The Gift

God’s Gift of Salvation

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This book is dedicated to Chaplain Myron Olson who stood behind me and helped me grow in so many ways believing in me even when others doubted me. A man who dedicated his life to helping those who many in the world have deemed beyond help. A man with a heart so big for God the love overflows through every word he says. Thank you Myron for always believing in me.

The Free Gift

Chapter 1

 The words ''free gift” are used all the time as a sales ploy. Order now and get a free gift! Join this club and get a free gift! We find this ploy being used all over the place and I believe everyone has been pulled in by it at some time in their life.

 In fact, if you were to call one hundred people and say, "If you come to where I am right now, I will give you a hundred dollars." What do you think would happen? Easy, you would give away $10,000! This is because our carnal side (greedy) loves a free gift.

 However, none of it offers a free gift, we must do something to get them. And, in most cases, we do something that we would not normally do. But there is one gift that is truly free. You don't have to do anything to get it. There is no membership rituals, you'll never have to jump through any hoops to get it and you can have it at any time. It is the gift of everlasting life, the gift of salvation. Sadly, most people choose not to accept it!

 ''For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Salvation is a process of renewal in which God transforms us and gives us a new life.

 This new life is created by being born again. We will discuss that topic later. Being Born Again will allow us to enter the kingdom of God. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Jesus defines this statement further in John 3:5 saying, "unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom Of God.

 By looking at these verses we learn that salvation is the key to heaven. How could anyone not want that key? Well, if they don't want it, it's not because God does not want than to have it. He offers this free gift to everyone. Yet, there is a lot that goes into this topic. We have free will and while God offers salvation to everyone not all will accept it. We have to choose to open the door and allow Jesus in.

The Bible says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). Notice that it says we must “hear His voice” and “open the door.”  We have to take action and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. But it all still goes back to Jesus who must call the person to Him first. The other key word here is “anyone.”  He does not say, “elect,” “called,” or any other word that would lead us to believe that there is some select group that are the only ones that can receive this call. It is ANYONE who decides to open the door.

 “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8:28-29). There are some key words in this phrase like “called,” “predestined” and “foreknew” that are all part of His plan of salvation.

 And lets not kid ourselves, this is a very difficult topic with many opposing views. But there is only one view that is correct and that is the Scriptural view. No matter what anyone thinks, believes, or says (including myself) the only view that is truly 100% correct is what the Bible says. But if we do disagree on anything, that is okay. We can simply discuss our views.

That being said, I want to be clear that for those that do hold to the Doctrine of Election and believe that aged chose who hold be saved before the foundation of the earth I get it. I held to this view for many years and believed it to be so.

But when I started really digging into the word from an exegetical standpoint I began to see things differently and began gaining a greater understanding of it. Sure, we will disagree on this but that is okay, we do not need to be divided at all. We can simply step back and know that we agree in the one truth that matters and that is that Jesus a Christ is our a Lord and Savior and He loves us no matter what.

Chapter 2

-ELECTION-

 Election is the process in which God chose those whom He would regenerate, save and sanctify. He did this before the foundation of the world. "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph. 1:4-5).

 This election does not remove the responsibility of man to repent and trust in Christ. ''But you are willing to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:40) However, since God's grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself sovereign election will result in what God determines (MacArthur, 1997, p. 2034). "moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rom 8:30). This is all done by God's grace and mercy.

 It's got nothing to do with what you've done or will do. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves, it the gift God." (Eph. 2:15). God's election is what truly matters and there is nothing we can do to change it. We are deserving of nothing more than the pits of hell. Yet, by grace, through faith, We are saved.

 But there is so much more to this topic. We need to understand that God is omniscient and knows everything. He knew those who would choose Him and accept salvation. He does not force them to do this but since He can see the future and what people would do He knew who would be saved. Those are the elect.

 Now I know that there are those who believe that God chose who would be saved and offers salvation only to those who He chose. They also believe that they will accept Him because He makes them and they have no power. This is the doctrine of Sovereign Election, and we are all free to believe what we feel is right in our hearts.

 I do not accept this view myself because the “love” that God offers does not seem to allow room for this view. Love does not force people to do things, it allows them to do it. Imagine if someone said they loved you and that meant you had to love them and obey them no matter what you felt. In a human relationship that would be considered abuse. But our loving God does not force anyone to do anything. He gives us Freewill and allows us to make a choice to follow Him.

 So then you may say that I do have to do something to receive this gift and it isn’t free. Well, that could be seen that way but the reality is that all you have to do is open the door and allow Him to come in. You don’t have to go anywhere or do anything to be saved. You don’t have to go to church, you don’t have to be baptized. Sure, you should do them, but these things do not get you saved. We know this because the thief on the cross gave his life to Christ by simply saying “Remember me” (Luke 23:42) and that is all he did, no baptism, no tithes, no church attendance, or small groups. He simply opened the door and let Jesus in. And that is all you need to do. The other things are just bonus gifts you get along with salvation.

Chapter 3

-CALLED-

 The word “called” is translated from the Greek word “Kaleo” and is defined as, “akin to the base of G2753; to call (properly aloud but used in a variety of applications directly or otherwise): - bid call (forth) (whose whose sur-) name (was called).” (Strong’s Concordance). The word is simply referring to calling someone’s name. Much like when you call a person’s name to get their attention! God calls you in the same way.

 So what does it mean for God to call you? Well, I believe That can be different for each person. So I will simply share how God called me.

 I heard God call me several times in my life though I didn’t receive it. When I was involved in a roll over accident in a semi I was told I should not have lived. But I walked away with only a few minor injuries. Why? Because God was there and as I look back I can see that. But, at the time I didn’t want to receive that call. That wasn’t God’s “fault” in any way, it was mine. And I can tell you that there are many ocassions in my life when I heard His call.

 But, it was during a concert a friend had invited me to that I heard God’s call and responded with a yes. I was experiencing an intense Migraine and I called out to Jesus to heal me. After, I questioned why I would ask “Jesus” to heal me. I believed in a God, I even believed that there was a man named Jesus who people believed was God. But up until that day I did not believe in the Christian God and did not accept that Jesus was God.

 However, on that day I had to ask why I asked Jesus to heal me. And when I did ask that question I responded with a simple answer. Because Jesus is the Lord and Savior of the world. Then I started to realize my need for Him in my life and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

 So what we see is that God used my situation to call me to Him. And that is how He calls all of us. He uses a situation you are in to reveal Himself to you. And the simple truth is that everybody’s story.

Yes, each ones will vary and be special to them. Some are simple as they grew up in church and always believed so it was simple to make the choice one day. For others, like myself, it is more complex and involves a powerful moment in their life.

For others it may involve something extreme such as a moment when their life had gotten so bad that they could see no way out. That may be through addiction or other life events. We call this hitting rock bottom.

Now, for each person “rock bottom” is different. Some it is a simple realization that they want God in their life and can’t live without Him. For others it is a powerful tragedy such as an accident or even sitting in a jail cell. What they all have in common is that it is the moment that they realize their need for Jesus Christ in their lives. Their need for God’s grace.

Chapter 4

-GRACE-

 What exactly is grace? A brother told me it is receiving what we do not deserve. Another brother gave me an anagram, Gods Riches At Christ’s Expense. The Bible describes it as, great (Acts 4:33), sovereign (Rom. 5:21), exceeding (2 Cor. 9:14) and glorious (Eph. 1:6). It also informs us that grace is the source of; election (Rom. 11:5), the call of God (Gal. 1:15), justification (Rom. 3:24), Faith (Acts 18:27), forgiveness (Eph. 1:7), salvation (Eph. 2:5) and hope (2 Thess. 2:16).

 Where does grace come from? 1 Peter 5:10 tells us that He is the "God of all grace." Simply put, grace is from God. Even the grace that came upon Christ was from God. "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." (Luke 2:40).

 It is through the grace of God that we are chosen (Rom. 11 :5) and called to Him (Gal. 1:15) for salvation. It is God's grace that allows us to be forgiven of our sins (Eph. 1:7) so that we may repent and have faith. We are justified by grace. ''Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom 3:24).

 "For by grace you have been saved through faith." (Eph. 2:15). We see here that we are saved through faith, not by it. For if it was by faith it would be of works "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace." (Rom. 11:6). So, this is to say that if our salvation is by faith as some believe, it is to say that grace does not exist and since this is a complete contradiction of the Bible, we know it is false.

 Simply put, grace is God’s unmerited favor towards us. We didn’t earn it, we don’t deserve it. In reality, we shouldn’t have it. Yet God gives it to us freely.

 Think about it like this. If you walk up to the cashier at a grocery store and hand her a credit card and tell her to put the next person’s purchase on it you are showing that person grace. You don’t know them, they’ve done nothing to earn the gift you are giving them, you couldn’t even know who was going to receive it. That is grace.

 Of course, while God does know you he looks beyond everything you have ever done and chose to offer you the gift of salvation. Why? GRACE! He simply loves you so much that no matter what you have done in this world He still wants you to have Salvation.

 Paul, then Saul, experienced God’s grace on the road to Damascus. In Acts 9:1 we find, “Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the lord…” He had not come to a point where he had chosen to change his ways or felt some compulsion to stop going against God and His people.

 Nope, instead we see that Saul was on his way to arrest more Christians for believing when God took hold of him. “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him.” He was not seeking to change, he was not seeking God. God was seeking him!

 And here is the best part, if you are a not a believer God is seeking you too. He is calling out to you and all you have to do is answer the door. He is knocking, will you open the door and let him in?

 If you are a believer you have already had this experience at some point in your life. It is your redemption story. The day God reached out to you was the day you were given unmerited grace, the day God called you to Him and you opened the door. The day you received eternal life, the free gift of salvation. And it was also the day you responded in FAITH.

Chapter 5

-FAITH-

 Faith is very important in our lives. For it is through faith that we have; remission of sins (Rom. 3:25), eternal life (John 3:15, 16), rest in heaven (Heb. 4:3) and access to God (Rom. 5:2). Faith is essential to the profitable reception of the gospel. "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in these who heard it." (Heb. 4:2).

 What exactly is faith? "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) . The book of Hebrews offers a good description of faith (Heb. 10:19-12:29).  Faith allows us to know the things we did not witness happen, did occur. And by faith we know that we are sealed for salvation through the Holy Spirit. To have faith is to believe! However, we must keep in mind that faith and belief are not the same thing.

 Faith is believing something without evidence. An excellent example of this is the wind. We cannot actually see the wind. However, we can see the effects of the wind. We can see the leaves blowing and things moving. Therefore we have faith that wind exists.

 Our faith in God and the saving power of the blood of Jesus can be seen in a similar way. We know it exists because we can see the effects it has on people’s lives. We see how it moves and changes them and can know that it is real. Our testimonies are a great way to share the power of God and what He can do for us.

Chapter 6

-WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SAVED? -

 Now that we know that we are saved by grace through faith, lets take a look at what it means to be saved, who can be saved and the process of all of this wonderful gift that is salvation.

 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Everyone has heard this verse, but what is it really saying? Let me ask you a question. Do you have a child or nephew or someone you love like that? Okay, would you mind if I took him, beat him and tortured him for something he had nothing to do with? Then I’ll nail him to a cross and wait for him to die. And when I think he's dead, I’ll shove a spear in his side. And all of this while you watch! Would you be okay with that? OF COURSE NOT! But God did just that. And he did it for you because He loves you!

 So, who can be saved? All those who God predestined. Who are predestined? I believe the simplest answer to that is mankind. I believe that God chose Israel and when they denied Him, He predestined the Gentiles to receive salvation. But we don’t really know for sure so instead we should look at every individual that we speak to as part of the elect or the chosen. Lead them all to God and let Him sort them out.

 Salvation is how God shows His love for us. The story of salvation began at creation. God created Adam and Eve out of the abundance of love He had. But He gave them freewill to choose to sin or not. Why? Because He truly loves us. He wanted to display His love for us so He allowed Adam to choose sin knowing that He would sin. This set up the long range plan of showing His love for us by sending His Son to be the propitiation (Replacement) for the sacrifice of our sins.

 So why did Adam choose to sin? The same reason we all choose sin. Because we do not fully understand God’s love for us. Before knowing God we do not understand it. But after accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are given a new desire, a desire to not sin. But we will discuss that further under the topic of sanctification.

Chapter 7

-Three Tenses of Salvation-

 So what we do know is that God chose to send His Son to die on the cross to bring us Salvation. But what exactly is salvation? To truly understand the answer to that question we need to understand the three parts, or tenses, of salvation.

The process of Salvation involves three parts:

1. Justification - The process of repenting from our past sinful life and turning to God and being born again.

2. Sanctification -The process of becoming Christ like (sanctified)

3. Glorification - The final process that will set us free from the power of sin and a new body.

So let’s take a moment to better understand each one of these and their role in salvation.

JUSTIFICATION

 Justification is purely an act of God. At this point in the process of salvation we are declared righteous through repentance of sin and faith in Christ. "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). We must also confess Jesus exist as our lord and Savior. “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Eph. 1:13).

 Through justification God declares the new believer righteous. They are cleansed of their past sins and is free from them. It is all an instantaneous process that is out of our hands. Being justified refers to our new standing in the Kingdom of the Lord. Jesus Christ suffered for this exact moment in our lives. Our sins are washed by His blood and our debt is paid.

 I look at it as if someone is short on money to pay a bill and a caring giver steps forward and pays it for them. The debtor is no longer in debt, but the money did not just appear out of nowhere. The kind giver had made that money and gave it. Christ did this for us. He covers our sins with His account which was filled on the cross.

 At the moment of justification we are freed from our sins. These sins are not simply forgotten. They are removed completely, we are justified, it is now            JUST (as) IF IED never sinned. There is no longer a debt to be paid, we owe nothing. The Bible states that God forgets our sins completely, “as far as the east is from the West, so far does He remove our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12).

 Think about this, the things that have held you back. The things that have forced you to live in the shadows with fear and shame are gone. Not just forgotten but gone completely as if they never happened. You are a new creation in Christ and the old you is gone. In place of that old you is a new you, a you created by God to glorify Him and serve Him. God has justified you.

 And at the very moment you are justified the second tense of salvation begins. This is the process of sanctification.

SANCTIFICATION

 "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10). This passage alone is quite scary. I think everybody can find themselves within these words.

 So, what do we do? Do not fear, the word continues with a comforting answer, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11).

 What a relief! Our sins are forgiven, and we are washed clean. So, how do we show our gratitude? By serving God and doing the work of He who saves.

 Once we are justified by the blood of Christ, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit which is the beginning of sanctification. To be sanctified means to be set apart to the service of God. "But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly." (Ps 4:3).

 This part of sanctification is positional and instantaneous. The rest of the process is a slow process of growth. We must allow God to work in our lives as we grow in Him. We can find a nice definition of this process in Romans, "And do this, knowing the time, that now is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. (Rom. 13:11-12). Here we find a calling to God. We hear again that it is the time to repent and give our lives to God.

 As this passage continues, we find instructions on how to do this. “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." (Rom 13:13-14).

 The phrase "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" is an excellent definition of sanctification in itself. When we are walking in the Lord we are being transformed into His image. And as Christians we need to reflect His image to others. When Someone sees you, what do they say? I do not want people to say, "there goes that guy named Spencer." Instead, I want them to say, “There goes that Christian guy."  My name is of no importance, only His. In order to do this, we must reflect the Son of God in everything we do.

 Think about the statement, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Think about that in regards to putting on a new suit. If you were to go out and have a tailor sew you a brand new custom suit would you keep your old clothes on when you put on the new suit? Or would you get rid of the old and start fresh?

 That is what we are to do when we become Born Again Christians, we are to “…put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. We are to live our lives as new creations. Step out and walk the narrow path to eternity.

 Our walk is of extreme importance. While 1 Peter 1:16, "Be holy, for I am    holy." is a perfect example of sanctification we can also turn to the Bible to find instructions on how to do this. Ephesians 4:1-6, 17-24, and 5:1-21 are instruction manuals for our walk. “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. (Eph. 5:1). There is the calling! He wants us to imitate Him while we serve Him on earth. We must strive to continue to grow and become more like our Savior.

 If you think for a second that you are even close, you need to look at your life. "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma." (Eph. 5:2). What a supreme sacrifice this is. God gave so much yet we give so little. Jesus was our sacrifice so that we could have eternal life. And what is asked of us in return? He wants us to be good, moral people.

 God wants us to walk in light. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), (Eph. 5:8-9).

 Sinners love the darkness, it hides their evil and comforts their retched souls. But God saves us from this darkness and comforts us. As children we were afraid of the dark. We knew the ''boogie man" (evil) lived there. This is because we are born into the light and begin our lives loving the light. But all too often, we are told to turn off the light and go to sleep. Sadly, we do just that. However, God will always be there to shine His light and destroy the darkness the encompasses our lives. He wakes us up from our sleep and gives us everlasting life.

 "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:15-16)   God wants us to seek spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we may grow in Christ. He wants us to walk in wisdom as Proverbs 12:1 tells us clearly, "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge. But he who hates correction is stupid." In order to gain knowledge we must accept correction. This is what sanctification is about, correcting our behavior and learning to live righteously. Proverbs is an excellent book to learn how to do this.

 So, how long does this process of sanctification take? When are we sanctified? This ongoing process continues until our fleshly death. We are forever being transformed  as we walk in this life, in Christ.

 This is not always easy. Many obstacles will be placed in our way in an attempt to trip us up. It is Satan who does this to us. He knows we are saved and he cannot take us from God. "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:28). However, Satan will try to trip us up so we cannot show others how much love God has for us.

 Basically, we are mirrors reflecting God's light. And Satan is trying hard to break that mirror. After all, when you want to turn off a light you don't just cover it up, you turn off the power. That is what Satan is trying to do to us. Do NOT let him! Keep your focus on God, that is the only way to keep the power flowing in our lives.

GLORIFICATION

 At the end of this life believers will be glorified. This is the deliverance from the presence of sin. Glorification is the final tense in salvation where we will be made like Him. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2)

 Salvation is the greatest of many gifts God has bestowed upon us. We are not worthy of this yet we still have it. And even better, once the eternal gift is received it cannot be lost! As I stated in the previous section, we cannot lose our salvation. The seal which is upon us is a permanent one. If someone feels they have lost their salvation they very well may have never had it in the first place.

 This happens all too often. I see people everyday that claim to be a real Christian but show no fruit. They spend their days living as a heathen! Going to church on Sunday does not make us a Christian. Being baptized in a tub or river does not make us a Christian (though it is important in our walk) We can volunteer in homeless shelters, work in soup kitchens, be missionaries etc. None of this makes us a Christian. Being justified and sanctified makes us Christians and that is the only way we can be glorified. I pray that you are a true believer and not just a "make-believer.”

Chapter 8

-REPENTANCE-

 Okay, lets take a moment to discuss the word repentance. What does it mean to repent? 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Repentance means to turn away or return. It is the process of doing a complete 180 degree turn away from sin and to God. It cannot be 179 or 181 degrees. If we do that, we are left with a view of the past and we cannot do that.

 Look at it like this; if a smoker wants to quit they can't give all but one cigarette away. They must give it all away and hold on to no part of it. No looking back! Besides there is nothing but filth back there anyway. Lay it all at the foot of the cross and move forward into your new life. This is the repentance we find when we are justified by God.

 We must be reconciled to God, “He died for all, that those who live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." (2 Cor 5:15). This reconciliation is the repentance which is attainable only by the grace of God. All of it is by God's grace. There is nothing we can do on our own. We need Him and what He is offering. So why not go ahead and accept what God is offering?

 Now, like salvation, there is that instant repentance and the gradual repentance which is part of sanctification. During this process we must turn to God and repent of the continuing sin that still has a grip on our lives. We all have some.

 Have you ever found yourself doing something and then feeling guilty over it? This is conviction. It is in the heart and is very powerful. Many people confuse this with our conscience but that is entirely different. We all have a conscience and have heard it tell us that what we are doing is wrong. But many times we just ignore it. But conviction is by the Holy Spirit and when we are convicted over something we listen.

 Conviction is not just a voice whispering in our ear, it is a feeling. It can make us sick. At times, when it does not stop us (only because our focus is not on God and instead is on things of this world) it grabs hold of us after we sin and brings sorrow for our actions. This is why we apologize and make amends. This feeling of conviction is deep rooted and is far different than simple guilt.

 Conviction is much more intense. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart." (Acts 2:37). The Greek word for cut used here means pierce or stab. This tells us that what Peter's listeners felt was sudden and surprising.

 When we do feel convicted what should we do? "Now therefore make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourself from the peoples of the land." (Ezra 10:1 1 ) . We must agree with God and take actions to separate  ourselves from sin. If something is causing you to sin, get rid of it.' Remove yourself from those people that endorse this behavior. "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh." (Rom 13:14).

 A man who is addicted to alcohol should not hang out with drinkers nor go to a bar. He must turn to God and ask Him for forgiveness. "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." (Acts 8:22). The alcoholic must reorganize his life but without God’s help, he will fail. He needs to pray to God and ask Him for help and give up the alcoholism to Him. He must give it up. He should also pray that the Holy Spirit fill that void.

 If the man simply gets rid of his desire to drink and sweeps his mind clean but does not fill that space up, he will be in trouble. "When an unclean Spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. (Luke 11:24-26) .

 When we sweep the evil (sin) out of our lives, we must fill it up with something else. We must ask the Holy Spirit to fill us up. Instead of drinking, he can go to a Bible study or something else helpful. Seek like minded friends that can help him stay away from the pitfalls. But if he just sits at home the demon will return with his friends for a party. The same holds true with all types of sin; sexual, drugs, lustfulness, swearing, all of it. We need to find replacements for them. And the best way to do this is to look to God and let Him guide us. He will do it if we allow Him to.

Chapter 9

-SECURITY OF SALVATION-

 One of the biggest heresies involving salvation is whether you can loose it or not. There are some who have been taught to believe that you can loose you salvation. However, this is not Scriptural! "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24). Jesus is giving us the assurance we "shall not come into judgment." We have "everlasting life" in Him. These terms are not at all ambiguous. A ten year old knows what these words mean. So why do people continue to try and second guess what they are saying?

 The phrases, everlasting life and eternal life appear many times in the Bible. And every time it is referring to God's free gift of salvation. But lets be fare. If everlasting does not mean what it clearly appears to mean, and it can stop, then will people also stop suffering in hell? After all, hell is referred to as "the everlasting fire" in Mathew 18:8. The same Greek word "aionios” is used in both instances. So, if you believe you can lose your salvation, you would also have to believe that the fires of hell are going to stop burning one day.  Maybe they'll even install heaters for those long cold nights after hell freezes over!

 I could stop here as I believe I have made my point. But God spent so much time giving us assurance of our everlasting life, I feel we should dig just a little bit deeper. Lets take a look at John 6:27-40. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (John 6:37). There is a lot here so let’s take a look at what we have.

 Jesus begins by telling us that all God gives Him will go to Him. This goes back to predestination and election, it is all by the grace of God. He then tells us that All, who come to Him, He “will by no means be cast out." Well, He's not talking about casting a fishing rod! In Revelation 12:9, the great dragon was cast out of heaven. People are cast into the lake of fire. This is what Jesus is referring to!

 He also says, "by no means," There is nothing that can cause Him to do this. Now in verse 39 we see "This is the will of the Father... all He has given Me, I should lose nothing." He will not lose you. He can't, the Scripture clearly forbids it. So, if anyone can tell me that these and a dozen other Scriptures does not exist or that they mean something else (and can back it up with Scripture) please go right ahead and fail. For in the end if you feel you have lost your salvation, YOU NEVER REALLY HAD IT!

 Now I know that we all have that friend who we were certain was a Christian. We may have even been the one to pray with them to receive salvation. They worked in the church and volunteered. They were always willing to give their time and talents to the church. So when they walk away we simply have to believe that they lost their salvation. After all, there is no way they could have fooled us. And there is the big issue, “US” or “ME” enters the equation. We don’t want to believe that we were fooled. We don’t want to accept that this person was faking.

 But hold on there for a moment. What we really need to understand is that person did accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They did say the prayer. However, the difference is where that prayer came from.

 What I believe is that there are two types of knowledge when it comes to God. There are those with a heart knowledge of God, these are the true believers, and there are those who have only a head knowledge of God. These are those who accepted Jesus for some other reason. What that reason is varies and can be different for each person.

 I say this because I speak from experience. I spent my teen years attending a ministry where we could hang out on weekends. They were a great group of people but they never really got deep into the truth of salvation. They simply said, “Say this prayer and you are saved.” So I did just that. But there was never a change in my life. There was never a change in my heart. I simply followed the motions and became what I like to refer to as a “Make-Believer.”

 I believed I was saved because I was told I was. So how do I know this? Simple, there was no change. There was no difference in my heart. Yes, I started helping people and doing things for others. I had an external appearance of being saved. But on the inside, nothing changed. I didn’t do these things for God’s glory. I didn’t do them to actually help others. I did them for me! I did them to make myself feel better. I had a head knowledge of God but no heart knowledge. There was no evidence of salvation at all.

 My life continued to prove that I was not saved as I continued to live for myself alone. I did nothing to glorify God in any way. Simply put there was no fruit.

 But when I truly gave my life to God everything changed. Who I was changed so much that people that knew me from the past could not even recognize me any more. And I mean physically. A best friend from middle school and beyond who e I hadn’t seen in 12 years could not physically recognize me any more. I had to show him my ID to prove it.

 Remember, when a person is saved their will be fruit as Jesus states in Matt. 7:15-20,  “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?  So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

 Saved people bare fruit. The fruit spoken of here is the fruit of the Spirit Paul speaks of in Gal. 5:22-23. What fruit do you bare?

 For More proof of this point check out, John 10:27-30; Rom 5:9,10;8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:35; 1 Pet 1:4-5; and Jude 24. Go ahead, I '11 wait, I need a break

 Okay, now that we have established our security of salvation, I must answer a question. "If my salvation is secure, why can't I continue to live a life of sin?" Well, that is easy, Scripture forbids it.

 ''For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age. (Titus 2:11-12). God gave us salvation so that we could live right and walk in Him. This salvation, when we truly receive it, transforms us (a new birth) into a new life where the power of sin has been extinguished.

 What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom 6:1-2). Question asked, answer given. Again, why would we want to sin if we died to it? Seriously, this would be the same as running back into a burning building after someone just rescued you from it! If you are still pondering this question, read Romans 6:15-23.

 A person who is truly saved will not desire to sin anymore. This is not to say that a saved person won't sin, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). The difference is, when a saved individual sins it is not planned, it is an accident. He allowed himself to be subdued by the fleshly, carnal side of himself. But God still forgives if we seek forgiveness. This is that conviction we spoke of earlier. When a saved person sins, they feel convicted and do not feel right until they ask for forgiveness from God. I will close this topic as I started it, with God’s word, ''Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is forgiven." (Ps 32:1).

Chapter 10

-CHRISTIAN CONDUCT-

 Okay, now that we know that we shouldn't live a sinful life, lets look at how we should live. What does God tell us is fitting for Christian conduct? What is meant by the words, "walk in Christ"? How do we do that? Why do we do that? Remember,  a Cristian is more than just believing in Jesus Christ. We must reflect Christ in our walk so we can set a positive example for others. When we say “walk” we are referring to our habitual lifestyle, not our strut.

 I feel the most important aspect of our conduct is obeying God. We see the consequence of not doing this throughout the Bible. Adam did not obey God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 6: 3) and look what: happened! We read in the books of Samuel and Judges about the kings who did not obey the Lord. And what became of them? So what do we do? "Fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandment of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good." (Deut. 10:12-13).

 Okay, but how do we walk in His ways? "That you may walk properly toward those who are outside." (1 Thes. 4:12). This is speaking of walking as a Christian so non-believers, "outsiders" see what is right. This walk needs to be worthy of God. "That you would walk worthy of God." (1 Thes. 2:12). So, is it clear yet? Okay, check this one out, “'Be imitators of God as dear children." (Eph. 5:1) . Paul is instructing us to be imitators of God. There is no other calling that is greater than this. That is what being sanctified is all about. We are to grow in His likeness while serving Him. Just like when we were little, and we wanted to be just like our fathers and mothers. God wants us to continue doing this. Be like your Father, your Heavenly Father.

 We are also instructed by Paul to, "Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Gal 5:16). When we walk in the Spirit, we are given the power to please God. We must allow ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit when we can. While this is not always possible we must keep our focus on God and allow the Spirit to guide us and we will do well.

 The term, “of the flesh" is not referring to our skin. Our fleshly side is our carnal side. We lived a carnal or fleshly lifestyle before coming to Christ. Some of you may be still and I pray that you make a change. Our flesh driven selves desire for personal gain. Things such as cars, houses, money etc. It allows us to lust after women or men and allows us to live immoral lives as described in Romans 1:29-31. We must instead strive to live a spiritual life and “Walk in the Spirit." (Gal 5:16).

 We should "love one another." (John 15:12), forgive each other, "if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:15). Live peaceably with all, "If it is possible, as much depends on you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom. 12:18). Notice the term "if it is possible.” God knows that this also depends on the other person. But we must do our part and strive for peace.

 As Christians, we should take time to visit the inflicted. “I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matt 25:36). This is not being done enough! Nursing homes and hospitals are full of people who would love someone to talk to. People go without proper clothing all the time. Children are freezing to death because they do not have any warm clothing! A prisoner sits tonight with no phone call, no letter, no visit.

 You don't have to know these people to help. Go to a shelter and ask how you can help. Go to a nursing home or hospital and ask if someone could use a visit. Find a prisoner and write to them (they're not all bad people). And why should you do this? "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt. 25:40). So, ask yourself, what did you do to Jesus today? Now ask yourself, what can I do for Jesus tomorrow? Now go do it!

 That's just the tip of the iceberg, we need to extend fair treatment, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." (Matt. 7:12). Do you recognize that one? Do you do that? We should also sympathize with others, "Bear one another's burdens." (Gal. 6:10). We must submit to authority, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." (Rom 13:1) . We must be content, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." (Phil. 4:11).

 Of great importance is being generous to others. “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). We grew up hearing this (especially at Christmas time). Coincidence? I don't think so. Have you ever given a homeless person a dollar bill? Their eyes light up and they say thank you. Go give a dollar to a bank owner standing on the street corner, he will probably just look confused.

 We are still only touching the tip of the iceberg. Do you remember seeing "WWJD" on stuff? It stands for "What Would Jesus Do?" We need to ask ourselves this more often. But what we should really ask is, “What did Jesus do?” We have an entire book that we can read and learn about how a Jesus handled himself in different situations.

 But don't just ask, listen to the answer and do it. Knowing the truth and what you are to do is one thing, applying it to your life and doing it is another. I promise, you won't go wrong. And don't worry about yourself so much. "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:19). Hold on, notice the word need. It does not say wants or desires. God will give you what you need.

 Think about that, pray on all of this, change your life and live a better life. But, don't do it for yourself or anyone else. Do it for God who has done so much for you. You will not regret it.

Chapter 11

-CHARACTERISTICS OF BELIEVERS-

 We will now take a deeper look at the the fruit, or characteristics, of believers. "Therefore by their fruit you will know them" (Matt 7:20). When Jesus said this, what did He mean? In the passage which begins at verse 15 we find a warning against prophets. But the message of bearing fruit is universal. Our actions as Christians are seen as our fruit.

 What people see are the characteristics of the believer, the product of Christian conduct. Jesus also speaks of this fruit in John 15:1-17.

"To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads than out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (John 10: 3-4) .

 Do you know the Good Shepherd’s voice? Do you listen when He speaks? As a good Christian we should be attentive to Christ's voice. We need to not only hear His voice but also follow it. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27). Are you following Him? We need to if we expect to receive the blessings He has for us. Many times, we say that we are walking with Christ. This should not be taken as if we are side by side as we do with a friend. Christ is the head of the body, and we need to follow Him.

 One of these fruits is being humble. But what does it mean to be humble? It means that we do not puff ourselves up when we do things. "When you do a charitable deed do not sound a trumpet before you." (Matt 6:12). We should do it solely for the sake of doing it. Do not look for your reward here on earth allow your reward to be stored in heaven. “Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Pet. 5:6-7). What a wonderful feeling it is to know this. So, try giving the credit to God, after all, it belongs to Him.

 The Bible tells us a lot about who we should be. We should be meek (Matt 5:5) hungry (Matt 5:6), merciful (Matt 5:7) etc. These are found in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12. The Bible continually tells us what we should be. But here is the real kicker, we should not strive to do good works, not at all. We should simply strive to be like Christ. By doing that we will just do what is right and just. "Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." (Titus 2:13-14).  When we strive to be Christ like, we will just do good things without thinking about it. Jesus never took time to think about healing someone, He just did it!

 Now, do people who are not saved do good things? Sure, I did a lot of good things when I was a heathen. However, I was always looking for a payoff. Whether it was money or a pat on the back, I wanted something for what I did. I was busy storing up treasures on earth. Now I just enjoy doing things in the name of Jesus Christ. That is the difference. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matt 7: 19-20).

 Above all, we need to be watchful. "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." (Matt 24:42). This is not saying that we should be physically watching for Him to come. Jesus is telling us to be ready so that we can be found free of sin. We must confess our sins and live right. There is a parable about watching found in Matthew 24:45-25:13.

 The characteristics of believers are very important. It is what the world sees. If you walked into church and saw people doing drugs, drinking, committing adultery and acting like fools what would you think? I would hope that you would turn and leave. (Remember this the next time you walk into a bar).

 So take a step back and ask yourself what people see when they see you. If you don't like what people are seeing, change it. Turn to God and ask Him to help you change. Start following Christ and bear fruit worthy of your salvation. "Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. (Matt 7:17-18). So show your fruit and live for God.

Chapter 12

 -BORN AGAIN-

 We hear people say, "I’m born again" a lot. But what does it mean to be born again? When Nicodemus was told that one must be born again, he asked, "How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). The reply that he received from Jesus told him that a person must be "born of water. and Spirit." (John 3:5). Jesus is referring to the cleansing water of justification. This cleansing is a purification for the soul and is done by the Holy Spirit.

 When we are born again we become new. We leave our carnal mind in the past. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Cor. 13:11). Now go back and read that verse again replacing the word child with heathen. We must repent (turn) from our old lifestyles and walk in the Lord. We must shed our old selves and ''put on the new man which was created according to. God in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:24)

 Being born again produces a new person: We find ourselves no longer enjoying the things of our past. Our sinful lives are despised and looked upon with disgust. We find ourselves hating sin. Not just our own but others as well. "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him." (1 John 5:18). The term "does not sin" is in reference to living a sinful life. We will not plan our sins and relish in then. Yes, we will sin, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of (Rom. 3:23).

 Okay, so now you are a born again Christian (I hope) living for God. And one day you are walking along and you see someone you are attracted to and you have a lustful thought. What do you do? First, don't panic, remember what we learned from Romans 3:23. Second, confess your sin. But how do we do that? Well, you do not have to go to church and do confession. We must confess our sins to the Lord, "Making confession to the Lord God of their fathers” (2 Chr. 30:22). Third, repent! We must turn away from the sin and not act on it or continue in it.

 Remember that Christianity is a walk and a process of growth. Nothing happens over night so be patient. We all make mistakes; the difference is how we deal with them. We have forgiveness and love from Christ. He died on the cross for our sins. And while you do get paid for sin, we won't get rich because, “the wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23). One more thing to remember,

"YOU MUST BORN AGAIN" (John 3:7)

IT’S JUST THAT SIMPLE!

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