

January to March 2023

Teenz RPG Series on

Salvation Q&A

Am I Saved?

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said,

*"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee,
my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."*

(Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang

On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

WHY DO I NEED TO BE SAVED?

There are many reasons why people would come to church. It could be because of friends, family, trials that they face, or a tract that they receive. Whatever be the case, what they should soon realise, is their need for salvation. If they do not see that, then there would be no reason for them to stay at all. If at this moment, you have not seen your need for salvation, or do not find it important, then you must ask yourselves, why am I even coming to church?

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1-3, that we were all once dead in trespasses and sins. All men are born with this sin nature in us. Just as a person who is physically dead cannot resurrect himself, one who is dead in sin can do nothing to make himself come alive spiritually. We are like corpses headed to hell, and nothing we do on our own can help us. Being spiritually dead, we are under Satan's domain, and are walking according to the wicked ways of the world. Not only that, but we are also walking according to the desires of Satan himself, who is the prince of the power of the air! The Bible says that he is working in all the '*children of disobedience*' – people who are unsaved! This is indeed a scary thought. We would simply be minions doing Satan's bidding.

Dearest teen, is this the state that you still find yourself in? This very is why we need Christ. We need to be quickened, to be made alive. We need to find a way out of this bondage of sin that we were born in, out of a life where we are simply living to fulfil the terrible lustful desires of the flesh and mind. We need a Saviour who can cleanse us from all our sins, and bring us into a relationship with God. Do you know who this Saviour is? Have you really put your faith and trust in Him, and repented of your evil and wicked ways? Or are you still the person Paul describes in Ephesians 2:1-3, one who is headed for destruction and condemnation?

For those of you who have already put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are no longer dead in your sins but now have a new life in Christ. You should now seek to know our great Saviour who has saved you, and live your life in service to Him!

Thought: We are either walking according to the world and Satan, or we are walking with Christ. There is no middle ground.

Prayer: Lord, I realise my need for salvation. May You give me the grace to have faith in Thee!

IS SALVATION FOR ALL?

Oftentimes, when the gospel is shared with a person, he may seem rather convinced, and does not dispute the truth of what he is being told. However, he then gives a nonchalant shrug, and says something like, “well nah, I think this whole Jesus and salvation thing is not for me”. Or maybe he would commend you for your faith and zeal, but laments that he is too deep in the world to get himself out of it. Is that how you feel as well?

My dear friend, the God of the Bible is the God who created the whole world. He created you and me, and all of us were made in His image. When He sent Jesus to die on the cross, it was because He loved the whole world. He has a care and concern for each and every one of His creation, and His desire is that not one of us should perish.

In fact, the very reason why the Lord has not yet returned to this world is because He is longsuffering, and waiting for more people to come to repentance. His promise is that He will return one day. But in His second coming, Jesus is no longer coming as a suffering saviour, but He will be coming as the triumphant King, who will judge all sinners who have not repented. The whole earth will be destroyed, and only those who are saved will enter into the new heaven and the new earth.

God’s desire, as clearly stated in this verse, is that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. In fact, He has *‘no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’* (Ezekiel 33:11). The gospel is freely given out to all who would hear. Anyone who simply receives the gospel by faith, who is convicted of his sin and repents, will definitely be saved! This is the promise of God’s Word. Note however that although this is what God desires, He still is the perfect Judge who will judge all who do not repent at the Day of Judgment. We are not to read this verse wrongly, and assume that since God does not desire for me to perish, then I am safe. No! God wants you to repent, and turn to Jesus Christ in faith, acknowledging that He alone can save you from your sins.

Thought: If salvation is for all that means salvation is for me!

Prayer: Lord, thank You for salvation so rich, so free, and given to all.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

If you were given a year's worth of free time, and granted free license do whatever you want, what do you think you would do? If you were told that there were no rules to follow, no obligations to be met, how do you think you would spend your time? Would you be playing computer games or sports all day? Going out with friends, or shopping to your heart's content? Watching every single movie and TV show ever made? Your answer would be very telling, for it shows what you perceive your life's purpose to be.

Often times, in today's materialistic and pleasure-driven culture, we can seldom see beyond the here and now. We are told by the world to just enjoy this life and do as you please, for life is short. However, as Christians, we ought to have a completely different perspective of our lives. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us clearly that as believers, we were bought with a price. That high price was the blood of Jesus Christ – a currency that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. It was a currency that could only be earned through the death of Jesus on the cross. That is indeed a supremely high price that was paid for your life. Therefore we must realise that the life that I now have, is not my own. It is not for me to do as I please, to just seek after fun and an easy life, wasting my time away in the sinful pleasures of this life.

No, we must realise that our purpose instead is to glorify God! With all that we have, all that we do, all that we say, and even all that we think, we must glorify God! Is that your life's purpose? Do you seek to live a life that is pleasing to God, that people would look at and glorify God? Or is your life no different from that of an aimless unbeliever, who does not know of God and eternity, who whiles his time away chasing after the things of this world?

Dear teen, as you are busy studying diligently, you should constantly and consistently seek to glorify Him. If the scouts endeavor to do a good deed a day, you can do better by shining brightly for the Lord, testifying for Jesus all the day!

Thought: I was bought with a price, and therefore my life is not mine to live, but should be consecrated to God.

Prayer: O Lord, help me to put aside the things of the world, and my carnal desires, but instead to glorify You in all that I do. Amen.

IS GOD REAL?

In 2008, a group of atheists in London raised money to fund an advertisement campaign to put signs on buses throughout the city. The slogan they put up read "There's probably no God, now stop worrying and enjoy your life". Sad to say, this is the philosophy of many people in the world today. How about you? Do you acknowledge God to be real? Is He real in your life?

Those people who reject God have rejected the clear signs that He has given us in this world to clue us in to His existence. The psalmist declares that just by looking up at the grandeur of the heavens and seeing the beauty of the firmament spread about us, we would be able to know of God. The simple but majestic splendour of the sky proclaim to us the glory of God, and His mighty hand in creation. It is only sinful men with their arrogant discoveries in science, who have declared that God does not exist, and that this whole world evolved through time and chance over billions of years. Truly, only the fool would say in his heart, there is no God (Psalm 14:1). Throughout history, man has always had an innate knowledge of a being higher than they, of one who created them and controlled their fate. Whilst they may not have known the true God, by simply marvelling at creation around them, they concluded that God is real. Like the men of Athens in Acts 17, they devised pagan and heathen religions in an attempt to worship this '*unknown god*'.

For us, we have the privilege of knowing the living and true God. He has given us a whole book to teach us who He is, how we can know Him and live a life pleasing to Him. If God is indeed real in your life, then you must desire to live a life that witness to others that He exists! Sadly, so many so-called Christians today claim to believe in God, but they care nothing for His Word and His commandments. Instead, like the atheists, they seek to enjoy life the way they please. Are you one of them?

Dear teen, if God is real to you, show it in the way you live your life. Show it in the way you study the Bible. Show it in the way you love your family and obey your parents. Yes, there are countless ways you can show your obedience to God's commandments and glorify Him.

Thought: Does the way that I live reflect my belief that God exists?

Prayer: Help me O Lord to see Your presence and realise Your reality wherever I go, and in whatever I do.

WHY SHOULD I TRUST THE BIBLE?

To some extent, all the religions of the world claim to have a set of truths or religious writings that they live by. What then sets us apart from the rest of the world? Why can we uphold the Bible and proclaim it to be the only perfect and absolute truth to the exclusion of all other religious texts?

It is primarily a position of faith. Yes there are many undeniable proofs that do show the historical accuracy, validity and veracity of the Bible. One can point to the prophecies and show how every one of them was fulfilled down to the last detail. One can look at the secular historical records of Israel and Jesus Christ to show that these events truly did exist. All these could convince one's mind of its truth. However only through faith can our hearts be moved to accept the message of the Bible, and embrace it with our lives. This faith, will lead us to believe the Bible as it declares itself to be, as the very Word of God! This is how the Thessalonian Christians recognized the writings and teachings of Paul the Apostle, for they did not receive it as the word of men, but as it truly is, they saw it as the word of God.

All the other religions, believe in works penned by men claiming to be oracles or prophets of a god. But they are all the fallible writings of men! The Bible on the other hand has the directly inspired words of God Himself, written by holy men moved by the Holy Ghost. Yes the Bible is entirely trustworthy, infallible, inerrant, and applicable to all areas of our lives. We can confidently read it, and know that they are exactly the words that God has meant for us to read. He was personally involved in breathing out the very words, and then in preserving every one of those words, so that what we have in our hands today is exactly as what was originally given.

Dear teen, with such an amazing book in our hands, will we not take time to read it, to study it, and to love it? Will we not want to live it out in our lives, so that through your testimony others will come to believe in the Bible the same way that you have? Make it your top priority to have your Quiet Time every day. Read a portion of Scripture and pray each morning. Make an effort to memorize the verses given to you. Also, meditate on what you have learnt. You will benefit much.

Thought: The Bible is none other than the Word of God, faultless, unerring, supreme.

Prayer: O God, help me to love Your Word, to cherish it, read it, study it, and then live it out in my life.

AM I A GOOD PERSON?

What do you think? Do you think you are a good person? Think of everything that you have ever done in your life. And then try to balance them on the scales of what you think is good and bad. How do you think you would measure up? Be honest with yourself. Do not try to rationalize or justify your actions, or try to compare with others. Simply judge your actions objectively. What are your results like?

Now add God into the equation. When you first judged your own goodness, what was the basis of your judgment? Realise that there is only one absolute standard in the world, and that is the standard of God. God is holy, and it is His standard of holiness that we must live up to. If we were to base it upon our own ideas of morality and virtue, it can be easily disputed, and is very subjective. Our idea of good and bad is often decided by our culture, nurture and experiences in life. However, God’s standards as given in His Word never change, and it is to that yardstick that we ought to compare ourselves. God’s Word is therefore like a searchlight, that shines into every deep dark corner of your life, that reveals every thought, word and action that you have ever had, and determines if it is good or bad.

Sadly, when faced with such a standard, the verdict quickly becomes very clear. Romans 3:12 clearly states that *“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”*. We are all innately sinful. No one ever taught us how to lie or cheat or throw tantrums. We did it naturally. Why? Because of the original sin inherited from our father Adam. When he fell in the Garden of Eden, we all became sinners, and could not help but sin. There is nothing that we can do to make up for sin in our lives, and make ourselves good people. There is only one man who could ever have been described as a good person – and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why our only hope is in Him.

Dear teen, the truth is that we are all sinners. If you have repented of your sins and believe in Christ, you are now a child of God, and are good only because of the merits of Christ. If not, you are still a sinner and dead in your sins and trespasses. Come to the Saviour and make no delay. He is waiting for you.

Thought: I may not be a good person, but Jesus Christ is, and therefore my only hope is in Him.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for my unrighteousness, and thank You for the blood of Christ that washes me clean.

WHAT IS SIN?

In our lives, we are surrounded by rules. Some are clearly spelt out to us, whilst others are more an unspoken sort of guidelines that we understand are there. Everywhere we go, we know there is a sort of decorum that we must have, a certain sort of standard that we must conform to. If we do not obey these rules, there would also be penalties and punishments.

In the past few days, the term ‘*sin*’ has been mentioned from time to time. But have we ever stopped to question, what exactly is sin? How do I define it? Based on the text for today, 1 John 3:4, the Westminster Shorter Catechism defined it as such: “*Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God*”.

Thus simply put, we have two broad overlapping definitions of what is sin:

1. When we fall short of the standards given in the law of God. When we do not meet up to the requirements set, when we are in want of (meaning lacking) conformity to God’s law. For example, when we do not love our neighbours as we ought, or not honour our parents enough, these are areas in our lives where we are actually in sin. This is as Romans 3:23 says - we have all sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.
2. When we transgress the law of God, when we break the commandments that God has set for us. This is when we do not do what we are told to do. For example, when we lie, covet, practice idolatry etc. This is the clearer and more easily identifiable sort of sin in our lives.

Realise that within these two categories, the scope of application is very broad, where there are indeed so many different ways in which we fall short of or transgress against the law of God. Thus as Christians we must be very careful of everything that we do, to guard our hearts, our mouths and our actions from sinning against the holy and righteous God whom we love so dearly.

Thought: To know sin, we must know the law of God.

Prayer: O Lord, grant me the strength and courage to deal with the many sins in my life.

WHAT IS ORIGINAL SIN?

A few days ago, we explored the idea of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. This is what we term the original sin of man. Understanding this original sin would lead us to understand why we even sin in the first place.

When Adam was created as the first man, he was created perfect, without sin. However, he did have the ability to sin. In the Garden of Eden, he was put to a test. It was a Covenant of Works that God made with Man. Adam was given a single law to abide by, that he was not to eat of a particular fruit. If he had obeyed, he would have been granted eternal life and fellowship with God. He would continue in his sinless state, and be in harmony with God forever.

However Eve succumbed to the Devil’s temptations, took of the fruit and then gave it to Adam to eat. In so doing, they rebelled against God and experienced sin for the first time in their lives. Having sinned, they fell from their originally sinless state, and all of mankind fell with Adam. Adam as the first man, was representative for all men, and thus by this one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners (Romans 5:19). As a result, sin entered into the world, and with it, came the judgment of death. From then on, all men were born in sin, born in a state of spiritual death.

You may at this moment protest at the unfairness of such a situation. Should not everyone be given a chance? How can the whole human race be represented by just one man? Well that is God’s plan and we are never to question it. However, just as we had one representative through which we all fell into sin, likewise God has given us a second Adam, one man through whom many can be made righteous. That one man is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Through His obedience the free gift of grace can be given to us. Just as we had no choice in receiving the sin nature from Adam, we also do not have to do anything to receive the righteousness through justification in Jesus Christ. Adam had sinned the original sin and caused man to fall, but Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience, and then died on the Cross to redeem us!

Thought: I can rejoice in the fact that I am made righteous through Jesus Christ who died for my sins.

Prayer: O Lord, we thank You for the righteousness of Christ, and the free gift of grace whereby we can be justified!

AM I A SINNER?

People today really do not like being told that they are sinners. If you do so, they would label you as being judgmental, or a religious bigot. However, this is a cold hard truth that everyone must all face up to. We have all sinned, we have fallen short of the glory of God, and we will all have to receive the wages due for the sins that we have committed – that is death.

Though I may not know you, I do know one thing that is certain about you, and that is you are definitely a sinner. It might be a difficult fact to swallow, and you may not like it, but it is the truth. There is no denying the fact that every day of our lives we sin. We transgress against the commandments of God, and do not do that which is required of us. We are all rebels, showing ingratitude for the God who created us and gave us life. Paul in his address to the Romans did not mince his words, in declaring that all have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God. He does not hold back at all as he tells them that everyone without exception is a sinner, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile.

Likewise for us, we must face up to sin for what it really is. We must understand the seriousness of sin, and God's absolute hatred for sin. We must realise how terribly we have offended God by being the sinners that we are, and then come to repentance before Him. Yes we are sinners, but we are sinners who have been promised hope. God has provided for us a Saviour who has redeemed us from our sin, and made us righteous before God. Not to say we are no longer sinners, for we still do sin because we are still in the body of flesh. But we have also been given a freedom from sin, and are no longer captive to its terrible bondage. We have the ability to be dead unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11). Therefore treasure this freedom that you have, and daily endeavour to struggle to overcome the many temptations to sin that come your way. We may be sinners, but we can have victory over our sin, because we have Christ and the Holy Spirit with us.

Dear teen, if you have repented and believed in Jesus, you indeed are blessed. Yet you have the responsibility to continue to resist the sins that beset you. You need to endeavour to say no to sin, the world and Satan, and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit every day of your life.

Thought: I may be a sinner, but I can choose not to sin.

Prayer: O Lord, grant me the strength to overcome sin and be victorious in Christ.

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE SIN?

If we were to place each and every aspect of our lives under close scrutiny and examine the thoughts and motives for each action that we do or word that we say, we would quickly become very ashamed. We would not go very far in our search, before we would discern yet another way in which we have allowed pride to rear its ugly head, or realise we have fallen into the clutches of laziness. Romans 3:11 gives us 2 ways in which we do sin daily in our lives:

1. Our lack of understanding of God and His Word. Oftentimes, the reason why we sin is because of our lack of understanding of the character of God. We seem to think that just because the Bible does not explicitly forbid a certain thing, then it is all right for me to do it. However, we fail to take into consideration the holiness of God, and that His standards are far higher than ours. Because we do not have a sufficient understanding of God's Word, we carelessly saunter through life, thinking that we can do nothing wrong, when in actual fact we are sinning so much against God.
2. We do not seek after God enough. Many times, we also leave God out of the picture. We claim to be a Christian, sing songs about how Jesus is all the world to us, but practically speaking, God is just a tiny insignificant aspect in our lives. Because we do not seek Him and try to do His will in whatsoever that we do, we often fall into sin. We solve our problems with our own human wisdom; we interact with family and friends with our own selfish attitudes; we abhor school and homework because we just desire fun and leisure. In all these things that we do, we do not seek God, place him first in our lives, or live to please and glorify Him. Instead we place our selfish wants and desires as first place in our lives, and live to please and glorify self and self alone.

Dear teen, in order to overcome sin, you need to study God's Word more and seek Him in all that you do. He must take first place in your heart, and His Word must guide us through every step of life's journey.

Thought: We need to know less of the world and more of Christ; seek less of self and more of God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to repent of my ways, and to seek Thee in everything I do.

HOW CAN I BE A SINNER IF I STILL DO GOOD?

Isaiah 64:6a declares that all of us are unclean: for certainly none of us can ever claim to have led a perfect sinless life. This uncleanness separated us from our perfect, pure and holy God. Isaiah goes on to say that *"all our righteousness are as filthy rags"*. In our fallen state we do not know God, nothing we do is ever for him, but only for our sinful selves. Therefore even the apparently righteous things that we do, are also regarded as filthy rags before God.

We can never be saved by combining faith and works, for any attempt to merge the robes of righteousness given by Christ with these filthy rags of works will render us unclean. We must be spotlessly clean, washed by the blood of Christ. Once we are saved, however, our good works are no longer filthy rags, but can be regarded as gold, silver, precious stones in God's sight, fit for His reward (1 Corinthians 3:12-14).

If your sins are not washed by faith in Christ's work alone, then you are not saved. No matter how regular you are at church or how much you serve God or how many other good works you do, you can never be considered righteous and clean in the sight of God. You must first confess your sins and believe in Christ. If you already have this saving faith, then ask yourself if your good works are tainted by sin. Do you serve Him with ulterior motives? If so, realise that in God's sight, some of your works are as wood, hay and stubble, to be burned up (1 Corinthians 3:15). Paul himself realised *"... when I would do good, evil is present with me"* (Romans 7:21). Search your heart to make sure all your thoughts and actions are clean and pure, or else they will not be accepted by God.

The Bible clearly teaches us in Acts 4:12, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."* That name is Jesus. Only Jesus saves.

Thought: Am I saved by Christ's robes of righteousness alone?

Prayer: O God, help me to check that my testimony is not tainted by sin.

SO WHAT IF I HAVE SINNED?

Romans 3:19 says *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”*. Sin is breaking God’s Holy Law. When comparing ourselves with the Law, none of us can ever claim before our all-knowing God that we have never broken any of the laws at all. As long as we have broken one law, even if we have kept other laws, we are guilty of all (James 2:10). The more we know God’s Word, the more we would realise our guilt before God, and the less we would rationalize and try to justify our own sins.

The verse above starts with the phrase *“Now we know”*. Paul knew and admitted his own guilt before God. The question is, do you know? Do you know this truth, that the Law shows your guilt before God? If you only know this when you are finally before God’s Great White Throne Judgment, it will be too late. Dear teen, may you realise that, young though you may be, death strikes at all ages. Repent today.

Just as someone who is judged as guilty in a human court will be sentenced to an appropriate punishment, likewise someone who is proven guilty before the just God will receive the appropriate punishment for his sin. You might think that your sins go unnoticed, or that others have sinned more than you have. Do realise that man is so depraved in sin, that many will rebel against even the very notion that we are sinners. However, at the day of reckoning, before our just God, *“every mouth may be stopped”*. In God’s court, there will be no doubt of our guilt.

Those who die in their sin and are unrepentant will find themselves in hell when they die. The account in Luke 16:19-31 tells us that the rich man ended up in hell because of his unbelief. There he felt the torment of a fire that died not. He cried for mercy. He begged Abraham who is in heaven to send Lazarus to tell his brothers to believe. Abraham replied that if they simply believe in what Moses and the prophets recorded in the Scriptures, it is enough to convict them of their sin and lead them to repent and believe. If you are still lost in sin today, may God’s Word speak to your heart and convict you of your sin, otherwise you will have to suffer the same consequence one day.

Thought: Have I ever confessed to God that I am guilty of sin?

Prayer: O God, help me remember that it is my sin that sent Your Son to the cross.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SIN?

In the days of Noah, sin had so completely pervaded and overtaken humanity, such that the Bible describes how the imaginations and thoughts of man's heart was “only evil continually”. They were so lost in sin and wickedness that it was all they could think about! As a result, God was grieved, and decided to destroy all of mankind, and start afresh with Noah and his family. To God, the effects of sin in corrupting man's hearts were so terrible that he saw a need to wipe out all of humanity, and cleanse the world of their wickedness.

Likewise, unbelievers today do not seek God and His holiness, but seek the desires of flesh and what the world offers. Like a corpse that is dead to feeling, those who are dead in sin do not feel any remorse for sin, and have no realization of the consequences of sin. Indeed the theological term for someone who is dead in sin is “*totally depraved*”: we are so corrupt and our hearts so hardened as stone, that unless God Himself makes us realise our sinful state, we will never repent. This is the woeful effect that sin has in every unbeliever.

If we are dead in sin, all our righteousness are as filthy rags in God's sight. Note the term is not dying in sin, but dead in sin: we are already spiritually dead, separate from God. Consider that even someone as wicked as Judas Iscariot can feel sorry for his sins without confessing his need for a Saviour, and likewise everyone who is dead in sin can still feel remorseful but without true repentance. That is what sin does.

Dear teen, are you currently experiencing the effects of sin in your heart? Are you still in rebellion against God, and are you still lost and dead in your sins? Unless you are made alive or “*quickened*” by the Holy Spirit, you will also have to suffer the consequences of sin: both in this earthly life and after our physical death. You will experience the second death, which is eternal punishment in hellfire. God does not desire that you suffer these consequences: listen and believe the Gospel!

Thought: Have I ever realised how far sin has affected me?

Prayer: O God, thank You for revealing to me my sinful estate!

WHY DOES GOD HATE SIN?

People understand the need for personal hygiene - that we must maintain cleanliness in order to prevent the spread of diseases. Sadly, these people do not desire to be free from the disease of sin. Romans 8:7-8 tells us *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."* The unregenerate are described as one having a carnal mind that does not abide by the law of God. In fact it is not possible for such a mind to please God, because it is completely under the bondage of sin. In contrast, God is perfect and sinless. Everything about God is holy, whether it is His thoughts, His words or His works. God cannot stand sin for it is an abomination to Him, entirely in opposition to His perfection.

And so we ask, do we have carnal minds that are lost in sin? We must not compare with other men, for you might think you are law abiding and good in society's eyes and are *'saints'* compared to the criminals of the land! This kind of comparison is very arbitrary and results in every one doing what is right in their own eyes. The focus must instead be on God: can you come before the thrice Holy God, and live?

The opposite of a carnal mind is a spiritual mind. Such a mind (obtained only when a person is born again) seeks the things which please God. The spiritual mind is energized and directed by the Holy Spirit of God. It is He who enables a child of God to produce the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

Dear teen, check to see if you are really saved. Some have been known to profess that they are saved but when tried they were found to worship a God of their own imagination and not the living and true God. One proof of whether you truly are saved is whether you hate sin the same way God hates sin. It is not to say that true believers will never sin; rather, true believers will never be casual with sin, but will always struggle with their sin, knowing fully well that God hates sin and every time we rebel against Him, we grieve His heart.

Thought: Do I struggle with sin or do I wilfully sin?

Prayer: O God, may I not displease Thee by sinning!

WHAT IS THE PENALTY OF SIN?

When a person goes to work, he deserves to be paid wages according to the labour that he puts in. In like manner, God deems that the wages we deserve for our sin is death! Besides spiritual death which we have considered, sin brings two other deaths: physical death, and the second death which is eternal punishment (as opposed to eternal life) in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). There may be some that think that a loving God surely cannot send His creation to hell, but that contradicts what our Holy God has justly stated in His perfect Word that death is what sin deserves.

Sin often appears to be very alluring and pleasant. There is an attraction about it that is deceptive. Remember that Satan can appear as an angel of light to deceive. It leads to a vain and useless life of self-pleasure. It also leads to iniquity and wickedness to others, and yields sorrow and bitterness. Ultimately the end is death. If we turn from such a life and come to Christ and walk in His commandments, the believer is made free from the bondage of sin. The road may be up-hill, narrow and difficult but there is everlasting life at the end.

Salvation is a gift of God, for none of us in any way are deserving of being saved from this death nor can we save ourselves. For believers, if not for the Holy Spirit that pricked our hearts to see our need for Christ as Saviour, we would never have done so in our own depraved state. It is this gift of God that has made us spiritually alive instead of being dead in sin, it is this same gift that convicts us we need not fear physical death, it is this same gift that brings us eternal life rather than eternal death.

Dear teen, if we know that our sin deserves this terrible penalty of death, how can we continue in sin after we are saved? To do so is telling the whole world we take hellfire lightly, and that we take the gift of Jesus Christ for granted! Nay, let us always remember that it is our sins that put Him on the Cross. If not for Him, we can only live our lives miserably looking forward to eternal torment in hellfire that we justly and fully deserve as our wages for sin. Why do you prefer to have sin as your master that will eventually reward you with such a terrible end, instead of embracing Christ as your Lord and Saviour who has sacrificed Himself to save you?

Thought: What was the ‘wages’ of Christ’s perfect life and death?

Prayer: O God, may I give You my total service and allegiance!

DIDN'T GOD CREATE SIN?

The above question is sometimes asked by unbelievers who do not want to acknowledge their sinful estate; they think that if they can find some contradiction in the gospel, then the wages of sin do not apply to them.

Genesis 2:16-17 says *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”* God created man with the ability to choose to do good or evil. If Adam obeyed God’s command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would remain sinless. However, Adam and Eve did eat of the forbidden fruit, then sin entered into the world (Romans 5:12). It was our first ancestor’s fault, not God’s design. One can hardly blame the designer of the first knife for introducing killing by knife; the fault rests on he whom had misapplied the use of the knife for evil instead of good. It is a travesty to accuse our Holy God of creating sin. It was man that chose to rebel against God’s law.

Also note that just before this event took place, something else also took place in heaven. There was rebellion in heaven, led by Lucifer. In Ezekiel 28: 11-17 we are told that God made him perfect and beautiful till iniquity was found in him. His heart was lifted up because of his beauty. He wanted to be like the most High and so God cast him to the ground. Read also Isaiah 14:12-15 for more information about this incident. He is now Satan, lurking about, seeking whom he may devour. One third of the host of heaven also rebelled with him and they were also cast down and today they are demons, doing the bidding of Satan. In this we have the origin of sin.

Dear teen, do you try to give excuses for your sin? Do you try to argue with God that you do not deserve to be punished, thinking that you? Do you tell God that you are still young and deserve multiple chances to make mistakes, that your inexperience somehow excuses you from penalty? Are you trying to argue with God? Remember, God is fully justified in His actions, and we breathe every breath we take by His mercies alone (Lamentations 3:22-23). Do not test God.

Thought: Do I try to excuse my own sin?

Prayer: O God, against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.

WHAT IS HELL LIKE?

Matthew 13:42 gives us a succinct description of hell: “... a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”. Hell is a furnace of fire: the word ‘furnace’ implies high heat and constant burning from much that fuels the fire. The Valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem was the city dump and incinerator for the rubbish of Jerusalem in ancient times, and Jesus used the same name for hell, “Gehenna”. This was apt because in both cases, the fire is unquenchable (Matthew 9:44), and in the Valley of Hinnom, the only living things were worms that fed on burning animal carcasses, and thus Jesus described hell as a place where “*their worm dieth not*” implying that the occupants of hell would suffer this torment forever without being burnt up.

There would be two reactions for every occupant of hell. Firstly, there will be wailing as a result of the intense suffering experienced; emergency room doctors will tell you that the worst wailing in the ER comes from burn victims. The rich man in hell implored for water to cool the torment he was experiencing (Luke 16:24). Secondly, there will be gnashing of teeth, indicating regret for past sins that caused him to end up like this, and despair for there is no further chance of redemption, no avenue of exit. They are confronted with the dastardly nature of their sin, and would realise that the just punishment is eternity in this place of torment. Please do not believe those cartoons or jokes that portray hell as a place where one will meet friends or as an exciting decadent place where you will enjoy yourself.

Those who are yet in their sins and have never confessed Christ should be alarmed at the thought of hell. It is a real and terrifying place, and not a place where we would want even our worst enemies to suffer in.

Dear teen, if you have not truly confessed Christ as your personal Saviour, please do so today. Nothing is more important in this life than this decision that affects your eternity. Nothing! If you have unsaved friends or loved ones, do share with them the gospel; for you are not truly a friend if you do not care about where this friend is going after death, and likewise you do not truly love your family member if you say nothing about their eternity. Can you live with the thought that your unsaved friend or loved one may one day be gnashing his teeth in hell for eternity?

Thought: Am I really a true friend if I do not share the gospel?

Prayer: O God, give me a passion to rescue the perishing!

WHY DOES A GOD OF LOVE CREATE HELL?

There is an alarming number of professing Christian preachers who find it so difficult to answer this question. Some have resorted to explaining that hell is not a place of eternal punishment, but only as a place where the sinner is separated forever from God. Is this a biblical answer?

While God is a God of love, Romans 2:2 reminds us that that is only one of God's attributes, for God is also a God of justice. Remember it is we who sin, and not God who caused us to do so. Sin must be punished, otherwise God cannot be called a just God. Our God is perfect in His judgment. The punishment for our sins will be no more and no less than what we deserve. While none of us who believe in the existence of hell would desire even our worst enemy to be forever punished there, the fact remains that sin is heinous and grievous, and much evil abounds in this world of ours. Since God is holy, He cannot stand sin, and it is thus consistent with His character that sin must be severely punished, and we who are created in His image and who have been made holy by the blood of Christ must also view sin in the same light. We cannot join the world and overlook sin and its consequences. Instead, we must point out to this dark world that the wages of sin is eternal death. Just as God punished the past wicked world through a global flood, God will likewise bring a Great Tribulation, and cast all the unregenerate into the Lake of Fire forever (Revelation 20:15). The Apostle Paul also here in Romans 2:1-2 tells us that it is a well-known fact that God will punish sins. Outwardly, the hypocrite can pretend to be good and obtain the praise of men, but God searches the heart, and sees the secrets as well as the open deeds of people. God, without respect of persons, will punish wickedness, and render to every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:6).

Dear teen, be careful of those who preach love and tolerance and try to conform the image of God into one that fits their imagination. While many of you desire love and are appalled at acts of hatred, do remember that love rejoiceth in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6), and the truth is that sin must be punished. If you truly have love for others, then show them the truth of God's Word that their sin must be dealt with. Show them the truth that it is precisely because God is a God of love, that He then sent His Son to die on behalf of us sinners.

Thought: Do I conform to the image of God in my thoughts?

Prayer: O God, may I learn to be more like Thee each day!

IS THERE ANY ESCAPE FROM HELL?

The episode of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 is not a parable but an actual incident. First of all, Jesus did not introduce it as a parable, and also one of the persons is named (Lazarus) which never happens in a parable. Thus, unlike a parable, we can see important truths in every verse of this episode.

In Luke 16:26, Abraham told the rich man who was in hell that there is no escape. The great gap between heaven and hell is permanent, and no one can travel from one to the other. The Greek word for gulf is “chasma”, from which we get the modern word chasm - a huge gap between two elevated bodies. Lazarus was together with Abraham on the side of heaven, and the rich man on the side of hell. Between them was this chasm that can never be bridged. He was there because of his sin, and God’s verdict is that he must stay there for eternity.

How long is eternity? It is beyond our imagination to begin to comprehend how incredibly long it is. Let’s just try to take a glimpse at how long eternity really is:

“Suppose that a sparrow took a drop of water from the Atlantic Ocean, hopped across the country, put that drop in the Pacific Ocean, then hopped back to the Atlantic Ocean, and repeated the same thing. When that bird had emptied the Atlantic Ocean into the Pacific Ocean, eternity would have just begun. And how tragic to spend that eternity in hell.”

Dear teen, which side will you be on? Realise that you can only be on one side, heaven or hell, eternal rest or eternal torment. There is no half-way, or movement in-between. Once you arrive on the side of hell, there is no more evangelism, no more gospel, no more opportunities to accept Christ as one’s personal Saviour. While we are still on earth, Christ is the bridge to heaven for all of us who call upon Him to save us. Once we breathe our last breath, which may happen in a flash before we realise it, we no longer have any opportunity to use this bridge.

Thought: Am I on the right side? Am I sure?

Prayer: O Lord, may I live with eternity’s values in view!

WOULDN'T I JUST DISAPPEAR AFTER DEATH?

There are some Christians who believe in Annihilationism: the theory that after death, the soul just disappears. Usually this belief stems from the reluctance to accept the existence of hell as created by a God of love. They believe that while the souls of Christians go to heaven, the souls of those who do not will simply vanish.

Hebrews 9:27 proves this theory is false: *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”* God has decreed that man will die once and at the time appointed by Him, and has also decreed that after this death, man will be judged. There will be no disappearing of the soul or any other escape from this decree of judgment. As we have studied earlier, before that judgment throne, the penalty of sin is eternal death, not a vanishing away. This order of death followed by judgment is the same for all men.

Christians will face the Bema judgment of Christ, and the judgment will be one of reward in heaven for our faithfulness towards Christ while we are on earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). Unbelievers will face the Great White Throne Judgment, and the judgment will be the casting of body and soul into the lake of fire for sin and those whose names are not written in the book of life. Again the pressing question: which judgment will you face? Remember, our God is a righteous judge, and He will make no mistake.

Dear teen, all that people say and all that you read, must not be accepted wholesale. They must pass through the lens of Scripture to see and evaluate whether such things be true. We must be discerning for not all that people say and what you read is true. In other words, there are many errors and half-truths out there in the world. Only what the Bible teaches us will be accepted. Truth is found in God's Word and not in man's imagination. Will you be discerning concerning this?

Thought: How clear the distinction is between heaven and hell!

Prayer: O God, may I be found faithful to Thee!

DO YOU SORROW FOR YOUR SIN?

This first beatitude is also the first step that anyone must take if he would find God. This is a condition of heart which Jesus is referring to. It is definitely not about struggling financially. It is against a spirit of self-reliance and self-confidence.

When a person is poor in spirit, he understands his depravity and sees no good in himself. He realises how lacking his spirit is before God, and acknowledges his need for spiritual enriching. This is humility. He sees clearly how the sins he has committed brought sorrow not only to himself but also to those around him. This is how the prodigal son in Luke 15:18 was when he realised that he had sinned against his father and against heaven. He confessed that he was an unworthy son. He recognised how he had been careless about the way he treated his father, and was not even fit to be a servant in his father's house. He saw how his utter selfishness had destroyed his own life and brought sorrow to his father.

A man who is poor in spirit is sorrowful and has a broken and contrite heart. He is ashamed that he had been proud and vain, foolishly thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think. It is here that all true Christian experience begins. It is the absolute opposite of a self-assertive and self-sufficient disposition. He comes to know himself as he truly is. He is convicted of sin and to him God gives that first repentance which is needed to have faith in Christ. In other words, poverty of spirit is the beginning to see oneself as God sees us.

Dear teen, are you conscious of your poverty of spirit? Do you know that you are poor, wretched and blind to the beauty and holiness of Christ? It is your sin that has nailed Christ to the cross of Calvary and He died in your place. Why have you rejected Him? If you are a believer, daily die to self and you will find yourselves growing more holy each day. This holiness will be marked by a lowliness of heart. When you receive criticism about you and your work, how do you respond? If you are always defensive, it is not a good sign. Be objective and humble. If there are ways to improve, thank your friends for pointing it out. Then sincerely and humbly seek the Lord's wisdom and strength to improve in those areas.

Thought: Christ can only fill the heart which has first been emptied of self.

Prayer: Help me O God for I am a sinner! Make me more like Christ my LORD and Saviour that I may glorify His holy name.

IS THERE COMFORT FOR THIS SORROW?

Chrysostom, a famous early Church Father of the fourth century, once commented: *"The Beatitudes succeed one another like links in a golden chain"*. There is a logical progression from one to another. After a person has seen the sin in his life, he must turn to God. This is the solution. A denial or a turning to the pleasures and vanities of the world would only lead to more heartaches and sorrows. No matter how hard we try by our own strength and wisdom, not to sin again, the fleshly nature in man will always surface and can never be rooted out, except by the blood of Christ.

Thus with a conscious poverty of spirit, there is a mourning over our sinful state, for we see that our sin had nailed our Saviour to the cross. This mourning in spirit is the *"godly sorrow which worketh repentance"* (2 Corinthians 7:10). This repentance towards God will point us to *"faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"*. This is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. When the three thousand were converted on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it is recorded that they were pricked in their heart and cried out (Acts 2:37). This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

For such mourning and sorrow over our sin, there is always divine comfort as we turn and seek the Lord. It will be as if a heavy burden has rolled away. All your anxiety and sleeplessness will disappear. Feelings of relief and joy will flood your soul. You will receive the blessedness of being instructed with wisdom from on high. All who sorrow over sin will know the blessedness of the presence of the Holy Spirit and receive abundant grace for all our need.

Dear teen, were you ever ashamed of a selfish act you have committed? You have lied and deceived your parents. Perhaps you went to the movies and told them you went to the library. If you have no sorrow for your sins, your sins are still with you and there will be little or no spiritual growth in your life. But if you earnestly seek the Lord to forgive you of that sin, you will be comforted. Then you will experience God's love and forgiveness. You will also experience His grace to overcome that sin. Indeed what a blessed to seek the Lord with a mournful contrite heart!

Thought: We mourn too when many are dying without Christ.

Prayer: Lord, may the Holy Spirit give us strength and grace to sorrow for our sins.

HOW SHOULD I SEEK AFTER GOD?

Hunger and thirst are the ever present physical needs of the human body. One who is hungry yearns for food; one who is thirsty yearns for water. The one who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness is a man who is yearning for God within his soul. Therefore he sets himself eagerly and avidly to seek after God. He is prepared to do what God demands of him and does it with his whole heart.

This desire is what salvation is about. When you are awakened to your sinful state, you are drawn also to the Saviour who can save you from your sins. When you learn that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sins and died for you, you come to Him for salvation. He is your righteousness. He can cleanse and He can make whole. He will save those who come to Him with a broken and contrite heart, mourning over their sins and realizing their poverty of spirit. This sinner wants to be right with God.

Such a person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled. There is only one truly Righteous One. He is the Son of God, the Saviour of men. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ which God gives to the soul that seeks its Saviour. This is the glorious gospel. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. By that infinite sacrifice, He opened a way of salvation to all who are poor in spirit and who mourn over their sin.

Only God can give us true righteousness. The Pharisees of Jesus' time appeared to be religious and righteous, but they were not. They only had an outward facade of righteousness. Jesus said that inwardly they were "*ravening wolves*" (Matthew 7:14). Furthermore, true righteousness is only found in Jesus, always Jesus and in none other.

Dear teen, have you experienced this hungering after God? When you see the awfulness of your sin, you will see your great need to come to God for cleansing and purity in your life. Once you are saved, you will continue to experience this, for sin is ever with us and daily you need to come to Jesus for His cleansing.

Thought: Blessed are those who have received God's gift of righteousness.

Prayer: Lord, give me this thirst and hunger for Thee and I shall be filled and satisfied.

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

This grand majestic verse in John 1:1 proclaims unequivocally that Jesus is God. His existence was before the beginning of time. Before His incarnation, He already existed as God. At the beginning of the book of Genesis, when we read about how God created the heavens and the earth and all the creatures, Jesus, the eternal Word, was there and very much involved in creation as well.

Jesus Christ co-existed with the Father. He was with God from eternity and never separated from Him. All the attributes of God are found in the Son, Jesus Christ. One of the most famous descriptive definitions of God is in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: *"God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth."* That is not just a description of God the Father, but is of the triune Godhead, of which Jesus Christ is the second person of. Although Jesus Christ is a Person distinct from the Father, He is of the same essence and nature as the Father. He is God, being of one substance with the Father. The Word was with God and was God.

This is the revelation of God given to John the Apostle. He received this divine revelation and penned it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our understanding. The eternity and deity of Christ are to be believed and received with joy and gladness. You and I worship Him with our hearts and minds by faith. We worship the Son even as we worship the Father (John 5:23).

Dear teen, this is the most important question that you will ever have to answer: "Who is Jesus Christ?" Your eternal destiny depends upon your answer. If Jesus Christ to you was only a man, a very great and influential man, then you have failed to recognize the Saviour of the world. If you say He is fully man and fully God, that's a totally different story. You have enlightened eyes to see and recognize that He is God, and that He alone, through his life, death and resurrection can save you from your sins!

Thought: The finite mind accepts the infinite wisdom and revelation of God.

Prayer: Lord, how great Thou art. How deep are the riches both of Thy wisdom and knowledge. I praise and worship Thee.

WHY CAN JESUS SAVE?

It is difficult for the mind of sinful man to fully grasp the miracle of redemption through Jesus Christ. This miracle of redemption is how He saved us by giving up His life in order to buy us back, paying the ransom for our sins. The price paid for this redemption was not silver or gold. In fact, all the riches and wealth of the world can never even begin to pay for our sins to free us from the bondage of sin.

Our sins were paid in full at Calvary's cross, when our Lord Jesus Christ shed His precious blood for us. Jesus saves for He died on the cross for our sins. This sacrifice was accepted by God the Father for Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish. He led a perfect life, and fulfilled all the requirements of the law on our behalf. As God, Jesus' sacrifice was infinite in value, and enough to pay for all our sins. All we need to do is to believe in Jesus that He died for our sins and His precious blood cleanses us of our sins. His precious blood is effectual to take away our sins and God will remember our sins no more. *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered"* (Psalm 32:1).

Dear teen, since you cannot buy your salvation and a place in heaven even if you have all the money in the world, think and appreciate what love the Father has for you that He sent Jesus to die to save you. What love it was too that Jesus, the Son of God, was willing to lay down His life and shed His precious blood to save a sinner like you. It is love so amazing, beyond degree and beyond measure.

If you have already trusted in the Lord and experienced the forgiveness of sin, rejoice! But if you have not, will you not do it today? Find a time and a place to seek the Lord. Pray the sinner's prayer asking God Almighty to forgive you of your sins. Ask Jesus Christ to be your Saviour to save you, thanking Him at the same time for His love when He died on the cross for your sins and gave you everlasting life. Finally ask for strength to live a godly life, trusting and obeying Him.

Thought: God chose me before the foundation of the world.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for salvation through the precious blood of Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

IS JESUS THE SON OF GOD?

Central to our understanding of the gospel, is the confidence that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, fully God, and fully man. This was absolutely necessary in order for Jesus' sacrifice to be sufficient to save, He had to be the perfect Son of God, who was God manifest in human form, as a man. Only God could make full atonement for sinners and only a man could be a substitute for man. We ought to accept this truth for our finite minds could not possibly begin to hold or comprehend the truth about Jesus. We can fully accept the fact that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God, trusting and believing what God's Word tells us. Faith clings to Scripture alone.

1 John 5:20 tells us that the Son of God has already come into the world. It is simply stated as a known, undisputed fact. His birth and life has been recorded for us in the four gospels. Not only that, in those gospels, He has taught us and given us much revelation about the nature of His kingdom and the way we ought to live if we are truly His. Christ is described here as *'him that is true'* – that there is no hint of any lie, error or falsehood in Him. He is also described as the *'true God, and eternal life'*. If we know Him in all His perfect truth, known through His Word, then yes to us He is the source of eternal life. Through our knowledge of Him, of our faith in the fact that He is indeed the Son of God who has come into this world to save us from our sins, then we will be saved.

Have you accepted Him as your saviour? Do not delay if you have not. Seek to know Him who is the living and true God. There is no one else who can save you. *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Only Jesus, always Jesus. He is the perfect sacrifice that God accepts to take our place as sinners condemned and destined for hell and destruction.

Thought: Jesus Christ – the image of the invisible God.

Prayer: Lord, make me to know Thee more fully, to glorify Thee and enjoy Thee forever.

IS JESUS FULLY GOD?

A few days ago, we looked at John 1:1 which clearly teaches us that Jesus Christ, the living Word, is God. There are many other verses that teach this great and central truth about Jesus Christ. Today, we shall consider Colossians 2:9, clearly declaring that in Jesus Christ *“dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”* What this means is that when Jesus became man and walked the streets of Jerusalem, He had all the attributes of God in Him. Jesus was not lacking in any one attribute of the Godhead. He was not merely endowed with the knowledge, or the power, or the wisdom of God; but all the complete attributes, for Jesus is fully God. Thus just as God is to be worshipped, so likewise Jesus is to be the proper object of our worship. *“And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him”* (Hebrews 1:6). As God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable and eternal, so is Jesus. The divine works of creation attributed to God is also attributed to Jesus. *“I and my Father are one”* (John 10:30).

This verse can also be used to refute those who think that Mary must also be worshipped in order to have access to God the Father. If the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in Jesus, we need no other persons to complement the worship. There is to be no Mary worship, angel worship or even worship of a leader (as the cults are very prone to).

Dear teen, can you see now the error that many in this world hold when they say that Jesus is a very great man and they stop at that? They do not see the divine nature of Jesus – that He was fully God. All the fullness of the Godhead was in Him. And all of His fullness comes into our lives when we receive Jesus – everything we need for life and godliness. We need to discover more of what it means to have Jesus in our heart. This is the lifelong process of spiritual growth that lies ahead for you.

Thought: *“Ye are complete in him...”* Colossians 2:10

Prayer: Lord, ever more teach us to know that we have a wonderful Saviour and a great God whom we ought to praise and magnify continually.

WHY MUST JESUS BE FULLY MAN?

We have already established the fact that Jesus was fully man as He was born in a manger, grew into boyhood and then manhood in his home in Nazareth. He experienced tiredness, hunger, thirst, sorrow and grief. When He saw that His friend Lazarus died, He wept.

It was necessary for Jesus to be fully man in order to be our mediator. As a man, He functions as our great High Priest, coming in between us and the Father. It was only as a High Priest that Jesus was able to intercede on behalf of man and thus represent man before God. In Old Testament times, the High Priest was the only one who entered the Holy of Holies once a year to offer sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people of Israel. But first, as sinful man, he had to atone for his own sins by sacrificing his own offering.

Without being man, Christ could not be man's sin-bearer. Thus Jesus had to be fully man and fully God in order to be the perfect sin-bearer and sacrifice that can atone for our sins. Our text tells us that He was “without sin.” Jesus Christ acts both as high priest and sacrifice. When He died on the cross, He took your place, and made His own pure soul and innocent body an offering and perfect sacrifice for sin.

Jesus is like us in every aspect but without sin. How amazing that the divine Son of God would not just take on part of our humanity but all of it – body, mind and emotions. He became man in full so that He might save us in full. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

My friend, there is no one who can take your sin away, there is no mere human being, no church, no system – the Lord Jesus Christ is the only high priest. He understands, sympathizes and succours those whom He represents. As you go through distress and struggle with your sin, you are represented this day in heaven. Jesus the high priest has paid the price for your sin and brings your problems before God the Father in heaven. He intercedes on our behalf. What an intercessor!

Thought: No ordinary priest but Jesus the perfect high priest can take away our sin.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your unconditional love that You went all the way to the cross for my sin.

WHY DID JESUS NEED TO LEAD A PERFECT LIFE?

When Adam sinned, the entire human race fell into sin together with him. As a result, we were all lost in our unrighteousness, and there was no way for us to redeem ourselves. The law demands complete obedience but sinful man is unable to keep the commandments perfectly and live a perfect life. Therefore all are condemned and unrighteous before God.

The only solution for us, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 10:4 tells us that it is only through Christ, that we can have perfection in the law. This verse teaches us that faith in Christ grants us this righteousness, for Christ was able to perform all the demands of the law as He lived a perfect life. In fulfilling the law perfectly, He attained God's standard of righteousness for us, thus enabling us to be justified in His sight, and be granted eternal life.

Thus while man by himself has no way of perfectly obeying the law, yet we can have that righteousness by faith in Christ. To everyone that believed in Jesus Christ, it is as if they have perfectly obeyed the law. God sees them as having performed all that the law required, for God sees Christ in them and He led a perfect life of obedience to the law. If Jesus did not lead a perfect life, how can He be said to have fulfilled the requirements of the law? The law demands perfection and every one of us falls short of it. Only Christ can fulfill the law on our behalf. Through Him we are made righteous, and therefore we are saved if we believe on Him, even as Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Dear friend, having trusted in the Lord, grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him. Daily and increasingly, see the beauty of Jesus. He was tempted and tried but He was always victorious. Recall His temptation in the wilderness soon after He was baptised, to fulfil righteousness. He never once gave in to Satan's three temptations (Matthew 4:1-11) but answered him with God's powerful Word. Jesus Christ has attained the righteousness of the law for us, all we need to do is to believe!

Thought: Submit to God's plan of righteousness.

Prayer: Lord of my righteousness, thank You for Your full and perfect obedience that secured for me righteousness, even eternal life.

“he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...”

WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO SUFFER?

Isaiah 53 is one of the most poignant and stirring passages of Old Testament prophetic literature. In this we see the prophecies concerning the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read of how He was rejected by the very people whom He came to save (v. 1-3); yet suffered most excruciatingly for our sins (v. 4-6), was killed as a lamb to the slaughter (v. 7-9), and through this great sacrifice, God’s wrath is appeased, and many shall be justified (v. 10-12).

Zooming in to verses 4-6, we have a moving picture of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. He bore our griefs and sorrows, and through his death, we are healed. Notice the emphasis on man’s role in Christ’s sufferings, for it is our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, our iniquities, chastisement of our peace, the iniquity of us all. We are the sole cause for our Saviour’s sufferings and death on the cross. It was all because of us that He went to the cross to shed his precious blood to die for our sins.

Yet in response, we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God. Instead of gratitude, men walked past Jesus on the cross and *‘reviled him, wagging their heads’* (Matthew 27:39). They derided Him as a common criminal, when in fact they could not be further from the truth. He was the one person who had never committed a single crime, the only sinless man ever to live. Yet this same mocking continues on today, as men hear of Christ and scoff, shake their head, and walk away. Likewise, we were all like sheep that have gone astray, living in sin and doing that which is right in our eyes.

And so there on the cross, God, as the righteous judge, laid our iniquity upon Christ. On behalf of sinful man, Christ took the blame, suffered all the pain and agony - not only of the physical pain of death, but the weight of the sins of us all. Through this great sacrifice, by His stripes, we are healed. Healed not simply of our sickness and illnesses, heart disease and diabetes, as what some charismatic would preach, but of the sickness and consequence of our sin. Whereas without Christ we would be doomed to not just physical death but also the second death for eternity, in Christ we are healed, and no longer have to die a second time. Instead through Him we have the hope of the glorified body, and eternity in heaven with God.

Thought: Christ’s sorrow is the foundation of our joy.

Prayer: Lord, amazing love that it was for me that through the sufferings and death of Christ, we can be saved.

WHAT HAPPENED AT CALVARY?

The Apostle Paul tells us the depth of Jesus' condescension to become man. He says of Him, "*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*". The term 'robbery' refers to a prize possession, as something that one would grasp tightly and not want to let go. You and I have no idea how high an honour it is to be equal with God! Jesus, as God in all of heaven's glories, chose to humble himself and come down as a man, to die for us! How can we, therefore, measure the condescension of Christ?

The extent of his humility is not just in coming to live as a man, but much more in allowing Himself to be put to death at the hands of wicked men. With awe and reverence, we see Him in His death at Calvary. He did not need to die, yet He was willing to surrender His life. He said, "*I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again*" (John 10:18).

Jesus died as a criminal upon the cross of Calvary. He was made a curse for us! Crucifixion is the worst kind of death. It was a violent and excruciatingly painful death. The nails pierced His hands and feet. The weight of the body was made to hang upon these tender parts of the body. He was made a spectacle, as He hung there with the thieves by His side, in view of the general public. Yet the worst of it all was that as He hung there, God the Father had to turn away from Jesus, as He alone bore the punishment for all our sins. Our Lord, the King of Glory was in the Valley of Humiliation.

Dear teen, you and I are unlikely to be required to die for the cause of Christ. There are still those who are dying for the faith, who are "*obedient unto death*" especially in the Middle East today. These are modern day martyrs. Yet in a similar manner, what Jesus requires of you and me are simple every day - dying to self and living in complete obedience to Him, not partial obedience. Jesus was willing to go to Calvary for our sins. Would we not be willing to give up our sins for Him?

Thought: Rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

Prayer: Lord, King of my life, I crown Thee now, Thine shall the glory be.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE CRUCIFIED?

What is the greatest pain that you have ever suffered? A broken bone, a toothache, or perhaps cuts from a bad fall? For me, the worst injury I ever suffered is probably a sprained ankle – nothing very major, but painful nonetheless.

Few or none of us, therefore, can even begin to imagine the horror of death by crucifixion. Basically, the person being crucified is nailed by his hands and feet to a large wooden cross, or sometimes to a horizontal beam that is then attached to a tree trunk. For every breath that the person takes, he has to lift up his body by pushing up on his feet and arms; however, this would cause a searing, fiery pain because of the nails pierced into them. In such a state, they would be left to die, either by bleeding to death, or through asphyxiation. It was a slow, agonizing death.

In today's reading, we read that Christ was "*wounded*" and "*bruised*", and that he suffered "*chastisement*" and "*stripes*". Amazingly, even though this prophecy was written 700 years before the crucifixion of Christ, the description is so minutely accurate! The wounds that Christ suffered were the piercing of His hands and feet, and also of His side after He was dead (John 19:34). He was bruised, or crushed, by the weight of the sorrows that He bore on His shoulders. He suffered chastisement, which was the punishment for our sins. And He endured stripes, which refers to the beating and scourging He was given (Matthew 27:26). Besides the physical torment, there is also the humiliation involved. Christ had to carry his own cross to Calvary, while the crowds mocked and jeered. In the depth of His sufferings, He was stared at and spat on by the onlookers. He was stripped of all dignity, and died the death of only the most wicked criminals.

Dear teen, do you realise that all that Christ had to endure was for your sake? It was because of our "*transgressions*" and "*sins*" that Christ had to die this cruel death, in order we might have "*peace*" and be "*healed*". Will you carry on in your sins and take Christ's sacrifice for granted, or will you live a consecrated life for Him today?

Thought: All that Christ suffered was for me!

Prayer: Thank You Lord, for the great sacrifice in sending Your Son to be crucified for our sins.

WHAT WERE THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST?

Have you ever experienced the anguish that comes when you know that you have sinned? It is certainly not a pleasant feeling, for the weight of guilt feels almost physically heavy in our hearts, and we feel so distant from God.

How do you think Christ felt, then, when He bore the guilt for our sins? In today's reading, we read that God made Christ *“to be sin for us”*. Certainly, this does not mean that Christ was at any point a sinner or guilty of any sin. The next phrase makes this very clear – Christ *“knew no sin”*. Rather, it refers to the fact that Christ was made to bear the guilt for our sins. Christ, the perfect, holy and sinless Son of God, who hates sin with His entire being, took on Himself all the sins of the world! All that He hated most deeply was poured out fully upon Him – and this He did voluntarily, for our sakes. What amazing love, what wonderful compassion! Because of this, Christ was also made to suffer the punishment and consequence of sin. In that moment the weight of the sins of the world was on His shoulders. And as He bore the guilt of our sins alone, God the Father poured out on Jesus the fury of His wrath – the anger of a holy, righteous God against the filth and wickedness of the sin of the world. This is a suffering of immense proportions that we cannot even begin to comprehend.

To what end? Why did Christ willingly put Himself through such intense suffering and agony? The second part of the verse gives us the answer – *“that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”*. Because of what Christ did for us on the cross of Calvary, we are now declared righteous in the sight of God. Christ who was holy and pure was made sin, that we who are wretched and sinful might be made righteous. Truly, how marvellous the whole plan of salvation is!

Dear teen, what is your response to this wonderful truth? Do you realise that Christ went through all these sufferings in your place? That, because of Christ's sacrifice, you have been saved from the wrath of God? Or have you become dulled to sin, that you no longer view it as horrid and vile? Dear teen, come with a repentant heart to Jesus today.

Thought: God treated Christ as the guilty one, so that He could treat us as right in His sight.

Prayer: Lord, help me never to take the sufferings of Christ for granted.

HOW IS CHRIST THE SACRIFICE FOR SIN?

When you went to church last Sunday, did you go with a lamb or bullock in tow? Or perhaps you brought a bird cage containing a pair of pigeons, or turtledoves? ‘How absurd!’ you may think.

For God’s chosen people living in the Old Testament times, this was not a strange practice at all. God instituted the Levitical system of sacrifice as the means by which the Israelites could be cleansed of their sins. A chief requirement for the animals which they presented as their sacrifice was that they had to be *“without blemish”* (Leviticus 22:17-25). Imagine this – every single time you commit a sin, you would have to buy or otherwise obtain a specified animal that is physically perfect and flawless. You would then have to bring it to the priest who would sacrifice it on the altar, according to a set of rules and guidelines. Perhaps you would really think twice before sinning!

Today, however, we no longer have to carry out such a tedious process, for the *“one sacrifice”* offered by Christ has been offered *“for sins for ever”*! This sacrifice is none other than Christ Himself, *“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). In order to satisfy God’s requirement, Jesus had to be the spotless and unblemished Lamb of God. This, He fulfilled, by living a perfect and sinless life as a Man on this earth in complete obedience to God’s holy law (called His *‘active obedience’*), as well as by taking on Himself the sufferings necessary to pay the penalty for our sins, even submitting to death on the cross (called His *‘passive obedience’*). Christ’s sacrifice was so perfect and complete that it was sufficient for all the sins of the world. Unlike the priests in the Old Testament who needed to offer up sacrifices daily, Christ only needed to do this *“once, when he offered up himself”* (Hebrews 7:27). The word *“once”* in this verse carries the idea of *“once, for all”* – one and only one sacrifice is necessary.

How wonderful it is, dear teen, that Christ’s single act of sacrifice is sufficient to bring salvation to you and to me! Do you treasure this wonderful gift? Will you not live for Christ today, and tell a friend of the wonderful Saviour that you have?

Thought: Christ’s sacrifice is once and for all!

Prayer: Lord, lead me to some soul today.

ARE WE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS?

What is so significant about blood? It runs throughout your entire body, delivering oxygen to all the parts of your body in order to give you life. Without blood, no human can possibly live.

In Leviticus 17:11, we find a very clear explanation on the significance of blood: *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul”*. Therefore, for every animal that was brought as a sacrifice before God, the priest had to slay it and pour out its blood, and sprinkle its blood on the altar. While sometimes things were purified by water or fire, in general, *“almost all things are by the law purged with blood”* (Hebrews 9:22).

That is why, in today’s reading, we read that *“without shedding of blood is no remission”*. Blood represents life, and when blood is shed, it is evidence of the fact that a life is being given. In the Old Testament times, the sprinkling or pouring out of the blood of the sacrificed animal signified that its life was given to God instead of the sinner’s life. That is why, for Christ to be our Saviour, He had to shed His blood. His precious blood which was shed for us on the cross of Calvary is the clear evidence that His life blood was poured out when He died a sacrificial death to pay for our redemption. This blood therefore has the power to cleanse us from all our sins.

Dear teen, are you thankful for the blood that Jesus Christ has shed for your sake? The writer of Hebrews puts this point across wonderfully – *“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* (Hebrews 9:13-14). Today, we no longer have to rely on the blood of bulls and goats to cleanse us from our sins, for the blood of Jesus alone is sufficient. The question that remains is, has this blood been applied to your sins yet?

Thought: *What can wash away my sins?*
Nothing but the blood of Jesus. 🎵
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus. 🎵

Prayer: Lord, cleanse me with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But it shall not be well with the wicked...because he feareth not before God."

WHAT IS GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT?

I know of many young people who have a very blasé attitude towards sin. They like to think, "Even though I sin, my life is good! God isn't punishing me in any way, so I can carry on sinning as I like".

Is this the right attitude to have? In today's reading, Jesus Christ said to the Pharisees, *"...my judgment is true"*. Though the final judgment was not yet come during Jesus' first coming, this served as a warning to the Jews that He had the same authority as God the Father to judge them *"according to truth"* (Romans 2:2). This was a rebuke against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees – though they focused so much on the outward appearance, God would one day judge them according to truth, measuring not just their actions, but the inner motives of their heart against the perfect standard of God's Word.

So what exactly is the righteous judgment of God? The Word of God tells us very clearly that God is a holy God who hates sin – *"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity"* (Habakkuk 1:13). In His eyes, sin is so vile, so wicked, so evil. As He is holy, He demands that we be holy too. Sinners, falling short of this standard, will therefore one day be judged and punished by God. The standard and basis for this judgment will not be man's subjective moral standards, but God's perfection. He sets the yardstick of what righteousness and perfection is, and we know that we can never measure up to His perfect holiness.

The punishment is clear: *"the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23) – not just a physical death, but an eternal one. Though sinners might seem to go scot-free in this present life, they will definitely be judged *"according to their works"* in the next (Revelation 20:13). God is a just God whose righteousness must be satisfied. There is thus no way that God could ever allow a sinner to go unpunished, unless he attains the salvation achieved through Christ's death.

Dear teen, do you have a similar attitude towards sin? Do you realise that God delays in judgment not because He will not judge, but only because of His longsuffering and mercies? Will you not repent before it is too late?

Thought: All sinners will have to face God's judgment.

Prayer: Lord, save me from the judgment to come.

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

Recall the last time you did something wrong. Did you try to make excuses for it? Perhaps you did not complete your homework, and you tried to justify yourself to your teacher by saying that you had no time. Or perhaps you got into a fight with your sibling, and you tried to justify yourself to your parents by saying that it was your sibling who started the fight. Most of the time though, you will still be punished, for you did wrong, and error can never be justified with mere words or excuses!

How comforting it is, then, to know that when it comes to our salvation, we do not need to justify ourselves before God. Indeed, if we had to, we would most certainly fall short, for we are guilty of every single sin that we commit! Instead, we who come to Jesus for salvation are “*justified by his blood*”. The word “*justify*” here means to declare or to regard as just, innocent or righteous. Through the shed blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary, we have been declared innocent in the sight of God. We are pardoned of all our sins and accepted as righteous before Him. The righteousness of Jesus now covers us, such that as we stand before God, He no longer sees our sins, but sees the perfect sinlessness of Christ.

When that happens, it is like our slates are wiped clean before God. We are now forever saved from the wrath of God and will never be sent to hell, for we are now perfectly righteous in the sight of God! This is a precious gift that is freely given to us. We certainly did not deserve this, for we were all sinners, enemies of God. It is only through the unconditional love of God that He chose to commend His love toward us in sending His only begotten Son to come to die for our sins.

There is therefore no reason at all for us to boast or to be proud of our salvation, for it is entirely through the grace of God and through Christ’s sacrifice! Dear teen, you must thank the Lord daily for His wondrous gift of salvation, that you have been “*saved from wrath through him*”. This great doctrine of the gospel – the justification of a sinner by the blood of Jesus, will ground you and cause you to enjoy peace with God, and be strong to labour for the Lord. May you also not take His grace and forgiveness for granted, but instead strive to lead a pure and blameless life.

Thought: Salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

Prayer: Lord, I thank Thee, that through Thy grace, I can be justified.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

WHAT IS RECONCILIATION?

Is there anybody in your life whom you regard as an enemy? In my teenage years, I recall having some people in my life that I really did not like. Looking back, it all seems so childish and petty, but those feelings of intense dislike were very real at that time.

But what are these, compared to how God regarded us when we were still unsaved? Today’s reading tells us that, before we were saved, we were enemies of God! It may seem like such a strong word, but it perfectly describes the relationship that used to exist between God and us. On God’s part, His holy and just nature gives Him a hatred for sin, such that all sinners are His enemies. Can you imagine that? To have the Almighty God, creator of the whole universe, regard us as His enemy? What a terrifying position to be in! And on our part, we had no love for God at all. We hated His laws, broke His commandments and lived according to our own lusts and desires. Ephesians 2:2-3 describes us as *“children of wrath”* and *“children of disobedience”* who *“walked according to the course of this world”*.

Praise the Lord, that we can be reconciled to Him “by the death of his Son”! Through Christ’s death on Calvary’s cross, we are justified, such that we are no longer alienated from God. We are brought into a relationship, friendship and love with God, and we now enjoy blessed harmony and unity with Him. The peace that we can now have with God is a perfect union that is not based on our good works or our love for Him, but it is through what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. He, as our perfect mediator, has bridged the great gulf that once existed between us and God, and reconciled us unto Him.

Dear teen, have you experienced the blessedness of this relationship? Have you been reconciled to God? Or are you still His enemy, alienated from Him and living a life of disobedience and rebellion? And if you have been reconciled to Him, 2 Corinthians 5:19 says that God has now *“committed unto us the word of reconciliation”*, which means that we are to make known to others this message of how they can be reconciled to God. This includes even those whom you regard as your *‘enemies’*, for what wrong can they have done to you that is greater than the wrongs that you did against God in the past?

Thought: Nobody can have wronged me more than I have wronged God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a peacemaker.

WHAT IS ATONEMENT?

The word "atonement" has a similar meaning to the word we considered yesterday: "reconciliation". It carries the idea of a "restoration to favour". Literally, it comes from the words, "at one"; hence it has the idea of two parties being at one. It refers to the work Christ did in His life and death to earn our salvation. It encompasses the entire work of Christ – from His birth in a manger in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago, to His life and ministry during the 33 years He spent on this earth, to His death on the cross at Calvary.

From His birth, Christ had a singular purpose for coming to this earth: to earn salvation for us. That is why He had to be born as a man, so that He could be our representative. At the same time, His supernatural conception and birth ensured that He was not born in sin, but was sinless at birth. Throughout His life on this earth, though He was "in all points tempted like as we are", yet He never succumbed to temptation and remained "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). And in His death, He remained sinless and perfectly obedient to God's law. He "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). He had to die, because this was the penalty for sin which He paid to God on our behalf.

One thing we must realise is that, without Christ, we would never be able to save ourselves. As the words of the beautiful hymn Rock of Ages go,

*Not the labours of my hands can fulfill thy law's commands;
Could my zeal no languor know, could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou alone.*

Dear teen, do you realise that Christ has done in your place what you could not do for yourself? No longer will you have to suffer God's wrath and pay the penalty for your sins, for Christ has already accomplished it all! All that is left for you to do is to recognize that you are a sinner in need of a Saviour, confess your sins and accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour. Will you not do that right now?

Thought: How wonderful the plan of salvation is!

Prayer: Lord, save me, for I cannot save myself.

WHAT IS REDEMPTION?

In my secondary school days, I remember how everyone wanted to get their hands on the latest iPod and Crumpler bag. Now, people around me are always talking about branded bags, shoes and clothing. I am sure that you have similar experiences – perhaps with your friends in school, or maybe even you yourself! The materialistic world that we live in indeed puts great weight on such possessions.

But what are all these material goods, when compared with the greatest gift that one can ever receive? In today’s reading, we read that we are redeemed not *“with corruptible things, as silver and gold”*, but *“with the precious blood of Christ”*! The word *“redeemed”* in this verse also means *“ransom”*, and refers literally to a price paid for the redemption of captives, for example, people who have been kidnapped. For us, we are all by nature captive to sin, *“subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:15) to sin and to Satan. Under the curse of sin, we would have been condemned to eternal death and suffering. Because of Christ, though, who came to this earth *“to give his life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28), we have been redeemed from this bondage. Jesus died in our place that we no longer need to pay the penalty for our sins.

Dear teen, do you treasure this wonderful gift of salvation? Silver and gold and all the material possessions that this world can offer are but *“corruptible things”*, things that cannot last beyond the grave. The blood of Christ, though, is more precious than anything else in the world, for it has the power to save and to grant eternal life. Some of your favourite hymns and spiritual songs would be about the blood of Christ. *“O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.”* 🎵

The question is, is it precious to you?

Thought: “Sing, O sing of my Redeemer, with His blood He purchased me!”

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the precious gift of salvation.

WHAT IS PROPITIATION?

Recall the last time you made someone very angry. How did you appease him? Probably, you had to apologise, or perhaps you did something nice for the other person before he forgave you.

In a way, this is how things are between God and us too. Our sins have caused Him to show His wrath and righteous anger toward us. In our unsaved state, we deserved nothing but eternal damnation for all our sins. Because He is holy and just, God cannot forgive us just like that – His wrath had to be appeased. Christ achieved this by being a “*propitiation*” for us. The word “*propitiation*” here means a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath, such that God’s wrath toward us is changed into favour. By giving His life on the cross and shedding His blood, Christ was able to turn away God’s anger and restore us into a right relationship with Him.

Romans 3:25 tells us that this was actually an arrangement that was ‘*set forth*’ by God. It was God’s will that Jesus Christ would come to be the one to appease His wrath. What great love this is, that God would choose to punish his own Son, in order that mankind can receive the remission of sins. This is indeed a testament to the great forbearance of God, that He would forgive sinners such as us.

This does not mean that God Himself is changed. Rather, His wrath towards us was appeased by Christ’s sacrificial death, such that He can now show His favour towards us. Indeed, the entire plan of salvation declares to us God’s righteousness – He is a just God to whom we can approach only if we have faith in the blood of Christ.

Dear teen, do you acknowledge the fact that you are entirely deserving of God’s wrath, and that there is therefore a need to turn away this wrath? Christ has already turned God’s wrath away in your place, by being a propitiation for you. This sacrifice will be of no use to you, though, unless you accept Jesus as your Saviour. Will you not do so today, “*through faith in his blood*”?

Thought: Christ bore God’s wrath in my place.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for sending Lord Jesus Christ to be the propitiation for our sins.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BORN AGAIN?

Consider Nicodemus’s question in the preceding verse. *“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”* Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. By virtue of his birth and the life he had led, he had a certain standing in society. Not only was the concept of being born again alien, but would someone like him need or want to be born again? Could anyone have a better birth than he? Surely not! Born again? No thanks. Not necessary.

However, Nicodemus’ problem was that he did not really understand what Christ meant about being ‘born again’. Birth marks the beginning of all new life. Without a new birth, there cannot be a new life. Our first birth is of the flesh but this second birth is of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6). The “water” in verse 5 refers to the Word of God, which the Spirit applies to our heart to convict us of our sin and to teach us of Christ our Saviour. The new birth is therefore a spiritual birth that brings about a new life in Christ.

Nicodemus had great knowledge; and admired and acknowledged Christ’s teachings and miracles, and that He was a teacher sent from God. Some of us may be like Nicodemus – having only the outward forms of Christianity. We are born into a Christian home, have many Christian friends, knowledge of the Bible, attend church diligently. We may have great knowledge; but like Nicodemus, no understanding. Many people today acknowledge the works and the exemplary life of Christ. They admire the principles of Christianity. Many strive to live good, moral lives. But this is not being born again. This life remains in the flesh. It is like patching up an old building here and there when what is required is a new building – of a different kind, with new principles, new affections, and new purposes built on a different foundation – a spiritual one.

Today, are we all that different from the Pharisees who focused and placed great importance on the externals? The Holy Spirit works within us, converting our very soul. Like the wind, it works invisibly and mysteriously. We know it is a work of the Spirit when we see men and woman whose lives are changed and bear fruit for the Lord.

Thought: Am I living a new life in the spirit or simply patching up the old one with good works and knowledge? How do I know?

Prayer: May I be in Christ a new creature: where old things are passed away and all things are become new.

WHAT DOES ADOPTION MEAN?

In our natural sinful state of unbelief, we were all enemies of Christ. We had no relationship with Christ, except one of enmity and rebellion. We were under the spirit of bondage to sin, whereby we had no choice but to sin. This spirit of bondage produces only fear. It cannot reconcile us to Christ. But once we receive Christ, we receive the spirit of adoption into the family of God and begin a filial relationship with Him. God treats us as His children and receives us with affection and love. We are now under His protection and care. This close relationship will result in His children calling upon Him freely and daily.

In an act of adoption, a parent takes a stranger into the family, as one's very own child, and treats and considers him as one's flesh and blood. It is the prerogative of the parent, not the child. So it is with the Holy Spirit who has adopted us through the gospel. We were strangers, spiritual orphans, but were welcomed into God's family. Consequently, we are accorded the privileges and rights of a child. One of these is to call God Abba Father. “Abba” is the Aramaic word for Father. We as His adopted children can now cry unto Him, “Father, father”. And He will answer us. Furthermore, we who were strangers are now heirs of God's kingdom and joint-heirs with Christ! We have complete assurance of our place as His children and need no longer fear as we did under the law.

Now that you are adopted, are you living as a child of God, as an heir of His Kingdom, or as a spiritual orphan, a child of the world? An orphan has no rules and regulations to abide by and restrict. He is his own master. An orphan has no one to care, teach and provide for him. There is no one who loves him. We have a heavenly Father whom we can turn to, who will never disappoint, punish unjustly nor leave us. You have been given the privilege of prayer, of reading His Word and of fellowship with fellow saints. Are you making the most of these privileges which are given to only believers? What does the double emphasis of Father, father imply? Do you have such a close relationship with the Lord that you can call upon Him such as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Thought: With privileges come responsibilities. Consider what your responsibilities as a child of God are to Him and to your fellow mankind.

Prayer: May I strive to live a life as an heir of my Heavenly Father's kingdom, fully utilizing the privileges and blessings bestowed, and fulfilling my responsibilities.

HOW DID CHRIST GAIN VICTORY OVER DEATH?

As one who was sinlessly perfect, Christ fulfilled the law by His birth, ministry and work on the cross. He died for our sins, paying the penalty for our sin. It is through His life, death and resurrection that He gained victory over death for us who were condemned to death. Although Jesus had to die on the cross, yet we know that He rose again from the dead 3 days later. Through this, God signified that He accepted the sacrifice of Christ, and now He lives again as a testament that death has been vanquished, and all who believe in Christ can have this same resurrection as well! This is the victory that Jesus wrought for us – of eternal life, through Christ, and Christ alone. Nevertheless, our present corruptible bodies will all die, because they cannot as flesh and blood inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). When we are raised from the dead, our corrupted bodies will be transformed into glorified ones and death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54).

What should our response to such knowledge be? When we know that our Lord Jesus Christ alone has been the one to achieve this victory for us, how does it affect our present life?

Firstly, we are able to stare death in the face, and question “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*” (1 Corinthians 15:55). We will no longer fear death, for we know that death is not the end, but the beginning of eternity with God. We know that Jesus Christ has already wrought the victory over death for us, and thus it is no longer a thing to be feared nor looked upon with dread.

Secondly, we must be filled with gratitude and thanksgiving for all that Christ has done for us. We cry together with Paul, “*but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*” Our lives must therefore reflect this thankfulness, and we must endeavour to live our lives for the One who has saved us and given us this victory. When was the last time you thanked the Lord for the gift of salvation? We are forgetful creatures, and prone to ungratefulness. Are you also thankful for the salvation of loved ones and friends? Do you have a burden for those who have not claimed the promise of victory over death? Time is running out.

Thought: Should Christians be fearful about death?

Prayer: Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IS IT IMPORTANT THAT CHRIST IS RISEN?

Consider these facts:

- Christ's death, burial and resurrection on the 3rd day is according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). It had been prophesied and fulfilled in Christ.
- The disciples and Paul (and others) testified to seeing the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Were they mistaken? Or worse still, are they liars?
- If Christ our Lord, the Son of God did not have power over death, what of those who have already died in the faith? Have they perished for all eternity? (1 Corinthians 15:18)
- Christ Himself said He would rise again (Matthew 16:21, Luke 24:7). Can we not trust the very words spoken by our Lord?
- If Christ is not raised, we are still dead in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:7).

If Christ is not risen, our faith is vain! It is futile. Christianity leads nowhere. Do you believe the Bible is true and that Christ indeed is risen? The firstfruits are, as the name suggests, the first fruits of the harvest that were offered to God by His people. Christ is the first who has risen from the dead with the glorified body, and in so doing paves the way for that same resurrection to be had for all who believe in Him. If Christ had not risen from the dead, then what hope do we have that we too can have eternal life, and that glorified body?

Today, medical and scientific knowledge have and continue to advance in leaps and bounds. People are living healthier and longer lives. There are cures for diseases that would have killed countless in the past. Man thinks he is so clever, so powerful. Whilst these can be used for good, they are to be viewed with discernment by Christians. We must realise that such medical treatments only postpone the inevitable – death, whether you are rich, poor, young, old, wise or simple. As Christians our only hope is in the risen Christ. We are most blessed to have a faith that is not in vain, but rests on a risen Christ.

Thought: What is your perspective on life and death?

Prayer: May I not become preoccupied and obsessed about prolonging my physical life here on earth.

“...now faith is substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S RESURRECTED BODY LIKE?

Jesus appeared suddenly and supernaturally at a gathering of the disciples, and they were indeed shocked. They thought they had seen a spirit and were afraid. Christ assures them that it was not so, for he asked them to see and touch his hands and feet. He was a real physical being with flesh and bones!

Later, Thomas who was not with the other disciples insisted “*...Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*” (John 20:25) The Lord graciously appeared and condescended to fulfill Thomas’s faithless request, leading him to respond: “*My Lord and my God*” (John 20:28).

The resurrected body of Christ was a real, physical, corporeal body. It was the Lord Himself, who had risen from the dead. He was not a spirit. The resurrected body bore the scars and the marks of His crucifixion and death on the cross. It was also a living body which ate broiled fish and honeycomb (Luke 24:42). Yet it also seems there was a supernatural aspect to it, whereby He was able to suddenly appear in the midst of the disciples and even pass through walls.

The nature of Christ’s resurrected body proves that Christ did indeed rise from the dead. Jesus, who was fully man, was crucified and died. His resurrection was physical and literal. If this was not true, if the resurrected Christ was a spirit, could it be said He had truly conquered death? Is the work of Christ complete?

Dear teen, what blessed assurance we have that Christ lives and is seated at the right hand of God interceding for us. But do you believe? Or are you like doubting Thomas? He wanted to see before he believed. What does Christ say of those who believe without ever seeing?

(Find the answer in John 20:29)

Thought: Faith is believing what God says He will do.

Prayer: My Lord and my God... may my faith rest wholly on what the Scriptures has recorded for us.

WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE ALL ABOUT?

What is life all about here on earth? Is its purpose different from what it will be in heaven? The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. To glorify God, is to praise; to elevate and honour Him in worship, in thought, in songs of praise or words. We also glorify God by the godly lives we live – testifying of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What are the ways in which we enjoy God? We talk to Him, spend time in His presence, think about Him, find out more about Him. Can we ever know too much about the Lord, or do enough for Him if we truly love Him? Thus, our main purpose in heaven will remain unchanged – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is what eternal life will be all about.

However, in eternity, the circumstances in which we do so will be different. There will be no tears, no death, no sorrow, no pain, no worries, no hurt, no disappointments, no anger, and no jealousy! God Himself will wipe away our tears forever. What are the things that make you sad and hurt you? What makes you toss and turn and keep you up at night? Can you imagine what it will be like to neither experience nor fear all these things ever again? Whilst we can and do enjoy God and glorify Him here in this world, it is in an imperfect way. We often serve the Lord with mixed motives, become easily discouraged, or hurt. We murmur and complain, and so quickly get bored or tired. Ever sung a hymn but your mind was elsewhere? Listened to a compelling sermon that touched your heart only to remember it for all of a day or two only? Our prayers are prone to repetition, to be narrow and selfish in scope, small in faith, and all too often ending prematurely when we drift off to sleep. Our relationship with the Lord becomes lukewarm or cold. We forget Him so easily.

In eternity, sin will have no place. Our relationship with God will be perfect. We will enjoy Him and glorify Him perfectly. Each day will be filled with joy and peace. There is absolutely nothing that will alarm us or create pain and fear in our hearts. We will lay our burdens down. We will sing and praise God with our whole heart day after day. With each passing day, I know I look forward to that day even more. What about you?

Thought: What will it be like to see God face to face?

Prayer: May I examine my heart and my life, and get rid of the things that hinder me from enjoying and glorifying God.

WON'T HEAVEN BE BORING?

There are people who have wrong views of what heaven is like. They assume that with the things of the world gone, there would be nothing to do in heaven, just sitting on a cloud and playing one tune on a harp. They are misled by the erroneous notions of their imagination.

Our views and thoughts and mind must be on what the Bible teaches. That is our authority and it is truth. Heaven will not be boring because Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth and Author of our salvation will be there. Heaven is where God dwells. Psalm 16:11 tells us that in His presence is fullness of joy. We will see Him face to face – in person. Imagine what that will be like? What did Moses' face look like after he saw God on Mt Sinai (Exodus 34:29-30)? Fullness of joy, is perfect joy. It is joy that lacks nothing, it is complete. At God's right hand, the place of highest honour there will be pleasures evermore. Pleasures that go on and on, without end. We will see it. We will experience it. No longer will heaven be something we sing and read about. Heaven will be realised!

Heaven will be a very joyful place indeed. If God's creation is so beautiful and wonderful on earth, what will heaven be like? There will be more pleasures to explore and experience. Heaven will be more than what earth has to offer. Furthermore, with our glorified bodies, we will no longer be able to sin, and will be able to enjoy and appreciate the glories of heaven with a perfect, sinless heart.

Dear teen, ever thought to yourself, if only I achieve this or obtain this possession, I will be happy? So you got it and were happy and content. But for how long? There is only so much one can eat of the most decadent chocolate cake. If you had an endless supply and ate it day after day, how long before you are sick of it? In Heaven will you tell God, please, no more pleasures? I do not wish to live in the mansion you have prepared for me nor walk down streets of gold! Have you ever prayed for God to stop blessing you? In heaven, we will rest from all our labours, and will receive our inheritance and enjoy perfect fellowship with God and our fellow saints. Is this what you are looking forward to?

Thought: Is this world really so exciting and pleasurable?

Prayer: May I grow to love the LORD more and more with each passing day, looking forward with great anticipation to the day when I see Him face to face and spend all eternity in His presence.

HOW LONG IS ETERNITY?

There are only two places in which we can spend eternity: heaven or hell. Everyone will be placed in one of these two places on judgment day to be there forever and ever. Our Lord in speaking of eternity in Matthew 25:46 says, “*And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*”. Notice that the duration of the lost in Hell is the same as the duration of the saved in Heaven, “*forever and ever*”. It is hard for us as mortals to grasp how long eternity will be. As the line in the famous hymn so poetically states: “*When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun. We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise, than when we first begun*”.

It is hard to imagine eternity. Even a second can be a very long time – a split second can make all the difference between an Olympic gold and silver medallist. Our lives here on earth are marked by time – seconds, minutes, hours...days and nights. Time both flies and crawls, but mostly it flies. Examinations drag by painfully and indeterminably. Yet, there does not seem enough time to study. When doing something we enjoy, time flies.

Where I grew up though, in the middle of winter it would be dark by the time I got home from school at 5:30pm and dark when I left in the morning. I would look forward to long hot summer days, shedding my winter layers for light summer clothes and basking in the sun. Think of our life here on Earth as one long night, and eternity in Heaven as one joyous endless day. Everything will be clear and bright as we will be able to see and experience everything perfectly as we reign with the Lord forever.

Our lives here on earth have an ending. But our lives in Heaven have no end. Make the best use of your time here. Dear teen, whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. One of your best life mottos is to live in the light of eternity or as the hymn reminds us, “*With eternity’s values in view, Lord, May I live each day with eternity’s values in view.*” Be the best student, daughter, son, friend, servant of the Lord. What we do here for the Lord, in the fixed amount of time given to each of us, will count for eternity.

Thought: As your life here is but a mere vapour, how then should we face trials and difficulties in the light of eternity?

Prayer: Lord, help us understand that our light affliction is but for a moment, working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

CAN'T HEAVEN BE FOUND ON EARTH?

In the 1980s, a famous pop song had lyrics that read *'They say in heaven, love comes first. We'll make heaven a place on earth'*. This is an extremely shallow and erroneous view of what heaven is all about. Yes there is love in heaven, but it is also a place of perfect holiness, pure joy and godly beauty. The carnal sinful world's notion of what love and joy will not be found there at all. Instead, the world's sins will only have a place in hell. Man thinks that in making this world a more comfortable and exciting place to be in, they have created heaven on earth. They cannot be further from the truth.

In Heaven, with the presence of God, with the holy city of New Jerusalem lit by the glory of God - it will be perfect. Nothing or no one that is sinful can enter Heaven. Only born again Christians whose sins have been cleansed by the blood of Christ will be able to enter. Sin is the antithesis – diametrically opposed to everything God, who is holy, is. Sin is an abomination to the Lord – He hates sin with an absolute and perfect hatred. Imagine if it were indeed possible for sin to enter Heaven. What would be its effect? Even a tiny, minute speck of sin would taint and corrupt Heaven. 99.99% pure is not pure at all. Heaven would no longer be Heaven!

Conversely, in this world, do you see more of God's holiness or man's wickedness? Even in the universal church, the beloved bride of Christ, is there sin? What about your local church? Yes maybe through prayer, worship and fellowship with saints we do have a glimpse and foretaste of Heaven, but can we say Heaven is well and truly here?

Heaven is not here on earth and can never be because of sin. Sin contaminates everything. A newborn child, seemingly innocent and pure is also born in sin. Examine just the past day of your life. How pure were your thoughts and actions? Would you have been able to enter Heaven based on them? As long as we are on this earth, the Christian will never find perfect peace and enjoyment, for he will yearn for the perfect holiness that can only be achieved in heaven. Dear teen, is this your desire as well?

Thought: Is your perspective of this world different from friends and family who are unbelievers?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I be the salt and the light for Thee in this sinful world.

WHAT IF I ENJOY THIS WORLD MORE?

Jesus speaks of two things at stake: one is your soul, and the other, the things of the world. The things of the world are bewitching and beguiling; there are so many things to do, achieve and experience: knowledge, reputation, wealth, comfort, beauty, popularity, power. Who in their right mind would not desire at least some of these things? Perhaps you do not wish to gain the whole world, just a slice of it, or just a taste. Well, you will have to work for it. Furthermore, there is another far greater price to pay for these things. The things of the world will last a lifetime at most but you cannot take them with you to Heaven. In contrast, your soul is eternal, and you only have one. The entire world even if you were to attain it, is not worth the price of your soul! So then, is even just a taste of the world for a lifetime worth trading your eternal soul for?

When I was younger, my goal was to travel to every continent before I turned 30. This would be fulfilment for me. I did see a fair bit of the world and did enjoy it, but it did not accord me complete and lasting fulfillment. Like the woman at the well, I was seeking for things that could not satisfy. Reflect upon all the things you ever desired and/or worked for thus far. Have they satisfied you perfectly? At the end of your life, will you look back on your life and regret that you did not enjoy this world more and are leaving it? It is not wrong to desire to travel, or to go to university and earn a good living. But as Christians, we now have freedom not to lust after them, to be enslaved in the wholehearted pursuit of them believing they are the be all and end all. What did King Solomon have to say? *"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."* (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Dear teen, can you truly love the Lord yet love this world more? There is also a price to be pay if you wish to follow Christ. To spend all your time, money, talents enjoying the world will be at the expense of the things of the Lord and His Kingdom. It is a poor exchange. May we learn to take up His cross and follow Him.

Thought: Have you counted the cost of following Christ? Is it too great?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I have great ambitions for Christ and bring glory to Thee.

WHAT IS OUR BLESSED HOPE?

"They have done all that they can and all they can do now was hope for the best." This is how the world views hope. It sees hope as a rather desperate uncertainty. Christians, on the other hand, define hope as *"confident expectation"*. It is not merely wishing that something good will happen but knowing that it will definitely happen and thus look forward earnestly to it.

In Titus 2:13, we see that our hope is centred on a person – the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Second Coming. Just as how the people of the past waited in anticipation for Christ's first coming, we now wait with bated breath for *"the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"*. It is not a remote event that may or may not happen but it is a definite day in the future, confirmed by the testimony of God's Word and His Spirit to our hearts. It is also called our *"blessed hope"* showing how precious and uplifting it is to us.

Without the Christian's hope, it is extremely difficult to find meaning in our lives. This is especially so in this day and age where sin is so rife and desire for God so scarce that our souls are vexed from day to day, like Lot's was when he lived in Sodom. Hope in Christ's Second Coming helps us to see past the present state and know that the things that are happening today are signs that the day of the Lord *"is near, even at the doors"* (Matthew 24:33). This knowledge that Christ is coming again soon spurs the Christian on in his/her walk.

Dear teen, does the thought of Christ's second coming fill you with hope? The key verb of this verse is *"looking"*. Are you looking and living with the excitement of the future God has promised us or just building your life on this earth as if you do not have an eternal home that awaits you? God wants us to be in an attitude of expectancy. This attitude will influence our actions and the way we are living, working out our daily practical choices. We would certainly not lay our treasures on earth but in heaven. We would mortify our sins daily. We would zealously pursue righteousness and godliness and holiness.

Thought: How important is hope in Christ's return to you?

Prayer: Lord, let me not be discouraged by this current world and my present circumstances, but enable me to have hope in Thy promise that Christ is coming again soon. Let this hope uplift my heart and spur me on in my walk and service for Thee.

DO I WANT TO BE FOREVER WITH GOD?

When we think of a tabernacle, we are reminded of the tabernacle in the wilderness when the children of Israel made their forty-year journey to the Promised Land. It was a tent built specially to God’s specifications and was a symbol of God dwelling with His people. Also, during their journey to the Promised Land, the Israelites had the very presence of God with them, a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Exodus 40:34–38). Revelation 21:3 alludes to this time in history when God was present with His people in a visible physical form. The other time this happened was when Jesus Christ lived on earth as God taking on the form of a man. Here we are told that in eternity, Christ will once again dwell with us in the New Jerusalem after He comes again.

How wonderful a description we have in Revelation 21:3, telling us of how God will dwell with us. We will be His people and He will be our God. We will see Him every day and enjoy being in His presence for eternity. No longer will He be far off. No longer will He be “veiled” in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. No longer will His people approach Him with fear and trembling in the Holy of Holies only once a year. No longer will we have the great gulf of sin separating us and God. Just like God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, seeking him in the cool of the day, He will be in heaven with us continually.

Does the idea of eternity with God excite you? It is no doubt difficult to imagine what eternity is like as we are finite beings who live in time and space. Many Christians are so caught up with their lives on this earth and the cares of the present that they forget that their lives on earth are only temporary. When we are living with Christ in the future, our lives on this earth will be such a distant memory. How then should we live our lives on this earth, seeing that it is but a transient abode? Let us watch ourselves and each other as we sojourn on this earth as it is often a gradual slipping away as a Christian loses sight of his eternal home. Forget not to fellowship and encourage one another. Let us constantly remind ourselves of where our home truly is.

Thought: If God calls you home today, will you be ready to leave?

Prayer: Help me to examine my heart honestly, O Lord. Do I truly look forward to a life of eternity with You? Or have I become too caught up in this present world?

SO HOW EXACTLY CAN I BE SAVED?

Romans 10:9 tells us plainly how one is saved. It involves our hearts and our mouths. Our hearts need to believe the salvation work that Christ has done for us. How He is the Son of God, *“the image of the invisible God”* (Colossians 1:15), and how He is *“the Word was made flesh”* (John 1:14). Our hearts need to believe His life on earth, His death on the cross and *“that God hath raised him from the dead”*. We need to believe that we are *“justified by his blood”* (Romans 5:9) and it is through Him, and Him alone, that we are saved.

When we truly believe in our hearts the Gospel, we will naturally open our mouths and proclaim what we believe. Romans 10:9 states that we need to confess with our mouths what we have believed in our hearts before man. We need to stand up for our Saviour and state our belief in Him and His work to the rest of the world. We should never be closet Christians who are ashamed of the Gospel for that is not how a true Christian who understands the gospel behaves.

You may have been coming to church with your parents since you were a baby or perhaps, a good friend may have invited you along for Worship Service. You have heard the Gospel and know all about the life and ministry of Jesus. But is that where it stops? Does your heart believe what your head knows? Does your mouth confess that you believe and that you are born again? These are pertinent questions that you must answer honestly today. For no one else can judge whether you are really saved. Only you yourself and God can. If you realise that you have not believed, do not delay any further. Believe in thine heart and confess with thy mouth that Jesus is your Saviour and you shall be saved. It is that simple.

Thought: Have you truly believed in your heart and confessed with your mouth that Jesus is your Saviour?

Prayer: O Lord, I believe in Jesus Christ and that He is the Son of God. I believe that He lived on earth, died on the cross and has risen from the dead. I believe that salvation is through His work on the cross alone. O Lord, help me to confess through my mouth and my life that Jesus is my Saviour.

WHAT IS GRACE?

Grace is unmerited favour. It is given to someone who has done nothing to deserve it. It requires much generosity, love and forgiveness on the part of the giver. The Bible tells us that it is through God's grace alone that we are saved.

Romans 5:8 sums up the essence of grace completely. We are sinners and totally undeserving of any love or forgiveness. We are in fact deserving of death for *"the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). Although we are undeserving and filled with sin which God hates, God loves us and He took the first step to reach out to us to reconcile us to Himself. He died for us. He gave His life to people who hated Him and rebelled against His will with their sin. Only our God who is so full of love for His creation could have shown such grace to us fallen creatures. There are no appropriate superlatives to describe such grace. All we can do is fall on our knees in gratitude and awe and worship the Giver of this wondrous grace.

Dear teen, do you remember any instances where someone has shown you grace when you did not deserve it? It could be someone who showed you kindness even though you often gossip and speak ill of this person to others. It could be your parents who showed you love and forgiveness even though you disobeyed them time and time again. Remember how sorry and yet grateful you felt when you received such grace. Now multiply that an infinite amount of times and you might perhaps just get an idea of what it means for God to show us grace.

Have you grasped how amazing God's grace is? How unbelievable that the Creator of heaven and earth would love such insignificant and filthy beings as us? And yet He does.

Thought: *"Grace, grace, God's grace.
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within.
Grace, grace, God's grace.
Grace that is greater than all my sin!"* 🎵 🎵

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for Your amazing and matchless grace. Let every day be filled with awe and gratitude for Your grace towards me.

WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

We are saved by grace through faith. Yes it is our faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross that brings salvation. However, it is only by God's grace, whereby the Holy Spirit's enables us to have that faith to believe in the first place. Left to ourselves, our sinful hearts would otherwise never look for God and yearn to be reconciled to Him. By His divine predestination, the elect are given this saving faith to believe and be saved. Therefore, in Ephesians 2:8-9, this saving faith is called the “*gift of God*” that is given to us freely.

Paul also makes it clear that because this saving faith of ours is given to us completely out of the free will and grace of God, no one can boast that he earned his salvation. It is not because we built up our faith such that it is stronger than others that we are saved. It is not through good works that we have done that we are saved. It is also not that God foresaw that we would believe and so God saved us. It is purely by His grace.

All other religions practise some form of salvation by works. This is because all their founders are humans. Somehow, human beings have this idea that we need to earn our salvation and that more good works will give us hopefully enough points to secure a place in heaven. In reality, our sin is too deep and our works too small to ever obtain salvation through our own merits. Sadly, a vast majority of people have not realised this and they continue to plod on vainly trying to earn favour with God. Only Christianity whose founder is God Himself has the right way to salvation.

Yet even though we know that salvation is solely through grace, Christians sometimes still fall into the trap of pursuing a salvation through works. They lack assurance of their salvation through grace and look to things like attendance at church, service in ministries and more generous offerings, thinking that through them they can somehow earn their way into Heaven or gain extra merit with God. If you find that you too are believing in a salvation through works, you need to examine your faith as it is not the saving faith that the Holy Spirit gives.

Thought: *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

(Philippians 2:12b)

Prayer: O Lord, if I am relying on a salvation by works, forgive me and grant me the saving faith to believe that it is through Christ and Christ alone that we are saved by grace through faith.

WHAT IF I DON'T BELIEVE?

Jesus did not mince His Words as he spoke to the Jews in the temple about His identity as the Son of God and the promised Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for. The group he addressed was antagonistic and defiant. The Pharisees called Him a liar at the start and it was clear that they did not truly believe even in God the Father although outwardly they deceived others that they did. Jesus exposed their unbelief when He said, *“Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also”* (John 8:19).

Jesus then told them outright that if they did not believe that He was the Messiah and that salvation came through Him, they would *“die in [their] sins”*. Christ did not hide the painful truth from them. He did not downplay the fatal consequence of not believing in Him. It was simple. Believe that He was the Messiah or else, it was eternal death.

We should definitely learn from Christ. We have a responsibility to the lost person. We should not brush over the reality of hell and the fact that if one does not believe in Christ, one will *“die in [his] sins”*. We owe it to the people we love to tell them the dire consequences of not believing in Christ. If they do not know about hell, they will not see the urgency of accepting Christ. We should not be afraid of offending them and hiding this fact from them. It is lying to them if we do not tell them the whole truth. The stakes are eternal life and death as we proclaim the Gospel. What if there is blood in our hands?

Thought: Have you been guilty of not telling the whole truth of the Gospel to a loved one? If so, you owe it to them to tell them the Gospel in its entirety.

Prayer: Dear Lord, it is indeed true that if we do not believe in Christ, we will die in our sins. Thank You, Lord, for saving me from this certain death. Lord, help me to proclaim this truth without the fear of men to my loved ones so that they may also be saved from dying in their sins.

HOW CAN SALVATION BE SIMPLY BELIEVING?

It is impossible to work your own way into Heaven. It is impossible even if someone were to devote his whole life to good works starting as a child and persevering on into old age. Our good works and “*righteousnesses*” are only “*filthy rags*” when contrasted in the light of a thrice holy God (Isaiah 64:6). Even Abraham who was called the “*Friend of God*” (James 2:23) could not boast of his works before God. Romans 4:2 says that indeed Abraham’s works were worthy of praise before Man but before God, they did nothing to earn him a place in Heaven.

So how did Abraham attain his place in Heaven? Simply by believing. Romans 4:3 says that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”. Likewise, for us too, if we “[believe] *on him that justifieth the ungodly, [our] faith is counted for righteousness*” (Romans 4:5). It can only be simply believing as there is completely nothing we can do to obtain salvation. By simply believing, we acknowledge this and accept God’s full work and plan for salvation. Only the blood of Christ is good enough to be accepted by God as payment for our sins.

If you find it difficult to accept that salvation is simply believing, it could be due to a number of reasons. Perhaps you have not truly understood the Gospel and the doctrine of sin. Roman Catholicism teaches justification takes place by the means of the keeping of the sacraments and you might have been influenced by such unbiblical ideas. Perhaps it is pride that prevents you from accepting that there is nothing you can do to save yourself. Or it may be the lack of faith in the power of Christ’s blood to wash away your sins.

Dear teen, If a man so great in faith like Abraham could not boast of his works before God, how can you? And if Abraham could simply believe in God’s plan for salvation, you too can simply believe and be saved.

Thought: How would you convince someone that salvation is simply believing?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I thank Thee for the example of Abraham and how his faith was counted for righteousness. I thank Thee that our faith in Thee and Thy work of salvation is also counted for righteousness. I thank Thee that salvation is simply believing in Christ and what He has done for us on the cross.

HOW COME THE GOSPEL ISN'T UPDATED?

Immutability is an attribute of God. It means that He is unchangeable. It is impossible for Him to change His character or any of His qualities. Indeed, as the hymn writer puts it, *“there is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not; As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be”*. He is not like a temperamental human being who can change with the seasons. He is *“the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”* (Hebrews 13:8).

As God is immutable, so is His salvation work. From the beginning of time when He first promised Adam and Eve that He would send them a Saviour, through the period when He called Israel as His chosen nation, to the time when His promise was made flesh in the person of Jesus, to the beginning of the New Testament Church, and to our present era in the last days, His Gospel has remained unchanged. There is no need to change it. In every era, all men have sinned and need the Lord. Christ's atoning work on the cross is a complete work, a one time event. The Christian faith was *“once delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 1:3). The Gospel is timeless and always current to the needs of Man.

We live in a world of persistent and ruthless change. The landscape is constantly changing as new buildings are erected. Products become obsolete after a few months when new, upgraded models are released. Events in various parts of the world can impact the whole face of the global, political and financial scene in a moment. Perhaps it is this same need for change that makes some Christians think that the Gospel needs to be updated for the new generation. They feel that it needs to appeal to them more and should be presented in a more interesting and entertaining way. As a result, the Gospel becomes distorted and false gospels such as the health and wealth gospel are born.

Just as the Bible is perfect and unchanging, so is the gospel. The message that Paul preached to the churches in the book of Acts, is the same message that we need today.

Thought: How does the immutability of God and His Gospel bring assurance to your soul?

Prayer: O Lord, help me never to fall into the trap of changing the Gospel message to try to appeal to my friends or to the people I reach out to.

IF GOD HAS CHOSEN ME, ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

Romans 8:29 explains that God has chosen from eternity past whom He would save. However it does not address the issue of human responsibility with regards to a person's salvation. The Bible makes it clear that though it is God who does the choosing, this does not in any way absolve a person from the responsibility of responding to the Gospel in faith. Neither can it be used as an excuse to reject the Gospel on account of not being one of God's chosen ones.

Responding in faith to the Gospel and accepting the Lord Jesus as Saviour is just the first step of a Christian's journey from the point of conversion to glorification when we shall see Jesus face to face. Being a Christian also entails growing in the faith and confessing the Lord Jesus as Saviour not merely in word but also in deed. To think that it is enough that God has chosen you and then to live after the flesh is to remain a babe in Christ. As Paul in Romans 8:12 says, *“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh”*. Moreover, *“...they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:8). Having begun in the Spirit, God wants His children to continue to live in the Spirit. In the past, we might have developed a habit of swearing and cursing but after believing, we must stop it. There is a change in our lives. We want to please God and bring honour to Him. We want to live clean lives.

Romans 10:10 says that the genuine believer confesses with his mouth what he truly believes in his heart, and lives a life consistent with such a belief. Once we are saved, we do not continue living as if nothing has happened. Rather, we respond in love and gratitude to Jesus who gave Himself for us by hating sin and loving holiness. Indeed, the Christian's entire life should be a confession of faith in Jesus as his Lord and personal Saviour to the world.

Thought: If Jesus were to return right now, would He be pleased with the way I have been living my life?

Prayer: Help me Lord to please You in all that I do, and forgive me in times of weakness when I have failed You.

IS GOD FAIR TO ELECT SOME AND NOT OTHERS?

God is sovereign and shows favour and mercy to whosoever He pleases. He has the authority to do so and this is the way He deals with man in all matters, including that of salvation. Some people may find this hard to accept and feel that God is unfair to exclude others while choosing some to be saved.

The way to dispel this misconception is firstly to realise that as sinners, none of us deserve anything but God's judgment. Secondly, we must understand that all of us were already under condemnation and on the way to hell if it were not for God's intervention (John 3:18).

If you had some spare change and chose to give it all to a starving beggar, none of the other starving beggars would have the right to ask why you had given money to one and not the others simply because the money belonged to you. You do as you please with it. This is the same with election. God does as He pleases, and no one can accuse Him of being unfair.

To get the right answer, one has to ask the right question. So often we ask for fairness when what we really need is mercy. You may have observed that some self-professing Christians behave terribly and wonder how they could possibly be saved. Conversely, you may have known wonderful people who are not believers, and wonder how they could possibly not be saved. We should remember 4 things:

1. God makes no mistakes.
2. We cannot tell if someone will eventually accept Christ in the last few moments of his life.
3. People are saved because of God's mercy and not because of their own goodness.
4. God's standard for salvation is not goodness but sinless perfection which Christ has already achieved on the believer's behalf.

Thought: It is God's amazing mercy and grace indeed that even one sinner's soul is saved.

Prayer: O Lord, You are the Potter who does as You please with Your clay. Help me to trust that You are perfect in all that You do.

DIDN'T JESUS DIE FOR THE SINS OF ALL?

When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he proclaimed in John 1:29, “...behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. It is indeed true that Jesus’ work of salvation, including His death on the cross, is sufficient to save every man, woman and child that has lived and will ever live. Through that single sacrifice, He conclusively dealt with the problem of sin for all of mankind. However, we know that the fact of the matter is that not every single man, woman and child will eventually believe in Christ and be saved. Why is that so? Didn’t Jesus die for the sin of the whole world?

While it was true that Jesus’ sacrifice is sufficient to save all, yet the Bible also tells us that it is only effectively applied upon all who come to Him in faith and repentance. Thus the question really is who God’s plan of salvation was designed to save. The answer lies in the description of a husband’s sacrificial love for his wife in Ephesians 5:25 as a relationship likened to that of Jesus and His Church (which is made up of believers). Here it is explained that Jesus died specifically to save His church, the bride of Christ. For Christ’s work of salvation on the cross to be effective for us, we have to enter into a relationship with Him, and we do that by repenting of our sins and accepting Him as Lord and Saviour. Thus when the elect of God respond in faith to the Gospel, we see the effect of His sacrifice applied to them, and they are saved. Therefore even though Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), not all are saved, for not all have faith.

There are times when our unbelieving friends may question the goodness of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They may scoff at the fact that an all-powerful and loving God cannot save the whole world from condemnation. We must realise that our God is perfectly holy and cannot tolerate sin. Yet He has devised a way for sinners to be saved in spite of their wickedness; you can help them to understand the depths of God’s love for the sinner and point them to Jesus. Yes Jesus died to save the world, but the world must also believe in Him in order to be saved.

Thought: Understanding the depths of our own depravity, we can appreciate the depths of God’s love for us even more.

Prayer: Lord, we love You because You first loved us. Fill us with Your Spirit that our love for You will grow deeper every day.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO'VE NEVER HEARD?

Believers sometimes get anxious when they are unable to adequately explain to their unbelieving friends how God could be so *"unreasonable"* to condemn those who have never heard the Gospel. Unbelievers also sometimes use this as an excuse that they would not want to believe in an *"unreasonable"* God. Is God being unreasonable?

Romans 1:20-25 explains that because of sin, the natural man is unable to know God in spite of creation pointing to the existence of an all-powerful Creator. Instead of seeking Him, they indulge in idolatrous practices. God's Word says that they are without excuse. Furthermore, even a person who has never heard the Gospel has some knowledge of right and wrong; he feels offended when someone cheats, lies or steals at his expense even if he does not know God. Yet he too is guilty of committing those very sins against others at one time or another. Honest self-examination would inevitably lead to the fact that he is guilty of doing what is wrong in spite of knowing what is right. Everyone is accountable to God for wrongdoing whether or not they have ever heard of the Gospel. This is what Jesus was explaining when he told Nicodemus that *"this is the condemnation, that men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"*(John 3:19). Without Jesus, the whole world is in a state of condemnation already, because of their own sin and their rejection of God. Since everyone is already in a state of condemnation, God could not have sent Jesus to the world to condemn them but rather, to save them. This is an act of grace and mercy on God's part.

Dear teen, the fact is that most people would look for any excuse for not believing in the Gospel. They are not actually concerned that people who have never heard the Gospel could be condemned. What is important is how they personally respond to the Gospel once they have heard it. Then, after believing, the next important thing is not only to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, but also to witness and preach Christ to the lost around you for they need to hear the gospel and be saved.

Thought: If ignorance is bliss we would be doing the world a great disservice by evangelizing to them, and Christ would have died in vain.

Prayer: May Your Spirit, O Lord, move the hearts of sinners to believe in the Gospel unto salvation.

CAN'T OTHER RELIGIONS BRING SALVATION?

1 Timothy 2:5 clearly tells us that Jesus is the one and only Mediator between God and men. Just as there is only one true God, there is also only one true mediator, and that is found in Christ Jesus. A mediator is someone who comes between two feuding parties and seeks a peaceful resolution. Fallen man is at enmity with God, for in his sin, he deserves only judgment from the perfect and Holy God. Thus the only way whereby man can be reconciled to God, is through His perfect son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is certainly a sobering thought that of all the many religions in the world, there is only one which is true and which can save the sinner's soul and that is Christianity. During His earthly ministry, Jesus taught his disciples that He alone is *"the way, the truth and the life"* (John 14:6), and that there is no other way to the Father but by Him. Thus we clearly see that there is no salvation apart from faith in Him. Yet this should not surprise us. After all, the Bible explains that the way to destruction is broad with many going down this path compared to the narrow way to salvation that few would choose (Matthew 7:13).

If most, perhaps even all, of the other false religions teach their followers to do *"good"*, why then can they not bring salvation? The problem with *"doing good"* is that it will never be good enough for heaven because a perfectly holy God demands perfect holiness. Only Christianity points towards Jesus, who lived a perfectly sinless and holy life on our behalf because we are powerless to do so. He alone lived for us, died for us and rose again for our justification. He is therefore the one and only Mediator between God and men.

Dear teen, we cannot earn our way to heaven through doing good deeds. While there is nothing wrong with doing good (and we ought to do as much good as God enables us to), this alone cannot save us. Good works should be a result of believing in Jesus and not the other way round. After we are truly saved, our desire to perform good works for Jesus' sake is evidence of our salvation.

Thought: If salvation can be earned, then how much good works is enough?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach us not to trust in our own effort for salvation but rather in Jesus who is our sufficiency.

IS THERE NO OTHER WAY TO SALVATION?

Living in this age, we have a culture of wanting to have “options”, “individualism” and “self-determination”. By and large, while it is good to have options to give us the flexibility to achieve a certain objective in various ways, we soon find that matters pertaining to spiritual truth cannot be approached with this attitude.

Believing that salvation lies in Jesus alone would seem narrow-minded, intolerant and even bigoted by those who do not know Christ, but truth is not determined by popular opinion, votes or consensus. Some people who reject Christ as the one and only Saviour of the world do so because they either cannot accept that the Gospel is absolute and non-negotiable or are afraid to be seen as an intolerant bigot. To reject the gospel in the former instance is to be intentionally ignorant. To do so in the latter instance is plain vanity. Neither is good as both lead to damnation (Matthew 12:31).

God sent Jesus to the world as the only way in which any sinner can be saved and not one of many. God makes no allowance for alternative options, individual opinions or human input into His plan of salvation. Either we accept His gracious but narrow way to heaven, or the broad way to hell.

Dear teen, our prayer for you is that you now fully understand God’s marvellous plan of salvation and how Jesus is mighty to save. Having been grounded in such truths, our prayer is also that you will stand steadfast when required to take a stand for Christ. You might sometimes worry about offending others or feel embarrassed for standing up for Jesus and proclaiming that only Jesus saves and none other. By the way, none of the so-called founders of other religions died and rose again. We stand on the Word of God. We would never fail to publicly acknowledge a dear friend who risked his life to save ours no matter how shabby he looks, so why should we treat Jesus any differently?

Thought: If I am ashamed of Jesus, then Jesus shall also be ashamed of me on that great Day of Judgment before God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us the strength and courage to witness for Jesus and glorify His name in every circumstance.

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF WORKS?

A covenant is a promise, an agreement or a contract. When two or more individuals sign on a contract, they are acknowledging that they agree to abide by the conditions that are set out in the contract and failure to do so constitutes an infringement of this contract. Action can therefore be taken against the offending individual for such an infringement.

In the Garden of Eden, God entered into a Covenant of Works with Adam. God promised Adam eternal life upon condition of perfect obedience. The Covenant of Works is like a contract which involved Adam (representing the entire human race) and God. The difference is that this agreement and its conditions were dictated by God. Adam had no input. God would agree to grant Adam eternal life on one condition - he is not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Put simply, Adam was promised life and blessedness in return for his obedience to God. The promise of eternal life was based on the condition of total obedience (good works) by Adam to God's command. Had Adam passed the test of obedience, God would have kept His Word and granted Adam eternal life as promised.

In the Covenant of Works, Adam was the representative and federal head of the human race. Therefore, whatever he did, he did on behalf of all mankind (Romans 5:12,19). Adam was under probation in the Garden. He was given freedom of will to choose between God and self, between obedience and rebellion (Genesis 2:15-17). Adam disobeyed God and fell into sin (Genesis 3:17) when he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Thereupon, he suffered the penalty of eternal death and the world was plunged into this sin cursed state today.

Adam was banished from the Garden of Eden. Man has lost paradise, and his freedom to partake of the tree of life (Genesis 3:22). Is there hope for mankind? Dear reader, how miserable to be born if we were all to be condemned forever. But God *“is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). The hope then is found in the Covenant of Grace, which we will learn about tomorrow.

Thought: God is sovereign and He did not owe Adam anything in return for perfect obedience. Yet, He chose to deal with Adam graciously.

Prayer: O Lord, the depths of Thy amazing grace know no bounds.

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF GRACE?

The first instance of the Gospel appearing in the Bible is found in Genesis 3:15. Here, God tells Satan that the seed of a woman (the Saviour) would be sent to bruise his head (save man from the bondage of sin by destroying Satan's power). This is once again mentioned in Galatians 4:4 whereby the identity of the Saviour is revealed as Jesus, the Son of God. At a time of God's own choosing, Jesus would be sent to live among man and to die on the cross for the sins of man to save him from the consequences of sin.

Man sins because he is born a sinner. This is because all of Adam's descendants inherit the sin nature which he acquired after giving in to Satan's temptation to disobey God in the Garden of Eden (Romans 5:12). Every person is subsequently already born in a state of condemnation and on the way to hell unless he chooses God's simple plan of salvation: believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved (Romans 5:17-19).

This is God's Covenant of Grace which has been offered to man since the time of Adam's fall. Just like the Covenant of Works, it is God who dictates the conditions, and here God decides to bestow unmerited favour to man by sending Jesus to pay the awful price for our sins because man is incapable of doing anything to counter the effects of our own sin. God agrees to grant salvation on the condition of faith in His Son, Jesus, as Saviour. Once again, man had no input into the design of this covenant.

As its name suggests, the Covenant of Grace is a wonderful testimony to the gracious provision of God in granting us the free gift of salvation. There are no longer any works that we need to perform in order to fulfill the terms of this covenant. Christ alone has met all the requirements for us, and therefore anyone who is in Christ, can receive the full benefits of God's promise! Are you in Christ, and a part of the Covenant of Grace?

Thought: That God even bothered to provide a plan for our salvation is proof beyond doubt of His infinite grace and mercy.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for granting me salvation so richly and freely through Jesus my Redeemer.

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Regret, guilt and sorrow. We all understand these words. We know their meaning and have experienced them personally one time or another. But what about repentance? Do we also know and understand what repentance really is, and most importantly, have we truly repented in Christ and enjoyed peace and joy through the forgiveness of sin?

Regret is not repentance. A feeling of guilt for wrongdoing is not repentance. A worldly kind of sorrow whereby a person feels terribly saddened for something that he either did or did not do is not repentance. Judas Iscariot regretted that he had betrayed Jesus. He returned the thirty pieces of silver that he received for his iniquity. He found no peace and finally he hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). He did not experience true repentance.

True repentance is described by Paul as godly sorrow, and godly sorrow always results in an irreversible change in the person. This involves a change of heart. Where a person used to enjoy sinning, he now makes a rational, intentional and determined choice to shun sin and honour Christ instead. His entire way of thinking and living are now at odds with the world. This cannot come about unless he is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. This is why 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that *“godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation”*.

When we were unbelievers, we merely felt guilty for our wrongdoing until God revealed to us the true state of our sinfulness and a need for His forgiveness. This was when we truly repented of our sins and accepted Christ. Now, as believers who have the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are given the ability to recognize it when we inadvertently fall into sin. When this happens, we pray for God’s forgiveness out of a desire for holiness. Thereafter, we make a conscious effort to avoid falling into sin again. This, too, is evidence of true repentance.

Thought: To simply reject the ways of the world avails to us nothing unless it is done for the love of Christ.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for empowering me to be holy through the marvelous inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT IF I DON'T REPENT?

Tainted by sin, man can never save himself out of his own fallen state, so God in His mercy had to intervene and send the Lord Jesus to the world to save sinners. Sinners do not repent because they do not see a need to do so. Judging themselves by the standards of the world, they pat themselves on the back and comfort themselves by thinking that they do not deserve condemnation because they are “better” than the crooks, thieves or criminals that are locked up behind bars.

However, this is flawed thinking as it is God who decides who deserves to go to heaven or hell. It is therefore God's standards by which we must abide and not that of the world. The Bible says that besides Jesus no man is good enough for heaven, but those who hear this do not accept it because they are unable to examine themselves with complete honesty on account of their own sinful minds unless the Holy Spirit opens their eyes.

This was the problem that the scribes and Pharisees had in Jesus' day. What Jesus said in Mark 2:17 indicated that He would not have come to deliver the world from sin if man was capable of being righteous on their own, but this was lost on the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who thought too highly of themselves to repent. Not wanting to repent, therefore, is evidence that a person is not saved.

Whenever a child of God commits sin, he should become so acutely aware of what he has done that he will repent and pray for God's forgiveness as soon as possible. This is because sin comes in between his relationship with the God he so loves. Only a person who does not know Jesus would feel no need to be forgiven for sinning, as the love of God is absent from his heart. Do you repent and seek God's forgiveness with urgency whenever you have sinned?

Thought: We sin even as believers because we are still in the body of flesh and have a fleshly nature. How wonderful it would be to finally have our sinless glorified bodies!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I yearn for the soon return of Thy Son when we shall all be transformed, never to sin again!

“...he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “BAPTISED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT”?

John the Baptist has been described as the greatest prophet of all. This is because of the fact that he was the one chosen by God to herald the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; the long promised Messiah. God prepared John's way in the form of prophecy found in Malachi 3:1 foretelling his coming. John's ministry was unique in that he baptised those who came in repentance with water was symbolic of the cleansing of sin. His call was for all to come to repentance of their sins and to receive forgiveness from God.

John was a faithful prophet. His work was never about himself. Instead he pointed to the coming true Saviour; Jesus Christ. Today's reading was an example of this. John declared that there was one who will not only baptise them but will also transform their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. John was referring to Christ who would impart the Holy Spirit to the believer. Every believer is baptised with the Holy Spirit upon conversion (Romans 8:14,16). We know from Scripture that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer (1 Corinthians 3:16). In fact, the Holy Spirit *“communes”* or fellowships with the believer (2 Corinthians 13:14). The Spirit helps us to pray (Romans 8:26), helps us to say the right things for God (1 Corinthians 2:4), changes our hearts to love and to be wise (2 Timothy 1:7, Romans 5:5), gives us joy, peace and hope (Romans 15:13), helps us to understand our relationship with God better (Romans 8:15). In short, the Holy Spirit helps us in an intimate way towards becoming more like Christ.

The work of the Holy Spirit is obviously very important in the life of a believer. The spiritual life of a believer is dependent on how much the Spirit works in him and we know that the thing that prevents this from happening is sin (Ephesians 4:30). Hence, a life of holiness is required for the Spirit to bear fruit in us.

Have you ever experienced the work or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in your life at all? If not, it is possible that you may not be saved. Check your heart today, do not delay, come to believe Him before it is too late.

Thought: God's love is poured out to us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

Prayer: God, I want to experience a closer walk with You through the Holy Spirit.

MUST I 'FEEL' SAVED?

What is the feeling of being saved? Is it possible to feel saved and yet not be? Will I know if I am truly saved? These are frequently asked questions. To find the answer will require personal soul searching and God's Word. Romans 8:16 tell us, *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"*. The Spirit works in all believers and imparts to them the assurance that they are indeed the children of God. 2 Corinthians 1:22 also teaches concerning our salvation, *"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts"*. The *"earnest of the Spirit"* is a promise or a seal, and this is placed in our hearts; meaning the Christian will know and feel deeply about his salvation. Hence we learn that Christians can certainly have the assurance of salvation.

Taking this one more step we can ask, "Is there something outward that shows us if we are saved?" 1 John 2:5 says, *"But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him"*. This passage tells us that believers will keep God's Word and this is an indication of salvation. To call yourself a Christian, and yet refuse to obey God's Word is really a contradiction!

That said, some truly saved Christians, may sometimes still doubt their salvation. This is often because of a life not fully committed to serving and living for God. *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"* (2 Corinthians 13:5). Search your heart, examine it and find out if you are truly Christ's. It may be that in your search, you will find that you are after all a child of God. Praise God then.

However, in your search, you may also find that you are not actually saved. You may have thought that by attending church or as your parents are Christians, therefore you are saved. If so, you must accept the Lord as your Saviour. Recognize that you are sinful and you are doomed for judgment and the only way is that Christ saves you from your sins. It is better to make sure of your salvation than to be among those whom the Lord will say, *"I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matthew 7:23). Believe today!

Thought: Do you know if you are saved?

Prayer: Lord, please open my eyes to see the reality of my salvation.

WHY NOT FAITH + WORKS = SALVATION?

I know of many people who possess a passion for helping the disadvantaged in society. They would set aside personal time to visit and help strangers who have difficulty looking after themselves. They would help to clean up homes, even washing poorly maintained toilets despite the stench. They would stay to cheer up the old folks by talking and listening. Some would even set aside limited work leave to visit less developed countries to assist in the building of schools or hospitals. We also read and hear of great "saints" in places like India, dedicating their entire lives to help the people there. Would it surprise you if none of these works will help them gain acceptance with God and gain eternal life?

Romans 3:10, 23 tell us that there is none righteous. All are guilty of despicable sin in one form or another. The sins we have committed overwhelm any good works that there may be. Jeremiah 17:9 states truly that our hearts are desperately wicked. Although one may not have killed anyone, but in the heart, murder has been committed many times. Sin is so grievous that all it takes is one sin to justify hell for all eternity. None of us are free of sin. This is why Isaiah 64:6 tells us that without Christ, our righteousness are as filthy rags. What good we do is useless because of the evil we have consciously and deliberately committed. By ourselves, there is no way where we can 'work' for our salvation. Our works will count for nothing, if we are still in sin and condemnation.

But God in His great love and mercy, through the sacrifice of Christ, made it possible for us to be washed of all sins. Through Christ, God forgives us of our sins and makes us fit for heaven (Ephesians 2:4-7). God saved us from eternal damnation by grace; salvation is given to us as a gift. There are no conditions and there is nothing we can do to be deserving of this gift (Ephesians 2:8,9). It is given to us by God's mercy and love toward us. We deserve hell, but God chooses to save us. For those who have believed, we must be grateful. For those who have not, God offers this salvation to you today. It is a free gift, not conditioned upon any work we do. It is given to us by the grace of God. All we need to do is to simply have faith to accept it. Have you received it yet?

Thought: There is nothing we can do to deserve salvation.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for saving me despite my unworthiness.

"But after that faith is come... we are no longer under a schoolmaster."

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW OF GOD?

"If following God's law does not save us, then why do we bother?" one may ask. God's Word is clear that the law cannot save (Romans 3:20). The heart of man is evil, no one is able to keep the law perfectly (Romans 3:23). Another question that may follow is, "What if there was no law, would there still be sin? Is it not because of the law that sin exists?"

Paul addressed this exact question in Romans 7:7. "*God forbid*" was his answer. Sin exists with or without the law. Instead, the law made sin known to us. Because the law says "*Thou shalt not covet*", we are able to recognize it when we ourselves covet. Galatians 3:24 tells us that the law is our schoolmaster, our teacher to bring us to Christ. The law shows us our sins and hence our need for the Saviour (Romans 3:20). The law points out our faults and we cannot escape from the guilt. Because of the law, you and I are able to recognize that we are sinners.

If this is true, what must we do? If you see that you are truly a sinner according to the law of God, what is the consequence of that? Romans 1:32 is clear that as sinners, death awaits us. That is the fair and deserved judgment for sin. But God is merciful. Despite man's unwillingness to keep the law, God reached out to man, and by grace, save man from their sins (Romans 6:14). He achieved this by placing the judgment of our sins onto Christ Himself. Instead of you and I who rightfully deserve eternal damnation, Christ became the sacrifice for us by bearing the punishment of our sins. He died, the just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18).

Therefore, dear teen, the law cannot save you. Instead the more we know the law, the more we realise that we cannot keep it perfectly. It thus leads us to recognize our sin, but then also leads us to see our need for the Saviour. It also helps us to appreciate the great value of Christ's perfect obedience on our behalf, for He fulfilled the law perfectly, in order that we can have righteousness through Him.

Thought: The Law tells us that we are sinners.

Prayer: God, help me to recognize that I am a sinner.

"...the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

DOESN'T COMING TO CHURCH SAVE ME?

Some believe that if I do the things that Christians do, it would make me a Christian and I would have a place in heaven. If I go to church faithfully, attend every prayer meeting, give of my tithe, all this would please God and secure me a place in heaven.

This idea is actually the foundation of many major religions. The leaders of these religions form elaborate ceremonies and rituals that followers have to adhere to in order to enter heaven's gates. Many of these followers cling onto these rituals believing that they are their ticket to heaven. Paul described the Jews as such. The Jews were very zealous and claim to have great love and faithfulness to God. However, Paul describes their situation very well, "*...they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*"; their faith and actions are not based on what God requires of man; it is not based on God's Word. Instead, their fervour is based on man's principles and ideas. They may have great zeal and yet they may not know the true God at all. Their faith is man-made. The Apostle Paul himself was such a man before his conversion (Acts 26:9-10). He thought that persecuting and killing Christians was in obedience to God!

Are you guilty of serving God the wrong way? Do you believe the God of the Bible or a god of your own ideas and imagination? Jesus tells us that many will say to him on the Day of Judgment that they did many mighty things for Him, yet Christ will deny having ever known them (Matthew 7:22-23). This is so possible and you must check yourself and see which are you? You must check your heart and ask if your faith is based on God's Word. Or does God's Word point out error in your ways and are you repentant or stubbornly persisting in incorrect understanding and sin? You have to continue to be a diligent student of God's Word and the more you discover and obey, the more you can check your faith.

Thought: How do I know that our faith is true? Only by God's Word.

Prayer: Lord, give me a humble seeking heart that I may know if I am right with Thee.

ARE THOSE IN OTHER CHURCHES SAVED?

We know from God's Word that the Church of God, often referred to as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), consists of all true believers, past, present or future. It also refers to all believers in the Old Testament. Hence, the Church of God is not confined to a building or country or even time period. It consists of all believers. Titus 2:11 tells us that salvation is offered to all. Anyone who is willing to accept God's gift of salvation can be saved. Hence, the answer is "yes", it is possible that members of other churches are indeed saved. However, we would be cautious as to state that not all members of all churches are saved and not all churches are faithful in the teaching of God's Word. Unfortunately, there is no straightforward answer to this question as it deals with matters of the heart and only God can judge the hearts of men, only God can say if any person is truly saved.

The early church faced a similar issue, when the gospel first went out to the Gentiles. Many of the Jews refused to acknowledge the fact that Gentiles too could believe in the gospel and be saved, for they did not keep the Old Testament law. Peter then had to stand up and remind that it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ alone that anyone can be saved. If they believe in the true gospel, and receive the grace of God, then Gentiles too can be saved. Likewise, as long as a person believes in the full gospel, repents of his sin, then he too can be saved by the grace of our Lord.

The issue then is not so much about salvation, but it is a matter of obedience. Just because a church has believers in them, does not validate all their practices, or show that they are a good church. What we can do is to be discerning and wise. We have to be able to tell if a church is teaching and practising God's truth or not. We are instructed to "...try the spirits whether they are of God..." (1 John 4:1). We have been warned that in the last days, many false prophets will go into the world and lead many astray by telling them what they want to hear (1 Timothy 4:1). Many will be led astray. We can conclude that there will be many churches that will be unfaithful and that few churches that will stay true. The yardstick is not whether they are saved or not, but whether they obey God's Word in all that they do. This is what God desires of us, and this is what we must strive to do.

Thought: If I find that my church is not faithful, what must I do?

Prayer: Lord, give me wisdom to discern and give me a true church to worship in.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE THEN?

The emphasis of the Charismatic movement is one of experience, over the truth of God's Word. They believe that God speaks to us not only from the Bible but also by speaking “new” truths to the believer directly. The believer may see visions, or claim he heard God spoke to him or may even simply have a “feeling” that he has been imparted with some special truth. Hence, it is not uncommon to see individuals standing up unexpectedly in the middle of a Charismatic worship service declaring, “God spoke to me!” If asked why he did that, he would profess that he had a “feeling” that that was to be said and often attributed the action to the Holy Spirit.

While we may not share the beliefs of the Charismatics, we may sometimes wonder if we should act on a feeling within us that we sometimes experience. Perhaps it is a sudden feeling of passion, or excitement and we think that it may be Holy Spirit's prompting. Some of us call it a “gut feel”. Or, it may be a sickening feeling of distaste and think perhaps that too is a prompting from God to avoid something.

Feelings or experiences can sometimes be used by God. In Acts 2:37, when Peter preached, the listeners were pricked to the heart and were converted. It describes a feeling of pain that cannot be ignored and it was used by the Holy Spirit to move them into conversion. Hence, it is possible for God to cause an experience in the hearts of man. It is also possible for the Holy Ghost to impart a sense of uneasiness when we are confronted with sin, so that we may be discerning to avoid committing it. However, certain feelings can also be very wrong and do not originate from God but instead from a desperately wicked heart (Jeremiah 17:9). We should not always trust it and instead must always counter-check an experience or feeling with the more sure word of prophecy that we have in our hands - the Word of God (2 Peter 1:19).

Only if God's Word confirms what we feel is from God can we give it credit. Hence, we have to humbly check ourselves and perhaps, possess a healthy scepticism about our experiences. Any experience must definitely be within the confines of the Bible.

Thought: Can a wonderful feeling be completely sinful?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to trust You more than myself.

HOW CAN I BE SURE IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION?

Many inter-denominational fellowships believe that a single Bible passage can have different meanings and applications to different people. They believe that the Holy Spirit can move in a person and reveal different truths that are applicable to that person and reveal other truths useful for another person's needs all from the same passage of Scripture. This belief is unbiblical and wrong.

God's Word can have different applications but can have only one meaning. It is possible for a Christian to understand a passage more and more over time and hence, see deeper truths in that same passage, but the meaning does not change. 2 Peter 1:20-21 tell us this. The interpretation of Scripture is not different for different individuals, but is the same because it comes from the same single source; the Holy Ghost.

A natural question one may then ask next is, “How do I ensure that my interpretation is the correct one?” Well here are a few basic steps that we can apply to help us to be sure in our Bible interpretations:

1. To understand God's Word correctly we need God's help and hence an important first step is to be right with the Lord. Confess your sin and ask for cleansing by the precious blood of the Lamb. (Sin is a barrier and a hindrance to us being blessed by God.)
2. Have the highest view of God's Word, recognizing with humility that our ideas and those of others must submit to its authority.
3. Pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and a love for God's Word.
4. Be ready to put in time and effort.
5. Always check your understanding by seeing what other parts of scripture says. In other words, Scripture will interpret Scripture for you and you need to see the whole context.
6. Collect a library of bible study helps. Ask your pastor/Sunday School teacher for advice on what to obtain. Nowadays with modern technology, the internet will provide you with commentaries, maps, concordance and much of the information you need. But beware of unsound and unbiblical material, so please use with discernment.
7. Attend as many sound Bible studies and classes as you can.

Thought: How can I know if my interpretation is wrong?

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love Your Word.

WHY CAN'T I DELAY ACCEPTING CHRIST?

Christ shared a parable about a rich man who was busy planning and organizing how he could amass his wealth in the most effective manner so that he could be set for life. He had great plans and his hopes were high. Things were going his way and he could see his profits rolling in. Everything was very bright indeed and he was looking forward to a comfortable life ahead. But unknown to him, God was going to take him from this world that very night. His life shall be required of him. All that he planned and was looking forward to would have been in vain. The thought of death would have been far from his mind, but a tragic surprise awaited him. Death is a certainty. Except for those who have been or will be raptured by God into heaven, all will meet with death. However, what human beings do not know with certainty is when they will die. No one knows the time that he will have to face God to give an account for his life. Even so, we will not know in advance how we will die - whether it be a long drawn fatal disease or a sudden unexpected accident that takes away life in an instance. We do not know if we will have a chance to first believe before dying. This is something completely beyond our control.

If you know this fact, would you then delay in accepting Christ? Do you know when and how you will die? Can you plan to do all that is necessary before that time? Do you know if you will wake up again when you next sleep? Do you know if there will be a tomorrow for you? We know none of this. Only God knows.

What we do know is that we have the time now. We know we have the opportunity to come to believe in the gospel this very moment. Not later, not tomorrow but now. If you neglect this opportunity, you cannot be certain if there will be another. So why wait? Do not be as the rich fool who thinks he knows he will have a future. In the busyness of planning and preparing for his prosperous future, he neglected his soul. When he died, it was too late for his soul to be saved. Once death comes, the door or opportunity to believe will be gone. Then it closes and a person's fate is sealed and cannot be changed. Don't be like the certain rich man who "fared sumptuously" but ended up in hell and found that out (Luke 16:19-31). It is a decision of eternal consequence. Accept now!

Thought: What if I missed my last opportunity to be saved?

Prayer: Lord, I want to believe, help me to believe now.

HOW DO I KNOW I AM TRULY SAVED?

Some Christians doubt their salvation because they did not feel or witness anything spectacular. There were neither visions nor miracles of any kind and neither did their lives change instantaneously. In the parable of the soils, God’s Word was likened to seeds while the ground represented the hearts of man. Some seeds fell on stony ground, others among thorns, and none of these showed real growths, implying that there was no salvation. There was, however, one type of ground that did bear fruit. The seed flourished into a tree and fruit was produced; some 100, others 60 and 30 fold.

The parable teaches that in the life of one who is truly saved, there will certainly be fruit. These are changes in one’s life brought about by the Holy Spirit working in the soul of the believer. These are fruits that only a soul that is made alive can produce. For example the believer should now have an understanding and love for God’s Word, whereby he should echo the words of the Psalmist when he says God’s Word is sweeter than honey (Psalm 119:103). Another fruit is a changed life; one that is now inclined towards obeying God’s Word and abandoning his old sinful ways. There is also now a love for God’s people and a burden for the unsaved. There is also a desire to serve the Lord in any capacity as He calls us to. Even simple joy and peace in the heart can be one of the fruits of salvation (Galatians 5:22).

We should note though, that the amount of fruit can vary among individual believers. For instance, some have a greater understanding of God’s Word than others, but it does not mean then that the one with poorer understanding is not saved. In time, that understanding will grow with God’s help. So for some, spiritual fruit may appear few or weak, but there has to be at least some sign of fruit, for no fruit means no salvation.

Dear teen, is there fruit in your life? Do you find yourself reading the Bible more? Do you have a concern for those who are lost and can never go to heaven? Do spend some time examining yourself. For the past month or so, have you read your Bible consistently? How we thank God if your spiritual life and understanding is growing little by little each day.

Thought: What can slow the growth of a Christian?

Prayer: Lord, help me bear more fruit for Thee as I seek to obey You more.

WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

Do words like “*holy*” and “*sanctification*” sound foreign to you? They do not have to be! They come from the same root words (“*sanctus*” is a Latin word meaning “*holy*”). Many people have the impression that to be sanctified (meaning to be holy) means that you must go around looking solemn the whole day long, and saying no to the things that young people like to do like having a good basketball game or outing, or simply good humour. Is that true holiness? We should rather think of sanctification as being “*set apart*”. This means that, as children of God, we should not be “*conformed to this world*”, but “*transformed by the renewing of your mind*”.

There are two aspects of sanctification taught in the Scriptures. One is positional sanctification. The other is practical or progressive sanctification. In positional sanctification, God sets us apart by Himself, to Himself, and for Himself. When that happens, our position before God is deemed to be one of perfect righteousness, for He does not judge us for our sins, but sees the righteousness of Christ. All this takes place instantly when a person is saved by the grace of God. Practical sanctification is simply the process of us living out in practice what God has given to us positionally in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a lifelong struggle against sin, as we strive to obey the Lord in all things, and to conform to the image of Christ. Yet we know that it is not by our own efforts, but it is God himself who will “*sanctify you wholly*” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He is the one who will help us perfect or complete our sanctification, such that we can stand sanctified and holy at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is done through the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer’s life, for he will restrain, correct and guide us so that we would slowly and gradually become more like Christ.

To remind ourselves of our status as saints that are set apart, we would do well to memorise Romans 12:1-2. In the earlier chapters of Romans, Paul explained the wonderful plan of God – justification, sanctification, assurance of salvation, and glorification. Then he said, “*by the mercies of God*” – these mercies are His loving acts of salvation and daily blessings for us. Do you feel God’s mercy for you? If you do, then do you love Him in return? If you do, then “*sanctification*” comes naturally! If you love Him, you would want to identify with Him, think and act like His child, and separate yourself from the sins of those who do not know Him.

Thought: Christians are “*strangers and pilgrims*” on this earth!

Prayer: Lord, may I, by my everyday conduct, be a worthy witness to Your love.

MUST I BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

Yesterday we learned what sanctification is. I hope you are not intimidated by this “big word”! It is true, in a sense, that this is a big word – it expresses God’s “BIG ambition” for us! The Apostle Peter means the same thing when he wrote, “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 20:7).

I can understand if you are scared! How can human beings be holy! But, if God commands it, He will give us the “power” to be holy! How does He give us this “power”, this ability to be holy? The answer is in the verse for today, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*”. When we are filled with the Spirit, we will yield ourselves fully to the control of the Spirit. He will abundantly bless such a person with joy and ability to do much good work. Such a person will enjoy coming to church to worship God, and have fellowship with other Christians (Ephesians 5:18-20).

How do you know you are filled with the Spirit? Read the following verses (Ephesians 5:19-21), “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God*”. Can you see the contrast with somebody “*drunk with wine*”? A drunkard is under the influence of alcohol – we should rather be under the influence of the Holy Spirit! Somebody who loves God will naturally love to sing praises to God! He thanks God every day for blessings, big and small, even when things go badly (from a human point of view). He will not be proud (how can we be proud when all that we have comes from God?), and he is always ready to “*esteem other better than themselves*” (Philippians 2:3) – not because he is timid and fear other people, but because he fears God (not with cravenly fear, but the fear of offending a holy loving God).

Would you not earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you and guide your life?

Thought: Must I remember the exact date and time of my salvation before I am truly saved?

Prayer: Help me O God for I am a sinner! Make me more like Christ my LORD and Saviour that I may glorify His holy Name.

AM I A NEW CREATURE?

I must confess – this verse used to bother me. Paul wrote, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). I was converted in 1980, but, for many years afterwards, whenever I read this verse, I felt guilty! Frankly, even though I attended church regularly, I did not feel myself *“a new creature”*! Sometimes I even wondered whether I was truly converted.

But, thank God, I have come more and more to feel that I am a *“new creation”* (the word *“creature”* can also mean *“creation”* in Old English). You would remember that there are two types of *“sanctification”* – positional sanctification (when we were first converted), and progressive sanctification. So, I was *“a new creature”* when I came to believe in God, but I was still living life very much in the old ways – that was why I did not *“feel”* like a *“new creature”*. But God did not give up on me! The Holy Spirit worked in my heart through the Word of God and I was *“progressively sanctified”*, and I felt more and more like a child of God.. Now, indeed, I can say that the old has passed away; behold, the new has come (and continues to be renewed)!

A born again believer is said to be living in a new world. This is because God *“hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son”* (Colossians 1:13). Remember that *“the kingdom of his dear Son”* is also the kingdom of light. The Bible describes it as *“marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Therefore there is a great transformation.

Do you feel like you are God’s new creation? Have you given up- some bad habits? Do you have the love for the same things as your non-Christians friends? – I am sure you can think of plenty of things like watching TV programs and films and reading books which depict worldly passion. Do you have the same *“lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”* as them? Slowly but surely, as the new creature in Christ, you will flee from all these worldly and sinful lifestyle.

Thought: Christians are *“strangers and pilgrims”*. They are no longer citizens of this world, but are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Lord, You have promised that Your compassions are *“new every morning”*. So help me live like Your new creation more and more each day.

SINCE MY SINS ARE FORGIVEN, CAN I ENJOY SIN?

The answer to the question is, in a way, simple – Of course not! For the past 3 days, we have learned that a Christian is a person who has been sanctified (separated and righteous), the Holy Spirit is in him, and he is a new creature! So we are aliens and pilgrims in this world of sin – we just do not belong here! We are *"in the world but not of the world"*.

However, the fact of the matter is that although we are born again, Christians still do fall into sin. The Apostle John wrote, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). However, he also added, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*.

Our flesh often wants to have it both ways! – to have salvation, and continue to enjoy sin at the same time! But if we truly love God, we would not even think of such a thing! Sin should no longer be attractive to us, nor should we yearn to *'enjoy it'*. Instead, we should detest sin, and see it in the same light that our Lord see it, for sin was the very thing that brought Jesus to the cross, and caused Him to have to suffer the cross!

This wrong thinking of wanting to enjoy sin was such a big headache for Apostle Paul that he wrote the whole chapter 6 of Romans to refute it, telling us that now as believers, we are dead to sin, and should no longer live for sin! The key here, is that we must understand our position as a new creation in Christ. To be dead to sin means we are no longer tempted or allured by it. Just as a dead person is insensitive to the world, likewise one who is dead to sin is one who no longer has any inclination for the sin of the world. Instead, we have a new life in Christ, and we should therefore walk in this *'newness of life'* (Romans 6:4). Our desires and yearnings should now be for the things of Christ, for we live unto God. The things that we now enjoy are no longer the old sins of the past, but instead would be in being an *'instrument of righteousness unto God'* – in doing His will and glorifying the Lord who saved us!

Thought: Thank you Lord, for being such a merciful and forgiving God.

Prayer: Help me O God for I am a sinner! May you grant me the strength to say no to sin, and yes to righteousness!

WHY IS OBEDIENCE CRITICAL?

You would remember that the Sermon on the Mount was recorded in the Gospel of Matthew from Chapters 5-7. Earlier in chapter 7, Jesus said, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat”.*

That passage, and also today’s passage tells us that there are many who claim to be Christians (they call Jesus “Lord, Lord”) and expect to be saved, but they refuse to obey Him (they do not do “the will of my Father which is in heaven”, and they continue to walk in the “broad way” (living a worldly life of sin) that “leadeth to destruction”. Their end is certain, for they will be sadly rejected by God on the day of judgment, and Christ will say to them, *“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”.*

But how do you know whether you are “in” or “out” (in the Kingdom of heaven or out of it)? Listen to our Lord in the same passage (Matthew 7-18-20), *“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them”.* Your life and Christian conduct is the indicator as to whether you are known by God or not.

Are you producing fruit for the Lord? Are you a good tree or a corrupt tree? Can your friends, your parents see the fruit in you? What fruit? *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”* (Galatians 5:22-23a). For example, you show your love for the brethren by praying for them, writing encouraging notes to them, helping them when they have problems and remember to forgive them for any hurts they have done to you. These are simple signs in our life that you are living a life of obedience to God, and are bringing forth good fruit for Him. Obedience is certainly critical in a believer’s life, for it shows that one is truly born again. If you claim to be a Christian, then certainly, you will want to obey God and His Word.

Thought: Can I claim to be a Christian, but yet not obey God?

Prayer: Lord, help me to produce fruit for You and glorify You in my life.

WHY DO I STILL SIN?

Why do I still sin? Are you troubled by sin? Are you troubled by this question “Why do I still sin”? You may ask yourself, “Am I really a Christian? Since we learn that the Holy Spirit lives in me, why do I still sin? Does this mean that I am not a Christian, that I am not saved?”

The Bible tells us that even after we are saved, we are still in our fleshly bodies, and continue to have to struggle against sin – but that does not make us lose our salvation. For example you may be still tempted to watch a movie or two but as time goes on, you will realise that the worldly lifestyle is displeasing to God, affects your walk with God and you will have no desire to go to the movies anymore.

Paul spoke of this contention in Romans 7:22-23, *“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”*. So, we have “another law” in “our members” (our mortal body, which will only be changed when we are resurrected to an immortal body), which cause us to continue sinning.

This is indeed a great mystery. Why does God not abolish sin entirely in us while we are in this mortal body? Could it be that He wants us to be tried, so we can be purified? Is this life still a battleground for us so that we can develop our “spiritual muscles”? Job seemed to think so for he said, *“...when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”* (Job 23:10).

Though we may still sin, but we should focus on God’s gifts to us to overcome sin! Read the next few verses and be encouraged! *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin”* (Romans 7:24-25). Yes we still have the propensity to sin within us, but with the Holy Spirit within us, we have the ability to overcome this desire to sin, and serve God instead. It will be a constant struggle that we will have all the days of our lives, but with God on our side, we can have the victory!

Thought: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Prayer: Lord, may You fill me with the Holy Spirit that I may be able to have victory over sin!

CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?

Yesterday, we dealt with the fleshly nature that is still in us. So we continue to sin, though we should always repent, and be “*transformed by the renewing*” of our mind, so that we sin less and less as we mature in the faith, as we know God better day by day, and love Him more and more. However, you may wonder sometimes, especially when we sin, whether you can lose your salvation. The bible’s answer is very clear: NO! There are many reassuring passages in the bible to convince us of this. One of these is from John 10:27-28, telling us clearly that true believers can never lose their salvation, for we are safe and secure in the hands of God.

So, first, you must know that you are saved. Ask yourself – are you His sheep? If you are His sheep, you will hear His voice, and you will follow Him. Then – how do you know your salvation is secure? Jesus says, “*I give unto them eternal life*” – so the security comes from Jesus! He is the one who created the heaven and the earth. He is the one who gives us eternal life! Our security (eternal life) comes from Him, not by our own works! Meditate upon the verse and you will realise how secure the children of God are. There is the promise of eternal life. Then we are told we will never perish. The reason is that we are in the hands of Christ. To be in the hands of Christ is safe enough. But see the Father’s hand over the hand of Jesus. You are now inside two hands. No man is able to pluck us out of the Father’s hand, who is God Almighty. What security!

Dear reader, let us joyfully rest on these blessed words. Let us be joyful that our heavenly Father loves us so much and He will see us safely home to heaven. As the elect of God, it does not depend on us to struggle to live a holy life to earn our salvation. No. The elect of God will never lose their salvation because it is God who preserve us to the very end. God’s special providential preservation of His people will cause them to persevere in their faith to the very end. A person who is truly born again will reach heaven one day because God always keeps His promises and He never fails. Be the joyful Christian who no longer worries whether he is truly saved, who no longer worries whether he will lose his salvation. Give Him praise day after day for this free and unchangeable love of God that will keep us safe to the very end.

Thought: Once saved, always saved. What a glorious assurance!

Prayer: Lord, thank You for your great salvation, and the assurance of the “perseverance of the saints”.

CAN MY SINS BE TOO MANY FOR GOD TO FORGIVE?

The Apostle John wrote the Epistle of 1 John when he was very old! Why did he write the Epistle? In 1:4 he explains, *"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."* It's obvious that God wants us to be joyful as the Apostle Peter wrote, *"...joy unspeakable and fully of glory"*! Can we be full of this joy, if we constantly worry about our sin, and continue to feel the condemnation of God upon us, even after we have repented? Can we ever sin so much that God no longer wants to forgive us?

In verse 8, he wrote, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"*. No one can say that he has no sin. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). Yes it is true that even after we are saved, we may still sin from time to time, and there are times when we feel that we have sinned so badly, that there can no longer be any redemption for us.

But then verse 9 assures us and gives us the comfort, that *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9).

God's word is full of reassurance like these! Keep them close to your heart and you will find great comfort for your soul. Look to the Lamb of God! There is a place for introspection in the Christian life, but too much introspection just produces a Christian who is morbidly depressed! Focus on God rather than yourself. Remember David. Remember Peter. Have you committed the sins of adultery and murder like David? Have you openly denied Jesus like Peter? God forgave them. Can He forgive you of your many sins? His abundant mercies are higher than heaven and deeper than the ocean. You can't get over it or under it!

Dear reader, God can break every fetter. That is how powerful our God is. Not only is He merciful to forgive us our sins if we genuinely confess them and are repentant but also powerful to break every bondage of sin. Come in brokenness and He will mightily forgive, cleanse and restore.

Thought: His love is greater than our sins!

Prayer: Lord, You forgave David, as You forgave Peter, since they had genuine repentance. Help me not to sin; but when I do, help me to have this tender conscience, that I will repent and come back to You.

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”

HOW DO I DEAL WITH BESETTING SINS?

In Hebrews 12:1, Paul looks at the Christian journey in life as a race. Many godly and courageous men of faith have gone before us and they are our glorious examples of victory over sin.

What do you do to win a race? You remove everything that you do not need (*“let us lay aside every weight”*) and especially things that slows you down (*“the sin which so easily beset us”*), so you can run freely and win the race! These sins are our baggage that slows us down in the spiritual race of living for Christ. The word *“beset”* means literally *“to place around or to stand around”* – something that is placed around us so we can barely move! So, it is not something that pops up in front of you now and then, but it is always there – a habitual sin!

Do you have besetting sin? All of us are unique with our own weakness and struggles, and so we are faced with different types of besetting sins. Mine could be laziness, yours could be impatience. The danger is that it can be so much a part of us that we excuse it away by saying, “It’s just me, I was born with it, I can’t help it”. But if you say so, you are in practice blaspheming God. Remember Philipians 4:3 (*“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”*) or Matthew 19:26 (*“...with God all things are possible”*).

Dear teen, how do I deal with besetting sins? Look to Jesus, *“the author (founder) and finisher of our faith”*. Read His words, understand them, and obey them daily, pray to know Him better and to ask Him to help you in your walk with God, and grow. When you know God truly and love Him, sins becomes abhorrent. They will melt away, they will no longer *“surround”* you and slow you down in your race, and you can see God at the finishing line! This race also calls for endurance and discipline. As Jesus endured the pain and agony of the cross, we too need to despise the little ills and inconveniences of our life. Be strong to endure hardship and suffer pain if need be. Let us fight the good fight of faith and soon we will taste the victory.

Thought: As I learn to love God more and more, worldly sins would be less and less attractive to me.

Prayer: Lord, help me to glorify You daily by not sinning.

HOW CAN I LEAD A HOLY LIFE?

I hope by now you are certain of your salvation, and have a sincere desire to lead a holy life that is pleasing unto the Lord. However, perhaps you are still unsure of how. You have been trying hard, but there are times when you still stumble and do things that are displeasing to God. Don't worry, you are not alone! The Lord understands our struggle, and He has given to us all we need to accomplish this goal.

Today's passage tells us that we are longer servants of sin, but are now servants of God; and so we should produce fruit! We should live holy lives. Prior to our salvation, we were 'free from righteousness'. This means that there was no way at all that we could do anything that could be deemed righteous before our holy God. All our lives resulted in were shameful fruits that end in death. However, when we were saved, we were freed from the bondage of sin, and now able to have fruit unto holiness. What this means is that every believer is certainly capable to lead a holy life as servants of God.

Are you “scared” of the word “holy”? It just means that we are no longer citizens of this world – we are separated unto God, citizens of the kingdom of God. This is “*positional holiness*”. God has given us the ability to live a life of “*practical holiness*”. How you may ask? The Word of God and the Holy Spirit are the tools that every believer has to enable him to walk in the paths of righteousness and to live lives in obedience to God.

Dear teen, cultivate the fruit of the Holy Spirit. These are the qualities of a mature believer. Seek to grow in love not only for God but for His people and also to the wider circle of unbelievers who are condemned to hell. Experience the joy and peace that God sends to those who trust in Him. When times are bad, stay calm and pray. You will soon experience His presence and the peace that passes all understanding. Your friends will be very surprised. That's the way to shine for Jesus. As Jesus went about doing good, seek to do at least a good deed a day. These are some of the countless ways you can gradually lead a holy life, full of the blessings of the Lord.

Thought: To live a holy life is such a logical thing to do!

Prayer: Lord, help me to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).

WHAT IS PURITY?

In this last letter of Paul before he was executed by the Romans, Paul wrote to Timothy, “*Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*”

In this verse, Paul encourages Timothy to:

1. Flee youthful lusts (passions that are common to the younger generations – like impatience and sexual sins)
2. Follow (pursue) the Christian virtues of righteousness, faith, charity, peace
3. Do these with “*them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*” What is called for here is a sanctified, untainted, single-minded dedication to God. Our Lord says, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*”. God Himself is the epitome of pureness, and it is only with pure heart, pure eyes that we can see (know) Him! Why did Paul ask Timothy to do these with other Christians of like mind? I think it is because, as Christians, we all need mutual support in our walk with the Lord. The Roman world during the time of Paul and Timothy was a very sinful world (e.g. adultery, fornication and homosexuality were all rampant) and it is difficult to stand firm alone. Likewise we must support each other in our quest for purity.

How do we have pure mind, pure thoughts, glorying to God? Listen to Paul, “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*” (Philippians 4:8)

Dear teen, guard your mind. Paul taught in Philippians 4:8 that the Christian’s mind should be focused on the great truths of Scripture. Pure thoughts come from thinking on those things that are true and all of God’s Word is truth. Be careful therefore what you read. Do not waste your time reading those materials that are not true to Scripture. As we meditate on the things that are honest and just, these thoughts will guide our actions. The end result will be a life that that is pure and good.

Thought: We should not be conformed to this world.

Prayer: Lord, help me to immerse myself so much in Thy love that I will always be pure, and thus glorify Thy name daily.

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