

UPON THE ROCK

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Vol. 5 Issue 9

REASONS FOR LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Upon the Rock is published monthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians

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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS THE ABUNDANT LIFE

A.J. Cox

The Christian life is thought by some to be a life of monastic boredom. The unregenerate are no doubt confused and amused because “those poor Christians are missing out on the good life!” It is true that Christians do not partake of most of what the unrighteous consider to be the good things in life. This is not because Christians are “dull and don’t know how to enjoy themselves.” Christians simply disagree with non-Christians as to what are the good things in life. In fact, non-Christians are just plain wrong as to what composes the good life. The Lord said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). The Christian life is the “uncommon, exceeding, and full” life. It is “more than average;” a life of overflowing benefits. Why is the Christian life the abundant life?

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LIFE OF PEACE

Isaiah the prophet saw a time of peace wherein predator and prey would dwell together and the earth would be full of the knowledge of the LORD (Isaiah 11:6-9). That time of peace began on the day of Pentecost and is fulfilled in the spiritual peace enjoyed in the church of Christ (Acts 2). Upon receiving the gospel of peace a person can be justified by faith and have peace with God (Ephesians 6:15; Romans 5:1). By the preaching of peace, and reconciliation in the body, all men can be at peace with one another (Ephesians 2:11-17).

Peter said grace and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (2 Peter 1:2). Imagine how much more peace there would be in the home if spouses, parents, and children applied the knowledge of God to their families (Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:21-6:4). Consider the pain and suffering that is associated with drugs and alcohol and how applying the knowledge of God could bring peace (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; Matthew 6:24). Think about all of those who have suffered at the hands of lawless men and how the application of the knowledge of God could have spared them so much grief and turmoil (Romans 13:1-10). The Christian life is the abundant life because it is a life of spiritual peace that passes all understanding (Romans 8:6; Philippians 4:7).

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

1. Hear THE WORD OF GOD - (Romans 10:17; Matthew 7:24-27).
2. Believe THE WORD OF GOD - (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).
3. Repent OF YOUR SINS - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3).
4. Confess THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD - (Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).
5. Be baptized FOR THE REMISSION OF YOUR SINS- (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4).
6. Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

**FIRST ANNUAL CHESTNUT MOUNTAIN
LECTURESHIP
OCTOBER 11-13, 2002**

PRIZED PASSAGES FROM HEBREWS

Friday, OCTOBER 11, 2002

- 7:00 pm “God Spoke to the Fathers by the Prophets”
(Hebrews 1:1) - Mark Reynolds

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2002

- 1:00 pm "God Spoke by His Son" (Hebrews 1:2) – A.J. Cox
- 2:00 pm “The Word was Confirmed” (Hebrews 2:1-4) - Skip Andrews
 - 3:00 pm “The Word of God is Living and Powerful”
(Hebrews 4:12) - Brandon Britton
 - 4:00 pm “Make All Things According to the Pattern”
(Hebrews 8:5) - Mike Gors
- 7:00 pm “Better Covenant; Better Promises” (Hebrews 8:6)
- Larry Reynolds

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2002

- 9:00 am “He Who Promised Is Faithful” (Hebrews 10:23) -
Mike Gors
 - 10:00 am “Do Not Refuse Him Who Speaks” (Hebrews
12:25) - Larry Reynolds
- 6:00 pm “May God Make Your Complete” (Hebrews 13:20-
21) - AJ. Cox

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LIFE OF CONTENTMENT

Every person has a void to fill; a hunger to satisfy; a thirst to quench. Men seek to content themselves by filling their lives with all manner of things. Solomon sought to fill his life with all the wrong things. He tried to fill the void in his life with pleasure, eating and drinking, great works, wealth, music, knowledge, and every other conceivable excess (Ecclesiastes 2). If ever there was a man who could have filled the void in his life with material possessions and pleasures, it was Solomon. In the end, however, Solomon concluded that the only thing that could bring man true contentment was fearing God and keeping His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

It is both sad and ironic that so many today would seek to fill the void in their life with the very same things with which Solomon sought to content himself, only in lesser quantities than Solomon! The person who thinks he can be happy and content simply by surrounding himself with great material wealth will find that he can never be wealthy enough (Luke 12:16-21). So many have learned what the rich man learned, only too late; “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). The Christian, however, fills the void in His life by seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and trusting in the providence of God to add the necessities of life (Matthew 6:24-34). The Christian’s thirst is quenched by drinking the living water, and his hunger is satisfied by partaking of the bread of life (John 4:5-14; 6:32-35; Revelation 22:17). When a person fills the void in his life with Christ he learns in whatsoever sate he is in, therewith to be content (Philippians 4:11). Since Christians are not consumed with the need to keep up with the Jones’ they are not discontent and miserable when they do not.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LIFE OF JOY

It is believed that Christians, by their abstaining from immorality, are missing out on all the good and pleasurable things of life. Christians, however, are the happiest people you will ever meet! Those who have their fill of immorality are the ones who are most often unhappy. The non-Christian’s happiness is generally determined by the quality of his surroundings. If he is not happy with his circumstances he is not

happy at all. The Christian, however, can rejoice in any and all circumstances. Take, for example, the apostle Paul. While in prison he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). How could Paul rejoice in such undesirable circumstances?

Number one, he could rejoice because he was in Christ (Philippians 3:3). In Christ he had all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, he was God's chosen, he enjoyed redemption, and he had obtained a heavenly inheritance (Ephesians 1:3, 4, 7, 11). His enemies could never take those things away from him!

Number two, Paul could rejoice because he was in fellowship with the saints (Philippians 1:1-7). When a person becomes a child of God they become a part of the greatest family in existence (Mark 10:29-30; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 2:19; I Timothy 3:15). The fellowship Paul enjoyed with the brethren in Philippi was special because they had financially supported him (Philippians 1:3-5; 4:15-18). Though a prisoner in Rome, Paul could take comfort in the knowledge that he had brethren who loved him.

Number three, Paul could rejoice because he had the hope of eternal life (Romans 8:23-25; II Timothy 4:8; Titus 1:2). Paul did not have to live, or die, in fear. In fact, he viewed death as great gain (Philippians 1:21-24). Paul had been laying up for himself treasures in heaven, and he knew once he departed to be with the Lord he would enjoy a kind of wealth this world could not offer (Matthew 6:19-21). The non-Christian does not have this hope. When the unrighteous face death they face it alone.

The Christian life is the abundant life because it is a life of joy. The Christian enjoys all of the blessings that come with being in Christ. They are a part of the greatest family known to man. And Christians do not have to live in fear, because they have the hope of eternal life.

A person is either saved or not saved; lost or not lost in Christ or not in Christ. There is no middle ground. Are you saved? Have you begun living the Christian life? If you have heard God's word you have taken a necessary step. If you have believed you are moving in the right direction. If you have repented of your sins you are getting close to Christ. If you have confessed Christ before men you are knocking on the door (Romans 10:10). But until you have been buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism, you have not entered into Christ's body. Do you want to face the Judgement as one who is outside the body of Christ? The door is there. Only you can open it. What will you choose? How about beginning today?

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essential in fact, but none put them in my house. Only the final, transitional step of entering my front door put each person inside my house, where the important item was located.

Just as one following directions to travel into my house must use common sense, so also must one following directions to get into Christ, where salvation is located. A person who has already believed in Christ and is asking what he must then do to be saved would not need to be told to believe as well as do other things, because that person has already believed. That individual is like the person in Nashville who does not need to be told to take 140 because he has already done that necessary step. One thing all who are outside my house must do to get inside my house is enter through the door. Similarly, one thing all must do to enter into Christ is be baptized into Christ. "Know ye not, that so many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4). "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Many things are necessary for one to be saved. A person must hear God's word (Romans 10:17); believe in Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16); repent of sins (Luke 13:3) and confess Christ before men (Matt. 10:32). All of these things are necessary in order to begin living the Christian life. Yet not one of these necessary steps puts us into Christ where one is saved. The step that moves us into Christ is water baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

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HOW MAY ONE ENJOY THE ABUNDANT LIFE?

The Christian life is the abundant life because it is a life of peace, contentment, and joy. Those who would enjoy the abundant life must hear the Good Shepherd's voice (the Lord's teaching) and follow Him (obey the Lord's teaching), (John 10:1-4). Men must enter in by the Lord to be saved, and having done so may find pasture (the abundant life), (John 10:7-10; Acts 2:41, 47).

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WHY LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE? TO AVOID THE HORRORS OF HELL

Brandon Britton

We have read the transcripts of the flight data recorders. We have listened to the cockpit audio recordings and the telephone answering machine messages. We have even seen the photographs, but we still cannot legitimately comprehend what it was like to be on those doomed planes the morning of September 11, 2001. No amount of dramatic recreation or revealing information can fully describe for us the terror, agony, fear and horror of being on one of those hijacked planes as they crashed into buildings or the ground. We would have to have been on those planes to fully understand the awfulness of what they went through, yet none of us would be willing to trade places with them just to know what it was like.

While the previous statements describe the hijacking of airplanes last year, they would also be a fitting description of the place known as Hell. We have read all about it in Scripture. Jesus has fully described it for us. We have had a picture of it painted for our mind's eye by the descriptive language of the New Testament, yet we cannot fully comprehend the horrors of Hell. No amount of description, no amount of warnings can make us fully aware of how unspeakably terrible Hell really is. The only way one can truly grasp the horror of such a place is by going there and experiencing it for himself; which is something none of us desire to do.

Perhaps an equally terrible tragedy is that, despite the adequate descriptions and warnings in the Bible, most people have forgotten or ignored Hell. Most people never give it a thought and few are truly terrified of such a place. Many people, even prominent religious leaders, deny the existence of such a place. In an article titled "Church Turns Away From Fire And Brimstone" in the Religion Section of *The Tennessean* newspaper (Volume 95; Number 213; Sunday August 1, 1999), some startling statements were made by influential religious leaders. For instance, "the pope sketched a version of hell that is more a state of ultimate loneliness than place of torment 'More than a physical place, hell is the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God,' the pope told an audience." The Religion Editor, Ray Waddle, went on to say that, "the Vatican is campaigning to strip the popular notion of hell of its devilish, folklorish ornament." Waddle would also mention that "in 1996, a Church of England commission declared it's time to put away hell's images of broiling furnaces and unquenchable fire. Those are quaint images from the Middle Ages that are used, unethically, to scare people into faith." In this article several other ministers and authors are cited as saying, "it's time to rethink hell in order to communicate better with people in the pews...centuries ago, we could talk about hell with fire and demons, and it made sense to people...talking about a devil with a pitchfork probably isn't believable." Alice Turner, author of *The History of Hell*, predicts, "the popularity of 'near-death experiences' will drive the idea of flaming hell underground." She further stated, "the concept of eternal hell is nowadays 'something of an embarrassment' in mainline Christianity." How awful it is that people will base their beliefs concerning Hell on "near-death experiences" while rejecting what the Word of God says about it. Sadly, untold millions put their faith in religious teachers who blaspheme the Word and integrity of God by referring to His description of Hell as being an unethical scare tactic. If you are the type of person who puts his faith in "near-death experiences" or the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9), you may want to stop reading because the remainder of this article will be devoted to studying what the Word of God has to say about the horrors of Hell.

HELL IS HORRIBLE BECAUSE OF ITS DARKNESS

One of the first and most basic of all human fears is the dark. Virtually all children are afraid of the dark. Some people remain afraid of the

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you..." (Acts 2:38) "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:31) "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16) "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom. 10:9) "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13) It seems as though several different answers are given for the same question. Could this mean that there are different ways to be saved? Must different people do different things to be saved?

The answer to these questions is easy when one first realizes where salvation is located. Salvation is in Christ. (2 Tim. 2:10) Thus, all saved individuals are in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). Christ claims to be the only way to heaven, thus all saved individuals must go the same way, through Christ To sum it up, Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved..." (John 10:9) Therefore, there is only one way to be saved and that way is Christ. So why were so many told to do different things?

A simple illustration should help clear up our thinking. A man located in Nashville, TN asks me how to get to my house. I reply, "Go south on 165; east on Hwy 278; and through my front door." Similarly, if someone in Cullman, AL asked me the same question I would answer, "Go east on Hwy 278 and through my front door." And for someone in Memphis, TN? "Go east on 140; south on 165; east on Hwy 278; and through my front door." Depending on where the person is in relation to my house, the remaining requirements into my house will be different. A person in Nashville would have no need to go back and travel on 140 because the individual has already past that step. Similarly, a person in Cullman would have no need going back to 140 or 165 because that individual has already accomplished both of those necessary steps. Yet, for each person, they were not in my home till they entered thought the front door. That was the step that put each one into my house. If something important were in my house that each person wanted, they would have to take the necessary remaining steps to get to my home, then all enter my home through the door. Each step before entering my front door were important,

THE FOOLISHNESS OF BEING UNPREPARED

God has forewarned us of the coming judgment that we all will face. He is waiting for the lost sinner to repent and come to Him. He is faithful in that it is certain that His Son will return. It is therefore foolish to be unprepared to meet God in judgment. We want to encourage you if you are not ready for the Lord to return today that it is not too late. Today is the day of salvation. Prepare to meet your God by hearing Him, repenting of your sins, confessing the Son of God and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38). Prepare today, do not delay.

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HOW TO BEGIN LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Tony Choate

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37) “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30) Both of these quotations have only two words in common. The first word, “what”, places the statement in the form of a question. The second word is “do”. Both the thousands present in Jerusalem on Pentecost and the Philippian Jailor wanted to know what they had to do to begin their Christian lives. They did not ask what God was going to do or what they had already done to become a Christian. They wanted to know what action(s) they needed to partake in to begin living the Christian life. The Apostles to whom they were speaking did not say, “You don’t have to do anything. God has done it all for you. The simple fact that you have asked means you have already done all you need.” Nor did they say, “There is nothing you can do to be saved.” Because they made no such statement we realize that we must do something to become a Christian. But what?

Many people throughout history have wondered what they needed to do to begin living the Christian life. We are blessed to have several accounts recorded in the New Testament of those desiring to become Christians. What were they told to do? Here are a few answers.

dark into adulthood. We do not like to be in the dark because we cannot see what is around us. In the dark someone could be standing right beside me, intending to hurt me, and I would not know it. Can you recall the last time the power went out and you had to spend most of the night in darkness? Chances are it was frustrating and you were very glad to get the lights back on. Would you want to spend one week in total darkness? How about one month? Does the idea of spending five years in total darkness, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, sound pleasant? The simple fact is, we prefer the light to the dark. Friend, in Hell the darkness lasts for all eternity. In the book of Matthew the Lord focuses on Hell as being a place of eternal darkness. In the parable of the marriage of the king’s son (Matthew 22:1-14) Jesus speaks of one who attempted to enter the wedding feast without the proper garments as being removed and cast into outer darkness (Matthew 22:13). A short time later He would teach the disciples the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Those who used what the Lord had given them were rewarded abundantly, but the one who was lazy and neglected to do the work of the Lord was cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:30). Children of God, children of the kingdom are not immune to this outer darkness. Jesus warned that the unfaithful children of God would be sentenced to outer darkness (Matthew 8:12). Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of this is the weeping and gnashing of teeth that will accompany this complete blindness. One thing that should motivate every Christian to live a life in faithful service to God is the fear of the horrors of Hell, such as eternal darkness.

HELL IS HORRIBLE BECAUSE OF ITS DESTRUCTION

One thing that all inhabitants of this planet must come to accept is the reality of destruction. There are natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, fires, tornados) and terrorist attacks, and any number of other things that can destroy in an instant what took years to build. Because these things are a reality, we have learned how to start over and rebuild. If you destroy an anthill, the survivors will immediately begin picking up the pieces and rebuilding. After the World Trade Center fell, we began cleaning up and making plans to rebuild. We believe that we can always start over. But in the spiritual sense the time for rebuilding is now, not when destruction comes, for then it will be too late. Jesus gave His life that we might be saved from our past sins and begin reconstructing our lives according to His Word

(Luke 19:10; Philippians 2:5ff). Through sin we have made a mess of our lives and Jesus offers to fix our mistakes and teach us how to begin again (Isaiah 53). When the Lord returns it will be too late. *“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Those who have not obeyed His Gospel will be sentenced to everlasting destruction. The rich man described his condition as being in torment (Luke 16:24-28) with no hope of relief. In Hell there will be no second chances, no amending past wrongs, no starting over, only eternal destruction and suffering.

HELL IS HORRIBLE BECAUSE OF ITS DURATION

Those who are serving prison sentences of one, five, ten, even fifty years are able to continue because they know eventually, no matter how long it may be, they will be set free. Hope is a powerful motivator. People have been able to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds because they had the hope of something better. In Hell, hope is taken away. The idea of darkness and the reality of suffering are horrible, but they would be bearable if we knew they would end in time. The most disturbing aspect of Hell is that it is eternal. The day you enter Hell the clock and calendar are thrown away because time as we know it will cease to exist. Once an individual is condemned to Hell, they will be there for all eternity. There will be no escape, there will be no parole. There will be no hope. We find comfort in the words to the song “Amazing Grace,” telling us, *“When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun; We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.”* However, these words are terrifying when we consider the same is true for Hell. Even after ten thousand years in torment the lost will be no closer to the end of their suffering than the day they entered the lake of fire. As has been previously mentioned the torment, the darkness, the suffering, the punishment will be everlasting, eternal (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 14:11; 20:10).

While it may be unpleasant and unpopular, the subject of Hell must be discussed and studied. There are too many young people who

will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live!” (Ezekiel 18:30-32). The God of heaven demands faithfulness of His children and it greaves Him when we choose to walk in accordance with the god of this world. Every time a person repents and becomes obedient to God the angels in heaven rejoice (Luke 15:7). He is waiting and wanting people to turn from their wickedness and turn to Him. Paul realized this when he penned the words to the young evangelist Timothy. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3,4). The nature of God is that He does not want anyone to be lost. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

The Bible affirms that God is faithful. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). Since God is faithful it is impossible for Him to lie. “That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:18). In the Old Testament when God promised judgment coming upon Israel He fulfilled every one of them without fail. When God promised that His Son would return we know that He will come. “Watch therefore for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Matthew 24:42-44). When our Lord returns He will come for His bride, the church. Those who have listened to His Word, repented of their sins and have been washed in the blood of His Son are those in His church. Those who refuse to listen He will punish. “In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Because the judgment is certain we should live the Christian life so that we can be prepared at the judgment.

To help us be prepared for the judgment we must have the proper view of God. Think about it for a minute, what is your concept of God in view of the coming judgment? Do you believe God will save everyone? Do you believe that God has already determined who will be lost or saved? You see how we view God determines a lot how we prepare ourselves for the judgment. In this article we will notice, the forewarnings of God, the forbearance of God, the faithfulness of God and the foolishness of being unprepared.

THE FOREWARNINGS OF GOD

A study of the prophets is a good place to begin to learn that when God brings judgment on His people, He always warns them of that coming judgment. It was part of the prophet’s work to go and warn the people. “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, ‘you shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul” (Ezekiel 3:17-19). God through the prophet Amos told the people, “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12)! Please consider these warnings were given to people who had been blessed and loved by God. They had seen His blessings, seen His power demonstrated time and time again, yet many did not heed the warnings.

THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD

The reason God warns of the coming judgment is because of his nature. He does not want anyone to perish. “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord God. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity

think Hell is a cuss word instead of a place, because they have never heard the word used in a biblical context. I think one of my former teachers said it best when he told our class of preacher students, “Brethren, if there was more Hell in the pulpit there would be less in the pew.” Amen.

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WHY LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE? TO GAIN THE REWARDS OF HEAVEN

Patrick Morrison

To my knowledge, I have never met an individual who did not desire to go to heaven when this life is over. Most people, however, believe that heaven will be the abode of all people except the vilest of the vile. Any good moral person will be saved eternally in heaven, according to popular opinion. As glorious as heaven is according to the Biblical description, it is not surprising that all who have any knowledge of heaven desire to live there in eternity. Indeed, heaven is the reward for those who have lived a worthy life while upon this earth (Revelation 3:4). It may come as quite a shock to the myriads of individuals who believe that heaven will be opened unto all to realize that most people will spend eternity in hell (Matthew 7:13,14). There are many reasons to live the Christian life. If there were no promise of eternal reward, the Christian life would still be the best life to live. We live the Christian life to escape the horrors of eternal torment in hell. But perhaps the greatest motivation for living the life God would have us to live is the desire to live in eternal bliss in heaven. What is it that makes heaven so great, so glorious, so grand? What is it about heaven that captivates us, that motivates us to endure the rigors of the Christian race until the end?

Heaven appeals to us because it is a perfect place. It is perfect because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwell there (1 John 5:7). Those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb certainly desire to spend eternity with the Father Who gave His only begotten on our behalf (John 3:16), with the Son, the precious Lamb Who bore our sins (John 1:29) and with the Holy Spirit Who gave unto

us the precious word of Life (2 Peter 1:20,21). In heaven we will be gathered around the Father's throne (Revelation 4:10), in the presence of the eternal Spirit (Revelation 2:5), basking in the light of the glorious Son of God (Revelation 21:23). Heaven is a perfect place because the body no longer decays there (Revelation 21:4). None of us is immune from the pains and sorrows that accompany life on earth. We all experience sickness, disease, pain, all of which bring us closer to the grave. It will be the common lot of all men to die (Hebrews 9:27), unless the Lord should return before we depart the walks of this life. In the land of fadeless day, death and disease, pain and sorrow will no longer afflict us. The trials and tribulations we experience day by day should serve as a reminder that something far greater awaits us if we will remain faithful to Him Who died for us. Heaven is a perfect place because sin no longer destroys there. As trying as our physical troubles may be, the greatest battle we face is the spiritual warfare against our archenemy Satan (Ephesians 6:12). Satan is constantly waging war against our souls (1 Peter 5:8), desiring that we turn away from God and enslave ourselves to sin. He places temptation before at every opportunity, wishing it to bloom into sin, in the hopes that we will remain in sin and die in that condition (James 1:13-15). In heaven, we will no longer be faced with temptation to sin (Revelation 21:27). The perfection of heaven stands in sharp contrast to the imperfections of this world.

Heaven is also appealing in that it is a prepared place. Knowing that he would soon depart this world, Jesus sought to give comfort to his followers. What more comforting words could be said than those he uttered in John 14:1-6? Jesus has gone to prepare a place in heaven for all the faithful. Heaven has been made ready by the Savior, but only for a people who have made themselves ready. Heaven is a prepared place of rest for those who have labored for the Lord while upon this earth (John 9:4). On the Day of Judgment this pronouncement will be made to the Lord's laborers, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). We weary ourselves in doing the Lord's will so that we may enter into this rest when time is no more (Hebrews 4:11). Indeed, "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord...that they may rest from their labors..." (Revelation 14:13). This place made ready, this place of rest for the weary, is a place reserved (1 Peter 1:4). Those who have been sanctified through obedience to the will of God (1 Peter 1:2) and who continue to live

reminded of the illustration Curtis Cates used when I was a student of his. He compared our faithfulness to God to our role as a husband. He said, "I know I am not a PERFECT husband," meaning that he makes mistakes from time to time, "but I am FAITHFUL to my wife." As Christians, and friends of God, we will make mistakes from time to time, but let us resolve to ask God for forgiveness and ever remain faithful to our Friend!

Another grand benefit of having God as our friend is the ability to talk to Him in prayer. Peter wrote: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). God only hears that who are his friends, that is, those who keep His commandments (John 15:14).

Still another benefit of being God's friend is the anticipation we have of seeing Him someday as He welcomes us home. One of the most comforting passages in the Bible, John 14:1-3, tells us: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." One day all the friends of God will rise to meet Jesus in the air! What a blessing it will be to sing with all the redeemed, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus!"

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WHY LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE? SO I CAN BE PREPARED AT THE JUDGMENT

Larry G. Reynolds

God did not leave us any guesswork as if there will be a judgment. He has given us the Old Testament to learn how He punished the wicked. Then in the New Testament He tells us that there will be a judgment for all mankind. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). "For we must all appear before

that a man lay down his life for his FRIENDS. Ye are my FRIENDS, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you FRIENDS; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:13-15, emphasis mine MER).

A friend, as the Proverb writer stated, sticks close at all times. Jesus said, “...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). We know Jesus is our friend because He is always there for us.

Further, we know that Jesus is our friend because He WAS willing to lay down his life for us showing that the love He has for His followers is the strongest type of love, making His friendship with us, the strongest type of friendship possible. Many of us would give up great things for our friends: We would give our time in helping a friend in need; We would give money to a friend in need; we would give shelter to a friend; we would even give the “shirt off our backs”, as we sometimes say, to a friend who needed a shirt. But Jesus did not stop there! He gave the greatest gift He could offer to His friends...His very own life! And because He gave this gift, friendship with Him is possible today.

BENEFITS OF BEING GOD’S FRIENDS

The first benefit of a friendship with God is forgiveness. One of the greatest things about friends is the ability to forgive one another. Even Abraham, the one God called “His friend” was in need of forgiveness from time to time. On one occasion Abraham lied about his relationship with his wife out of fear for his own life, allowing his fear to be greater than his faith in God (Genesis 20). God did not end His friendship with Abraham, but rather allowed Abraham to have another opportunity.

Our relationship with God today is quite the same. Christ died for us when we did not deserve another opportunity. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Not only that but how many times since obeying the gospel have we stumbled in our walk with Christ? Yet time and time again, God is ready to forgive His friends when they ask. I am

faithfully to the point of death (Revelation 2:10) are those who have their place reserved in heaven. Their names are written on the great register, the Lamb’s book of Life (Revelation 21:27). What a great blessing to have a place prepared by our Lord and Savior. Just as surely as he has gone to prepare this place for the faithful, he will come again and receive the righteous into the glorious eternal abode of the saved.

We also find heaven appealing because it is a promised place. It is not a place promised to just anyone. Many have the idea that simply claiming to follow the Lord, without any real devotion, is sufficient enough to gain entrance into heaven. However, this idea is refuted by the words of the Savior when he said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Some would even say that one does not have to have faith in Jesus, or be obedient to the Lord. All that is required, they would say, is to live a good moral life. Yet the Bible proclaims that those who obey not the gospel will be lost (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). No, heaven is not promised to just anyone. Rather, it is promised to those that love the Lord. Loving the Lord means that we will do what he has instructed us to do (John 14:15). Only those who are willing to follow the Lord’s commands can be said to be His friends (John 15:14). To love the Lord means that we will put Him first above all else (Matthew 22:37). It means that we will love the church just as much as Christ loves it (Ephesians 5:25), and that nothing will be more important to us than His precious bride for which He gave His life (Matthew 6:33). It means that we will do good at any opportunity we have, whether the recipient be saint or sinner (Galatians 6:10). Those who truly love the Lord eagerly anticipate His coming. For those who live their lives in view of His return, the crown of life awaits (II Timothy 4:8). To those who overcome are the promises given: the right to the tree of life (Revelation 2:7); protection from the second death (2:11); hidden manna, and a white stone upon which is written a new name (2:17); power over the nations, and the morning star (2:26,28); clothing of white raiment, names permanently written in the book of life, and the name of the faithful confessed before the Father (3:5); being made a pillar in the temple of God, upon which will be written the name of God and the name of the city of God (3:12); and the privilege of sitting with Christ in his throne (3:21). In order for one to “come over” into the glories of heaven, we must first “overcome” by living faithfully

for the Lord. The prepared perfection of heaven is promised to all who will give their lives in service to the King. Have you given your life to Him? If not, then do so today by obeying the gospel. Allow your faith in Christ to lead you to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him as the Son of God, and be immersed in water for the remission of your sins. This will begin your walk with the Lord. To continue your walk with Him, live for Him each day, until He comes again or until death. To do so will ensure your place in the home of the redeemed of all ages, the glorious bliss of heaven!

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THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

Phil Grear

Although the word “influence” is never found in the Bible, the principle definitely is. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16). We can have an impact like salt—making the world more palatable. We can be like light—making the world brighter. We can be like a city on a hill—a beacon to a weary traveler.

People can be led to Jesus by watching our righteous lives. Peter told Christian wives, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (1 Peter 3:1). The original language actually says wives may win their husbands “without a word”. The reference is not to the word of God, but the word of the wives. A wife living a godly, Christian life can influence her husband without constantly “preaching” and nagging him. Her chaste “conversation” (manner of life) can be a powerful persuasion to a man who might otherwise completely refuse to consider Christianity. A godly life can accomplish an amazing amount of good.

ABRAHAM PROVED HIS FRIENDSHIP TO GOD

The Proverb writer wrote: “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). A true friendship is one that has been “tried by fire,” and came out shining as gold. One of the things that make a close friendship different than a mere acquaintance is that a true friendship has been proven. In other words, we have done things for our friends, and vice versa, that we have not done for others. A friend proves his allegiance to another by doing what others refuse to do. This was certainly the case with the friendship between God and Abraham. Abraham was willing to do things for God that he would not do for just anybody. For example, Abraham left the majority of his family; he left his homeland, and many of the “friends” that he had in his homeland for one reason...God, his friend, told him to do it.

Another occasion that shows that the friendship of God and Abraham was tried and true is the account where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. “And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt [prove, ASV] Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Genesis 22:1-2). God had never made a command to Abraham like this command, and it seemed to go against the type of sacrifices that God had commanded him to make in the past, but nevertheless, we see Abraham ready to obey. The following verses show that God stopped Abraham from offering Isaac, and making the statement “And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (Genesis 22:12). God knew, in a scientific way, that Abraham’s desire to please God was even stronger than his love for his son Isaac. Abraham showed himself friendly by his desire to please his friend.

IS THIS FRIENDSHIP POSSIBLE TODAY?

In a word — yes, this friendship is just as possible today as it was in the days of Abraham. Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this,

physically. We should never be mean or unkind, but we will never make this world a better place by allowing sin to spread and destroy. We cannot compromise.

One of the greatest reasons for living the Christian life is the opportunity we have to demonstrate for the world a better way to live. “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life” (Philippians 2:15-16). May we always live so as to fulfill this opportunity.

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A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN IS GOD’S FRIEND

Mark Reynolds

Abraham, a man who God complimented many times throughout the pages of holy writ, was given a compliment by God that all should seek to attain and appreciate. God called Abraham, His friend: “But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend” (Isaiah 41:8). James, a New Testament writer acknowledged this great compliment in the book that bears his name: “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23).

What did Abraham do in his life that would deserve such a high compliment from the One who created the “heavens and the earth”? (Genesis 1:1). What were the benefits of the friendship that Abraham enjoyed with God? Is this a friendship that we can attain today? These questions, and more, shall be answered as we discuss being God’s friend.

Jesus illustrated the quiet, effective power of godly lives in the parable of the “Leaven”. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matthew 13:33). Leaven is quiet and unobtrusive, doing its job without fanfare and display. It gradually, but surely permeates the whole loaf. A genuine Christian life will have a quiet but definite effect on those around us. Our influence will ripple through the world in gradual, ever-increasing circles, making it a better place.

No man ever displayed the power of influence more than Jesus. He lived on this earth only thirty-three years, but two thousand years later he still impacts more people than any other man who ever lived. Much of the world counts time from his birth, and defines goodness by his teachings. Even the atheist must admit that his “Golden Rule” is the highest possible principle of human relations. No one can doubt his impact on the world. What made him such a powerful influence? And how can we imitate that? “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

CHRIST DID GOOD EVERYWHERE HE WENT

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power *who went about doing good*, (italics mine, PLG) and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38) Repeatedly it is said that he healed and comforted all who needed him. “They brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.” (Matthew 4:24) Similar statements are made seven times in Matthew alone. It is said the world could not contain the books necessary to record all the good things Jesus did (John 21:25). Such a man could not help being a major influence for good in the world.

(Continued on page 15).

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James O. Okumu

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Those who follow Jesus are to be similar good influences. We have been recreated spiritually for that purpose. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). God determined before the world began that his people would be characterized by good works.

We should never underestimate the good we can accomplish. What may seem like a small thing to us can be used by God in powerful ways. The ripple effect of one small good deed can light up the lives of many people. Christians doing good things can bring undeniable honor and glory to God. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). People talk of "making a difference in the world". This is best done by living as a Christian.

CHRIST OPPOSED THE EVIL IN THE WORLD

Christ is commonly viewed as one who is loving and accepting of everyone and everything, but this is incorrect. Jesus was a powerful influence for good because of his strong, determined stand against sin. While he certainly was a person of love, there are some things he is said to hate. "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity" (Hebrews 1:9). Sin, and its horrible consequences, was the reason for his coming into this world in the first place. Sin sent him to the cross. Sin cost him his blood.

It broke His heart to see the powerful grip sin had on those in its clutches. He rebuked those who mistreated others for their own benefit (Matthew 7:12). He renounced lax attitudes toward divorce and remarriage (Matthew 19:9). He spoke out boldly against those who had reduced religion to mere show and sham (Matthew 23). He defended the weak and downtrodden. He was bitterly hated because of his strong stand against those who abused their power. One cannot read his teachings without being impressed with his uncompromising stand against sin and evil.

We will not be the good influence we should be in this world if we do not take a similar stand against sin. It is not "loving tolerance" to fail to speak out against the sin that is destroying people spiritually and