. Or maybe you have been a child of God for a considerable time already but are going through hardship or temptations. Perhaps you are feeling somewhat weary of the good fight. God seems to deem it right to give us unexpected comfort then. It would be an unhealthy relationship, however, if a child requested a kiss from her father every five minutes or else she couldn't believe that she was truly his daughter. Comparably, something would be wrong if a mother had to hold her daughter all day long or else the kid would no longer believe she was a member of the family. Let no misunderstanding emerge here: True family life is based on faith and trust; only if children don't believe their parents, will they demand signs.

I often come across children of God who ask for signs. They reason that signs will help them grow spiritually. The question arises where else these believers want to go. Owing to God's grace, I live in His house. There, I want to stay. What other place do I want to go? Frankly, I don't need to experience signs all the time. My relationship with God has been clarified once and for all. I am His child and His heir. He told me so in His

Word, even said it on oath. Nothing will change this fact. It is an eternal truth – and I believe every bit of it.

In the story of the prodigal son, we are told that the older son became mad at his father because he had never received a young goat as a beautiful sign of the father's relationship towards his son. This is what the father replied, "*Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine*" (Luke 15:31, KJV). We could paraphrase his answer like this, "Do you have to have such a sign?" Of course, when Thomas asked for a sign, Jesus freely gave it to him. Do you know how Jesus commented on Thomas's request though? He said, "*Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29, KJV). I don't mean to be one-sided. Yes, there are situations where God in His providential care for us wants to kill a young goat for us.

I can personally testify to it that God quite frequently gave me that extra blessing of personally hearing from Him. A number of times, He has comforted me by stroking my hair and making the presence of my heavenly Father very real to me. Those hours were truly special. I shall never forget the times of God's anointing and personal encounters with Him. And surely, there will be more of them in the future. Our truly Christian life, however, does not derive its assurance from emotions or personal knowledge but from our faith in Jesus.

### **How are we to evaluate such messages of the Spirit?**

I'm fully convinced that every Christian will sooner or later receive such personal messages of the Spirit. There is no absolute yardstick though. So, even if a Christian has never experienced such personal encouragements yet, we would like to make him or her aware of the following: The basis of your salvation is not a personal encounter with the living God but what Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary when He redeemed you. Therefore, the most important thing to do boils

down to looking for Christ, to perceiving Him in His Word, and to clinging to Him, regardless of what you feel or don't feel. What Peter taught us remains true for every believer, "*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy*" (1 Peter 1:8). For that reason, what did Jesus answer when the devil tempted him? Did He say, He had heard a voice? Absolutely not. He said, "*It is written*" (Matthew 4:4, 6, 10). When our sanctification seems to get deadlocked and we experience failure, we might get unsure sometimes with regards to the work of the Holy Spirit. We might even ask, "Where do I see the Holy Spirit at work in my life?" Parallel to this, we might not always have the certainty of being encouraged by the Spirit in a personal way. On your death bed, it is only that objective testimony that makes the difference – the testimony of God's assurance based on your faith because, as Scripture tells us, "*My righteous one will live by faith*" (Hebrews 10:38).

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father above, thank You for making me a child of God. As Your child, I'm privileged to call you Father. It is still beyond my grasp that you made me heir to the heavenly riches. It is simply awesome and I am grateful to You. I am no longer a servant of sin but have become Your beloved child instead. Thank You, Lord. Thank You so much. Amen.*

## Believe And Be Baptized

*“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.”*  
(Acts 2:38a)

Once you repent of your sins and put your trust in Jesus, you’ll become a child of God. This, however, is just the beginning of your new life. You actually stand ready now for growing up in Christ, and indeed, you need to grow! If a newly-born baby does not grow, the child will fall sick. A new believer has to take a major step also in order to grow spiritually; this leap is called baptism. I’m afraid this very topic has led to rifts and arguments among the churches over the centuries. This is somewhat amazing since Scripture clearly states that believers ought to get baptized. Haven’t we just read an important verse from the book of Acts in this respect? *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 2:38a).

The verse shows us the correct sequence of what we are to do: First Repent. First Return to God. First Believe in Jesus and get saved. Afterwards, you should be baptized. What does this sequence amount to? It amounts to the fact that a living faith is the prerequisite for baptism.

### Baptism of the believers

As we delve into the subject of baptism, you will immediately have a controversy between getting baptized as a child or getting baptized as an adult. The Bible rejects such arguments on the grounds of what we might call “faith baptism”: *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16, KJV). Reading on, we are told, *“But he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16, KJV). So an individual can actually get baptized without believing in the Lord – something, that will ultimately lead to that person’s condemnation. For it is a fact that whosoever does not believe will be condemned.

Say, an eight year-old testifies that she received forgiveness of her sins and that she whole-heartedly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. No doubt, that child's faith entitles her to get baptized. Now, let us look at another person. A sixty year-old man wants to get baptized. He is asked if he truly believes in Jesus and if faith made him a child of God. The man replies he considers himself a righteous person and thus, wants to get baptized. Good works are no requirement or the prerequisite at all to get baptized, even if they look fairly Christian. As stated before, it takes that living faith in Jesus Christ to take the step of baptism. Evidently, the sixty year-old man could not be baptized even though he's an adult already.

Somebody tried to poke fun at baptism, based on faith. He reasoned that it didn't matter one bit if you poured tea on sugar first or put sugar in the tea afterwards; therefore, the timing of getting baptized first or later was supposed to be no issue at all. Here's what I think about this idea: You first need to put the cup on the table, then you pour the tea. There is a wrong way, however, which states, that you could equally well first pour the tea on the table and then put the cup there. As we can see, there is no reason to change the basic principle of baptism, not even if such ideas or suggestions derive from certain developments in church history.

We should follow what Jesus taught us about baptism and what the apostles put into practice. Repent, and then be baptized, everyone of us. Please, note that baptism in itself does not save you or trigger a new birth. Baptism makes you obedient to the word of God. Let us study the eighth chapter of the book of Acts, where we can find a report on the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian treasurer. You might recall that Philip joins the Ethiopian official in his chariot and expounds to him what salvation is all about. A little while later, they pass along some water and the foreigner asks, "*Why shouldn't I be baptized?*" (Acts 8:36). Philip, however, replies, "*If you believe*

*with all your heart, you may. The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”. And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:37-38).*

When did Philip baptize the treasurer? After asking him correctly if he believed with all his heart. It was only when the treasurer confirmed that indeed, he trusted Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with all his heart, that Philip admitted the man to baptism. I’d like to encourage you to get baptized if you gave your life over to the Lord and accepted Him as your personal Savior and Lord. Be obedient to the Lord and get baptized.

### **Baptism by full immersion**

Time and again, people ask us why believers at our church are fully immersed in water. Wouldn’t it suffice if you simply sprinkled a bit of water on the person or poured some on his head? I’d like to share with you what the word “to baptize” really means. Its origin is Greek and the precise meaning of this vocabulary is nothing but “to immerse”. As a matter of fact, immersion is the only thing that makes sense, for it is written, *“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:3-4).*

Through baptism, the believer declares what happened to him inside. Our old life of sinfulness was buried – thus, our immersion in water. As Christ rose again, believers also have been raised to a new life in Christ – symbolically pictured as we leave the water again. Baptism, therefore, publicly confesses, and testifies to our salvation. Consequently, the New Testament only teaches baptism by full immersion.

## **The blessing of getting baptized**

Sometimes people get the impression that the argument about baptism is actually an argument about which church is right. The truth about this argument is something else, however. It is about honoring the word of God. It's about you. You also are to be obedient to God, for we must be more obedient to Him than man. There is a great blessing in it when people get baptized. Baptism is one of the highlights in the spiritual life of any church. When the newly-baptized leave the water again, often they are overwhelmed by joy. God's blessing has filled their lives and made them rich in Christ. It is not uncommon that they hug each other and cry for joy and happiness. Having been redeemed by Christ leads to unspeakable joy among them, and they gladly proclaim, "How wonderful it is to be obedient to Him and to get baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – in accordance with what Jesus quite literally commanded us to do." Sometimes, people experienced healing or baptism in the Holy Spirit then, and began praising God by speaking in tongues they didn't know before.

I remember a young girl who came out of the water and was deeply grateful to the Lord. After her baptism, the elders placed hands on her, as well as on the other newly-baptized, in order to pronounce a blessing on them. When the elders did so to her, she was filled by the power of God and started to prophecy. The Holy Spirit had imparted that gift to her, a gift she was allowed to dispense for the benefit of the entire congregation later on also. These days, she serves the Lord in missionary work.

Baptism belongs to the local church, your congregation. If I could relay to you the importance of it at all, I'd like to ask you to get baptized as the Bible teaches us. You will thus make a major step in your spiritual growth. Please, make sure that you get baptized at a Bible-believing church that pays attention to

the teachings of the New Testament. It is my prayer that you will be greatly blessed in taking that decision.

### ***Prayer***

*Thank You, wonderful Lord, for the blessing we find in getting baptized. I'm all willing to go the full way with You – and I want to follow You also with regards to baptism. I want to get to know what it means to be crucified, buried, and raised with You. Yes, I want to get baptized – independent of the opposition I might encounter from friends or loved ones. I trust You. Amen.*

## Finding A Bible-believing Church

*“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”*  
(Acts 2:47, KJV)

The New Testament shows us clearly what to do as born-again Christians. Not only are we to get baptized but also to find a church. The book of Acts reports over and over again how people were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24).

It is for your faith of vital importance to be a part of a church that believes in the Bible. I like to compare Christians that are alive in Christ to red embers. When they are together, they are on fire. What happens, however, if one of them gets separated from the rest? That piece of coal grows cold pretty fast. Once Jesus set you on fire and gave you that burning love for Him, you need to make it your top priority not only to keep the fire going but actually to turn up the heat. That is the reason why Christians should come together with other believers and have fellowship with them. The Bible tells us that the early Christians devoted themselves to fellowship continuously, *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:41-42, KJV).

Essentially, there are four ingredients that your new life in Christ requires: biblical **doctrine**, **fellowship**, the **Lord’s Prayer** and **prayer**. These elements should be found in every Bible-believing church.

### **Afraid to make a commitment**

It grieves me that some Christians don’t seem to appreciate the statutes that are characteristic for churches that uphold the teachings of the New Testament. These Christians prefer

meeting in groups of no particular denomination where they are not required to make any kind of commitment; they very much hesitate to join a Bible-believing church and are not willing to trust any particular church. Jesus teaches something different though, when he states, "... *I will build my church*" (*Matthew 16:18*).

He wanted to build His church. Nothing else. It was His intention to strengthen the church in such a way that not even the forces of hell could overpower it. The apostles sent their letters to the various churches and to them exclusively. They never bypassed them. The church is God's explicit plan not a chance product that stands next to a group of alternative settings. God revealed this plan called "church" to the apostles so that all Christians could understand how following Jesus works and what kind of structures God has in mind. It is through the church that God wants to display His power so that, "*The manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm*" (*Ephesians 3:10*).

## **The body of Christ**

In the New Testament, the church is compared to a body. When the apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the church of Corinth, he elaborated on that truth in great detail. The single Christian is not a separate player but rather a member of the body of Christ; he depends on the other members also. Paul says, "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ... If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body*" (*1 Corinthians 12:12, 15*).

According to Scripture, we need to make a commitment to a church. In today's world, lots of people are scared of making commitments. Take marriage, for example. It is said that there are about two million couples in Germany that live together

without being married. The number is increasing by the day. These individuals are afraid to make a firm commitment to one another. They fear that by committing themselves to another person, they will be robbed of their independence and their own goals in life. Such close ties to another person are not up-to-date anymore. One cherishes that beautiful possibility of being able to say “NO” under certain circumstances. Today’s ruling is called “self-governance” with no more room for bothersome commitments. That idea sounds rather attractive to many Christians as well. The Bible emphasizes a very different truth: “Serve one another”. So don’t get fooled but make a difference. Commit yourself and join a Bible-believing church. Without a doubt, you’ll spot some mistakes eventually. And you will face disappointments also. Isn’t that, however, something you can equally well expect when you get married? Your spouse won’t be perfect. Do marital trials scare you from making a commitment to your husband or wife? Of course, not. Not even in a million years!

### **So, which church to choose?**

Please, don’t expect me to tell you, you should join a particular denomination. I would like to assist you, however, in making that decision somewhat easier. There are a few fundamental issues you ought to bear in mind:

When you read the New Testament, pay the closest attention to the characteristics of the first church. In many ways it was utterly different from what we call the church today. The church in those days did not depend on the government nor did it tax its members. The church was pure and renounced on traditions that were foreign to the teachings of Scripture. Political pluralism was absent. So, what should you look out for in particular?

1. A church that is deserving of that title “Christian” will always pursue proclaiming and living what the Bible teaches.

That does not make any congregation perfect or infallible; 1 Corinthians 13:9 reminds us that “*we know in part*”. Still, the church should do its utmost to make the Word of God its yardstick to teach and act appropriately.

2. When the church gets together, love should be found abundantly. Many non-Christians are turned off by the many divisions and splits we see in the body of Christ. Instead of drawing the lost ones, such churches rather scare them away. We already have more than a handful of trouble and strife in the world. As a result, people want to get away from the hatred and bitterness. They are looking for that oasis of love and peace. Can you picture how bitter a newly-born believer must feel when he or she realizes that the church they attend has the same quarrels and unloving attitude as the world he thought he had just left behind? I should like to recommend to you that you primarily look out for love as the distinctive feature when you want to join a Bible-believing church. It is not so much the doctrine of a church, let alone its building or liturgy. Jesus Christ dealt with this issue this way, “*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:35).

3. A living church will always reach out to the lost ones. Outreach in terms of winning souls for Jesus is an integral part of any church. If a church is no longer interested in going into all the world and preaching the good news to all creation, it will soon die. In a nutshell, a church that doesn't evangelize will soon fossilize! It was that drive that led the early church to uninterrupted growth. Churches that follow that example will sooner or later bear witness to the fact that God looks at them with favor. The business of Jesus is not to build beautiful cathedrals but to save the lost. He wants us to tell the world about Him. If the church does not pass His life on to others, it won't take long until it will lose its own life. The Lord gives

His church a clear choice – die or win souls. Your church should therefore, be concerned with missionary work.

4. Join a church where the Holy Spirit is a reality and His gifts are present. Both Christians and individual churches can only survive if they are filled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Stand ready to commit yourself to a church and to become a member of the body of Christ. Join the fellowship of other Christians in your pursuit of the Lord. That is God's way for spiritual growth and your spiritual well-being, something that is my sincere prayer for you also.

### ***Prayer***

*Jesus Christ, thank You for the church. It is Your body, and You are its Head. Thank You for allowing me to be a member of Your body. Please, show me my assignment and my place at church so that I can bear fruit. Help me serve and love my brothers and sisters in the way You loved me first. Thank You once again for the church. Please, bless all our services and especially our ministry leaders. I'm grateful to You for answering my prayers. Amen.*

## God Answers Prayers

*“And call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”*  
(Psalm 50:15)

Do you know about the wonderful secret of prayer? Even if you don't, praying is of great importance. So I'd like to ask you quite frankly:

### Can you pray?

Can you have a dialogue with God? Do you really know what praying is all about? There are lots of people who don't know how to pray.

When the Nazis ruled Germany and their regime faced its last moments in time, even youngsters, literally children, were sent to the battleline. Well-known German pastor Wilhelm Busch tells us a deeply upsetting story of a sixteen year-old boy<sup>6</sup> whose battery had just been raided by severe bombing. The youngster gets out of the bunker first and finds a man with his body torn open. He wants to help the man but the man just asks him a simple favor. “I'm going to die. You don't need to help me anymore. I only need someone to pray with.” The teenager replies, “The only thing they taught me at the Hitler Youth Organization was how to curse. I'm unable to pray.” The captain is called. Upon his immediate arrival, he kneels down next to the man whose intestines are looking out fairly visibly. “What do you want, my comrade?” “Captain,” the man answers, “I'll soon be dead. Pray with me!” The captain throws his arms up. “Heavens, I don't know how to pray.” He calls another officer, a lieutenant. Turns out that not one of these war-horses who are so proud of being tough guys and being able to tell dirty jokes, knows how to say a prayer. They are not even capable of saying the Lord's Prayer. This is what the

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<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Busch: „Jesus unser Schicksal“. Schriftenmissions-Verlag: Gladbeck, 1971<sup>5</sup>. p. 107 (“Jesus, Our Destiny.”)

teenage boy proclaims, “If I ever get out of this dirty mess called war again, the first thing I’ll do is this – I’ll go someplace where they’ll teach me how to pray. I don’t want to find myself in such dreadful condition as this man next to us happens to be!”

This is the situation we are in today. Man is highly-educated and has technologically advanced to a superior level: We know how to build computers, even artificial moons, yet we cannot pray anymore. Surely, unbelievers are quick to offer excuses, ranging from “It doesn’t help” to “What’s the use?” Well, I can very well understand these statements. If someone has never experienced prayer, and prayers answered, he or she is pretty much inclined to laugh at it. Some of them go as far as to ridicule those who talk about prayer and its blessings.

Imagine, everybody on earth was born without any eyes. Being blind would be the normal way of life: There would be no vocabulary like “to see”, since nobody had the ability to do so. Then, due to a miracle of some sort, one person could suddenly see. He is totally overwhelmed and starts sharing his joy with his blind fellow-men. “Wow, I can see the trees, the mountains, and the beautiful sky, the sun and the moon.” I’m rather certain that the blind would think the seeing person was crazy. They would hardly ever believe all those stories “the strange guy” told them. The blind could never imagine any other world than the one they were used to all their lives, the one of utter darkness.

This describes a similar experience Christians have when they share what living with God is like. Unbelievers lack the personal encounter with a God who answers prayers. Since they don’t know anything else but unbelief and rationalism, it is no wonder that they are deeply skeptical about faith and prayer.

## God answers prayers

A number of years ago, Germany found herself involved in a dramatic hostage-taking drama. A commercial airplane of Lufthansa, the German airline, was taken captive by a group of terrorists and directed to Mogadishu, the Somalian capital. About a hundred passengers went through a series of traumas over the next couple of days. For most of them, it was like hell. We are happy to say that the hijacking had a rather positive ending even though one of the pilots lost his life in the course of events. When the drama was over and the passengers returned to Germany, they were met by scores of journalists who wanted to get an interview from the exhausted people right at the gangway of the plane at Frankfurt airport. "What did you do most during your terrible imprisonment on the plane?", was one of their questions. The answer of most of the passengers was plain and simple: They had silently cried out to God and prayed. Right before their flight, they might have seen no sense in praying or might have even laughed at it. Suddenly, however, things looked totally different.

When you are in a valley and face the low times of life, neither money nor fame can help you. Knowing people, big or small, won't make a difference either. That's when only God can work things out. It might delight you as much as me that during the hostage crisis I just described, former German president Walter Scheel asked all the people of my country to pray. I'm fully convinced that millions of people did and that those prayers caused the criminal act to stop. For it is true and will always remain true that God lives and answers prayers! The Bible teaches, "*And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me*" (Psalm 50:15, KJV). Why don't you call on God also, when you are in trouble? Please, take the Bible seriously and be amazed to see that you can rely on the Word of God.

## God knows best what we need

Sometimes you will find God not answering prayers in the way you figured it. He always listens though. He is, however, much like a father who often knows better what is good for us and what is not. I remember hearing about a boy who got mad at his dad because he wasn't allowed to play with dynamite and fire. At times, we ask for things that seem important and necessary to us. God, on the other hand, might regard them as harmful. You know what kind of things children like to pick up and even want to put in their mouths and eat. If parents were to okay all these things, more than one child would have already died.

Jesus says, *“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him”* (Matthew 6:7-8). Some people make a mistake in saying God didn't answer their prayers because things turned out different from what they had desired. God always listens to our prayers but He does so with wisdom and true love.

A Christian lady fell in love with a man who did not respond to her feelings. Given that she was not too young anymore and hopes for a marriage were dwindling, she prayed to God without ceasing. Nothing happened. She began arguing with God and sort of wrestled with Him for a positive answer. Eventually, she did get married to the man. It was not so much based on the feelings he had for her but rather on her many ways to entice him. After a few fairly dreadful years, the man killed her with an axe. When she was buried, people mourned and said, “If only she had never married that man.” That poor lady wanted God to answer her prayers according to her own ideas and thinking. What does prayer really mean? It means being received by a God whose arms are opened wide and to trust

Him to deal with circumstances in His own good measure and timing.

That's the reason why Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer, *"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10, KJV). So feel free to put all the matters of your life into the hands of Jesus. Ask Him to be the leader in your life. *"Commit your way to the Lord: trust in him and he will do this"* (Psalm 37:5). If you pray like this, God will get involved in your life, one way or another, and you will be helped.

One day I read the prayer of the early church that went through lots of trials and was met with great hostility. Those Christians, however, did not pray for fire to rain down from heaven; instead, their prayer went something like this, *"... Both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done"* (Acts 4:27-28, KJV). The believers knew: Only those things can happen that were determined by God's counsel before. Everything that Christ's enemies did, had been worked into God's plan. Always they are – even if it doesn't seem so at all – God's laborers: They have to act in accordance with God's will. That brings about great relaxation and peace in prayer. You will only pray like this, if you are ready to pray for His will to be done in your life. That's when you'll be surprised to see how Jesus works in conjunction with our prayers. Sometimes there is no change at all. God, however, allows us to draw close to Him so that we can be comforted by His presence. May the Lord grant you to be close to Him in prayer.

### **Pray plain and simple**

You don't depend on a hymn or a prayer book for prayer. Nor do you need a priest or a church for it. Having graduated in theology is not a requirement either. What you need is a sincere heart. Talk to Jesus as if talking to your best friend. That's the

place you can feel free. It is not necessary to recite beautiful verses of Scripture. You don't do that when you go see the doctor either: with a medical specialist, you don't communicate in verses but you tell him or her plainly and in a natural fashion what's bothering you. Jesus is more than a physician. He is the best Physician you could ever find: He is also your good Shepherd that understands you better than anybody else.

God answers the calls of people who honestly seek Him. You can make a start, too. Believe in Jesus as your personal Savior. Ask Him to forgive you. He will give you a new life. Just begin by talking to Jesus. Tell Him how you are doing. That's how easy prayer can be. One single sigh from a sincere heart can suffice, and God will turn the circumstances of your miserable situation and make you a completely new person.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for giving me the privilege that I can call You and tell You all about my sorrows and hurts. Thank You for Your promise that I can count on You and that You will help me. I give You all the praise for that. Amen.*

## The Lord's Supper

*"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

*(1 Corinthians 11:26; please also read vv. 23-32)*

Partaking in the Lord's Supper is one of the most beautiful services we may enjoy. Time and again, we want to celebrate the Holy Communion in holy seriousness but equally well, with an inner joy; also, we want to be reminded of the death of our beloved Savior, as Paul told us in today's verse of Scripture. Let us have a look at what this particular verse shows us concerning the Lord's Supper.

### The great wisdom found in Jesus

The Lord's Supper reveals a part of the great wisdom that Jesus possesses. It is a reminder of Him, a memory that we keep. How **effective and indestructible** the "monument" is that Jesus gave us! The normal way to keep the memory of the deceased alive is to erect a tombstone. It usually only takes a few decades until that stone will be removed, simply because there is no-one left to take care of it. All such tombstones must eventually yield to the changing times.

Monuments and statues, carved in stone or made of iron, have been erected for the great men of an era. We happened to take a trip through the former Soviet Union right after the change of the political regime. Wherever we went, we spotted the overtowering monuments of Lenin. On Lenin's birthday, students and others were to put flower bouquets right there; with the arrival of the new political powers, one monument after the other was dismantled and any reminder of that political revolutionary was removed.

In history, it's been like this time and time again. People try to keep the memory of great individuals alive and go to great lengths to embalm their corpses and put them behind glass. It is

said that in ancient Italy poor peasants had to erect marble columns next to their dilapidated houses, bearing engravings of Roman triumphs. How futile those efforts are to try to come up with lasting memories that would withstand the change of times!

Jesus, in His great wisdom, does not command us to set up places of pilgrimage or huge monuments. Surely, the number of crosses abound, but He never asked for them. He simply initiates a supper where believers gather at a plain table; He then shares with them a piece of bread and a bit of wine and says, *“This do in remembrance of me”* (Luke 22:19). Unlike those vast monuments hewn in granite and marble, this memory has survived. It has actually done so for more than two thousand years already because it continues to be a living reminder of the death of Christ to the church. This will not change until the day of His return.

The Holy Communion is more than a unique symbol. In contrast to all human memories, this one is not dead but **alive**. Isn't it wonderful that we can celebrate communion with the entire body of Christ all over the world? To His very first disciples, Jesus said, *“This do in remembrance of me”*. How fabulous to know that our forefathers could enjoy the Lord's Supper. And so did John and Peter, Paul and James, and the martyrs as well. They might not have had the candles and silverware we often use today, but they certainly communed with bread and wine.

A cloud of witnesses has vividly upheld for us the memory of the death of Christ. Never could this memory be erased. The people had the Lord's Supper in this house or that one, in the catacombs and labor camps. It might have been freezing cold or scorching hot. Among all peoples and races, languages and cultures, we find a sincere love for the Lord's Supper. One day when we have passed away a long time already, future generations will still have the Holy Communion. Nobody – whether

dictator or tyrant, army or secret police – will ever manage banning this monument of the death of Christ to the saints until that appointed time when Jesus will come again.

Even amidst greatest persecution, when Christians are forced to leave everything and are required to stop believing in Jesus, some brothers and sisters in Christ will gather and remember the death of the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion. Can you count the millions of hands that have ever been joined to break the bread and drink from the cup? Unless the Lord returns before, future generations will still join in love and faithfully celebrate the Lord's Supper, praising their beloved Savior for His body and His blood. Why can this living monument not wither or decay, burn or break apart? Because it is full of life and wisdom.

Come and look how wisely chosen those symbols truly are. They are a **convincing parable** of what happened when Christ laid down His life on the cross. Think of the bread. Could there be something more suitable than broken bread to signify His sufferings? In fact, bread is a very appropriate symbol, given what it has to go through in its 'life cycle'.

Initially, the seed is sown into the soil. That's where it'll remain for some time, right in this cold soil. Once it starts to prosper, it has to endure the cold of wintry times and the heat of the summer right after. Then, it's ready for harvest. A heavy-duty vehicle moves across the field, making sure that the wheat is properly cut and threshed and taken to the miller. There the grinding gets done until the wheat is turned into finest flour. Some person will have to knead it into dough and stuff it into a hot baking oven. Is that the end of this tiresome process? Not at all. You take the loaf of bread and put it onto a tray, just to cut it again and to break it into pieces. Someone will eat the bread and have their teeth do the grinding job again so that digesting can be facilitated. I presume that this lengthy process any kind of bread has to go through, is a rich picture of the valuable

body of our Lord Jesus Christ that had to bear all the sorrows of this world. He was indeed the man of suffering who had to go to the extreme because of the heavy burden of our sins. How apt the parable of the bread is!

In a similar way we could describe the arduous process grapes must go through until they are transformed into a delicious drink. It is because the fruit of the vine undergoes pretty much the same hardship, so-to-speak, a loaf of bread has to bear. In order to produce wine or juice, you put the grapes into the winepress. Ages ago, people used their feet to squeeze every drop of juice, as red as blood, out of the grapes. That is a significant parable for the costly blood that our Lord shed for us. We can once again see divine wisdom in choosing those two symbols for the meal that stands as a living and powerful memory of the sacrificial work of our Savior.

Please, allow me to broach another aspect. Human monuments or memorial sights such as the cross or an icon are put there so that people can reflect and quietly meditate on them. Lenin's dead body was put in a glass coffin on the Red Square so that the Russian people could pass along it and recall the man's "great deeds".

When we meet for Holy Communion, we, too are to meditate on the Lord in spirit, and focus on Him. It does, however, go beyond that. We may **not just look at the Lord but actually receive Him in us!** That's why Jesus said upon breaking the bread, "*Take and eat, this is my body*". In the same manner, He took the cup and told us, "*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant*" (*Matthew 26:26-28a*).

As far as we can see, Jesus left His church only two instructions on how to conduct a service. The first one is to do with baptism, the other one concerns the Holy Communion. Apart from these, there are no other rituals, for serving God is not a matter of pictures and customs but worshipping Him "*in spirit and in truth*" (*John 4:24, KJV*).

Baptism is about the beginning of a Christian's life. It represents the renewed life of a sinner who was born again by the Holy Spirit and is now united with His redeemer.

The Holy Communion commemorates the fact that people who are spiritually growing, may have their food daily. Every day anew, Christians are permitted to come to their Lord and eat of Him. "*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him*" (John 6:56, KJV). Therefore, every time we enjoy the Lord's Supper, we may proclaim that Jesus is in us. I am in Christ, and Christ is in me. We belong together.

### **The priority of our Master**

When Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, He showed us the priority that He wants us to take. Consider this verse, please. "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death*" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

As we can see, **proclaiming the Lord's death** takes top priority for our Master. The verse does not state, "for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's birth or His miracles and signs". Some people obviously don't like to make the sufferings Jesus had to endure, the Christian hallmark; the cross reminds them too much of the violence there and the death of Christ. They'd much prefer the manger to be the Christian symbol. Jesus, however, gave us a different instruction. He wants us to remember His death; the apostle Paul did not receive sort of a nativity play either. Frankly, we have already created a lot of fuss about Christmas, more than the Bible ever called us to do. The one thing, however, that believers are ordered to think of is the death of the Lord. I'm afraid we often forget.

The Lord's Supper reminds us of the privilege we have in proclaiming His death. We would have had neither salvation nor eternal life if His body had not been broken and His blood

not shed. If Jesus had not laid down His life for your sins, you would have had no hope. I'd like to tell this to all those people, too who haven't entered into a living relationship with Jesus yet: We might forget many things regarding the life of Christ; one thing though, we should always vividly remember is this: His death.

## God's big plan for His people

Last but not least, the Lord's Supper stands for the big plan God has for us, His people. The Scripture verse says, "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, until He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). So the Holy Communion also serves as a reminder of His return. Jesus calls us to the table so that the virgins won't be found sleeping and without oil when He comes back as our bridegroom (cf. Matthew 25:1-13).

Upon His return, **the Lord's Supper will cease** to be celebrated on earth. Jesus, however, also teaches us this, "I tell you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29). The day will come when God's children will celebrate the meal amidst His glory. Are you longing for heaven? Are you waiting on the Lord's return? Then, don't grow all too comfortable concerning the Holy Communion. To me, it is not understandable how some of God's children cannot partake in His Supper over a long period of time. How can it be that Jesus so lovingly invites us to celebrate the breaking of the bread with Him (Luke 22:15) and we react rather indifferently?

Joining the Lord for His Supper means sharing a living hope. You know that the bridegroom is coming to celebrate the wedding banquet of the lamb together with His bride, the church. The Holy Communion, in this respect, is like a symbol, a star even. Upon Christ's return, however, something yet

better is to come. It's the sun, and in His light, we will see the light.

“When will the Savior come again? **Will He come back any at all?**” These are some of the questions some believers raise. Isn't it true that the church, the body of Christ, has been celebrating the Lord's Supper for over two thousand years already? Year after year passes but He seems to be delayed. Our Savior doesn't tell us lies. Jesus is full of truth and faithfulness. If God were not true, the heavens and the earth would no longer exist. I could imagine that the earth might somehow continue to exist without a single ray of sunshine. If, however, the earth had to be without the Son of God, it would not survive for even the tiniest fraction of a moment. Why is that so? Because it is Jesus who sustains the whole world with His powerful Word, the Word of Truth. (Hebrews 1:3).

Is there any basis whatsoever for casting doubt on His return? Didn't the patriarchs and prophets have to wait for more than four thousand years until the Messiah walked the earth the first time? Yes, Abraham did see the day of Christ from a distance. They did not receive the promises of His coming but they believed nonetheless. They believed that the Messiah would come and yet, they died without seeing Him. So did Jesus not come? It took a long time, you might say, but the fact is, He kept His word. He came when the time was fulfilled (Galatians 4:4). And He will come again. He kept His word the first time and so, we can be certain that He will do so the second time also.

Our forefathers lived before Christ. They believed anyhow, even though they had not received a Savior yet. They knew nothing about the sacrificial death of Christ either – at least not in such clear revelation that we are privileged to have today. To some extent, their understanding was clouded; they had to rely on symbols and foreshadows. This is different for us. We have seen the light of salvation and have become God's children by

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We know that God kept His promise once before. Won't we believe then that He will come again? Two thousand years look like a mighty long time. But guess what? Even if it were to take twenty thousand years, we don't have a reason to doubt.

We want to wait patiently. We will celebrate the Lord's Supper with a joyful heart and in genuine adoration – for a great number of unbelievers need to be reached still. We don't want the Lord to come just yet so that the last person that is meant to be redeemed will be saved before. Then, the Lord will come in power and in glory, and we will be with Him forever more! This is our great hope! Thus, the Holy Communion is not only a memorial service of what happened on the cross of Calvary two thousand years ago; it is also a sign of hope that we continue to proclaim the death of the Lord until He returns. Surely, He will come! In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, I'm thankful that as Your child I may celebrate the Lord's Supper. I thank You that You bore my punishment so that I could receive forgiveness and eternal life. Amen.*

## The Work Of The Indwelling Spirit

*“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”*

*(1 Corinthians 3:16, KJV; please also read John 14:15-26)*

We have already broached the subject of how the Holy Spirit renews a spiritually dead sinner; this is an act of grace, freely given, and happens when divine life is poured out on the particular person.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the old self of that individual experiences a complete change. One becomes a new person, a new creature even, with a different set of desires and new ways of thinking. You might as well say that the Holy Spirit has moved into the heart of such a person, making it His new dwelling. Christ did not leave us any religious relics but His Spirit.

### What does that exactly mean?

What do we mean when we say, the Holy Spirit indwells a Christian? As the apostle Paul explains, Christ and His church interact in just the same way **as the head and the other parts of the body do**. Every part of my body, for instance, has a bit of my life in it. My blood runs through all the parts of my body. Every single organ is somehow connected to my nerve system. This little parable is meant to show that every believing Christian is a member of the body of Christ. Christ is the glorious Head but His life runs through all the parts of His body. It is His Spirit that makes God’s children all around the globe a part of His body and that unites them with Him. Evidently, everything that belongs to Christ is indwelled by His Spirit and forms His universal body. So we find Paul saying, *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:13, KJV).

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<sup>7</sup> cf. message entitled “Born To Believe”

We have now learned that Jesus transforms people into members of His body by making them partake of the Holy Spirit. Every part of the natural body must access the stream of blood. Comparably, the Spirit and life that Christ gives must fill us first so that we can become new members of His body. Without receiving the Holy Spirit, you cannot belong to Christ and be a part of Him. Scripture puts this fundamental principle this way, “*Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*” (Romans 8:9, KJV). Whosoever belongs to Christ, the Head of His body, has a share in His life and His divine nature. The Holy Spirit has made this person’s heart His home.

We need to take heed what kind of spirit the Holy Spirit truly is. **He is the Spirit of Christ.** The Spirit that dwells in the hearts of the believers, belongs to Christ. You must have the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9) if you are to be a member of His body. “*And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father*” (Galatians 4:6, KJV). So we can actually proclaim that Christ lives in our hearts, “*yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). Consequently, you will find Paul saying both that the Spirit lives inside of him as well as Christ indwelling him (see, for instance, Romans 8:9-10). The Holy Spirit is always tied to Christ.

There is a great deal of people who are very open-minded when it comes to spiritual issues. Little do they want to know about Christ, however. They will gladly talk about spiritual encounters but dodge the message of the cross. Paul admonishes us not to separate Christ from the supernatural realm. He writes, “*Do not let anyone ... disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body ... grows as God causes it to grow*” (Colossians 2:18-19).

Do we need the Holy Spirit? More than ever! Is it Scriptural, however, to address the Spirit directly? Should we, for example, pray like this, “Holy Spirit, please come and give me Your gifts“? If I’m not mistaken, there isn’t a single verse in Scripture where someone prays to the Spirit. Perhaps, as humans we are sometimes more inclined to look for the Spirit and His manifestations and not so much for Christ, and Him crucified. I’d therefore like to point out that it is not forbidden to pray to the Holy Spirit; we should, on the other hand, ensure that we get the priorities right, as they are laid down in the Holy Bible.

When we ask *for* the Holy Spirit, we should not seek the Spirit but the face of the Father or the Son. Please, note what this well-known verse of Scripture has to say in this context, “*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*” (Luke 11:13, KJV). So, once again, who are we to address? The Father. We are supposed to receive the Spirit as a gift from the Father. The Father gives us the Spirit through Jesus. Jesus says, “*When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me*” (John 15:26). Without a doubt, the Spirit comes from the Father and Jesus sends the Spirit to us. That’s why Jesus tells us, “*I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*” (Luke 24:49). Jesus Christ is the mediator for the Spirit.

How did the Pentecostal experience reach the first church? Please, listen to the answer, given in the book of Acts. “*Exalted to the right hand of God, he [= Christ] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear*” (Acts 2:33). Who poured out the Spirit? It was Jesus! In the following verse, John the Baptist, illuminates our minds even more. “*I indeed baptize you with water; ... he*

*[= Christ] shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Luke 3:16, KJV).*

Primarily, we see Jesus at work, not so much the Holy Spirit. So if you stand in need of the Holy Spirit, look for Christ. Whosoever seeks Jesus will find the Holy Ghost as well. He it is who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. I have a feeling that this is how God intended it because there are people who look for the Spirit but are not interested in the Son of God. Those individuals will encounter all kinds of spirits but not the one we know as the Holy Spirit. They might also experience lots of different feelings but they will miss out on the life-changing power of God. So, in a nutshell, it is always Christ Himself that through the Holy Spirit indwells the hearts of the born-again believers. He is the first and the last, the bright morning star. He is the lamb that is worthy to receive honor and glory and praise (Revelation 5:12-13).

### **The work of the Holy Spirit within us**

The Holy Spirit only does what the Father and the Son command Him to do. What then is the assignment the Holy Spirit is given? It is His role to call the children of God to become spiritually alive, to keep them and to lead them to glory. These three things are closely knit together and cannot be separated from one another – even though they don’t happen simultaneously. *“Those he predestined, he also called; those, he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:30).* Did you notice that God used the grammatical form of the past tense? The ones He predestined He did glorify already. God’s perspective is such that He sees both our rebirth and our glory as united. The Holy Spirit is called to work so that what God predestined will come to pass. This implies that the Holy Spirit needs to render a number of beautiful services to God’s children. Some of them, I’d like to highlight now.

The first thing the Spirit actually does is this; **He renews** us so that we can receive spiritual life, *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”* (John 6:63).

Next, the Spirit **enables** the person who became spiritually alive, **to see**. *“The God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him”* (Ephesians 1:17, KJV). The Holy Spirit sheds light on us so that we can see Christ more and more clearly.

The Holy Spirit **convicts** us. He shows us our sinfulness. It is this work of the Holy Spirit that leads the psalmist into crying out, *“My sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head”* (Psalm 40:12).

In the Holy Spirit, we also find a comforter. He **comforts** the children of God and reveals to them the cleansing power of the blood and the forgiveness in Christ. *“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever”* (John 14:16, KJV). When you face trials and temptations, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit comforts you.

The Holy Spirit **draws us** into the presence of God and creates a hunger for Christ. *“The LORD has appeared to us from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness’”* (Jeremiah 31:3).

Another service the Spirit renders is this: He **empowers** us to believe and to give testimony. *“Now the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 15:13, KJV).

He is also our **teacher**. *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you”* (John 14:26, KJV).

Also, the Holy Spirit **works sanctification** in our hearts. *“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).*

The Holy Spirit **transforms us and conforms us** to the likeness of Christ. *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV).*

How wonderful to know that the Spirit also **leads** us, and leads us into all wisdom. *“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).*

We also receive assurance from the Spirit; He **testifies** to the fact that we are God’s children. *“The Spirit testifies himself with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16).*

We are even **sealed** with the Holy Spirit. *“In whom [= Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13, KJV).*

The Holy Spirit **intercedes** for us. He is a Spirit of grace and supplication (Zechariah 12:10). Romans 8:26-27 illustrates this service even clearer, *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will”.*

It is by the power of the Spirit that the **fruit of the Spirit** comes about and grows. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith” (Galatians 5:22-23a, KJV).*

We should not forget that it is the Holy Spirit who gives us **the gifts of the Spirit** so that the church of Christ and every member of His body will be edified. *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10; cf. also Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14).*

The Holy Spirit will be faithful to **keep** us till the very last day. *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).*

Don’t you just marvel at what the Holy Spirit does in us, how He just works everything to perfection? He wants us to be without any spots or blemishes when we finally get to meet our bridegroom. Let us thank God for giving us the Holy Spirit who will remain in our hearts to the very last day. *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).* He is the token of God’s love, poured into our hearts. He is the seal with whom we are sealed. As God’s children, we belong to the Lord forever and always. Jesus saw to it that this law is irrevocable by sending the Spirit to us. Praise the Lord for it.

### **Prayer**

*Father in heaven, in the name of Jesus, I come to You as Your child. Thank You for the promise of the Holy Spirit. I dedicate all my life to You so that You make it Your temple. May the Holy Spirit fill me time and again, as You have said in Your word. I am grateful for everything Your Holy Spirit has already accomplished in my life and continues to do. Amen.*

## Lead Us Not Into Temptation

*“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*

*(Matthew 6:13, KJV; please also read vv. 9-13)*

If you want to gain a deeper understanding of the issue of temptation, the sixth request that we find in the Lord’s prayer is a fruitful study field.

The verse starts with the conjunction “*and*”, indicating that it is connected to the request made before: “*And forgive us our debts*” (*Matthew 6:12, KJV*). If the true face of that ugly sinful behavior in you ever got exposed, you will certainly appreciate the grace of God’s forgiveness. Also you will definitely want to never sin again. There is nothing that scares you more than falling prey to that old sinfulness again. Surely, you will gladly seek God’s face and pray right from the bottom of your heart, “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (*Matthew 6:13, KJV*). It doesn’t make sense to ask God for His forgiveness only; we also want to petition Him to keep us from sinning again. This seems to be one of the key themes expressed in this sixth request of the Lord’s prayer. What else does Jesus want to relay to us when He teaches us to pray in that way?

### God leads His children into temptation

What a provocative statement! And yet, Jesus wouldn’t teach us to pray like this if God didn’t lead us into temptation.

It might comfort you to know that you aren’t the only student of the Bible who has some **difficulty** with the truth laid down here. After all, isn’t it James who says, “*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed*” (*James 1:13-14, KJV*). I’m afraid we have to be rather petty now. Jesus does not teach us to pray, “do not tempt us”.

No, Jesus actually says, we ought to pray like this, “*lead us not into temptation*”. When the Bible refers to the tempter, the Word of God always means the devil, never God. What tempts us is either the devil or the world or that sinful old nature that lives inside of us. Now, when Satan tempts us, he has but one goal – to lead us right *into sin*. His temptation equals seduction. He wants to get us trapped, to inflict harm on us, even destruction if possible. So what does God do? He merely allows us to *enter the circumstances* of such temptations. Why? It goes without saying that He doesn’t intend to lead us into sin. He rather wants to test us, to help us grow and to sanctify us. He simply uses those temptations so as to give us some spiritual exercise. Unlike the devil, God always harbors good intentions when He leads us into temptation. What the devil would want to hurt us with, God utilizes as a means to help us grow spiritually.

**Jesus perfectly exemplifies** this principle. Let us examine in detail what happened during one of the most difficult times in His life. Who was it that tempted Him? Matthew 4:3 provides the answer, “*And when the tempter came to him, he said, ‘If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread’*” (KJV). And who led Jesus right into this temptation? The Holy Spirit did. Please, read the following verse of Scripture to see the evidence with your own eyeballs. “*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil*” (Matthew 4:1, KJV). Obviously, we are safe to say that it wasn’t the Holy Spirit who tempted Jesus. In no way did God seduce Jesus to sin against Him. All of this can only be attributed to the tempter, the devil. The Father, however, purposefully leads His beloved Son into temptation. Jesus “*has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). The epistle goes on to say that, “*Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered*” (Hebrews 5:8). Imagine that! God’s perfect Son had to go to

school and learn spiritual lessons! God put Him in a spiritual battle. The same He does with us. What's the idea here? Does God want us to fall and perish? Not at all. He wants us to learn how to be victorious. Once we get involved in this spiritual battle, the devil desperately tries to pursue that one goal of hurt and death. God's plan, however, is entirely different. He intends to teach us how to overcome, how to gain strength, and how to leave that battlefield a winner. We must emerge war-proven, tested in the storms of life, bruised perhaps but nevertheless victorious. If you find yourself in the fiery furnace of misery and hardship, then remember that the reason why you are there, is to turn you into that refined specimen of gold.

With this in mind, we can now comprehend the alleged paradox a bit better: on the one hand, God tempts nobody at all; on the other hand, it is also true that God does lead us into temptation.

### **God is Lord of all temptations**

Since this is so, we can freely turn to Jesus amidst our trials and temptations; we can ask Him to take control of these situations. As God's children, we aren't the devil's playthings. Satan can only tempt us if it fits into the greater plan that God has for our lives. If our heavenly Father does not want His children to be exposed to evil, the devil is outright powerless. It was only when God granted the devil permission to tempt Job, that the tempter was in a position to launch his attacks against God's faithful servant. Before that, the devil had no permission to do so. If God considers such an onslaught beneficial to us, He will allow the evil one to get busy, to some extent and for some time. Listen up, child of God. The wording here is this: to some extent and for some time. Scripture clearly tells us so, "*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

So, if you face the heat in the kitchen, please don't run to the devil, asking him to turn it down. He simply won't. In fact, the more you beg him, the more he will actually turn it up! He is a sadist who finds great pleasure in harming you. Therefore, don't wrestle with him but rather learn anew what might need refreshment today: It is your heavenly Father above who is in charge. He is in full control of all your temptations. So go talk to Him and say, "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*" (*Matthew 6:13, KJV*). Jesus is able to put the works of the enemy to an end. Please, rest assured that your heavenly Father will not let you perish! Peter tells us, "*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations*" (*2 Peter 2:9, KJV*). Even the psalmist was aware of this fact; just listen to his message, "*A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all*" (*Psalms 34:20*). If God wants the temptation to stop, He will do so.

He gave Jesus the power to say, "*Away from me, Satan!*" (*Matthew 4:10*). After those forty days in the desert, the angels came to the Son of God and ministered to Him. In the same way, I can already see God's angels come to you, strengthening you after that long and tiring battle amidst an array of temptations. You will emerge a victor. The gold of your heart will be even more purified. Your love for Jesus and your trust in Him will grow because you know how He has been with you, side-by-side. "*So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded*" (*Hebrews 10:35*). Never forget that God is Lord over all temptations. So turn to Him if you grow weary of them.

### **Preventive action against self-confidence**

Our prayer verse also helps us fight against relying on ourselves. Let us take Peter's denial as an example here. When Jesus prophesied that all His disciples would leave and fail Him, it was Peter who bragged, "*Even if all fall away on ac-*

*count of you, I never will. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Matthew 26:33, 35). The gospel informs us that all the other disciples made similar promises. It would have been better if they had recalled the Lord’s Prayer so that they could have humbled themselves, saying, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13, KJV).*

I reckon that God leads us into temptation to confront us with our self-confidence and arrogance. Oftentimes, we hardly notice how puffed up we are. Long before Peter got into trouble, God had already ordained that Peter was to be led into temptation. So Jesus simply put him in the picture, saying, “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Did that move the boastful disciple? Absolutely not. He remained unshaken and came up with a speedy answer instead, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). Peter didn’t have the faintest idea of what he was letting himself into; how could he ever be tempted? He wasn’t afraid at all. He was above any seductions or sin. He thought he could fully trust himself. Others, surely, might have stumbled and fumbled but in no way would he, Peter, yield to any temptation. It was more than necessary to lead him into temptation!*

If he was to be helped, he had to be tempted. Something vital was missing in his attitude; something that we find in the spirit of the Lord’s Prayer. It’s that spirit of humility that voices, “Lead me not into temptation for I might just fail the test!” Peter didn’t have that healthy bit of anxiety that yes, perhaps, he might not pass the test and sin again. He lacked that important sense of his own weaknesses and the ever-present possibility that we can fail. Peter felt strong. He counted on his own strength instead of consciously relying on God’s mercy and grace. So God had to deal with him and break that spirit of self-confidence. After Peter had sinned, “*He went out, and*

*wept bitterly*” (Matthew 26:75, KJV). It took Jesus a great deal of love to build this broken heart again. Peter had to learn the Lord’s Prayer all over again.

How are we to make this request known to God, “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*”? In prayer, yes, but with trembling! If we lose sight of what can happen, if we become all too confident in ourselves, we are in fairly dangerous waters. A Christian who knows himself well enough will be rather worried that he might fail when tempted; he’d rather not be led into such situations for he doesn’t want to become guilty before God. On the other hand, a Christian like this is also aware of the fact that sometimes he will have to face difficult scenarios; all the more will he ask God then to keep and help him instead of foolishly relying on his own strength. In this way, the Lord’s Prayer is an excellent means to prevent us from becoming overly self-confident.

### **Appeal for intercessory prayer**

According to Matthew 6:13, Jesus teaches us to pray “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*”. This verse implies an appeal for intercessory prayer. He wants us to pray for one another as we all face trials and temptations.

We want to help each other, and that holds for prayer also. Your main area of temptation might be that you keep on getting **trapped in that terrible, rousing anger** and lack of self-control. I remember a time in my life when I asked Jesus to prevent me from meeting people that would provoke me to anger; so often had I lost my temper already and failed the Lord. We don’t want to tempt each other but help one another overcome our temptations.

Other people have a hard time dealing with **sexual temptations**. Once again, we want to pray for them that God will keep them. A brother in Christ once shared this story with me. “If God hadn’t been with me, I would have fallen flat on my nose.

There was that particular lady whom I hardly knew. Nevertheless, both of us were ready for that extramarital one night stand, but guess what?! Every time we wanted to do it, something got in our way so that it turned out to be impossible.” Tears streamed down his face, as he continued. “If God hadn’t made all those opportunities null and void, I would have gotten deeply entangled in horrible sinfulness.” Let us pray for one another that we don’t get involved in sin again.

Still others are tempted by their **poverty**; they lose hope and don’t trust God anymore. Then, there are people whose **sufferings seem to never end**. Job found himself in such a state, where even his own wife advised him to “*curse God and die!*” (*Job 2:9*); perhaps you face such trials also. And what about those people who have to give up on their loved ones, that dear husband or wonderful son? Coping with such tragedies can become a major temptation also. Sometimes God leads you into temptation by allowing the devil to make you rich. All on a sudden, the wealthy individual finds himself trapped because he only cares about his wealth and prosperity now. Persecution can be a dreadful temptation also; it may happen anywhere – at home, in the office, among an unbelieving family. Let us be humble and trust in nothing but the grace of God. Only He can keep us from temptations and only He is the One who is right by our side to see us through if we do have to face them. Amen!

### **Prayer**

*Jesus, You were in all points tempted as we are. That’s why You understand what I’m going through right now. I’m so grateful that I’m not helpless and alone in this mess. As Your child, I have that blessed assurance that You stand right by my side in Your grace. Amen..*

## Being Kept In Christ

*“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. ... My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ... Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”*

*(John 17:11, 24; please also read vv. 9-26).*

Our text is taken from what is sometimes called the “high priest’s prayer” (John 17). This is the passage where Jesus specifically prays for those the Father gave Him (John 17:2), that is, His disciples and the believers. Jesus asks the Father **to protect** His people. What does that really mean? We shall now take a closer look at it.

### Protected in God

When Jesus said that prayer, we know that He didn’t primarily think of protection against diseases, accidents and things like that. In the sermon of the mount, He already told us that our heavenly Father cares about our external needs and that we don’t have to worry about the necessities of life; God, the Father, provides for the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:26, 28). *“Are you not much more valuable than they?”* Of course, we may still pray for protection when we get on the road for a longer ride or when we face a tough time.

The protection that Jesus has in mind in this verse of Scripture, however, is of a different type. It is about **“being protected in God”**. *“Protect them by the power of your name”* (John 17:11). In other words, Jesus asks God this, “Dear Father, please keep them in Yourself”. It means that our spiritual

life should be protected, that our faith and our very being should be kept in God.

Verse 15 reinforces this petition, “*My prayer is ... that you protect them from the evil one.*” The reference points are obvious: Jesus talks of our sins and the devil whom the Bible often identifies as the “evil one”. The very nature of the evil one is to separate us from God by enticing us to sin. He wants us to stand condemned eternally because the wages of sin is death. The devil even tries to steal that precious gift of salvation God’s children received; he is set on doing anything he can “*to deceive even the elect – if that were possible*” (Matthew 24:24). What brings great joy to me is the add-on Jesus puts here, “*if that were possible*”! So, if someone asks you if God’s chosen people can be lost, you can boldly quote Scripture to proclaim a resounding “No, this cannot happen!” Do you happen to know why not?

In the book of Romans, Paul sheds more light on this question. The apostle states that nothing “*can separate us from the love of God*” – “*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature*” (Romans 8:38-39, KJV; cf. also Romans 8:31-39).

## **God answers the prayer that He gave us through Jesus**

The reason for our assurance also lies in the fact that Jesus teaches us in the Lord’s Prayer how to pray, “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (Matthew 6:13). Does God answer a prayer that He Himself gave us through His Son Jesus? Without a doubt! All believers are in agreement about that. And yet, some of us still harbor some doubt, nervously scratch our heads and wonder if evil might not outfox us somehow and tear us away from God. Why don’t you trust your heavenly Father? What a pity it would be if you didn’t believe

in a God who answers prayers and provides deliverance from the mighty powers of darkness. Trust Him in answering your Lord's Prayer! I should point out here that I'm addressing those believers who pray with a sincere heart because "*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*" (James 5:16).

Perhaps you'll say, "But I need to have that want or desire in me first, don't I?! Or else, God will not deliver me from evil." You seem to overlook something very important here. Your evil desire or unwillingness is part of the evil. So when you pray, "*Deliver me from evil*", this actually means that God will deliver you from it all – including your ungodly will and desire. He blesses you with a godly will because He is the One who grants you both, and works in you both, the will and the act (Philippians 2:13). In view of this, I'm fully convinced that God answers the prayers of His children. You can trust Him that He will truly deliver you from evil whenever you pray the Lord's Prayer!

### **God answers the prayer of His Son Jesus**

Something even better is yet to come! God's children are not only protected because of the fact that God answers their prayers. We cannot get lost either, because of the prayer Jesus says and God answers! Jesus also asks the Father to protect us from evil and to keep us safe in faith (John 17:12). Tell me, don't you believe that the Father answers the prayers of His Son? If you don't, how then can you even assume that God answers any of *your* prayers? Unless we believe that God answers His Son's prayers, there is no sense in submitting our petitions to God.

Praise the Lord that the Father does answer His Son's prayers, for Jesus Himself stated upon raising Lazarus from the dead, "*I knew that thou hearest me always*" (John 11:42, KJV). We can completely rely on the fact that Jesus, our High Priest before God, prays for His people and that God, the Father, answers His prayers – more specifically here, His prayer for

sustaining us by the power of God's name and protecting us from evil.

If you turn with me to the book of Hebrews, we can clarify the matter some more. There, it is written that "*Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary ...; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence*" (Hebrews 9:24). We are also told that "*because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*" (7:24-25).

Christ is our High Priest who prays for us. Thus, our restless soul can find peace in Him. Some struggling Christians still worry about the certainty of their salvation and doubt on their eternal life. Why that? They think they are still not worthy or faithful enough and will fail the Lord. If it is your opinion that salvation is something that depends on you, you will always dread eternal condemnation.

I'd like to tell you this, however. No need to worry, poor soul! As a child of God, you may faithfully put your trust and eternal salvation in the hands of Jesus who through His sufferings and death and prayer ensures and guarantees your safe-being forever more. This is why Jesus states in John 10:28-29, "*I give them [i.e., the ones who believe in Him] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of His hand.*"

"*They shall never perish.*" This is the truth Jesus proclaims. Why should we twist and turn this statement? Someone said, "We can personally see to it that we are snatched out of His hand". Think about this opinion for a moment. How can Jesus say that no-one can snatch us out of His hand and that the Father is greater *than all*? Turns out, after all, I actually think I am greater than the Father and more powerful than the hand of Jesus! Please! Simply look at a father who wants to cross a

street with his child. The child wants to run into a car. Will the father allow that? If even an earthly father knows how to protect his child from getting hurt, how much more our heavenly Father! For we don't place our hope in us but the almighty hand of God. So take heart and trust in Him for protecting you. Don't rely on what you do but on what Christ, and He alone, has done for you!

### **God brings His work of grace to completion**

The Bible does in no way teach that God starts the work of grace in a person but leaves it unfinished so that the individual will be left alone, will eventually perish and render God's original plan of salvation null and void. The dramatic story of Peter is a powerful illustration of this point. He tried to snatch himself out of the Master's hand but did not succeed. Not only did that disciple deny the Lord three times but he actually turned away from Him three times. The first time he lied, the second time he disowned Him on oath, the last time he even cursed himself. Let us see what the account says in detail. *"Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you 're talking about," he said. Then he went out to the gateway where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He denied it again, with an oath: I don't know the man!" After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately, a cock crowed" (Matthew 26:69-74).*

If someone indicates by swearing and cursing that he doesn't want anything to do with Jesus, what then? Has he or she not deliberately and purposefully snatched himself out of the hand of God? Of course, they have! We also know, how-

ever, that Christ foresaw Peter's crisis and told him beforehand, *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat"*. Jesus, the High Priest, also let Peter know the following, *"But I prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"* (Luke 22:31-32, KJV).

Jesus did not say He would pray for His disciple once the temptation materialized. On the contrary, he had already prayed in advance. When the opportune time came, Peter was safe because the case had already been decided in the heavens above – i.e., before he sinned in such a big way. When Jesus prays for His children that their faith should never cease, we can be sure that His will be done. Believing in Him might get interrupted but it will not stop, for Christ prays for His people. *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one"* (John 17:15).

### **The overall testimony of the Bible**

There are numerous other passages in Scripture where we are told that Jesus and the Father act on our behalf and keep us safe. Please, browse through these verses, for instance:

*"But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil"* (2 Thessalonians 3:3, KJV).

*"If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself"* (2 Timothy 2:13).

*"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:6, KJV).

*"This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me"* (John 18:9).

*"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day"* (John 6:39).

“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8).

Perhaps verse 24 in John 17 could be seen as the culmination of God’s intention to protect the believers; it’s in this prayer, where our High Priest Jesus Christ states, “*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory.*” This is the plan that Jesus has for us and surely, He won’t miss His goal. His intercession will carry us all the way to our heavenly home. Charles Spurgeon said something like this once, “It won’t be chariots of fire that take us to heaven but rather the Lord’s prayers.”<sup>8</sup>

## **A brief message each to four different groups of people**

Please, bear with me for delivering a brief message each to four different groups of people. I’d like to address those of you first *who are growing old*: You don’t need to rely on your faithfulness and your Christian deeds any longer, wondering if you brought enough to the Lord. Instead, you may find delight in the fact that you can entirely depend on the righteousness of our Lord and His prayers on our behalf. If you face a time where you can’t even pray anymore, just close your eyes and have Him pray for you!

I’d also like to speak *to the young ones*. Despite your zeal for the Lord, you seem to only see your imperfection and your sinfulness. Those ugly things stick like glue to you. Take heart and stop worrying. Jesus prays for you! This is your hope.

May I share a message with *the nasty people* also? You think that God’s grace can be abused. The Lord’s prayer for

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<sup>8</sup> C.H. Spurgeon: Sermon ‘Why They Leave Us’, delivered on Sunday, March 21, 1886. In: “The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit”. Vol XXXII. Pilgrim Publications: Pasadena 1886

you serves as the perfect alibi to continue in your sinful behavior. Yes, you have gained a certain understanding of the gospel but that does not mean salvation. You still belong to what the Bible calls Babylon, having a ball in pursuing worldly pleasures. Jesus does not pray for the world. If you know about God's grace but reject it nevertheless by making it a cover for your pursuit of sinful desires, I'm afraid you don't have the Spirit of Christ.

Such people are certainly no true Christians. In fact, they are nothing but sly devils. The book of Hebrews describes them like this, *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people". It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:26-31).*

Maybe your parents were believers and you have been sanctified by God's grace through your parents, as the writer of the book of Hebrews suggests. Perhaps you are an unbelieving husband, sanctified through your believing wife. You know the gospel but use it as the perfect alibi for your sinful life. I must admonish you and all the other ones who only hear the word of God but never put it into practice, the ones who profess to be Christians but don't act accordingly and those people who oppose His word and rebel against it. Repent! Confess your sins and turn back to the Lord or else you will face what we just

read, “*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31).

Finally, a word for those people *who are still searching with all their heart*. Is it your desire that Christ stands as your mediator before the Father and prays for you as well? Then, you can no longer be of this world for Jesus does not pray for the world. Leave the world behind and hand your life over to Jesus. Not just a part but all of it. Confess your sins and ask Him to pray for you also. He will. And what’s more, He will safely take you to life eternal. If you call on His name now, you will be saved. Once and for all. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### ***Prayer***

*Father in heaven, thank You for still answering Your Son’s prayer for keeping His disciples. That gives me the privilege to walk with You through the day, feeling safe and sound. There is nothing and nobody that can snatch me out of Your hand or separate me from Your love. Amen.*

## Why Christians Die

*“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory.”*  
(John 17:24)

Jesus desires that His chosen people live in God’s eternal glory. That’s the place where He wants them to be. His opening phrase, “Father”, clearly states the direction and our final destination. God’s children will go to their Father. We came from Him and to Him we will go. In prayer, we often state “our heavenly Father”; this is more than just a phrase. For a born-again Christian, it is also an expression for his homesickness. When we call out “Abba, dear Father”, we state in fact that we are on our way home to the Father already. Right there, where our Father and God lives, that’s our home and country – the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of our eternal abode.

Do you realize what this means? When a Christian dies, this is not much of a tragedy really. Why stop people from leaving? Why not allow them to joyfully go heavenwards, the place of their true home? After all, this is only meant to fulfil what Jesus prays for when He wants us to be with Him in His glory. Once we depart from this world, we finally get to see what we have always believed with all our heart! How could that event be reason to feel blue if it had been our greatest desire all along?

Funnily, many a Christian is still very much tied to this world. This is a very sad thing to say, actually. We see these ties often expressed in desperate prayers for healing. The sick person might be a hundred years old already and professes he doesn’t want to live forever. Yet, he prays for healing, instead of relaxing at the prospect that he might be called home soon.

Possibly, you were at the doctor’s just now. You were told that you are seriously ill. It looks as if your heavenly Father wants to call you home. Are you feeling worried or frustrated now? Take heart and rejoice at the wonderful time ahead! When night falls and our life draws to a close, that’s the time

when we have reached our goal! Do we want to complain about the fact that we'll have to die soon? Are we dissatisfied on account of our sickness and infirmities? We should rather be glad that we are so weak. What better indication than this to tell us that we have almost completed our time here on earth and will soon be admitted to enter heaven! Or do you plan to stay on this planet for always? Should what is supposed to be a place of transition actually be our heaven? It is absolutely wonderful to experience bodily healing and yet, it is not the glory that we truly seek. Healing is not perfection but a mere sign, pointing to the true glory and perfection that is yet to come. It grieves me to say that many Christians have made healings their religion. They have no desire whatsoever for heaven. Something must be wrong about their faith. If a believer wishes for physical health and a long life only, I must ask that person: Do you have no greater hope than that? Do God's children have no other goal than prosperity and happiness? If so, what's the difference to the unbelievers then?

Let me reassure you that indeed, we have a higher goal than that, for we are going home to the Father! That's why Jesus prays, "*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me*". When a Christian departs, the prayer that Jesus said, is being fulfilled. Anyone who is led by the Holy Spirit will ultimately say "Amen", even when loved ones and friends go home. Certainly, separation is painful and we have to let go of something special then. Still, we can find comfort in the fact that we will be separated for some time only and that we will soon see the deceased again in heaven.

The lesson we learn is that the Lord's prayer brings about our departure. It is by His power that we are drawn heavenwards, as can be seen in His words, "*Father, I want*". When He prays, "*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am*", He puts His divine power into this prayer of taking home the saints. He wants them to be with His Father in

heaven. So relax, dear Christian. No need to get upset about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Turn everything over to your heavenly Father – your departure from this earth, your health or sickness. Why? Because your times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15) Isn't it a most beautiful thought that we will be expected and received in heaven?

Our Lord longs for His church. After all, the church is His bride. What an odd couple that would be that would want to remain engaged forever! And how strange your love for your bridegroom if you don't yearn to be with Him? Jesus wants to celebrate the wedding banquet. Consequently, the Bible teaches, "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*" (Psalm 116: 15, KJV). Please, don't get me wrong here; naturally, the Lord doesn't delight in our death and suffering. God makes this statement because death finally leads to eternal life. Therefore, don't hold the believers back as they get ready for going home. Don't even try to sweet-talk God into allowing a loved one to stay with you just a little longer still. If you truly love that individual, you will let him go in peace and consciously point him to Christ in the heavens above.

I love to recall the moment when my mother was about to go home to the Lord. For a long time, she had been fighting against a certain sickness, trying to prolong her days here on earth a bit more. Then, one day, she must have crossed an invisible roadblock. I said to her, "Mama, we'll keep on praying for you. God will definitely restore you once again". To my surprise, she replied, "But that would be terrible!" She was ready to go home. Why do we cling to life on earth as if joy and happiness were features of this world only? Do not hold fast to your husband, wife or children, acting as if you could not live without them.

Briefly, I'd like to turn with you to some verses in the Bible that clearly reflect how much people were looking forward to heaven. In Philippians 1:21, Paul doesn't state, "For to me, to

live is Christ, and to die is loss” but rather the opposite! “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*“). Reading on, we find the following sentence, “*I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*” Or how about this passage from Scripture? “*We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Just listen to that joy and certainty that those verses of Scripture radiate! Your heart should not feel any different, when you think of your departure. Do we still need to cross that valley of death? Of course, but it is actually the gate to God’s glory! In His prayer, Jesus says that He wants us to see His glory. And we will see Him, face-to-face. Blessed will be the day and great the shout when our Lord Savior comes to take us home to His eternal kingdom!

### ***Prayer***

*Our wonderful heavenly Father. I’m so grateful that I am Your child. That’s why I have my home in You. Thank You that one day soon, I shall enjoy eternal fellowship with You and Your dear Son, my Lord Savior Jesus. Please, keep me from false hopes and temptations, found on this earth. Instead, make all of my heart and mind and soul focus on You and my eternal home with You. Thank You so much for answering my prayer. Amen.*