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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

*Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.*

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without  
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

**Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World**

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# ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

"A declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us."  
Luke 1:1

By

**Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.**

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## **DEDICATION**

This book is lovingly dedicated to two laymen, my father and mother, whose loyalty to Christ and the Christian Church has always been an inspiration to me.

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This little book is a presentation of the essential elements of Christian doctrine. It has been prepared at the request of the Commission on Christian Service Training of the Church of the Nazarene and is designed for use in classes in our local churches and in summer institutes where a short course is desired.

The author is eminently qualified for his task. In addition to his formal training, he is possessed of a richly mature Christian character and has been for many years a teacher of the truths herein expounded. We commend this book both to the earnest student and to the average reader as one meriting the closest attention.

J. GLENN GOULD, Chairman,  
Commission on Christian Service Training

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## **CONTENTS**

I

GOD

II

MAN

III

CHRIST

IV

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTION

V

THE BIBLE

VI

THE FUTURE

\*\*\*\*\*

# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

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## **Chapter I GOD**

The word theology was first used by Plato. It means a discourse or study about God. Hence, from the Christian standpoint, it has come to signify in the narrower sense the doctrine of God. In the broader sense it means the whole range of Christian doctrine. Since the doctrine of God is, from many standpoints, the most important Christian belief, its name, theology, has come to be taken as the name for all of the doctrines of the Christian Church. Now, when Christians speak of theology, they include beliefs about man, Christ, the Holy Spirit in action, the Bible, and the future, as well as God. It is with theology in this broader sense that our discussion here is concerned, and it begins properly with the doctrine of God.

### **The Existence of God**

The Bible makes no attempt to prove that God exists. However, Christian thinkers have developed certain arguments for the existence of God. As Christians we should know something about these proofs and thus be able to give a reason for the faith which lies within us. These proofs are all of the same general nature — they argue from effect to cause. This type of reasoning may be illustrated as follows: If you should ask how a sapling in the front yard had been broken off, you would probably be satisfied if you were told that a ten-year-old boy had done it. You would reason that the cause which had been mentioned, a ten-year-old boy, was sufficient for the effect-broken off sapling. On the other hand, if you should inquire as to how a large tree had been suddenly laid low, you would not accept the explanation that a ten-year-old boy had pushed it over. The cause in this case would not be adequate for the effect. But it would be very different if you learned that a tornado had swept that way the night before and had blown the large tree over. This explanation would not be doubted by you, because you would recognize at once that the cause was powerful enough to produce the effect.

What is the effect involved in the situation before us? Non-living creation or the physical universe, and living creation or plants, animals, and man. No one can deny the fact of these existences. They are here and could not have just happened. They are effects of something.

Take the physical universe, for instance. Its existence must be accounted for. A sufficient cause must be assumed. Man could not cause any physical thing to come into being. Nothing that is found in an automobile or in any other product of man's ingenuity is a creation, it is only an assemblage or compound. Therefore, something or someone greater than man must have caused the existence of the physical universe.

Not only must the existence of the universe be explained, but also its vastness. And from what the astronomers tell us, the extent of the universe staggers the human imagination. Just one illustration is enough. Our galaxy, that group of heavenly bodies to which our solar system belongs,

may have as many as 100 billion stars in it. Some of these stars are much smaller than our sun and some much larger. But this is not all of the story. They tell us that there are at least one billion galaxies similar to our own. We must provide a cause sufficient, not only for the existence, but also for the incomprehensible area of this universe of which we are a part. If man is not able to create even the least bit of the physical universe, how much greater, then, than man must be the creator or cause of this immeasurable effect.

Another factor which we find in the universe is order. The sun and moon and stars have definite orbits and they move in these orbits always at the same rate of speed. A train may not be on time, but the heavenly bodies are never late. A comet's return can be exactly predicted many years before its arrival. The creator of the physical universe must be an adequate cause not only for the existence and vastness of the universe, but also for its wonderful order and precision.

The physical universe manifests still another marvelous characteristic and that is purpose or fitness. We see this fact in evidence on every hand. There are fish with fins for swimming, and there is water in which they can swim. There are eyes to see, and there is plenty that is worth while which one can see. There are ears to hear, and there is music to be heard. There are feet to walk, and an earth upon which they may exercise themselves. The cause of this existent, vast, and orderly universe has also introduced purpose into it. He could not have done this if He had not been capable of purposive action and therefore a person. More than this, He must be endowed with superhuman intelligence and power. Otherwise, He would not be a cause sufficient for the effect.

So far, we have accounted for only the physical universe. This is but a part of that which exists and, from the viewpoint of the other part, is insignificant. We refer to the living universe of which man is the climax. As the highest form of the living universe, he embodies in himself all of the features which are common to the creatures beneath him, as well as the features which are peculiar to him. Because of this, we shall seek for a cause which is sufficient for him, and in so doing will of course have a cause which is adequate for all other living existences.

If man cannot create the nonliving, he surely could not bring into existence the living. A greater than man would have to create man. There must be a sufficient cause for the existence and complexity of man's physical organism. The same must be true as to the order and purposiveness or fitness which is found in his physiological constitution. Then as we ascend the scale, we find that he is a creature with sensitivity and intelligence. A sufficient explanation for these must be found. Add to these characteristics, the supreme endowments of his personality — his morality and his religion, and we have included all of his personal attributes. The cause of man must be adequate for these unique and kingly qualities. The only rational conclusion, then, is that the origin of man must lie in a person who is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. Only such a person could create man with his wonderful physical mechanism, his mental capacities, and his moral and religious possibilities.

## **The Nature of God**

(1) God is a personal spirit. God is a person. He is neither a thing nor an animal. Human beings are persons and not things or animals. God is like human beings in this respect, except that He is a much greater person than any human being. God is an infinite person, while human beings are only

finite or limited persons. A person is a creature who can deliberately make resolutions or formulate ideals and consciously choose in the direction of the same. In other words, he can work toward ends or objectives and know when he is doing it that what he is doing is intended. A young man is called to preach the gospel. In view of this fact, he plans a course of study in a Christian college in preparation for this work. He can deliberately set this goal and move toward its achievement. Those who have chosen other professions or one of the trades are constantly following a like course of action. In this they are godlike, and to this extent God is akin to them, that is, a person.

There are many passages in the Bible which substantiate the fact that God is a person. These are those which ascribe to God personal characteristics, such as love, holiness, wisdom, and power. It is not necessary to give specific scriptures in this connection, for plenty of these will be cited as we discuss the particular qualities which constitute the personality of God.

God is unlike man in that He is pure spirit. God does not have a body. Man's spirit expresses itself through a body, at least at present. This is man's regular way of life now. With God it is not so. God's regular life is wholly spiritual. God may temporarily express himself through a body or through some other physical form, but this is not His usual manner of living. When the Bible speaks of God as having eyes or an arm or some other part of the human body, it is using figurative and not literal language. God has nothing about Him in His normal state which can be seen by the natural eye or touched by the natural finger. "God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

(2) God is one. That God is one is specifically stated or implied in many places in the Bible. "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Isaiah 45:5). A few of the other passages which may be referred to in this connection are as follows: Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:4; Galatians 3:20; I Timothy 2:5. The fact that God is one, means that there are ultimately not many gods. It also indicates that God is the source of everything else, either directly or indirectly. Nothing else has existed from all eternity with Him. The question naturally arises as to the origin of sin. This will be discussed later. All that can be stated now is that sin is not eternal.

The oneness of God is important because it guarantees the absoluteness or supremeness of God. If we destroy His Unity by making Him many or by holding that someone or something else has existed along with Him from all eternity, we thereby destroy the fact that He is ultimately supreme in the universe.

(3) God is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. We speak of men as having certain characteristics, such as, perseverance, energy, intellectuality, morality, and cheerfulness. God also has characteristics or attributes which describes His nature. He is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. From a rational standpoint, it seems essential that a God whom men would be willing to worship should have at least these characteristics. If God were limited in power or knowledge or defective in goodness, He would be too much like human persons to inspire worship.

What does it mean for God to be all-powerful? It means that He can do anything which is not contrary to His Nature or His purpose. Since God is all-wise as well as all-powerful, He could not on the basis of His all-powerfulness do that which manifest ignorance or short-sightedness rather



than wisdom. The same is true as to His all-goodness. God's all-powerfulness does not mean that He can do wrong, for such action would conflict with the fact that He is all-good. God's purpose resulted in the creation of free moral agents, such as angels and men. Thus, He limited Himself by bringing into existence those who could choose in opposition to Him and His plans. These limitations of God are internal and not external. They are a part of Him and could not in any sense be said to have been thrust upon Him.

God is all-wise. This means that God knows Himself fully, both as to His nature and as to that which may grow out of His will. Added to this, He has a complete knowledge of the world, both as to its past and its future; for all time is present with Him. Finally, it carries with it the thought that He knows free creatures fully, including what they will do before they act. This last point is where the greatest difficulty arises. How can God know beforehand what free moral agents will do? If He does have foreknowledge of free acts, does not this mean that those acts will have to be? If this is the case, then there is no such a thing as a free act. The Bible certainly holds that man is free and at the same time it surely teaches that God has foresight of events which undoubtedly depend upon the free acts of men. There are not many who are inclined to deny the former today, and he who denies the latter eliminates from both the Old and New Testaments certain cases of prophecy in which there is distinct prediction. The difficulty in harmonizing God's foreknowledge with man's free will may be lessened somewhat if we remember that God's knowledge is very different from ours. He does not get His knowledge by reasoning or inference. He does not have to follow such a roundabout method. He arrives at His knowledge immediately or directly.

God is all-good. This is His most important characteristic. Above all else, men want the God whom they worship to be good. They could tolerate a limitation on His power and His knowledge more than they could permit His goodness to be imperfect. The character of God must be unquestioned. For God to be all-good means that His motives or inner life are what they should be, as well as His deeds. From another standpoint, it means that God never desires anything for finite beings except that which will be for their highest good in the long run. In accordance with this, He never does anything to or for them except that which, if received as it could and should be, would promote what is truly best for them. This all goodness also includes in itself the thought that all of the factors of goodness are in God to the highest degree and that they are perfectly balanced in relation to each other. One phase of His goodness never expresses itself at the expense of the other. If we may express it in a somewhat piece-meal and easily misunderstood manner, we may assert that whereas a mother's love may outrun her sense of justice, divine love never does.

Is there Bible ground for believing that God is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good? There is plenty of such evidence. The following statements substantiate the fact that He is all-powerful: "I am the Almighty God" (Genesis 17:1); He can do as He pleases or can accomplish His pleasure, (Psalm 115:3 and Isaiah 46:10); there is nothing too hard for Him, (Jeremiah 32:17); and all things are possible with Him, (Matthew 19:26). Add to these a most significant passage in Daniel 4:35: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

The Bible also clearly teaches that God is all-wise. The psalmist declares that the Lord knows him completely — his thoughts, his words, and his ways (Psalm 139:1-6). The same writer states that God's understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5). The author of Hebrews asserts that all creatures and all things are manifest to God (Hebrews 4:13). Add to these references the many passages which teach God's foreknowledge, and it is difficult to deny that God is all-wise. (See Isaiah 48:3; Job 14:5; John 6:64; Acts 15:18; and Romans 8:29).

The Bible often speaks of God as being holy and righteous. From such statements we can infer that God is all-good. The God of the Bible is "a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

In Isaiah's vision of God's glory, the seraphims cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3). A similar note of praise is found in Revelation 4:8. Christ in His great prayer addresses the Father as holy and righteous (John 17:11, 25). Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, and yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

(4) God as Father. Jesus gives us the highest truth about God. He teaches us that the Christian should think of God as Father. In several places in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as elsewhere, Jesus speaks of "our Father," "thy Father," and when addressing His disciples, "your Father" (Matthew 5:44, 45; 6:1, 32; 23:9; Mark 11:25, 26). This new truth which Jesus brought inaugurates a new era in God's dealings with men. In the Old Testament, God is not usually thought of as Father. There the followers of God were His subjects and He was their king or ruler. In the New Testament, the disciples of Christ are the children of God. Each child may think of God as his Father. This brings the follower of God into a new world. Under the old system, only a few could come directly into the presence of God, and that only occasionally. This is the case with kings and rulers today. The masses do not have direct access to them. This is also in harmony with the ceremonial scheme, which is found in the Old Testament.

In accordance with it, only the high priest was permitted to go into the holy of holies where God's very presence was; and that privilege was granted to him only once a year. Under the new system which Jesus established, God's followers are His children; and as His children they can come into His immediate presence at any time. Prayer — communion with their heavenly Father — becomes the very life of His children. This Fatherhood of God means that God values us as an earthly father values his children and is as ready to help us. Yea, it means much more than this. He is an infinite Father, and thus can love and assist us far more fully and ably than an earthly father. The closing section of the sixth chapter of Matthew gives us a beautiful description of God's care for His children (Matthew 6:24-34). The child of God need not be anxious, for the God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies will not pass by His own children.

(5) God is triune. God is one, as we have already seen, but He is also triune. He is three in one, a complex substance or being. Bible readers are accustomed to the three dispensations — the dispensation of God the Father, that of the Son, and that of the Holy Spirit. These dispensations are historical or temporal. It must be remembered, however, that they do not give us the whole truth as to the Trinity.

These successive manifestations represent distinctions which are eternal in the Godhead. God was not first God the Father, then God the Son, and then God the Holy Spirit. These are only successive expressions of what God always has been and always will be. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit always have been and always will be. The decision of one of the early church councils refused to divide the divine substance or confuse the divine persons. The Son is eternally generated by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son from all eternity. Thus, we have from all eternity one substance and three persons.

Certain passages in the New Testament point clearly to the fact of the Trinity. Matthew's form of the great commission speaks of baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) Paul in his benediction clearly differentiates between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 13:14). In Romans 8 the distinction is brought out several times. The eleventh verse reads thus: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Here we have the Spirit, the Christ, and Him (God the Father) who raised up Jesus from the dead.

The greatest center for the teaching as to the Trinity, however, is found in John, chapters 14, 15, and 16. In these chapters the Holy Spirit, Christ, and God the Father are all given prominent places as distinct persons. The climax is reached in John 14:15-17. In this passage of three verses, Jesus promises that for those who love Him and keep His commandments, He will pray the Father and He will give them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth. Surely Jesus, in this case, differentiates between Himself and the Father and also between Himself and the Holy Spirit, as well as between the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the two great mysteries of the Christian religion. How can three persons be so united as to constitute only one substance? This question cannot be fully answered by finite minds. However, there are certain considerations which should help us at this point. In the first place, we should remember that we are in a world where oneness is often more than one. The universe is one, and yet it is many. The human body is one, and yet it is many. Man is one, and yet he is body and soul or body and soul and spirit. The human mind manifests itself as feeling, will, and intellect. Of course these illustrations are but intimations of the oneness that is three in the case of the Trinity, but perhaps they will help us in this connection.

In the second place, the divine organism in all of its infinite richness or wealth of consciousness demands self-awareness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in order to adequately express itself. Does this seem more beyond reason than that finite man should demand feeling, willing, and intellect in order to function adequately?

In the third place, we should not reject the doctrine of the Trinity merely because it cannot be fully comprehended; for consistency would force us to do likewise with everything which we cannot fully understand. Such a principle would soon rule out all action, as well as all belief, because we are beset by mystery on every hand. We can describe the behavior of electricity, but who can tell us what it is in its innermost essence? William Jennings Bryan was right when he declared that we are too prone to permit mystery to disturb us in the church, whereas we ignore it in the kitchen.

## **The Deity of Jesus Christ**

The deity of Jesus Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit come naturally under the study of the Trinity. Every proof for these two truths is a proof for the fact of the Trinity.

In our study of the deity of Jesus Christ, we begin with Christian experience. The Christian believer's life has been transformed by Christ, and this result is so significant that it cannot be attributed to anyone who is less than God. The redeeming activity of Christ is an effect which only a Divine One could have caused. Here lies the real cause of man's belief in His deity, from New Testament times until the present. Whenever and wherever men are saved by Christ, then and there they will acclaim that He is very God. There is a sense in which this is the proof of all proofs; for, in the last analysis, men cannot be argued into believing the fact that Christ is God. They must experience the fact that Christ is God, if they would get their feet down on the one and sure foundation.

Another evidence of Christ's deity is the Christian movement. It is with us and it involves millions of people and many millions of dollars. An authority in the field of the history of civilization has declared that Christianity, through the Apostle Paul, became the most tremendous power in history. St. Paul, according to his own testimony, secured his power and inspiration from Christ. How, then, are we to explain the rise and unprecedented development of the Christian movement? Canon Liddon answered this question some years ago. According to him, the explanation is not to be found in the reasons for the success of other or false religions. They have had many adherents, but their vision has never been world-wide and they have never touched so many different peoples and continents as Christianity. He also rules out Gibbon's five famous causes for the success of Christianity. They are as follows: The zeal of the early Christians, the doctrine of the future life, the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church, the pure and austere morals of the first Christians, and the union and discipline of the Christian republic. Liddon rightly adds: "But surely each of these causes points at once and irresistibly to a cause beyond itself." <sup>[1]</sup>

These characteristics and beliefs of the early Christians must be explained, and they cannot be explained by any natural means. The hypothesis of a favorable crisis, like Gibbon's cause, is excluded. The success of the Christian movement cannot be explained on the basis that it appeared at a critical time in the history of the world. Such an explanation ignores the hostility of both Judaism and Paganism — two strongly entrenched religions of that day. This leaves us but one answer. The success of the Christian movement is to be explained by the deity of its Founder. "The truth which really and only accounts for the establishment in this our human world of such a religion as Christianity, and of such an institution as the Church, is the truth that Jesus Christ was believed to be more than man, the truth that Jesus Christ is what men believed Him to be, the truth that Jesus Christ is God." <sup>[2]</sup>

Let us mention several other important proofs for the deity of Jesus Christ, to which we can give only passing notice. They are His miracles — His power over nature, all manner of disease, and life itself; His teaching — never man spake like He did; His character with its sinlessness and its positive righteousness. We thank God for these evidences. They point undeniably to One who was very God of God.

Christ's unique attitude toward men is another proof of His deity. His favorite title for Himself was "Son of Man." He undoubtedly loved this name because it emphasized His humanity and thus brought Him near to men. He loved men and wanted them to feel that He was one with them. Further, this title signified the fact that He was the Race-Man, the Son of Humanity, the second Adam, and as such stood in a relation to man that had never been paralleled before. This is in harmony with His teaching that He was to die for men, and on the basis of this death forgive their sins and thus bring rest to the weary and heavy laden (John 10:11; Mark 10:45; Matthew 26:28; Mark 2: 1-11). In fact, He taught that He alone was able to supply all of man's spiritual needs (John 4:13; 10:10; 14:6). He called on men not only to obey Him, but also to love Him above everything and everybody else (Luke 6:46; John 21:22; Matthew 10:37). Moreover, He did not hesitate to imply or teach that His authority was final for men (Matthew 7:29). This unusual and all but inconceivable attitude toward men was climaxed by His statement that He was to be their final judge (John 5:22; Matthew 25:31-46). A mere man could not make these claims as to men or take such attitudes toward them.

Another significant proof for the deity of Jesus Christ is His unique relation to the Father. He clearly teaches in the Synoptic Gospels, that He stands in a relation to God the Father which is not shared by anyone else. "He never addresses God as 'our Father.' He frequently says 'my Father,' (Matthew 7:21; 10:32; 12:50). He never refers to Himself as 'a son of God,' but he often refers to Himself as 'the Son.' The most notable passage is that in Matthew 11:27: 'All things are delivered unto me of my Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.' This passage is the most remarkable found anywhere in the Synoptic Gospels on this subject. It declares that Jesus sustains to the Father an extraordinary relation; possesses unparalleled knowledge of the Father; and performs a unique function in revealing the Father. He correlates His own knowledge of God with God's knowledge of Him. He claims to possess 'all things' from the Father. His own consciousness dwells completely in the divine consciousness. The center of His own will coincides with the center of God's will. Doctor Denney remarks on the passage: 'The sentence as a whole tells us plainly that Jesus is both to God and man what no other can be.'"

This position is also amply verified by the teaching of Jesus in John's Gospel. Here Jesus declares that He and the Father are one (John 10:30), that no one come unto the Father but by Him (John 14:9), that he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father, and that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 14:9, 10). This unity of the Son with the Father is more than a oneness of purpose and life. It is a unity of nature or essence as well. In fact, it is difficult to understand how the former could be possible without the latter.

The last proof which we shall offer for the deity of Jesus is His pre-existence. More than once He refers to His having come down from heaven (John 3:13; 6:33, 44-51).

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The last proof which we shall offer for the deity of Jesus is His pre-existence. More than once He refers to His having come down from heaven (John 3:13; 6:33, 44-51). These, as well as many other similar passages, imply His pre-existence. Let us connect with these, five great passages which directly teach the pre-existence of Jesus — two in the Gospel of John, two in Paul's epistles, and one in Hebrews. In John 1:1-3 we have these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." The term "Word" in this passage refers to Jesus Christ. Anyone who reads the remainder of the chapter cannot deny this. This "Word" was God and was in the beginning with God. He has existed forever in fellowship with God the Father. In John 17, Jesus, on the eve of His crucifixion, utters His great prayer to the Father. In the fifth verse he says: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Here again He definitely speaks of His pre-existence, the fact that He existed before the world was. The whole prayer cannot be understood without assuming that Jesus was pre-existent.

Paul, in that sublime passage in Philippians 2:5-11, covers the whole circuit of Christ's existence. He begins in the sixth verse with Jesus' re-existence — "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Then in the next two verses, he describes the humiliation of Jesus, the fact that He became man and suffered death on the cross — "but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He concludes with His present state, His exaltation — "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This passage from Philippians just as surely teaches the pre-existence of Jesus as it does His humiliation on earth and His present exaltation in heaven.

A passage in Colossians 1:15-17, sets before us Christ in relation to the universe. It is declared that Christ existed before all things and that all things were created by Him and for Him. Besides, it is asserted that all things consist by or in Him. Such a Christ would certainly have to be pre-existent. In Hebrews 1:1, 2, a similar teaching is given. The worlds are made by Christ and all things are upheld by the word of His power.

When the truth of the pre-existence of Christ is combined with Christ's own teaching as to His and the Father's oneness, it becomes still more conclusive as an argument for His deity. With this we rest the case for His deity. The arguments which we have offered are as follows: Christian experience; the Christian movement; Christ's miracles, teaching, and character; His unique attitude toward men; His unique relation to the Father; and finally, His pre-existence.

Back in the fourth century the Christian church faced the greatest crisis in its history. "Now Arianism offered to these redeemed men, worshipping Christ — what? A creature—a being who actually had commenced to live; a being made by a swift, potent volition of Almighty God; a being that could be duplicated — yes, duplicated as often as God might wish to will it — duplicated as easily as archangels or men or planets can be duplicated — Arianism offered to these redeemed men worshipping Christ that creature! Surely they had to reject the offer. Their rejection of all creaturehood in Christ was not only a redemptional consistency, but also a redemptional necessity. It was not so much their theology which was in danger as their Christian experience itself. Indeed, I myself believe that had Arianism been triumphant the Christian faith would have been swept entirely away." <sup>[3]</sup> This brings out the importance of the deity of Christ. If the Christian church in the fourth century had made Christ less than God, that is, if the view of Arius had finally triumphed, this discussion of Christian doctrine would not now be in the process of being written. There would be no Christian church today. But, thank God, Athanasius stood against Arius. He and his view finally gained the ascendancy and the following epoch — making words were written into the Creed as to the nature of Christ: "Very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." This was the Declaration of Independence of the Christian Church and Curtis was right when he wrote thus: "Every Christian man should be trained to understand the conflict with Arianism just as every citizen of the republic should be trained to understand the Declaration of Independence." <sup>[4]</sup>

### **The Personality of the Holy Spirit**

The doctrines of the personality of the Holy Spirit and the deity of Jesus Christ are closely bound up with that of the Trinity. A person cannot deny either of these and still believe in the Trinity. Neither can he reject the doctrine of the Trinity and continue to retain a belief in the deity of Jesus Christ or the personality of the Holy Spirit.

You will notice that we speak of the deity of Jesus Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. We do this because the personality of the former and the deity of the latter have seldom been questioned. Most people, even when they have denied the deity of Jesus, have been ready to accept the belief that He was a person who lived and walked on this earth. On the other hand, most of those who have faith in the Holy Spirit as a person have been ready to declare Him divine. He is usually thought of as a divine person or else as a mere influence. Thus the real battle has always been over

the deity of Jesus and the personality of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason we confined our previous discussion to the deity of Jesus and now limit this section to a consideration of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

For proofs of the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person, we turn at once to the Bible. There is teaching in the Old Testament as to the Holy Spirit, but we shall confine our study to the New Testament. The passages which teach this truth may be divided into two groups: Those which teach that the Holy Spirit reacts to us only as a person would and those which indicate that we may react to Him only as we would to a person. Let us notice the former type first. These reactions are certainly only such activities in relation to men as could not be ascribed to things or animals. The Spirit is described as the sovereign distributor of the spiritual gifts. He divides them to every man severally as He will (I Corinthians 12:4-11). In Romans, the Spirit is set forth as the source of Christ's and the Christian's resurrection, sons of God are led by the Spirit, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; and He "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:11, 14, 16, and 26).

In the Gospel of John, chapters 14, 15, and 16, Jesus gives us the most definite teaching that there is for the personality of the Holy Spirit. Here the Spirit's work in behalf of man is outlined as undoubtedly personal. Jesus speaks of the Spirit as "another Comforter," a comforter or helper such as He had been, who would be given by the Father after Jesus had departed. This Comforter is the Spirit of truth or revelation who will teach them, testify to them of Christ, guide them into all truth, and show them things to come. This Comforter will also convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

Not only does the Holy Spirit react to us as only a person would but we also react to Him only as we would to a person. We can grieve (Ephesians 4:30), resist (Acts 7:51), lie to (Acts 5:3), and blaspheme (Luke 12:10) Him. Further, the Holy Spirit is placed in the same class with persons — God the Father and God the Son — by Paul, in the great benediction (II Corinthians 13:14). Jesus does likewise in the baptismal formula, where the Holy Spirit is included along with Jesus Himself and God the Father (Matthew 28:19).

Christ is divine and the Holy Spirit is a person who is divine. With God the Father they make up the Trinity. Thus the discussion of the doctrine of God is brought to a close. We may add, however, three significant definitions of God. These will, in a sense, summarize all that has gone before. The definitions are as follows: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (Westminster Confession). Strong's definition reads as follows: "God is the infinite and perfect Spirit in whom all things have their source, support, and end." <sup>[5]</sup> Finally, Curtis defines God thus: "The God of the Christian faith is one Spirit, personal, moral, absolute, and triune." <sup>[6]</sup> This last definition is the best. It is short and simple and comprehensive. There is only one word in it which anyone is likely to stumble over, and that is the term absolute. However, we can escape its difficulty if we remember that it means self-dependent, independent, or without necessary relation.

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

**Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.**

## **Chapter II**

### **MAN**

#### **Man's First Estate**

(1) The Creation of Man. We turn to the book of Genesis to find out about man's first estate. "And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:26, 27). "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). These are the most significant words ever penned about man. They make God the source of man, and the method which He used was that of creation. They imply that man came into being; that is, he has not been the effect of God's activity from all eternity. These verses in Genesis also carry with them the thought of the unity of the human race. All peoples have a common ancestry. God created Adam and Eve and then commanded them to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

When was man created? This cannot be answered exactly. One chronological scheme would place man's beginning about four thousand years before the coming of Christ. Another view would fix it as more than five thousand years before Christ. We cannot be absolutely sure as to either of these claims. One reason this is the case is the fact that there is uncertainty as to just how the Bible reckons genealogies. For instance, a person may be spoken of as a son of another person when he is in reality a grandson or even a great-grandson. It was a custom in those times to speak of descendants as sons, whether they were far-off or near-at-hand in kinship. Thus, while we cannot solve this problem exactly, we are convinced that it is not necessary to assume an exceedingly long period of time since the creation of man. Some scientists do this, as they hold, in order to account for certain population and linguistic developments. This need not be done, for six to eight thousand years or even less would provide a sufficient number of years for these developments.

(2) The image of God. Another striking fact about man's creation is that he was made in the image of God. This was not the case with anything else. Man stands in a peculiar relation to God, he bears a definite likeness to his maker. Of what does this image consist? Man is not like God in that he has a body. God has no body. He is pure spirit. Someone has well said that whatever is considered highest in man will always be looked upon as the image of God in man. If one looks upon intelligence as the highest in man, he will think of that as the image of God. If he thinks that free-will stands in this place, he will make it the image of God. Undoubtedly this image of God in man does consist to some extent in both of these characteristics — his superior intelligence and his free-will. Along with these features of human personality, we must also mention man's holiness. He was created holy, and this attribute was a part of the image of God in him. To say that man was created in the image of God is just another way of declaring that he is more than an animal. Man does

partake of some physical and psychical characteristics which are similar to those which animals possess. But he who puts him in the same class with animals because of this ignores that which is most important in man. The qualities of personality which differentiated man from all of the rest of God's creation — his superior intelligence, his free-will, and his holiness — were far more significant than the likeness which he bore to any other part of God's creation. To state the same truth in still another way is to say that God, who is a person, created man a person like Himself. A person has been defined as a creature that is capable of "initiative, purposive action, and ethical ideals."<sup>[7]</sup> Like God, man is capable of acting consciously toward an end, and is aware of the fact that there is a right and wrong between which he can and must choose.

In his first estate, man had the closest of fellowship with God. As we have already seen, he was a holy person and, therefore, there was nothing to separate him from a holy God. He walked and talked with God, and there was no fear before sin came. Truly it was fellowship divine, and there was nothing within or without to disturb, as long as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. This was and is the normal life for a being who was made by a holy God and for companionship with this God.

(3) The creation of the body. The human body, like the human soul or personality, was a creation of God. Genesis 2:7 declares that the Lord formed man out of the dust of the earth. Thus God gave to man a physical form. As the handiwork of God, the human body is an intricate and marvelous mechanism. The Psalmist praises God for the fact that he is fearfully and wonderfully made. This is true with reference to the human body as well as to the soul. Man's body is a system of interrelated parts, parts which are almost inconceivably numerous and interdependent. There are mechanical, chemical, and nerve interconnections which are just beginning to be explored by physiologists and psychologists. One authority writes thus of the chemical co-ordinations: "The chemistry of the human body is just beginning to be understood in all of its enormous complexity. Latter-day discoveries of the importance to life of the different vitamins, of the maintenance of proper alkaline balance, of the necessity of supplying minute amounts of calcium, iodine, and so on, when certain glandular organs are defective — these and many other examples of insight are giving us some realization of how astonishingly subtle are the chemical interrelations of the *milieu interne*. The human being is an organism balanced chemically upon a knife edge. Let this equilibrium be ever so slightly disturbed, and the result may be fatal. Should he escape death, he may bear the marks of a misshapen skeleton, he may be an idiot charge upon the community, or he may be a permanent hospital patient with fits of depression giving away to maniac excitement and over-activity."<sup>[8]</sup> Truly God has wrought well in His creation of the human body.

(4) The body as the home of the soul or inner man. The body was not created for its own sake, it was created to become the home of the soul. As the home of the soul, it was to be used by the soul, that is, become the soul's instrument. Just as the musician plays the piano or violin or harp, so the soul makes music upon the body, the instrument of the soul. This subordinate position of the body was at least suggested by Paul when he declared that he kept his body under. Jesus also clearly subscribed to this truth when He commanded us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we would do this, food and raiment and shelter for the body would be provided.

It is through the body that man has dealings with the physical universe into which he has been thrust and of which he has been made. This physical universe includes not only things but also the

bodies of animals and of persons. The senses of sight and hearing, as well as the other senses, are the physical means whereby we pass from ourselves to the physical world about us and vice versa. This important role of the body is well described by Doctor Curtis: "Whatever the body may be in its final entity, we now have to do with it merely as the fixed instrument of man's objective life. Without the body man would be a person; but without the body man could not be a social person. The philosophical significance of the body is that it is the machinery of personal expression. By means of this body a person breaks isolation, and goes out, and gets a community. . . .

"Further, man's body is not only social, but also racial in its significance. The human body is the *racial nexus*. It connects the individual human person with his race. A man is not granted what I may call a generic body — a body to enable him to have social intercourse with any person and every person who may live somewhere in the outer spaces of the universe of God. No, he is granted the body of a man, a special body which nicely and precisely enables him to get at men." <sup>[9]</sup>

(5) The physical universe. Like the body, the physical universe — with which the body links man — was created by God. This creation of the physical universe is outlined in the first chapter of Genesis, beginning with the first verse. This signifies that the physical universe did not just happen. Neither did it create itself nor was it brought into existence by some impersonal force or power. God made it! The body is the servant of the soul, and the physical universe is to be dominated by man. God placed man over all of His other creation (as that creation is described in the first and second chapters of Genesis) and called on man to have dominion (Genesis 1:28). Man's great battle has been in connection with his ever increasing conquest of nature. He is gradually uncovering nature's microscopic and telescopic features and is, thereby, enabling himself either to control or better adjust himself to it.

(6) Divine providence. The Bible not only teaches that God is the creator of man and the physical universe, but it also teaches that He sustains them. They depend upon Him for their continued existence as well as their beginning. Daniel charged the sinful king thus: "And the God in whose hand thy breath is and whose are all thy ways hast thou not glorified" (Daniel 5:23). Paul, in his sermon on Mars' Hill, affirms that we are the offspring of God. However, he does not stop with this. He insists that we live and move and have our being in God (Acts 17:22-31). Divine providence grows out of or is based upon this truth as to divine sustenance. God not only has a general plan which He is working out, but He also "takes notice of everything, and is strictly indifferent to no item of reality."

## **Man's Fall**

The account of the fall is given in the third chapter of Genesis. Man ate the forbidden fruit and thus failed himself and God. It is not necessary to go into details; the chief fact to keep in mind is that man did not meet the test as he should. The test was inevitable, since man was a free moral agent. Sooner or later every creature that possesses the power of free choice must make a decision for himself as to right and wrong. Please bear in mind the fact that the decision must be made by the individual himself. Adam and Eve attempted to shift the responsibility for their sin, but they did not succeed. In the last analysis, no person or circumstance outside of the individual is ever to blame for the individual's sin.

Adam was created with a holy nature, as we have indicated earlier in this chapter. A holy nature can be bestowed. However, a holy character can only be achieved. The holiness with which God had endowed Adam, a moral and spiritual possession, could not become his, in the fullest sense, until he chose it. Holiness was God's greatest gift to man. In making this gift, God bestowed upon man the very heart of His own personality. Instead of thanking God for it and then making it his own by the choice of righteousness, man refused to keep it. By breaking God's one commandment, man said to God in effect: "No, thank you, I do not want holiness, this something which constitutes the very center of your personality, the best that you have." What a tragic decision!

How can a holy person sin? This question is not easy to answer, but there are some truths which will throw light upon it. There are only two personal capacities which are essential to the possibility of sin. These are as follows: freedom in the power of choice, and natural appetites which are in themselves perfectly legitimate. This is clearly implied in James' description of the development of sin — "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death" (James 1:14,15). Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust or strong desire. James describes temptation which results in sin, without any mention of the devil or carnality.

Adam and Eve were holy and yet they sinned. Of course the devil was there and aggravated the situation, but they could have sinned even without his presence and subtle deceptions. The presence of carnality in the heart and of the devil in the environment makes it more difficult to overcome temptation; but there can be temptation and sin without the presence of either of them. The devil was eternally bad, or else he fell from a state of holiness. Both Scripture and reason seem to substantiate the latter theory. If this be the case, he sinned without the presence of either carnality within or the devil without. The devil, in his original state, had natural appetites which in themselves were legitimate, but he chose to satisfy one of them illegitimately and sinned. This is exactly what Adam and Eve did, except that they had an external factor of evil in the person of the devil. The pressure which the devil brought upon them only intensified the situation and made it easier for them to sin, that is, to satisfy their appetite illegitimately.

Man as a free moral agent was created with limitless capacities for weal or woe. He could choose the right and ascend to heaven, or choose the wrong and descend to hell. Heaven high or hell low were the alternatives which he confronted. When one decides for holiness, he at the same time decides for its consequences, and the same is true as to sin. Adam and Eve chose sin and woe, and the human race today is in a woeful condition. We are reaping what we as a race sowed; and the individual will reap what he as an individual sows — either of heaven or of hell.

### **Man's Present State**

(1) Man is born in sin. It is important for us to recognize the fact that man is a fallen being. An inadequate view of sin results in an inadequate view of the moral law, the person of Christ, and the fundamental doctrines of salvation. Therefore, let us remember that man has lost the original state of holiness which he possessed. The image of God in him has been seriously marred by sin. That this is true, that is, that there is something radically wrong with the human family, no one who lives today and thinks at all can deny.

Not only does experience confirm the fact that man is a fallen being, but the Bible clearly teaches it. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:2,3). This passage from the Old Testament certainly teaches that all men are sinners. Let us place beside it the outstanding scripture on this subject from the New Testament. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. . . .)" (Romans 5:12-14. "For that all have sinned;" this is an ever-recurring note in the New Testament.

Man is born in sin. Sin is universal. Both experience and the Bible witness to this truth. The Bible also connects this condition of man with Adam's sin. The passage quoted above from Romans states this. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world." When Adam fell, man became a sinner by nature. This sinful state is called by various names, such as, inherited, inbred, or original sin, or total depravity. This racial bent to sin must be differentiated from acts of sin which arise in connection with the individual's own choices.

(2) The nature of the carnal mind or inherited sin explained. What is this inherited sin? In 1937, Dr. H. P. Sloan, who was then Editor of the New York Christian Advocate, had this to say about it in answering a question on perfect love: "Wesley regarded depravity as an active principle, just as he did also righteousness; only the two were utterly opposite. The analogy would be that of health, and, as opposed to it, any one of the diseases which are due to micro-organisms.

"Curtis recognized but one active principle, a God inspired and dominated righteousness. Sin was for him not an active principle, but a negation — the absence of righteousness. The analogy is heat and cold, where cold is just the absence of heat." <sup>[10]</sup> (Olin Alfred Curtis was Professor of Systematic Theology, at Drew Theological Seminary, during the time that Doctor Sloan was a pupil there.) Here Doctor Sloan sets forth Wesley's view of depravity as over against that of Curtis. (Doctor Sloan agrees with Curtis, as he states elsewhere in the article from which I have quoted.) The modern Holiness Movement and the Church of the Nazarene follow Wesley rather than Curtis. Depravity is more than a negative principle for us, a mere lack. It is a positive principle, a positive badness. On the other hand, the Church of the Nazarene does not go to the other extreme from Curtis' view and make depravity an entity or personality, an evil person that lives in the heart of the unsanctified. Depravity or original sin is more than a negative principle and less than an entity or personality.

A word must be added as to the phrase "total depravity." The phrase is all right if properly understood. In so far as it emphasizes the terrible character of the principle of sin within man, it does not miss the mark. Depravity is devilish or satanic in nature. It is all bad and all who have it have within that which is hellish. However, if it means that those who have it are entirely bad, it is misleading. Sometimes people take you to mean just this when you say that man is totally depraved. But in truth no one has reached this state except the man who has crossed the deadline. He is all bad. There is nothing left in him to which God can appeal. On the other hand, the man who is born in sin still has a sense of right and wrong, still has a capacity for God, and on occasion can do that which

is in itself good. The image of God in him has been marred, but not completely destroyed. Nevertheless, we may continue to describe fallen man as totally depraved if we mean by such a phrase that every part of his nature has felt the effects of sin or that he is in such a condition that he cannot save himself. He is helplessly but not hopelessly lost. Only the man who has crossed the deadline is both helplessly and hopelessly lost; and this is not the natural state of any man.

(3) Body is not sinful. Another point at which the effects of sin are carried too far is in connection with the body. There are those within the ranks of the Christian Church who hold that the body is sinful in itself. On this ground, then, they claim that we cannot be sanctified or freed from sin until death, that is, until we are loosed from this sinful body. This view harks back to Plato, the great Greek thinker. Matter for him was set over against idea or form; and the latter was good, while the former was evil. Matter resisted or stood in opposition to the good. This teaching is in accord with Plato's philosophy, but does it harmonize with Paul's theology? There are many authorities on Pauline theology who answer this question in the negative. Stevens and Bruce fully discuss Paul's theology as to the flesh. The Greek word which is translated flesh is used in more than one sense by Paul, according to them, but it never carries with it the thought that the flesh as mere matter is inherently evil (Romans 7 and 8). Another very recent authority makes this significant statement: "The Bible knows nothing of a good mind and an evil body," the Greek view of man.<sup>[11]</sup> The body of a man, like his inner self or soul or personality, was created good; and when he fell he did so because he chose as he should not have. His fall was not due to a sinful body, and it did not result in a body which is inherently evil.

There are other arguments for the fact that the body is not in itself evil. Paul does not hesitate to speak of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19). How could it ever be the temple of the Holy Spirit if it is by nature sinful? It surely could not be. Once we get the man who lives in the body cleansed from all sin, the Holy Spirit will come in in all of His fullness and make the body where the man dwells His abiding place. Further, Christ came in the flesh. He had a body. How could the holy Christ have inhabited an unholy body? "There can be no doubt that Paul held that Christ possessed a real human body and that He was sinless."<sup>[12]</sup>

The Bible teaching is substantiated by reason. The human body is nothing more than a complicated form of matter, and mere matter could not in itself be sinful. A chair could not sin or be sinful. It might be an instrument used by a sinner, but it could not be a sinner. The same is true of a finger or a foot — any part or all of the human body together (Romans 6:13).

Nevertheless, just as surely as we deny the assertion that the body is sinful in itself, just so surely do we insist that the body has been marred by sin. Sin has left its mark on the human body. Infirmary and disease beset us on every hand. Even those who are sanctified make mistakes because their thinking has to function through a brain which has upon it the scars of sin.

The physical universe, like the body, bears the marks of sin. Nature, as has been said, is a "limping king." Man's sin has left its blight upon the physical universe, as well as upon his body.

Man is by nature sinful, he lives in a body which has been broken down by sin; and the physical universe which surrounds him and of which he is a part because of his body, is shot through and

through with the effects of sin. It is no wonder, then, that the society which he is striving to build is far from ideal.

(4) The general problems of sin and suffering. The next general division of this book will be "Christ." There we shall study the person and work of Christ. We shall learn about God's wonderful plan for lifting man out of the terrible predicament into which he brought himself through sin. Before proceeding to this section, we shall, however, briefly discuss the general problem of sin and suffering. In spite of God's provision through Christ, there is and will continue to be much sin and suffering, both here and hereafter. Why, then, did God create man? How may we, in the light of man's sin and its consequences, justify the ways of God to man?

Sin is often called by the theologian, "moral evil," and suffering "natural evil." It is rather easy to believe that God did not will sin. He, as a holy being, could not be the creator of sin. On the other hand, suffering is often looked upon as a natural part of life. The very fact that it is called natural evil suggests this. Nevertheless, God is no more responsible for suffering than He is for sin, in the final and ultimate sense. Sin is the result of the will of other moral beings than God; and suffering is the direct or indirect consequence of sin. If this world were free from sin, there would be no suffering.

While we are sure that God did not will sin and suffering, we are just as sure that He did will the possibility of sin and thereby the possibility of suffering. When God created man a free moral agent He created the possibility of sin. A free moral agent always has before him the possibility of choosing wrong. To put it in another way, God had to will the possibility of sin and suffering if He willed the possibility of righteousness and happiness. We must remember that there are some things that God cannot do. He cannot do the contradictory. He cannot create a man free and yet not free at the same time. He had to will the possibility of a Judas if He willed the possibility of a Paul. God faced the same situation that a parent would face if he were told that he would have to choose between having two sons — one of whom would be a modern Nero and the other a modern Paul — or no son. God either had to create both the possibility of good and bad men, or else He had to create no man. God chose the former alternative.

God created the possibility of sin and knew when He did it that man would make it a reality. Nevertheless, He will somehow overrule the sin which He made possible. He will be able through His infinite wisdom and power to make the end achieved more glorious as a whole than it would have been if sin had not entered the universe. This will not be attained because of sin, but in spite of it. We cannot adequately explain this fact; but we can give some hints as to how it may be understood. God is supremely interested in a universe which is personal and moral. In such a universe, goodness that is chosen is far superior to goodness that is mechanical (if there can be such goodness) or goodness that is bestowed. And one good man, one man who has chosen to be like God, will develop into a being of much greater worth than one who has chosen against God and started on the road toward degeneration and unmanliness. The final outcome will be a society of holy persons who will control the universe. Those who have failed to co-operate with God in this great undertaking will not be annihilated but through their own choices will have become ineffective in the universe as a whole. What will have been achieved will be infinitely superior to a universe without any free finite persons.

What about suffering, which is, as we have already indicated, always the direct or the indirect result of sin? This much at least can be said about it — it can always be made a blessing if we take the right attitude toward it. Every disaster can be made to praise God if men will co-operate. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose" (Roman 8:28). There must be faith. When it happens, we cannot always see how a specific instance of suffering is to be for our good. However, if we take the proper attitude toward it and wait, we shall often be able to understand here. But if we do not come to understand here, we shall see the light in the world which is to come. "Some day we'll understand." Here is the place where we must choose between comfort and character. Character, in a world where there is sin, can be developed only through choices and suffering. This is just another way of saying that holiness is more important than happiness. In an ideal world, they would be exactly proportional to each other, but not so in the sort of world in which we live — a world where there is sin or what has been crippled by sin.

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

**Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.**

## **Chapter III CHRIST**

### **The Person of Christ**

(1) The imprisoned God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14).

What did it mean for the Eternal Word to become flesh and dwell among us? How are the divine and the human natures united in the one person? It meant that the Eternal Word was to be limited or imprisoned. We can describe the incarnate Word as the imprisoned God. At first, His infinite awareness was limited to the small awareness of Mary's tiny babe.

The active self-consciousness of the Son of God had to express itself through the instrument of the passive self-consciousness of human nature at the level of infancy. When we assert that He had to, we mean that He could not escape doing this if He did what He chose to do. It was not something which was forced upon Him arbitrarily, but rather something which lay inevitably in His pathway as Redeemer; and this He wanted to be above everything else.

This limitation of the Eternal Word is a definite teaching of the New Testament. In the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Christ beseeches the Father to restore unto Him the glory which He, the Son, had with Him, the Father, before the world was (John 17:5). It is declared of Him that for our sakes He became poor — that is, He gave up the full exercise or riches of His deity for our sakes (2 Corinthians 8:9). This same thought is set forth in Philippians 2:5-8: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Here there is a humiliation, an acceptance of a life which was less inclusive or more limited than that to which He had been accustomed. This does not mean that Jesus gave up His essential deity, but rather that He voluntarily subjected it to limitations of expression.

Let us study these limitations, or this imprisonment, more fully. The Eternal Word was imprisoned in a human body. Bodies limit even us. They circumscribe us because we have to give time to them which we would like to give to cultural and spiritual values. Bodies have to be-clothed, and fed, and rested. Further, nothing that we say or do fully or correctly expresses the self or spirit within us. Nevertheless, this is all that we have ever known. We have always had bodies. This undoubtedly prevents our limitations from being so real to us. With Christ it was different. Before the incarnation, He had no body. He enjoyed the full freedom of unhampered or pure spirit. How conscious He must have been of the inadequacy of the tiny baby's body in which He was at first housed! It is impossible for us to comprehend the situation as it must have been for Him. Another

way of stating this condition is to think of it in terms of space. Body can be in only one place at a time. Jesus in His pre-existent life was omnipresent — He knew nothing of spatial limitations. How different it must have been for Him to be caged up in a human body! The difference between airplane travel and ox-cart travel seems great indeed, but it does not even approach the difference between omnipresence and the spatial limitation involved in living in a body.

For the eternal Word to be imprisoned in a human body would be like Paderewski trying to play his Minuet on a toy piano, or like Shakespeare attempting to put his immortal tragedies into words by means of the vocabulary of a five-year-old child, or Beethoven striving to compose his supreme symphonies in terms of the simple musical scores of the earliest types of music.

The Eternal Word was imprisoned in a human nature. His divine omnipotent will was linked with a human will. The great executives of history — Napoleon, Bismarck, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill have all been men of indomitable will. They have held unprecedented powers. The outstanding corporation executives would not compare with them in the might of their rule. Still, the corporation executives would find themselves hemmed in on all sides should they be forced to unite with and work through the impulses of a child. It would be still more difficult for any one of the leaders of the nations to express his dynamic will in connection with the means of expression possible to a child. But in the case of Christ, we have divine omnipotence, one who has created worlds, shackled by human impotence, from His babyhood to His maturity.

This limitation of the Second Person in the Trinity by His union with a human nature implies that omniscience must express itself in conjunction with the human intellect. The child speaks as a child and the adult as an adult. The gap between the normal child and the normal adult as to intellect is great indeed, and the gulf between the average adult and the genius is difficult to comprehend. Who am I with my ordinary intellect when placed beside the intellectual giants of the past and the present? Most of us cannot compare with Plato, Aristotle, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Einstein, Dewey, and Whitehead. These men have influenced the thought of the world. Some of them have written scores of books and hundreds of magazine articles. Beside them, we have pigmy intellects; and beside us, the mind of the child is crude and undeveloped. The distance between the intellect of the child and that of the genius, as great as it must be, is insignificant when compared with the mental continent which separates omniscience and the best human intellects. Jesus Christ faced this situation. When He became incarnate, His omniscience was united with finite intelligence, and because of this, was compelled usually to function within its narrow confines.

The limitation in the realm of the feelings and the emotions is just as great. Christ's heart is a harp of a thousand strings. His love is infinite. No wonder we sing of its matchless character:

"Such love, such wondrous love,  
Such love, such wondrous love,  
That God should love a sinner such as I,  
How wonderful is love like this!"

Truly we can say with Charles Wesley:

"Love divine, all love excelling,  
Joy of heav'n to earth come down!  
Jesus thou art all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded love Thou art."

Not only is the quantity of His love immeasurable but also its quality is supremely superior. The fineness and sensitiveness of its discriminations are beyond compare. How obtuse and dumb and inadequate and insensitive must have seemed the human love with which Christ's divine love united and through which it must have largely manifested itself!

The whole psychical life of the incarnate Christ had to be lived out under the experience of time. The eternal One, the great I Am, for whom there had been no past, present, or future, was now tied up with a narrow, human present. The One by whom centuries, and even ages or eras — multiplied centuries in length, had been grasped in one act of consciousness, was now subjected to a grasp of consciousness which could not go beyond a few seconds.

The Eternal Word was not only imprisoned in a human body and a human nature, but also in a sinful human environment. Who can fathom what this must have meant for the Son of God! Just the other day I heard a woman testify. She had been saved and God had bestowed the blessing of entire sanctification upon her. God had been good to her apart from these special blessings. She had lived a rather sheltered life until a short time before this testimony was given. In the course of this testimony, she told of her work in a factory. She had gone out and secured the job there in order to help support the family while her husband, who had been called to preach, was doing his best to prepare for this great work. In the factory, this woman had met sin as she had never had to before. She testified that she thought for a time that she could not stand it. Her whole soul revolted against it. How much more must the holy Son of God have revolted against the sin of this earthly environment into which He had come! There had never been any stain of sin upon Him, and He had come from an environment where there had been no sin. The hell of this sinful human environment must have severely tried His soul.

There was another handicap that Jesus faced in connection with this sinful human environment. Because of sin and sin's effects, men were so slow to understand. It seemed at times as if it were all but impossible for Him to get His message across. He taught constantly in terms of a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom which was to be set up in the hearts of men, but most of His followers continued to think in terms of a political kingdom with Him as king, and Jerusalem as the capital of the world. He waited until He was far along in His earthly career before breaking the news of His coming death. He no doubt hoped that they would understand, but they did not. Peter said: "Be it far from thee, Lord" (Matthew 16:22). He talked to the Samaritan woman about the water of life, and she thought it was physical water that the Master meant. We might excuse her lack of spiritual understanding on the ground that she was not only a sinner of the deepest dye, but also an illiterate woman (John 4:1-42). But we find the same lack in Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a man who was undoubtedly very religious. Jesus brought the message of the new birth to him, but he failed to comprehend it. Nicodemus countered with the question: "How can a man be born when he is old?"

Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:1-13). On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus was giving His farewell address to His immediate followers. Surely they would respond to the truth then, He must have thought; but such was not the case. Listen to His conversation with Philip: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:7-9). How pained Jesus' heart must have been at such spiritual dumbness! And it must be remembered that it was manifested by those who had had the best possible opportunity. For months they had sat at the feet of the greatest teacher that ever lived. Jesus' task must have been akin to trying to teach a moron mathematics or logic or the doctrine of the Trinity.

Another limitation into which Jesus was thrust when He came down to earth to live is that of a disordered cosmic environment. Nature has its elements of disharmony — earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and other catastrophes. These no doubt played some part in frustrating His plans.

These conditions — the limitations of a human body, a human nature, a sinful human environment, a disordered cosmic environment — which the Christ inevitably fell heir to when He became incarnate, not only hemmed in His deity in its expression here below, but also at least to some extent the free and easy fellowship which He had had with the other members of the Trinity. The Godhead did not completely escape the effects of the incarnation. Of course Jesus' full deity was always within His grasp. He could rise above this situation, this impoverishment in the manifestation of His divine nature, whenever He so desired. This He did for the sake of human beings, and here we can place His miracles; but He never did it for His own sake. To have done so would have meant finally that He would have rejected the incarnation. He could have called forth ten legions of angels and have beaten back the angry mob when it came to arrest Him, but He could not have done this and have achieved His great purpose — redemption.

This brings us to a glorious thought. "For our sakes he became poor." The incarnation meant undoubtedly an imprisoned God, but for our sakes Jesus was willing to suffer it so. The cost of the incarnation to Jesus and the Godhead as a whole was incalculable, and yet it was all for you and for me. No wonder we sing, "All hail the power of Jesus' name."

(2) The released God. The incarnation, from the viewpoint of deity, was an imprisonment; but from our standpoint it was a release or revelation. In Jesus we had the supreme revelation of God. He was truly "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Man had been so blinded by sin that he could not clearly read the character of God out of a nature that had also been marred by sin. He must have a revelation which would supplement nature's message. God in the flesh was God concrete, God that could be seen and touched. As "God with us" we had the all-power and the all-wisdom of God at work in our midst. Better still, we are confronted with the holiness of God in His perfect life and with the love of God in His great and ever-present compassion. His matchless teaching fitted into the supreme revelation and helped to make it complete. That the incarnation meant a released God is indicated by the fact that John declares that it was the Word that was made flesh. A word is a revelation; its business is to release thought. Likewise, the purpose of the incarnation was to release the thought or mind or personality of God to men. This word that was made flesh and dwelt among

us was "full of grace and truth." And the Apostle John rightly says: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). These statements clearly carry with them the thought of revelation. Further, John also gives us these words: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Thus the incarnate Word has declared or released God to us. Matthew joins with John in this thought in the memorable words recorded in the twenty-seventh verse of the eleventh chapter. These words read as follows: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Paul and all of the writers of the New Testament join in this chorus of voices which unite in declaring that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. The eternal Word when He became incarnate released God or turned God loose in the world. Every argument for the deity of Jesus Christ as given earlier in the book substantiates the truth that the incarnation meant "God with us."

(3) The enriched God. Not only did Christ bring to us the imprisoned God and the released God, but He also brings to us an enriched God. The Son of God could not suffer and die as men suffer and die, but He who was the Son of God and the Son of man in one person could and did suffer and die. This union of deity and humanity opened up a new career to the eternal Word. He knew about human suffering and death by way of theory, before the incarnation, more fully than any human being; but He had no experiential knowledge of these realities. The incarnation placed Him within reach of such experiences.

Jesus Christ, as the Incarnate One, faced temptation as human beings face it, with the exception that there was no sin in His human nature. This made it possible for Him to be tempted in all points like as we are. Could the God-man have sinned? Of course He could have. Either this was the case or else His temptation was a farce. There can be no genuine temptation where there is no possibility of sin. A Christ who went through this earthly life without sin could not be of any inspiration to me if He failed to sin because He could not. He did not sin because He would not sin. He chose not to yield to temptation. In the realm of moral acts there are no musts or cannots; there are only wills or will nots.

That the Eternal Word was enriched by suffering and death, and by temptation is indicated by several texts in Hebrews. Christ was made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10). He is able to succor the tempted because He has suffered through temptation (Hebrews 2:18). Again, we are to come boldly to the throne of grace in order to obtain mercy and help, because we have an High Priest which can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, since He has been tempted in all points like as we are (Hebrews 4:15, 16). What can these scriptures mean except that the Eternal Word has been enriched through suffering (including His death) and through temptation, in fact, through all of the limitations which have been His because of the incarnation? We do not know the value of this enrichment to God Himself, but we do know that it has been of great worth to Him in His relation to lost men.

(4) The released humanity. Thus far we have discussed the imprisoned God, the released God, and the enriched God. In doing this, we have considered the divine aspects of the Son of God in their relation to His incarnate existence on this earth. However, our discussion of the person of Jesus Christ would be incomplete without a word as to His released humanity. In the divine-human Christ

we see humanity at its best, humanity unmarred by sin within or without. This released humanity gives us a living illustration of what humanity can become when freed from all sin. As such, it should stimulate all men to seek liberation from inherited sin and actual sinning. Thank God for the released humanity which Jesus Christ placed on exhibition!

### **The Work of Christ or the Atonement**

(1) The death of Jesus Christ. Christ's death was not the death of a human hero, a mere martyrdom. It was the death of the God-man, a person who united in Himself the Son of God and the Son of man. As such, the death of Jesus Christ was unique, that is, it stood in a class by itself. We thank God for the Christian martyrs of all ages — Stephen, Paul, Polycarp, Huss, and the men and women who, in more than one country today, are paying for their testimonies to Christ with their lives. They are a credit to the cause of Christ and an inspiration to all who follow the lowly Nazarene. Still, there is no saving power in their death. Only the death of Christ has saving efficacy. In the death of Him who was both the Lord of glory and the Son of man we have a significance which is not found elsewhere.

The scriptures which deal with the death of Jesus Christ may be classified as follows: (1) those which refer just to His death, (2) those which connect His death with our salvation, and (3) those which make at least some attempt to explain how His death makes our salvation possible.

(a) Those which refer just to His death. In the first class are the accounts of the death of Jesus. Each of the four Gospels gives a detailed record of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. From a fourth to a third of the space included in each Gospel is used to set forth the events of Passion Week. Most of this space is given to the death of Christ or the events immediately leading up to it.

There are some other very significant passages which fall into this class. In Matthew 16:21 we have these words: "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Peter rebuked Jesus for considering such an end, but the Master took issue with Peter in these words: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." This conversation between Christ and Peter took place immediately after the Great Confession (Matthew 16:13-20). Jesus had already been engaged in His public ministry for two or two and a half years, and now He begins a new era. Before, He himself had been silent about His coming death, but "from that time forth" He began to talk about it. Here Jesus sets forth the necessity for His death — a necessity that grew only out of His determination to redeem man. However, He does not in this statement specifically connect His death with man's salvation.

In the seventeenth chapter of Matthew, there are more references to His coming death. The chapter opens with an account of the Transfiguration. Luke's record of this great event declares that Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus' decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:30,31). Following the story of the transfiguration in Matthew, Jesus refers to His coming suffering, and later in the same chapter He gives us these words: "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, "The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day

he shall be raised again" (Matthew 17:22-23). There is no hint in these passages of the purpose of Christ's death. In other words, it is not connected definitely with our salvation.

(b) The death of Jesus Christ and our salvation. The second class of scriptures connect the death of Jesus with our salvation. There is an outstanding passage of this type found in both Matthew and Mark (Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45). Mark's record states it thus: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." The implication is that Jesus is to give His life for us. His death is not only mentioned, but it is mentioned in connection with us and our need. Another reference within this group is found in each of the first three Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22: 17-20). Matthew passes on to us the Master's words as follows: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Thus Christ instituted what we call the Lord's Supper and in connection with the institution of this sacred observance, He declared the significance of His death for our salvation.

His blood was to be shed for the remission of our sins. Hebrews asserts that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22); and this means, finally, that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of Jesus' blood. John records these words from the mouth of Jesus: "I am the good shepherd: as the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:11, 15). The good shepherd is described as dying for the sheep.

The New Testament has many other passages which belong to this group. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness for those who had been stricken with a terrible disease, so Christ is lifted up for sinners (John 3:14,15). Jesus through the suffering of death tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). He shared our flesh and blood in order "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). Christ died for the ungodly or for sinners (Romans 5:6,8). He was sent as an offering for sin (Romans 8:3). God delivered up His own Son for us all (Romans 8:32). Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3). He died and rose again for our sakes (II Corinthians 5:14, 15). Christ gave Himself for our sins (Galatians 1:4). He was offered to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28). He bare our sins in His body upon the tree (I Peter 2:24). In the book of Revelation we are told of the innumerable multitude that "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). Christ "hath given himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2). John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and said: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

(c) How the death of Jesus Christ makes our salvation possible. Those scriptures which belong to the third class mentioned above give us some clue as to how Christ's death makes our salvation possible. It is one thing to state a fact — and this is what the scriptures of the second class do — while it is quite another thing to explain the fact. The New Testament has much to say about the fact of the atonement, but it does not deal often with the explanation of the fact. We all believe, if we are true Christians, that the blood of Jesus has provided salvation for us; but how many of us know why this is the case? Why was it necessary for Christ to die in order that we might be saved? What is it

that the blood does that makes it possible for sinners to be saved? The answer to these questions must be found, to a large extent, in the writings of St. Paul. He is the great theologian of the New Testament.

In Romans 3:24, 25 we read: "Being justified freely by this grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. . ." Jesus is spoken of in this connection as having been set forth to be a propitiation. The term propitiation has been much discussed by the scholars; and there has been some difference of opinion as to its meaning. However, we agree with Dr. Curtis when he writes thus: "Whatever they do with the word, they are unable to destroy the idea of propitiation. As Professor Sanday says: 'The fundamental idea which underlies the word must be propitiation.' But deeply, what is meant by propitiation? Surely a propitiation is the means by which one is rendered propitious, or favorable, or open to plea. Inasmuch, therefore, as Saint Paul says that Christ was set forth, openly, in His blood, to be a propitiation, available by faith, the apostle's full thought, I am confident, is this: The death of Jesus Christ is the sacrificial means by which God is rendered propitious to one having faith." <sup>[13]</sup> This all indicates that there is something done to God by the shed blood of Jesus Christ which makes it possible for you and me to get saved, provided we meet certain conditions. The God-ward aspect of the atonement is here very evident.

The second passage in this group is also found in Romans. It reads as follows: "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:10, 11, R.V.). The crucial word in this passage is reconciliation, and it appears with the same meaning in Colossians 1:21, 22 and II Corinthians 5:18, 19. The great question as to this term is whether it refers to the reconciliation of God to the sinner or the reconciliation of the sinner to God. To state it in another way, the problem is whether the change involved in the reconciliation is in God or in man. We agree with those who hold that the change is at least primarily in God.

It is on the reconciliation of God to the sinner rather than the reconciliation of the sinner to God that we must place the main emphasis in connection with these passages. This can easily be seen to be the true interpretation if one will examine the passages carefully. The passage quoted states definitely that the reconciliation to God through the death of His Son took place while we were enemies. If it were accomplished while we were enemies, it could not have been a reconciliation of man to God. The reference in II Corinthians 5:18, 19 tells us that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. This is practically the same thought as was set forth in connection with the term propitiation. There God is described as being made propitious or favorable to the sinner by the death of Christ. Here He is reconciled to the sinner by the sacrifice that Christ made. This does not mean that there is no reconciliation of man to God. There is a reconciliation of man to God, and it is based on and grows out of the reconciliation of God to man. The latter is the provision and the former comes about when the sinner avails himself of the provision which has been made.

The last and most important of the three passages is Romans 3:25 and 26, with special emphasis upon the twenty-sixth verse. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance



of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." The death of Christ was to make salvation possible for you and me because it was a sufficient declaration of the righteousness or holiness of God. It so revealed the holiness of God that God could still be holy and yet be able to make holy any man who believes on Jesus Christ. (The terms just and justifier come from the same Greek root word from which the word righteousness comes. Thus, we do no violence to the truth if we translate all of them righteous or holy.) Herein lay the tremendous difficulty which demanded of God such infinite sacrifice or cost in order to be met. God's great problem was to save man and at the same time not imperil His own holiness, to find some way by means of which to save man and still be holy. God could not treat sin lightly and still maintain the integrity of His holy character. A true theory of the atonement must find in the death of Christ an expression of God's love for man which surpasses anything else in the universe, and at the same time it must manifest God's supreme hatred for sin or, in other words, His moral concern or holiness. However, this may seem to set one attribute over against another — the attribute of love against the attribute of holiness. Because of this fact, let us state the same truth in another way: God's holiness or holy love demands of God that He do all that an infinite God can do in order to rescue man from the depths of sin. He cannot hesitate at any cost. On the other hand, God cannot provide salvation for man in any way that would take from or depreciate His holiness.

(2) The glory of the cross. We must be careful not to confuse the provision which has been made for man's salvation with his actual salvation. The provision which has been made is for all men. The atonement is universal. The New Testament has many scriptures which either state or imply its universality. On the other hand, man's salvation depends upon his acceptance of the provision which has been made through the death of Jesus Christ. Just as surely as the New Testament teaches the universality of the provision, it also teaches that some men will not accept the provision. We hold to the universality of the atonement, but not to the universality of salvation. There will be those who by virtue of their power of free choice will reject the offers of mercy which have been extended to them through the atonement. The atonement is something which the triune God has wrought out apart from the will of man, while salvation is something which God has to work out in conjunction with the will of man; and if the will of man fails to respond properly, God's purpose is thereby frustrated.

The death of Jesus Christ — we have finished its discussion and yet how inadequately we have set forth its significance! It stands at the center of all Christian doctrine. It is the most terrible and yet the most meaningful event in all history. Of this event, Dr. Harold Paul Sloan writes thus: "Out on the bleak rock of Calvary, surrounded with human hate, the Eternal Son was about to yield Himself to the very extreme of tragedy. He was about to take up human death into His infinite experience. His eternal self-consciousness, by its utter identification with a creature's passive consciousness and its expanding memory, was to know the complete isolation and loneliness of the death. The Father lost His Son, the Son lost His Father! The Trinity suffers violence! The Godhead is bereaved!

"No thought my mind ever framed awes me as this. God, for moral judgment upon sin, and yet for love, accepts extreme tragedy. The incarnate Son dies as a man dies! The Eternal Father is shut away from fellowship with His Son — is bereaved as a man is bereaved. Redemptive love fixes a scar upon the infinite consciousness that is as inerasable as the memory of God!

"In the Incarnation God made Himself forever different, Professor Curtis used to say. He added a human creaturehood to the glory of His tri-unity. Professor Lewis says the same thing more searchingly when he affirms that this side of Calvary God is structurally different, having subjected Himself not only to creaturehood, but to tragedy for man's sake.

"Yes, herein, indeed is love. Not that we loved; but that Christ loved — that God loved! I have seen great human love. I knew intimately the love of a virtuous woman for her weak and faithless husband. I knew, too, afterward, the almost worshipping love of that weak man for his wife. I fellowshiped with the love of a father — of a mother for a wayward son whose life had ended in tragedy without repentance. Every one of these experiences made me feel as if I should take off my shoes, as Moses at the burning bush.

"But these loves are only suggestions. There is only one love — the love of the eternal God — the love that was poured out upon sinful men all the way from Bethlehem to Calvary. Remember, God's thoughts are worlds and suns. Remember, the relationships of the universe are as absolute as mathematics — the symbol of God's loving holiness. And this God in love accepts extreme cost for our sinful sakes.

"And the climax of the wonder is that He was loving us even when we were cursing Him. We poured our small hate upon Him even as His yielded omnipotence hung in seeming helplessness upon our cross. Yet even then He was loving us." <sup>[14]</sup>

No wonder Professor Curtis penned these words as to the death of Christ: "It must be made such a finality in awful self-sacrifice that no Christian man, and no saint in all eternity, can ever think of it without suffering." <sup>[15]</sup>

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

**Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.**

## **Chapter IV THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTION**

### **The Holy Spirit in Action in the Individual**

(1) Conviction, repentance, faith. The death of Jesus Christ provided salvation for all men. If there had been no divine Christ with His death and consequent atonement, there would have been no hope of salvation for any human being. But provision, while it is necessary, is not enough in itself to guarantee man's salvation. It is not sufficient that the blood of Jesus Christ was shed; it must also be applied to the individual sinner's heart. This application of the blood to the needy souls, one by one, is the special activity of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Trinity. He is the efficient agent in man's salvation as surely as the blood of the Second Person in the Trinity is the procuring agent.

The Christ was prophesied, and then He came and achieved His purpose on the earth. Soon after His ascension, the Holy Spirit descended upon the one hundred and twenty in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-13). This was the beginning of His day or dispensation, or, in other words, it was in a special sense the opening of the era of personal salvation. It is to the study of the Holy Spirit's activity in the individual in the initiation and perfecting of this personal salvation that we now give our attention.

As God took the initiative in providing salvation, so He takes the lead in making it actual in the heart of the sinner. God does not wait for man to come and seek Him through Christ, He goes out and searches for man by means of the ever-active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. The Gospel of John describes this initial work of the Holy Spirit as that of convincing the world (John 16:8-11). He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. In order to awaken the sinner, He must convince him of the fact that he is a sinner. There is no hope for the sinner as long as he thinks that he is all right. The Pharisee and the publican prayed; but the former did not succeed, while the latter did. What was the difference between them? The Pharisee spent his time telling God about his righteousness, a righteousness which he did not possess, but it was not thus with the poor publican. He called on God to be merciful to him a sinner (Luke 18:9-14). Thus the first step in conviction is to convince of sin.

He who has been convinced of sin must not be left there. He must also be convinced of righteousness. He must be shown that there is something worth while within his reach. To make a man aware of his need and then leave him with nothing better in sight is to leave him in despair. The Holy Spirit not only convinces of sin but also of righteousness. The last phase of this convicting work of the Holy Spirit is as necessary as the first one.

Beyond a convincement of sin and righteousness, there must be conviction as to a coming judgment. Sin has a terrible grip on man, and because of this it is not easy to shake it off. The sinner aroused to his sin and the possibility of a glorious righteousness may still make no move. The natural

inertia connected with the old way holds him back. There must be an extra stimulus before he will decide to break with sin. The conviction that he will have to face a coming judgment, if he continues as he is, sometimes furnishes the extra stimulus that is needed to produce a definite turning to Christ. Therefore, the complete work of the Holy Spirit in conviction is conviction as to sin, righteousness, and judgment.

What is the first response of the yielding soul to the convicting activity of the Holy Spirit? We can answer this question with one word, repentance. The message of John the Baptist was "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus also took up John's call to repentance (Matthew 4:17). Peter exhorted those who were convicted on the day of Pentecost to repent, and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Repentance is one of the great Christian messages. Many times within the pages of the New Testament the sinner is urged to repent. The climax of this procession of calls to repentance is found in the following words of Jesus: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

What does it mean to repent? The thought which is most often associated with this term is a godly sorrow for sin. A deep and sincere regret fills the heart because of the fact that the individual has sinned against God. He is not just sorrowful because he has been caught up with in his sin, as is the case sometimes. This is in no sense repentance. He is sorrowful to the depths of his soul because he has deliberately broken the law of God. With this godly sorrow, two other elements must be combined in order to get the full meaning of repentance. These are the confession of sin and the forsaking of sin. We must also bear in mind the fact that the forsaking of sin carries with it the thought of restitution; for I do not forsake sin by merely refusing any longer to indulge in it. I turn my back on it, in the second place, by making right the sins which I have committed in so far as I can. If I have stolen ten dollars from someone and that person is at hand, I will make it right as soon as I can — if I am really forsaking sin. Repentance, therefore, as the first response of the individual soul to the convicting activity of the Holy Spirit, is a godly sorrow for sin which includes a confession of sin and the forsaking of sin.

The second response of the yielding soul to the convicting activity of the Holy Spirit is faith. Faith is just as important as repentance. In fact, it is often viewed as more important than repentance. After we have repented we must believe, if we would properly respond to the call of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). His message to the Philippian jailer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). There is no human condition of salvation which is more emphasized in the Bible than faith. The great religious leaders of all ages have found justification by faith a great theme. Following Paul and his emphasis on justification by faith as opposed to justification by works, the slogan of the Judaism from which he had been saved, we have Augustine, Luther, and Wesley — the three greatest religious leaders since Paul — all being significantly influenced by the doctrine of justification by faith. Exactly, then, what is faith? It is complete confidence on the part of the repentant sinner that the divine Christ does now meet the need of which the Holy Spirit has made him so keenly conscious through conviction.

(2) Justification, regeneration, adoption. When a sinner repents and believes, something happens on the divine side. God through the Holy Spirit pardons or forgives or justifies him. This means that the sinner, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, is restored to the favor of God. The old account

has been settled. The black marks which have been on the books of God against him have been blotted out. The sinner stands before God no longer a sinner. He is given a clean sheet and can start life over again, as it were. A more formal definition of justification might be stated thus: Justification is that act of God's grace whereby the Holy Spirit frees a repentant and believing man from the guilt of his actual transgressions or sins. It is something, therefore, which takes place outside of man and yet it is in behalf of man. Again, we see the Holy Spirit in action in the individual. (See Acts 13:38 and 39; Galatians 2: 16.)

Regeneration or the new birth is the next crisis in man's salvation which we shall consider. Formally, regeneration may be defined as that act of God's grace whereby the Holy Spirit quickens into newness of life a repentant and believing man who has been dead in trespasses and sins. It is something which is not only done for man but also in man. It is a transformation which gives to man a new center of loyalty, and that new center is Jesus Christ. He can say truly that old things have passed away and behold all things have become new. All of this is in harmony with the great message which Jesus gave to Nicodemus in the third chapter of the Gospel of John. Here Jesus informs Nicodemus that he must be born again. He was a ruler of the Jews and undoubtedly a very religious man. Nevertheless, he needed the new birth. This is another way of declaring that all men whether high or low, learned or unlearned, religious or irreligious, must be born again. The requirement is universal. This new birth is something supernatural, something that God does for man, as we have already indicated. It is a birth which is from above or of God, as Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus. John also makes this clear in the first chapter of his Gospel. The verses read thus: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13). This crisis is a spiritual transformation, and as such cannot be adequately described in words. If you want to know what it is, you must experience it. This truth is suggested by the following words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:7, 8). Please notice also that this new birth is a birth of the Spirit. This is another instance where the Holy Spirit is in action in the heart of the individual.

Adoption, like justification, is a legal term. It is something done for us rather than in us. It always accompanies regeneration. Formally, we may define adoption as that act of God's grace whereby the Holy Spirit as the active representative of the Godhead makes the justified man a member of God's family, an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14-17). Indeed and in truth the one who has been adopted into the family of God can sing of the glorious fact that he is a child of the King.

We have discussed justification, adoption, and regeneration separately because they are logically, or from the standpoint of meaning, distinct. However, they are temporally simultaneous, that is, they occur at the same moment or are phases of the same spiritual movement. When a man is justified, he is at the same time regenerated and adopted into the family of God. Conversion is a nontheological term which is often used to signify the whole transaction which is involved in justification, regeneration, and adoption.

(3) Entire sanctification. The Holy Spirit in action in the heart of the individual is seen at His best in bestowing the experience of entire sanctification. This crisis, from the standpoint of spiritual crises, marks the supreme objective of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man, the climax of the Spirit's dispensation. The Spirit convicts in order that He may save and saves in order that He may sanctify. The aim of all that He does is to find at last an abiding place for Himself in the heart of man. Thus man becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the living Christ is perpetuated in the world. "God with us" was inaugurated when the Eternal Word became incarnate, and it is made permanent by the indwelling Spirit. An immanent God, a God within the world, can come to full realization only when Christian men yield themselves completely to the sanctifying and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16; II Thessalonians 2:13).

Formally, then, how may entire sanctification be defined? It is that act of God's grace whereby the Holy Spirit baptizes the Christian with Himself, and thus cleanses the heart of said individual from inherited or original sin. This is done only on condition that the Christian consecrates his all and believes that God does just now accept the sacrifice or offering. It is something done in man as well as for him instantaneously, and is always subsequent to regeneration. Christ definitely prayed, on the night before His crucifixion for the sanctification of His disciples (John 17). We believe that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was a definite answer to this prayer of Christ. Paul prayed thus for the Church at Thessalonica: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23). Anyone who will read the first chapter of First Thessalonians will realize that the people that Paul was praying for were genuine Christians. The writer of Hebrews gives us these words: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Hebrews 13:12). Saint John definitely teaches that the love of God which begins in man's heart when he is born again can be perfected in this life (John 4:16-21). Christ commended this significant injunction to His followers: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 37-40). This injunction, as Dr. Curtis well says, is not just an ideal to be striven for, but rather an actual injunction to be achieved (O. A. Curtis, *The Christian Faith*, p. 388).

The theme of a great book written within the last ten years is that this ideal of Christian perfection is attainable in this life. Some conception of this work can be secured from a quotation which is found in its introduction. The passage reads as follows: "Amid the inward conflicts of those years of war [the first world war] some of us stumbled on the principle of John Wesley, which was of immediate value as a guide in practical work — that the truest evangelism is to preach the full ideal for which power is offered in the present life. 'The work of God does not prosper,' said John Wesley, 'where perfect love is not preached.' . . . A vast evangelistic advance can be sustained only if the Christian ideal for this life is steadily set forth in all of its beauty and its fullness as being by the grace of God something not impossible of attainment. If this principle be valid, it is likely that the ignoring of it will bring impoverishment and arrest. In the following pages, for example, it is suggested that it was a defect in the Reformation divines that they were not at home with this principle, and that the sectarian reactions of Quakerism, Pietism and Methodism were, in spite of all appearances, symptoms of a return to a larger and more truly Catholic view. At all events, the

principle of Wesley was that of our Lord, who chose twelve that they might be with Him, whose last journey to Jerusalem was based on His own missionary tenet: Let the children first be filled. Holiness is not only (as Newman said) necessary for future blessedness. It is essential to the vitality and advance of the Christian message in this world." [16]

What conditions must be met in order to enter into the experience of entire sanctification? Consecration and faith are the prerequisites for entire sanctification (Romans 12:1 and Acts 26:18). The Christian must place his all on the altar and then believe that the altar sanctifies the gift. If he consecrates his all, it is usually easy to believe. In most cases where the seeking believer has difficulty, it is because he is making some reservation, holding back something from the altar. Nevertheless, there seem to be a few souls who really have trouble in believing. They have consecrated all and yet hesitate about stepping out on the promise. Such souls must be urged to believe. The God who has promised the victory is faithful and will surely perform what He has promised.

A feeling of need and an intense desire for the blessing of entire sanctification must precede consecration and faith. If one is not convicted enough to feel intense need of and mighty desire for this blessing, he will not seek it whole-heartedly. Further, if one does not seek it with all of his heart, he will not make the all-inclusive consecration which is necessary before there can be faith for its actual bestowment. It may be added, also, that only the Holy Spirit can produce this conviction of need and intense desire. He must be active in the individual in leading up to entire sanctification, as well as in leading up to justification and regeneration.

(4) The witness of the spirit and glorification. The Witness of the Spirit is a precious doctrine of the Christian Church. The chief text upon which it is based reads as follows: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16). This text is usually interpreted to mean that there is a double witness to the fact that the sinner has become a child of God. Both the Spirit of God and the man's own spirit witness to this glorious transformation. The former is direct or immediate and the latter is indirect or mediate. The former reveals immediately to the inner consciousness of the individual that he has been accepted into the family of God, while the latter witnesses to it indirectly or by means of the fruits of the Spirit — new feelings and activities which dominate the soul. Or, to state it in another way, the witness of the divine Spirit is an immediate intuition, while that of the human spirit is an inference.

One other crisis remains to be explained. It is the crisis of glorification. This experience may be defined as that act of God's grace whereby the Holy Spirit raises the dead which die in the Lord, with bodies which are patterned after the likeness of Christ's resurrection body (Philippians 3:20, 21). This crisis stands alone as something which takes place after death and apart from the will of the recipient. It is vitally related, however, to the state of grace attained in this life. No one is eligible for glorification except the individual who is a Christian when he dies. In this transformation of the human body in behalf of the resurrected Christian, we have the culminating crisis of salvation.

So far, we have dealt largely with the crises of salvation. They are very important and are due immediately to the activity of the Holy Spirit. Preceding and succeeding these crises are processes which the Spirit no doubt to some extent stimulates; even though His work in this connection is not

as evident as in the case of the crises. The preparation for the various crises of salvation is a part of the processes which precede them. Succeeding the crises, there must be processes in which the individual grows in grace and thus develops into a likeness to Christ, for which the crisis was but the starting point. More and more, there should be a place in all of our preaching and Christian work for a larger emphasis on growth in grace as represented by these processes. We must not permit our enthusiasm for the crises to blind us to the value of the processes in the Christian life.

## **The Holy Spirit in Action in the Church**

(1) Organizing the church. The term "church" as used in connection with the Christian movement has a variety of meanings. For instance, it may refer to the building where the local church organization worships, the local church itself, a whole denomination, or the whole body of Christian believers. For us, in this discussion, however, the word "church" will signify a group of true Christians, or of true and professed Christians, who are functioning together. It may also be added that a number of persons cannot thus carry on together without some organization.

The opening of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the beginning of the Christian Church (Acts 2). There were Christians before, but then God placed His special approval upon them as a co-operating group and made their co-operation possible in the best sense by baptizing them with the Spirit. From then on, they were a church indeed and in truth.

There is plenty of evidence in the Acts of the Apostles to the effect that the Holy Spirit was directing the church in the formation of an ever-developing organization. We are told that about three thousand souls were added (Acts 2:41). They could not have been added if there had not already been some. Again, it declares that the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). Peter and John were imprisoned and threatened and then let go. They went at once to their company, "and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them" (Acts 4:23). What did the company or church do? They began to pray mightily that God would help his servants and their leaders to continue to speak His word with all boldness (Acts 4:24-30). This was an example of real co-operation upon the part of those who constituted the church. Further, they not only stood together in spiritual matters, but also in connection with material affairs. They loved each other so well that they provided for the physical needs of all of those within their number (Acts 4:32-37). Seven deacons were appointed at the suggestion of the twelve to look after collecting and administering money for the Grecian widows. The church prayed and Peter was delivered from prison by an angel (Acts 12:1-19). Delegates were sent from the church at Antioch to the mother church at Jerusalem to consider the question as to the necessity of circumcision for salvation (Acts 15:1 and 2). Thus we have a church in the Acts of the Apostles which is functioning more and more as an organized body under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The organized Christian Church, even in its early days, made a place for the ordinances. Baptism was regularly being administered (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36; 9:18; 10:47, 48; 16:15, 33; 18:8). This was a part of the gospel plan — not as essential to salvation but as a means of grace. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which Jesus Himself had instituted before His death, was also observed (Mark 14:22-25). Like baptism, it was not necessary to salvation but a great means of grace. Baptism was an initiatory rite. It signified to those outside of the Christian fellowship, as well as to those within,



that the recipient had become a part of this new movement. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was a sign of continued fellowship with Christ and His followers, a pledge of continued devotion to Christ and His cause. Baptism as a sign of the beginning of the Christian life was administered only once, while the Lord's Supper as a sign of the continuation of this life was repeated.

The early church was truly a wonderful organization. As we have seen, its development was no doubt supervised by the Holy Spirit. However, the church as an organized body was not all good. The terrible judgments which were sent upon Ananias and Sapphira witness to this fact (Acts 5:1-11). They were a part of that unusual group, the early church, and yet they lied to the Holy Spirit. There were, no doubt, others in that company who were not what they ought to have been. What does all of this mean? It means that the visible church is not to be confused with the invisible church. The latter is perfect, ideal, while the former is not. The visible church is made up of all professed followers of Christ who have so related themselves to an organized Christian group as to indicate that they are at least in name a part of the Christian movement. On the other hand, the invisible church is composed of all true believers, whether belonging or not belonging to an organized Christian body, plus all of the saints of the past. The invisible church constitutes the body of Christ or the family of God. A person may be a member of the visible church and yet not be a part of the invisible church, or vice versa.

(2) Expanding the church. The Holy Spirit is the "Executive of the Godhead," Almighty God in action in the world. His main business is to expand or enlarge the Christian fellowship among men. Of course He can do this only as Christian men co-operate. All of this means that the main business or purpose of the church is promotional, evangelistic, missionary. The church is a mutual benefit society, but it is not merely or even chiefly such an institution. It must ever be primarily alert to the enlargement of its fellowship — not just for the sake of increasing its numbers but for the purpose of getting to others the glory and blessing which it possesses. The church must send forth witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. The very moment that a local or general church begins to live merely for itself it dies. Its very genius consists in the fact that it can live only in an atmosphere of conquest. The Holy Spirit cannot work through an organization which exists only for defense.

The church on earth is truly the church militant, a fighting church, a church which is as terrible as an army with banners (Song of Solomon 6:10), that is, a victorious army, an army that is constantly sweeping on and taking more territory. The church triumphant is the church in heaven — those who have already won the victory over sin and the devil. If we as members of the church militant prove faithful to the end, that is, continue to wage a war of conquest, we shall then become a part of the church triumphant. The battle will be over and we shall participate in the celebration of the victory.

Let us turn to the Acts of the Apostles again and trace the Holy Spirit in action in a church made militant by His presence. There is recorded there the beginning of the greatest revival movement in history. The Acts of the Holy Spirit begin at Jerusalem and then move on to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. It was a living church because it was a growing, expanding church. The heavenly dynamite or the dynamite of the Holy Spirit so moved the church from within that the world became her parish. "But ye shall receive power [heavenly dynamite] after that the Holy Spirit

is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The glorious story may be told thus: There were the one hundred and twenty in the upper room. They prayed ten days and were all of one accord as well as in one place. Then the Holy Spirit swept in upon them and they were baptized by Him. Thereby, the march of conquest was inaugurated. Peter preached the Lordship of the crucified and resurrected Christ with great boldness and power (Acts 2). Conviction seized upon the people and three thousand were saved. Peter and John healed the lame man in the name of Jesus and then Peter preached and about five thousand men, besides the women and children, were saved (Acts 3, 4). One thrilling incident follows another. There were imprisonment, miraculous release from prison, healings, mighty preaching, judgment for sin, and martyrdom for Christ.

The next stage was that of a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem. This evil which befell the Jerusalem church was made to praise God. Those who were persecuted were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria and went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4). Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them. There was a great revival. The people believed and were saved. Peter and John were sent down to Samaria by the apostles at Jerusalem to follow up the work of Philip. They prayed for the people, who had received the word under Philip's preaching, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, and their prayer was answered. While this was going on, Philip got another call from the Lord. He was directed to go to Gaza; and as he went he met the eunuch, a man of Ethiopia of great authority under Candace Queen of the Ethiopians. Through Philip this man was led to God, and thus the gospel continued to spread (Acts 8:5-40). The war of conquest was on and the Holy Spirit was certainly in action in the church. Peter's vision was enlarged in order that he might meet the situation created by an expanding Christian movement. He then heard the call of Cornelius, a just man and one who feared God. The result was as follows: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 10:44, 45). The climax of this stage was the spreading of the gospel to Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch. Only the Jews were preached to first and then in Antioch some spake unto the Grecians. What was the outcome? "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21). Then the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas down to Antioch to care for the work there, and he soon secured Paul as his co-laborer. Antioch quickly became a great center for the cause of Christ. The disciples were first called Christians here, and this city became the new capital of the Christian world. The center of militant Christianity shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch.

The last and the most far-reaching stage in the expansion of the Christian Church recorded in the Acts of the Apostles is that which has to do with the work of the Apostle Paul. The major portion of the Acts of the Apostles is taken up with the achievements of the Holy Spirit as He uses this mighty hero of the cross. While busy with his activities as the chief persecutor of the Christian Church, he was halted on the road to Damascus and gloriously converted. Later he was filled with the Holy Spirit and at once became a bold and effective preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-31). His preliminary ministry made itself felt in Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus, and Antioch in Syria. But he was to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria had already been

touched by the messengers of the cross of Christ. It was high time now for the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the message. Paul, who had been so well fitted for this world task by nature and nurture and divine transformation (Philippians 3), was soon to begin the work for which he had been set apart at birth (Galatians 1:15-17).

How did Paul come to start his world-wide missionary career? The Holy Spirit went into action again. In the church at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2,3). This was one of the glorious moments in the history of the Christian Church. However, space forbids that we discuss the acts of the Holy Spirit in detail as He manifested Himself in the church through Paul and his co-laborers. He was with them on their first missionary journey, at the Jerusalem Council, and on their second and third missionary journeys. Christian churches were started in many strategic centers, and Paul persevered even though he was driven out of many cities and had to endure many hardships. His journey to Rome was no doubt in the plan of the Holy Spirit, although the path which led to Rome was a rugged one — arrest, trial, waiting and imprisonment, and shipwreck. After several years of service in Rome, the capital of the world, he went to meet His Lord triumphantly by way of martyrdom (II Timothy 4:6-8). He was the greatest soldier of the cross that has ever lived. He started fires in many cities around the world which have swept on across the centuries down to the present. The church, the body of Christ, under the presidency and power of the same Holy Spirit which the church in Paul's day knew, continues the work so nobly begun then.

What do we find the leaders in the church chiefly doing in the Acts of the Apostles in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ? It was preaching. Forms and ceremonies did not have much place in this great program of expansion. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14), after the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:12), and on every occasion where there was an opportunity. Stephen's apology was really a sermon (Acts 7), Philip preached in Samaria (Acts 8:5), Peter and John did the same there and in many villages (Acts 8:25), Philip preached Jesus unto the eunuch (Acts 8:35), and Paul began preaching in Damascus a few days after his conversion and made it his main business from then on until his death some thirty or thirty-five years later (Acts 9:19-22). The words preach, preached, preacheth, and preaching are found nearly forty times in the Acts of the Apostles. The reading of the Scriptures, testimony, prayer, and singing supplemented the work of preaching as instruments of the Holy Spirit in His activity in the church.

(3) The church and the Kingdom of God. What is the relation of the expanding church to the kingdom of God? This is a question which is often asked; and there is some difference of opinion as to its answer. Christ often used the phrase "the kingdom of God" or "the kingdom," while Paul and the other writers of the Epistles often used the term "church." The former phrase is used one hundred and twelve times in the Gospels, while the term "church" is used only twice. In the Epistles the situation is almost reversed. The "church" is mentioned there one hundred and twelve times, while "the kingdom" or "the kingdom of God" is found only twenty-nine times. The kingdom is both present and future. It begins now, but will come to its full realization only in the future. Again, it is both spiritual — within you, and social — evident in the group activities of men. The church is undoubtedly closely related to the kingdom, but it is not to be completely identified with it. It may be thought of as the means whereby the kingdom is being developed, both within and without. If all

men would heed its message, their hearts would be made right; and the kingdom which had thus been established within would soon dominate society. Thus, we would then have the kingdom of God on earth. But the majority of men will reject the call of the Holy Spirit through the church, and God will finally have to establish His kingdom on the earth by means of a direct intervention — the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

There are two perverse attitudes which may be taken toward the visible church. One is the attitude that mis-interprets the passage in Matthew 16:18,19 which describes the relation of Peter to the church. Those who do this make the church on earth supreme. The church takes the place of Christ, and men go to it instead of Him for forgiveness and salvation. This is a grievous mistake and greatly hinders the progress of the cause of Christ. The church is the best institution known to men, but it is imperfect and cannot take the place of God. The other perverse attitude toward the organized church is that of those who refuse to have anything to do with it. This is a calamity, although there are some well-meaning people involved in it. Any church which a person may join will be imperfect, both as a local and as a general institution. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has always been able to do more through organized effort than through isolated Christians. From the very first, God has sanctioned organized Christianity; and the normal thing for every Christian to do is to join some Christian church.

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

**Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.**

## **Chapter V THE BIBLE**

### **The Biblical Canon**

The Bible has great practical value for the Christian, as well as for those who wish to become Christians. The Bible is not only the great depository of divine truth, but also the Christian's guide. The Christian cannot properly or safely chart his course in this world of changing and confusing scenes without daily touch with the Bible. It is truly "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway." Since this is the case, the consideration of the Bible has been left until the latter part of the book. It immediately follows the chapter which deals with salvation in the individual and in the church as administered by the Holy Spirit. The special aid of the Holy Spirit in the initiation and continuation of this great work in the world is the Word of God, or the Bible. The fact that we have delayed the specific study of the Bible until now has not, as you have noticed, prevented its use in the sections which have preceded. We have assumed its divine origin and have used it accordingly. Now we must justify its claims as a divine revelation.

The canon of the Bible refers to the books of the Bible which are received as authoritative. For the Church of the Nazarene and for the historic Christian church all of the books which are now a part of the Bible are authoritative. They thus belong to the biblical canon; that is, they are held to meet the necessary test or standard.

What is the test or standard of canonicity, or of the right of a book to become a part of the Bible? The primary test as applied by the Christians who formed the canon of the New Testament was that the books which constitute it must have been either directly or indirectly of apostolic origin. According to this standard, Paul's epistles would get in because they are directly the work of an apostle as he was inspired by God. The Gospel of Mark would become a part of the Bible by virtue of being indirectly the work of an apostle, Simon Peter. Mark wrote his Gospel under divine inspiration, but from the human standpoint he followed Peter's account. Where there was doubt as to the authorship of the book, there is no doubt but that other tests either consciously or unconsciously played a part. Did the truth harmonize with that which was undoubtedly of apostolic origin, and did it make a definite contribution to the system of known apostolic truth? In fact, no book would have been accepted as a part of the New Testament Canon — even though there were witnesses to its direct or indirect apostolic origin — if the contents of the book did not harmonize with the rule of faith as handed down to the church by Christ through the apostles. Of course inspired apostolic documents would unquestionably so harmonize.

The canon of the Old Testament is more difficult to explain. This much we do know, that it came to be accepted as an authoritative expression of the divine will by the Jewish nation. Added to this is the all important testimony of Jesus Christ. He indicated by His quotations from the same that He regarded the Old Testament as a special divine revelation. This sanctioning of the Old Testament

Canon by Jesus Christ has made it forever a part of the Scriptures for all Christians. It met the standard for the Jews, for Christ, and is now recognized as meeting the standard for us, although it is not possible to set forth the grounds for its canonicity as adequately as for the New Testament. There is no doubt but that the official sanctions which have been given to it from time to time have been justified by the contents as well as by any external test which may have been applied.

There is one very important thing to remember in connection with the canonicity of the books of the Bible. The formation of the canon of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament was a gradual process. God did not hand the Bible down from heaven. Neither did He come down to earth and arbitrarily pick out certain manuscripts and make them a part of the canon. Human beings, not as individuals but as groups, were responsible for the formation of the Bible. They did not do it all at once but were engaged in this task for centuries. Take the Old Testament, for instance. The formation of this canon began at least as far back as 621 B.C. with the discovery of the book of the law by Hilkiah and was certainly not finally settled for the Hebrews before 100 B.C. The New Testament was first recognized soon after the middle of the second century, but the discussion as to the right of some of the books to have a place in it did not come to an end until the close of the fourth century A.D.

While it is insisted that the canons of the Old and New Testaments were humanly mediated and not immediate divine gifts, it is not thereby claimed that God had nothing to do with their formation. The Holy Spirit supervised the selection of the books which were finally chosen to be a part of the two canons. God had a definite part in this work as He moved upon the Jewish and Christian groups which from time to time had to do with the fixing of the Old and New Testament Canons.

## **Revelation**

### **GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION**

The two great problems which must be considered in connection with the Bible are revelation and inspiration, the final bases of canonicity. Sometimes these terms are incorrectly used as synonyms. They should not be so construed because they do not mean the same. Revelation is the supernatural communication of the truth to man, while inspiration is the help which God gives to man in recording the truth which has been communicated. With this differentiation between these two terms, the way is opened for the discussion of each. We shall begin with revelation.

There are two types of revelation — general and special. General revelation refers to all of the methods by means of which God speaks to men except through the Bible. This means that through the medium of general revelation God reveals Himself in nature, human nature, and history. We can see the marks of God all about us. The arguments for the existence of God which we advanced in the first chapter of this book are based on God's general revelation of Himself. However, the object of this discussion is not general but special revelation, the revelation which comes to us through the Bible.

Anyone who believes in special revelation must assume a God who is both personal and good. He must be a God who is not only the source of all that exists, but is also now lovingly interested

in all that He has created. He is not the sort of God who could have created man and then have gone off on a vacation and left him to his own devices. A God that cares for His creation would be expected to reveal Himself to that creation if there were those within that creation who needed such a revelation and could understand it if given. Man, because of his sin, needed a special revelation; and yet his sin did not so mar him that he could not with the Holy Spirit's help at least to some extent comprehend this revelation. In other words, general revelation was not sufficient for a man whose mind had been crippled by sin.

## **THE BIBLE A SPECIAL REVELATION**

(1) Prophecy. What proof have we that the Bible is a revelation from God? First there is the proof from prophecy. If events are foretold in the Bible, it must, in a special way, be the revelation of God. Those who wrote it were finite and, therefore, could not have foreseen events except as One who had infinite knowledge — knowledge of the future as well as of the past and present — supplemented their understanding. Events are foretold by the writers of the Bible. This can be proven.

The prophets of Israel foretold specific events. "A writer of known moderation, while contending that the prophets were not wont to picture events that had no apprehended connections with the circumstances of their age, adduces the following list of particular and unconditional predictions: Michaiah, the son of Imlah, prophesied that Ahab and Jehoshaphat would be defeated by the Syrians, and permitted himself to be thrown into prison, with the declaration that he was willing to be regarded as a false prophet if his prediction were not fulfilled. In a similar manner Amos predicted the approaching destruction of the Damascene kingdom and the carrying of the Syrians to Kir. Isaiah had the fullest certainty that the kings, Rezin and Pekah, would not succeed in taking Jerusalem, and that in less than three years their countries would be devastated by the Assyrian armies, and that the kingdom of Judah would be heavily afflicted by Assyria, from which it had expected help. He also published the deliverance of Jerusalem from the army of Sennacherib, and the destruction of the latter by the direct intervention of Jehovah and the hasty flight of the remnant. On the other hand, Jeremiah predicted the fixed purpose of God to accomplish the destruction of Jerusalem and the overthrow of the Jewish kingdom by his servant Nebuchadnezzar; but he also foretold that in seventy years the judgments of God should overtake Babylon and bring about the deliverance and the return of the exiles; and the same prophet predicted the death of the false prophet Hananiah in the course of the year. Various items might be added to this list. Hosea, for example, foretold the downfall of Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians. Micah predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. Isaiah declared in the days of Hezekiah that the royal treasures and princes should be carried off to Babylon. The utter desolation prepared for Babylon was graphically described by Isaiah, and Nahum portrayed the like fate for Nineveh." <sup>[17]</sup>

Added to these prophecies are the predictions of the coming Messiah or Christ which are also found in the Old Testament. In Genesis we hear of the seed of the woman which is to bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). In Abraham's seed all of the families of the earth are to be blessed (Genesis 22:18). There are the Messianic Psalms — the second, the forty-fifth, the seventy-second and the one hundred and tenth, may be mentioned. They describe the glory and the extent of the kingdom of the coming Messiah.

"Isaiah is the richest mine of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. Messiah, especially designated as 'the Servant of God,' is the central figure in the prophecies of Isaiah. Both in Isaiah and in Jeremiah, the titles of Messiah are often and pointedly expressive of His true humanity. He is the fruit of the earth; He is the rod out of the stem of Jesse; He is the branch or sprout of David; He is called by God from His mother's womb; God has put His Spirit upon Him. He is anointed to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives." [18]

Isaiah 53 describes the humiliation of the coming Messiah. "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. . . . Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3-5). The iniquity of us all has been laid upon Him. He was to bear without a word the punishment which He was to endure for us. He had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth and yet He was to be numbered with the transgressors.

We conclude this section with the predictions of Christ. They witness both to His deity and to the divineness of the biblical revelation which has come into existence because of Him. Professor H. C. Sheldon summarizes the prophetic insight of Jesus Christ thus: "He contemplated His crucifixion as an event that was perfectly certain to occur. He foresaw His betrayal and the dispersion of His disciples. He pictured beforehand the denial of Peter, at the very moment when the confident disciple was protesting his undying fidelity. He painted in terms that were fulfilled to the letter the doom impending over Jerusalem and the temple. He forecast without a shadow of doubt that the very disciples who were to forsake Him in the hour of His humiliation would take up the cause of their crucified Master with the courage and zeal of martyrs, and would carry His gospel well toward the ends of the earth. He signified to Peter by what death he should glorify God. In short, the future seems to have been transparent to Christ so far as His vocation made a demand for foresight." [19]

(2) Miracles. The second proof for the fact that the Bible is a revelation from God is to be found in miracles. By miracles is meant God's direct or unusual activity as over against His work through nature. Here God acts indirectly or mediately rather than immediately. For example, His usual way of making grape juice would be through the growth of grape vines and then the development of grapes on them. After the grapes have ripened man gathers them and crushes the juice from them. This is a long process, and nature and man join with God in bringing it about. However, even in this case, the major responsibility rests with God. In the last analysis, it is He that must give the increase. It is customary to describe this method of making grape juice as natural. On the other hand, at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, Jesus as God made grape juice immediately or directly. It was done instantaneously and was a miracle, something supernatural. The Bible gives a record of many miracles — the supernatural or immediate activity of God. The fact that they are found in the Bible points to the supernatural origin of its contents.

The miracle already referred to — the turning of water into wine — and the references which have been made to nature indicate that a miracle, as the term is being used here, has to do with changes in the natural or physical world. Some speak of being saved or being entirely sanctified as miracles; and from one standpoint such experiences are truly the greatest of miracles. God acts immediately upon the personality when men are saved or sanctified. Here there is an example of the highest type



of supernatural activity. But, in the present discussion, we are limiting miracle to God's direct intervention in the visible or natural world. This is the usual meaning of the term.

How may one be sure that that which claims to be a miracle is a miracle? On what is the genuineness of miracles based? Miracles cannot avoid being spectacular or sensational. They cannot escape drawing attention to themselves and to those who perform them or are the immediate agents in their appearance. However, we may know at once that they are not genuine if there is good reason to believe that they were performed merely for show or just for the purpose of drawing attention to themselves. The primary purpose of a genuine miracle always goes beyond itself. In other words, it is always a means to an end. This end may be stated in a twofold form — the revelation of God and the relieving of human distress. God reveals Himself through the immediate assistance which He gives to men by intervening in nature in their behalf. Whatever is done through this ministry of miracle performing must be worthy of a God who is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. This rules out at once the trifling or the petty and the low or mean. One reason that there are so few miracles today is that God cannot trust His followers with this wonder-working power. It is too easy for us to get our eyes on the miracle and our importance as the agent of its performance and lose sight of its purpose as the revelation of God in the relief of human need.

In line with what has just been said, it is important to note that the evidential value of miracles is secondary. They were not mainly performed in order to prove that the Bible is a revelation from God, but one by-product of their presence in the biblical record is their witness to this fact. Their principal purpose was to worthily reveal God through their ministry to the life of man here on this earth.

Another by-product of miracles (especially those which were performed by Christ) is the spiritual message which they convey. The Feeding of the Five Thousand is followed in John's Gospel by the discourse on the Bread of Life. Just as Christ had satisfied their physical hunger, He would also be the Bread of Life to their famished souls. The miracle made His teaching as to the Bread of Life much more fitting and effective (John 6). Jesus opened the eyes of the man who had been born blind, but that was not all. This was but a sure sign of the fact that He could become the light of the world, could open blind spiritual eyes (John 9). Opening the blind physical eyes laid the foundation for the greater truth that He was the spiritual light of the world. It is no wonder that the blind man, soon after his sight was restored, became a believer and worshipped. His spiritual blindness was healed and he was able to behold that which was unseen and eternal. Christ stilled the tempest on the Galilean Sea, and the endangered boat rested on the calm waters. This miracle was but a token of the fact that the soul tossed about by sin could be quieted. This was proved by the fact that the demon possessed man was freed from the tempest which swept across his soul (Mark 4:35 to 5:21). Jesus' miracles were thus acted parables heralding to the world the glorious truth that what He had done in behalf of the material needs of men could be duplicated in the realm of the spiritual.

There are those who would accept the miracles of Christ and yet exclude those of the Old Testament. This is not a reasonable procedure. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New. "He is the same yesterday, today, and forever." The miracles of Moses and Aaron, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha are not to be ruled out. God was in them worthily revealing Himself in behalf of that which was right. Neither are the miracles of the disciples of Christ to be outlawed. God worked

through Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul as well as others of Christ's followers. They did not take the glory to themselves. They were ever ready to recognize that the power came from God. These miracles, as well as those from the Old Testament, bear the marks of genuineness. Therefore, while there is no reason to take from the significance of the miracles of the Old Testament and those of the followers of Christ, there is cause for emphasizing the miracles of Jesus. They set the standard for all of the others. They are exceptional both in variety and number. The Christ was master of both nature and human nature. He could turn water into wine, still the tempest, feed the five thousand and thus manifest His power over nature; or, He could cool the fevered brow, unstop the deaf ears, open the blind eyes, cause the lame man to walk, make the withered hand whole, cleanse the leper, raise the dead, and thus demonstrate His power over human nature. No other person on this earth has done what He did. And to put the seal upon all that He did in the way of miracles, He came forth from the dead Himself. He had a right to declare "I am the resurrection and the life." A book that records all of this must be a revelation from God.

(3) The unique personality of Jesus Christ. What has just been said as to the miracles of Jesus naturally leads to the next proof for the fact that the Bible is a revelation from God. This argument is the unique personality of Jesus Christ. What a person Jesus Christ was as He walked among men! Never man spake as He did. This was true both as to His manner or method and as to the content of what He said. He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. Along with this suggestion as to the method of His teaching must be placed the originality of His precepts. Read the Sermon on the Mount or some of His great parables and there will be evident a level of thought which surpasses anything else which has ever been brought to men. Think of the claims He made for Himself. He did not hesitate to say, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Still, along with all of these claims there was nothing of arrogance or of the air of superiority. He was the humblest person who has ever walked on this earth. He could, without the least embarrassment, take the towel and basin and wash the feet of His disciples. Such a procedure was not in the least foreign to Him. He was always forgiving others of the guilt of their sins but never had any consciousness of sin Himself. This forgiving spirit was a manifestation of His matchless love and tenderness. He saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, and His heart was filled with compassion for them. This was His usual reaction to the people he met; for most of them were in distress. There were occasions, however, when He manifested courage and severity. The hypocritical Pharisees more than once called forth the fury of His hatred for sin. In this case, He never hesitated to tell them to their faces their terrible condition (Matthew 23). There was not the least indication of fear on His part. He was a man of sorrows and yet He made a place for sociability and friendship with the joy that always accompanies them. As proof of this latter statement, His presence at the wedding celebration at Cana and His close friendship with Lazarus and Mary and Martha may be cited.

The Bible is a Christ-centered book. Its sole purpose is to present the redeeming Christ, His person and His work. This theme in itself raises the Bible above the level of other books. It is the

only book known to men which deals with a person who is supernatural and unique; and, therefore, it must be a supernatural and unique book.

(4) Variety and harmony of the Bible. Another proof for the divine origin of the Bible is its variety combined with its harmony and balance. It was produced by a large number of individuals over a period of many centuries, and yet there is no lop-sidedness or disharmony within its limits. In the Old Testament there are laws, history, psalms or songs, prophecies, and the aphorisms of Proverbs and the other portions of the wisdom literature. In the New Testament there are history, epistles, and prophecy. These different types may be divided and subdivided into sections which differ much among themselves. Every need of the human personality as to intellect, will, and feeling is met. Every experience of human life can find its place somewhere in this wonderful Book. No other volume has equalled it for variety, and yet it is a variety which brooks no contradictions or lack of balance. Surely it has upon it more than the touch of man!

(5) The Holy Spirit's witness. The last proof which shall be offered is the Holy Spirit's witness to the divine origin of the Bible. In the last analysis, man can only say that Christ is divine by the aid of the Holy Spirit. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3). The same is true as to the Bible. The final and only sure proof that the Bible is a revelation from God is the witness of the Holy Spirit to this fact in the heart of the believer. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth or revelation, and because of this He can witness to the truth (John 14:17; 15:26). Further, any witness of the Holy Spirit to Christ and His work is a witness to the truth of the Bible, because the record of the divine Christ and His redemptive work is found in the Bible. Next to the witness of the Holy Spirit to regeneration and entire sanctification stands His testimony to the Christ who lived and walked among men, who died on the cross, who was resurrected and then ascended to the Father, and who now ever liveth to make intercession for us. His witness to these facts is His witness to the divinely ordained record of them as given in the Bible.

### **Inspiration**

Closely related to the truth that the Bible is a revelation from God or a communication of truth from God to man is the fact of the inspiration of the Bible. Inspiration when applied to the Bible refers to the help which God gave man in recording the truth that had been communicated to him. It must be remembered, however, that these two terms — revelation and inspiration are so interrelated that their difference should not be too much emphasized. As a rule, one involves the other. This was certainly the case with the Bible.

How did God help men, to whom the truths of the Bible were communicated, to record those truths in such a way that they would be an infallible rule of faith and practice? It was of no great value to give the truth to them if they were not to be aided in such a way as to make it available to men all down through the centuries.

Sometimes men have emphasized the fact that God illuminated the mind of the inspired individual. This is true as far as it goes, but it really has nothing to do with inspiration. It is related to revelation and not inspiration. Illumination is that especially heightened or intensified condition which takes possession of the mind of a person which enables him to grasp the truth revealed or

communicated. It is not directly connected with inspiration, although along with revelation it must come into existence before there can be any need for inspiration or the recording of the message. Revelation — the message is given; illumination — the mind is prepared to receive the message; and inspiration — the individual is so assisted by the Holy Spirit that he is able to record the message correctly. Thus illumination cannot be an answer to the nature of inspiration. In other words, it is not a valid theory of inspiration.

Two human theories of inspiration may be considered next. These are the theories of genius and of the religious consciousness. The first of these theories would make the writers of the Bible nothing more than religious geniuses. They can record the truth given as it should be because they are naturally gifted in things religious. This would make the Bible no more inspired in its field than Shakespeare's works are in the field of literature. The religious consciousness theory of inspiration would make the recording of the truth of the Bible the effect of an unusual religious experience. Such a view would certainly not make the Bible a unique book. We must eliminate these two human theories as inadequate. They make plenty of room for man but no place for the special intervention of God. The third theory goes to the other extreme and places all of the responsibility for inspiration on God. It is the mechanical theory. Sometimes it is called the dictation or full verbal view as to inspiration. This theory holds that every word of the Bible was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Man was just an instrument used by God as a human being might use a pen to record his words. This really means that man as a person had nothing to do with the creation of the Bible.

The last view that will be mentioned is the dynamic theory. It holds that the thought of the writers of the Bible was so dominated by the Holy Spirit that the truth recorded is an infallible rule of faith and practice. This is truly a divine-human theory. It does not exclude the human element, and neither does it exclude the divine. This is the true theory of inspiration, the explanation of the way in which the writers of the Bible were enabled to record the truth communicated to them as they should.

There is one great passage in the Bible which has to do with inspiration that must not be overlooked. It is found in II Timothy 3:14-17. Paul has been telling Timothy of the wickedness which shall be so prevalent in the last days. He knows full well that conditions will be such as to try men's souls. Because of this, he closes the chapter with an exhortation to Timothy to hold fast to those things which he has learned from the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. And then Paul concludes the chapter with these significant words: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Of course the inspired scriptures for Paul were those of the Old Testament. However, the words which he was writing and all of those of the New Testament were as truly inspired as those of the Old Testament.

### **General Remarks**

We close this discussion on the Bible with three general remarks, all of which have already been implied but not specifically stated. The first of these is that the Bible is a divine-human book. It is a human book because it was written by men and for men and about men. Men of like passions as we are — Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Paul, John, and Peter — walk before us in this

book. It is also a human book because it is written sympathetically, that is, with a view to man's need and his highest good. More important than the fact that the Bible is a human book is the fact that it is a divine book. God through the Holy Spirit had to do with the making of the Bible in a way in which He never had to do with the making of any other book. The Bible, as we have it, was inspired as no other book has ever been inspired or will ever be inspired. It is different from other books both in degree and in kind. It is a unique book, just as Christ was a unique person.

The second general remark which is presented in concluding this section is that the Bible is not just the sacred book of one of the religions of the world. Neither is it merely a book about the Christian religion. It is the book of the Christian religion; and this Christian religion is the only true religion. Thus we have in the Bible the final word about the final religion. If one will follow its instructions, he can rest assured that he will be able to reach life's highest good.

The third and last general remark emphasizes the fact that the Bible must be a living book in order to be of any value to us. There are many people who hold a perfectly orthodox theory as to the inspiration of the Bible, and yet the Bible means little or nothing to them. A perfect theory is not enough for you and me. We must know the Holy Spirit and be able to have dealings with Him if we would have a Bible which is worthwhile. The words of the Bible are dead unless they are made alive by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. The Bible, to be dynamic and thus helpful, must be a living book; and it can be a living book only as the Holy Spirit makes it live.

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

**Stephen Solomon White, B.D., Ph.D.**

## **Chapter VI THE FUTURE**

### **The Immortality of the Soul**

The first consideration, as we begin to look into the future, is the immortality of the soul. What is the nature of this immortality, if there be such? or in other words, what is meant by the immortality of the soul? This immortality is personal and not mechanical. Men will not just continue to exist forever as so many physical atoms. Immortality is not an everlasting existence based on the scientific notion which holds that all matter is indestructible. Dr. O. A. Curtis, after having listened to a preacher trying to prove immortality from the scientist's claim as to the indestructibility of matter, expressed indignation at such an argument. He declared that he had no desire to live on forever as no more than so many atoms. It was personal and not mechanical immortality in which he was interested, and such immortality is the only thing which can be meant by true immortality. To be personal, this immortality must be conscious and not unconscious. Further, it must be self-conscious. We must not only have conscious experience but we must be conscious of the fact that we are having conscious experience. This conception of immortality also excludes the possibility of reducing immortality to what is termed social immortality. This is sometimes referred to as the immortality of influence and means that the only way a man will live in the future is in his influence on society. He dies but his works go on blessing or cursing the world. There is undoubtedly such an influence, but it is not all that there is to life in the future. Over and beyond this, immortality, when rightly understood, means that the individual will consciously exist as an individual forever.

What arguments are there for the immortality of the soul? It is one thing to set forth the nature of immortality, while it is quite another to prove that the immortality defined will be a reality. However, we believe that there are excellent arguments for personal immortality. There is the universal desire for immortality. Not only do men in Christian lands want to live after death, but those in non-Christian countries feel the same way about it. Not only do men in this age desire immortality, but men in every age have been tremendously interested in it. Roger Babson, in a preface which he wrote for a book on immortality, declared that if he were editor of the book he would have named it, "What Everybody Wants Most of All" (A. A. Gates, *My Belief in Immortality*, p. 12). Of course, it must be admitted that desire does not necessarily mean that that which is desired must be a reality. On the other hand, it seems strange that men should long so universally for immortality and yet there be no possibility for this longing to be satisfied.

Another fact which points to the immortality of the soul is the unfairness or inequalities of life. We know that this is not a just world. Too often the wicked flourish and prosper while the righteous suffer and are pressed by poverty. Too often crime goes unpunished. An attorney's secretary once declared to me that they won the cases they ought to lose and lost the cases they ought to win. Of course this was not meant literally, but it did emphasize in a vivid way the truth that justice is often not achieved in this life. This being the case, there must be a hereafter where the scales are balanced,

where the glaring inequalities of this life will be made right. This is certainly implied in the following statement about the rich man and Lazarus: "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke 16:25).

Connected with the argument from the inequalities of life is the claim that immortality is essential to morality. What meaning can conscience have, with its call to do the right and leave undone the wrong, if this life is all and its injustices are final? Why talk about duty and virtue if this is the kind of world we live in? Morality can really have value only as it rests upon a belief in immortality. Otherwise, the slogan would be, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

Another important piece of evidence for immortality is that this life does not furnish time enough for the wonderful capacities of the human personality to realize themselves. When man has just reached his prime and the mind is ready to function at its best, the body begins to disintegrate. Several years ago Henri Bergson, the famous French philosopher, said that two things must be established scientifically before immortality could be accepted from the standpoint of the scientist. These two requirements were stated as follows: It must be proved first that the soul can exist apart from the body and second that its abilities are not exhausted in this life. He very cautiously asserted that some progress had been made in the direction of both of these. We mention this bit of information as to the late French thinker because it centers in the second point on the importance of man's capacities and the probability that they are not used to their full limit in this present life. This fact which the overcautious scientist only partially recognizes is undoubtedly true. Man's capacities are not exhausted in his brief and hurried stay here. Therefore, there must be a life beyond where men will have a chance to develop the endowments which have been so richly bestowed upon them.

The thought of man's capacities leads us to the thought of his personality as a whole. The dignity and worth of man's personality demands his immortality. although sin has marred it, it still retains enough of its former glory to place it in a class by itself. The image of God which was his to begin with has not been completely destroyed. No wonder Shakespeare said, "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!" No wonder the Psalmist declared, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalm 8:4,5). No wonder God saw enough possibilities in man, even after he had sinned, to give His only begotten Son that he might not perish but have everlasting life! No wonder a recent writer emphasizes man's superiority over the animal world thus: "If dogs were to develop a written language and write plays like those of Shakespeare, if they were to erect edifices like the Empire State Building and build ships like the Queen Mary, if they were to construct telephones and radio stations, if they were to develop an intricate moral code and write histories of ethics, if they were to discover and classify the laws of nature and use them for their own purposes, we might begin to speak of the humanity of dogs. Until they do these things, we may leave them comfortably upon the subhuman level".<sup>[20]</sup> Man's personality has dignity and worth, and this fact demands that it shall not come to an end with the death and decay of the body. The creator of so significant a creature could not be such as to condemn it to so short an existence as falls within the limits of this earthly life.

In the past there were quite a few scientists, and even today there are some, who belittle the idea of man's immortality in a universe as vast as modern astronomy has discovered. This situation has been described as follows: "Science tells us that the Milky Way is a galaxy of stars, from ten billion to a trillion. And there are thousands of these galaxies in the heavens above us. Also, the microscope opens up to us the universe of the little things that the eye cannot see. The earth becomes a little speck tossed out into space, a drop of water in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore. Compared with the universe, the earth, man's home, is like a grain of sand. Why, then, should the inhabitant of this tiny bit of matter expect to go into the universe a son of the infinite God, and live forever?" <sup>[21]</sup> The same writer answers this question as follows: "The vastness of the universe is matched by the human personality. God is concerned with quality as well as with mass. The scientist who measures the stars is greater than the stars. The mind and its directing will, going abroad among the stars and galaxies, is greater than they. And the vaster the universe which man has discovered, the vaster and more significant his intellect. The man looking through the telescope is more than the spaces his thought travels and the masses he measures and weighs. . . . The vaster the universe, the clearer the title to immortality of the beings who can think such a universe. And is it not to be expected that such a being would live on to share with his Maker the wonders into which he has been born and has lived? It is quality that counts with God. The diamond which you hold between your thumb and finger may be worth more than a thousand tons of coal, or more than a hundred farms, the gray matter of man's brain may be more significant than a million suns." <sup>[22]</sup> It must also be added that the personality is much greater than the brain it uses. The vastness and wonder of the physical universe as revealed in modern times adds to rather than takes from the dignity and worth of human personality and its demand for immortality.

Still there are some who would add another proof for the immortality of the soul. They would make this one the most important of all. This argument is the goodness of God. A good God could not do otherwise than to conserve human personality, His highest creation, and the center of all that is worth while. There can be nothing truly valuable except in relation to personality; and God could not be good and fail to conserve that which is valuable and worth while. There is another way to state this argument. If there were a universe without God as its source, one would expect it to ignore and even crush personality. It would be mere blind matter and could not make a place for truth and beauty and goodness, the great moral and spiritual values — values which can reside only in personality. Immortality for man in such a universe — if one could conceive of man as existing under such circumstances — would be an impossible notion. Why should man live on and conserve truth and beauty and goodness in a universe that could have no regard for them? On the other hand, how could finite personality, a repository of moral and spiritual values, be created so as to perish in a universe created and supervised by an infinite person who is supremely interested in preserving these values?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is so well substantiated by the Gospels and Epistles, is conclusive evidence of immortality for the Christian. The classical statement of this truth is found in I Corinthians 15:3-23, 55-58. He who conquered death for Himself can surely conquer it for those who have committed their lives into His hands. The Spirit that raised Christ will raise us (Romans 8:11; II Corinthians 4:14). Further, we are confident that He who has quickened our spirits which were dead in trespasses and sins can and will quicken our mortal bodies.



2. The second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming back to earth again. His first coming was in humiliation. He came to die for the sinner. His second coming will be in triumph and glory. The Gospel of Mark sets forth this truth thus: "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26. See also Matthew 24:30 and Luke 21:27). When Christ ascended, two heavenly messengers appeared and comforted those who looked on with these words: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The Lord's second coming was very close to the heart of the Apostle Paul. It was the most prominent theme of his teachings as to the future. I Thessalonians 4:16-18 gives us one of his most significant passages. It reads as follows: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

In Revelation we read: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). These passages emphasize the certainty of our Lord's return. They also teach that this return is to be visible and personal.

We do not know when Jesus will come back to earth again. Jesus Himself taught that only the Father had this knowledge. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32. See also Matthew 24:36). After all, the future is in the hands of God, and Jesus cautions against seeking to know it. When His followers became inquisitive as to the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, Jesus answered them thus: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). There will be signs of His coming, but a knowledge of the exact time will not be within the grasp of man's mind.

While the Bible does not reveal the exact time of the second coming of Jesus, it does teach that His coming is imminent or at hand. Constant expectancy characterized the attitude of the New Testament writers and disciples toward the second coming. They were on the alert for the immediate return of their Lord. This is the attitude which should possess the true disciple of every age. He has the upward gaze and is filled with the hope that his Master may return at any moment.

The many exhortations to watchfulness on the part of the disciples of Christ are in harmony with this truth as to the imminence of His return. If His return is imminent, then we must ever be on the watch for it. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42). "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13). "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:35-37).

Closely connected with the idea of watchfulness is that of readiness. "Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). The Master's coming is to be sudden, as sudden as the lightning which "cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west" (Matthew 24:27), but those who follow Him must be ready. They must not permit the day to come upon them unawares (Luke 21:34). The parable of the ten virgins sets this truth before us in

a vivid manner. At midnight the coming of the bridegroom was broadcast. The five wise virgins were awakened and went out to meet their Lord. They had oil in their lamps and were consequently ready for His coming. While the foolish virgins went to buy oil for their lamps which were going out, the door was shut. They were not ready for the coming of their Lord. We may spend our time on detailed and strange interpretations in connection with this parable, but the one and only important truth in it is that some were ready when Christ came and others were not. God forbid that you and I should be in the latter class!

How may we be sure that we are ready for His coming? By a policy of watchful waiting? No! Some have claimed that the reaction on the part of those who believe strongly in the imminent return of their Lord is to watch and wait. This should not be the case. The proper reaction is watchful working. While we watch for His return we shall do everything that we can to introduce others to Him so that they too will be prepared for His coming. Another way of stating the same truth is to say that we must be up-to-date Christians if we would be ready when He comes. By this we mean that we must now be actively forwarding His kingdom. Christian experience is essential, but the highest Christian experience is not a stopping place. It is good to cross over Jordan and set foot on the land of Canaan, but we cannot dwell there if we would be ready when Jesus comes. We must go on up unto the hill country and conquer new territory.

The thought of the imminent return of Jesus is used as a stimulus to the highest type of Christian experience and living by the writers of the New Testament. Peter, after telling us that the Lord is not slack concerning His promises, gives us these words: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Peter 3:10, 11). James writes: "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (5:8). Peter sets up the second coming as a motive for holy conversation and godliness and James uses it to inspire us to patience and the establishment of our hearts. Paul begins his apocalypse (II Thessalonians 2:1-12) with these significant words: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ —" Notice that the basis of His beseeching or exhortations is the second coming. Again, in the third chapter of First Thessalonians we have this benediction: "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (3:11-13).

One more outstanding Pauline passage is found in First Thessalonians 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The twofold theme of Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonian Church is holiness and the second coming. The thought and prospect of the latter moves one to seek and attain the former in both experience and expanding life, while the former is the special preparation which one should have in order to be fully ready for the latter. "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and

a pure heart" (Psalm 24:2,3). He who would stand unafraid before the holy Christ when He returns must have clean hands and a pure heart.

The coming of Christ in glory and power is symbolic of the final triumph of Christianity. The Revelation of John which has so much to do with the second coming deals with a conflict which ends in glorious victory. One writer has summarized the message of Revelation thus: "The book is a picture of the persecuted Church, a prophecy of her certain deliverance by her heavenly Redeemer, a delineation of the supremacy and triumph of Christ over every foe, and the glory which awaits His faithful disciples." Christ's coming means victory and glory for Him and His Church.

### **Physical Death, Bodily Resurrection, and the Judgment**

Three other facts should be mentioned in connection with our study of the future, before we discuss hell and heaven. They have already been implied in much that we have written. The first is physical death. It is universal and is the result of sin. It is the racial penalty for sin. The second is that the Bible teaches a bodily resurrection and not just a spiritual resurrection. Third, there will be a judgment, either formal or informal, where rewards and punishments will be meted out to each individual.

### **Hell**

The Bible teaches that there is a hell. The following passages prove this fact. In the judgment scene found in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus says: 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' Another striking statement from the lips of Jesus is found in Matthew 8:12: "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." To these two passages, let us add one more which was also uttered by Jesus. It seems to me to be the most terrible in all of the Bible. Hell is described as "the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-48). Three times these awful words are recorded. We are told that it would be better for us to go through this life maimed— minus a hand or a foot or an eye — than to remain whole and because of the offense of one of these members go into hell. Of those who know not God and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul writes thus: "who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (II Thessalonians 1:9). Saint John writes as follows as to the final doom of the wicked: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). These are only a few of the passages which might be quoted that teach either directly or indirectly the fact that there is a hell.

The scriptures which we have presented teach that the wicked, the finally impenitent, are to go to hell. Their state in hell will be one of intense suffering, suffering which will be both physical and mental. The story of the rich man as well as the biblical passages already referred to teach this truth. He suffered physically — there was no water to quench his burning thirst; he suffered mentally — his memory was ever present, he constantly became more conscious of the gulf which he had dug between himself and God, and he was distressed lest his brethren would come to that place of

torment. But I hear someone say that this account of the rich man and Lazarus is only a parable. It does not say so. Besides, you would even make hell worse if you proved that it were a parable. Parables are only pictures; and if the realities which they represent are bad, they are worse than the representation of them. If Jesus gave us only a parable when He told us about the rich man and Lazarus, He implied thereby that hell was worse than this picture which he had presented.

This suffering which the wicked are to fall heir to in hell is endless. There are those who tell us that the wicked are annihilated — blotted out of existence. They base their proof largely on such words as death, perdition, destroy or destruction, and the term lost. But these words never mean annihilate in the Bible where they refer to the future of the wicked. Dr. Mullins has this to say in this connection: "Death in Scripture means the absence of life, and as applied to the soul it means the absence of fellowship with God. Perdition means the moral state resulting from this separation from God and His holiness. Destroy means to overcome or render inoperative. . . . The word lost means separated from God and without power of self-recovery" <sup>[23]</sup>

Again, if eternal means endless duration when applied to God (Romans 16:26; Hebrews 9:14) and endless duration when applied to the future state of the righteous (Matthew 25:46; II Corinthians 4:17; Hebrews 5:9), I see no reason why it should not signify that when used in connection with punishment and destruction (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Besides all this, we have Christ's own verdict on this question. He has this to say: "Their worm dieth not" and "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-48). He joins those who hold that the suffering of the wicked in hell is endless in duration, and His authority is final. Immortality is natural to man and not something which is acquired. The wicked will live forever as well as those who choose Christ. Therefore, their suffering will be without end, as surely as the joy and glory of the righteous will be without end.

Let us remember that hell was created by sin and not by God. There would not be a hell if there were no sin or sinners. This rules out forever the notion that there is no hell because God is too good to bring it into existence. Further, those who hold that everlasting punishment is too severe a consequence of the rejection of Christ, should bear in mind the awful price that the triune God paid in order to make salvation possible for men. There is no sin that can compare with the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. At infinite cost to Himself and the entire Godhead He made provision for man to have a second chance.

Although the lot of all of the wicked will be endless suffering, this condition will vary as to degree. "The Judge of all the earth will do right. We need have no misgivings as to this point. The degree of light men possess; the degree of fidelity to the light; the use of the opportunities and powers with which they are blessed; the circumstances which condition their lives; in a word, every fact which has any bearing upon human guilt and responsibility will be considered. It follows from this that not all the wicked will suffer the same degree of punishment." <sup>[24]</sup> Some of the scriptural proofs for this fact are as follows: Servants beaten with many stripes as over against those who are beaten with few (Luke 12:47,48); some wicked cities which will have better standing at the judgment than others (Matthew 11:21-24); every man will be dealt with according to his works (Romans 2:12). This truth is certainly taught in the Bible, but the full comprehension of it cannot be attained by men here below.

## Heaven

The Bible teaches that there is a heaven. The following passages prove this fact: Jesus said: "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). John calls this place the holy city, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). This place is further described in Revelation: "And there shall be no night there," "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof"; "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life;" "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him"; "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21, 22).

The scriptures which we have presented teach that the righteous, those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, will go to heaven. Those who get to heaven will always remain there. Their sojourn in that city will be everlasting.

The blessings of heaven will be many. This is indicated by the scriptures cited above. This life is not only endless in duration but it will be unexcelled in quality. The conquest of medical science has been wonderful indeed. The frontiers which mark the outposts of the advance of this marvelous science are continually being pushed back. However, sickness has not been abolished. Hospitals are still needed. Physicians still find plenty to do. But in heaven it will not be so. There will be no pain (sickness or disease) there. The contagion of heaven will be health. Its forces will ride upon every breeze and dwell in every element. The leaves of the tree of life will be dispensers of health.

Disease brings on death, but in heaven where there will be no disease, there will be no more death. How comforting this is since we now live in the land of the dying! An eastern legend tells of a woman who sought a handful of rice in a home where death never entered. She had no difficulty in getting the handful of rice when she asked if they were all there — father, mother, and children, the people shook their heads and invariably replied with sighs and sadness, that there was some vacant seat by the hearth-side. Someone has truly said that death is the commonest thing in life. But its day will end. There will be no graves on the hillsides of glory. Fadeless and immortal youth will be ours in the pearly white city.

"I have heard of a land on the far away strand,  
"Tis a beautiful home of the soul;  
Built by Jesus on high, there we shall never die,  
"Tis a land where we never grow old."

Sorrow, trouble, the aching heart are all too prevalent in this world. The husband and father who has worked hard to provide for his family and has thereby managed to save a nice sum loses it through some untoward circumstance. Thus one of the great ambitions of his life is left unrealized. What mental suffering hounds him as he ekes out a mere existence for himself and his family! There is the mother who is suddenly left alone to rear several children. Who can measure her sorrow? There is the mother who has a prodigal son or daughter from whom she has not heard for years. The

aching heart which results abides with her day and night. Then there are those who have burdens which are too deep and serious to mention. They never talk about them except to God. But in heaven there will be no sorrow or crying. God Himself shall wipe away all tears.

In heaven there will be no night. Night suggests the need for rest, repose, relaxation. These will not be necessary in the City of God. There will be no weariness there. Again, darkness is a type of sin; and a land without darkness will be a land without sin. All types of sin will be excluded from heaven.

A country in which there will be no sickness, death, sorrow, weariness, and sin will also have to be a land of cloudless day. This means that there will be no disasters or catastrophes. Tornadoes, floods, fires, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, wars, and similar calamities, will be ruled out in the holy City. No wonder our fathers and mothers sang:

"O they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,  
O they tell me of a home far away;  
O they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,  
O they tell me of an unclouded day.

O the land of a cloudless day,  
O the land of an unclouded sky;  
O they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,  
O they tell me of an unclouded day."

So far, we have dealt largely with what heaven will not be. Let us emphasize now what it will be. Heaven will be a land of endless health and life, of perennial energy and activity, of continuous accomplishment without weariness. It will be a land of endless light, and righteousness and progress. In heaven we shall be like Jesus Christ, our Savior, for we shall see Him as He is. There the mysteries of this life will be cleared up. We shall no longer see through a glass darkly, we shall know even as we are known. Heaven will bring us a blessed time of reunion and fellowship. We shall meet our loved ones, friends, the saints of all the ages, and, best of all, our Savior. We shall meet Him face to face. This close fellowship with Him and with the others will be endless. "Over there we'll never say goodbye. No parting words shall e'er be spoken in that bright land of flowers, But songs of joy, and peace and gladness shall evermore be ours.

"We'll never say goodbye in heaven,  
We'll never say goodbye,  
for in that land of joy and song  
we'll never say goodbye."

There are degrees in the rewards of heaven as well as in the punishments of hell. In the parable of the talents each servant was rewarded according to his ability (Matthew 25:14-30). The parable of the pounds suggests the same truth (Luke 19:12-27). Paul tells us of the man whose work shall be burned, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Corinthians 3:15). There will be

fullness of joy for all in heaven, but not all will have the same capacities. Our capacity there will depend upon our loyalty to Christ here.

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# **ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

By

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## **End Notes**

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[22] *Ibid*, p. 199.

[23] Mullins, E. Y., *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*, The Judson Press, 1917, p. 492. Used by permission.

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