

3.

THE TRUTH WHICH FREES US

Inevitably we come now to a very difficult part of our discussion. In order to really grasp the importance of repentance it is essential to unmask a few of today's Christian teachings which impede such repentance. These teachings seem to indicate that sincere, thorough repentance is unnecessary. They offer a kind of substitute, teaching an easier and less costly way to be accepted by God.

The process of arriving at the truth of these things may be a little difficult. This is mainly because there are so many entrenched notions about these subjects. But please, read the following sections carefully. These things are of the utmost importance if we are to be found acceptable to Him when He comes. We dare not err when trying to understand these precious, eternal truths.

Unfortunately, not a few modern concepts concerning the work which Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross are wrong. Yet they are prevalent among congregations of believers all over the world.

I am convinced that these erroneous teachings are largely responsible for the fact that many believers do not seem to be making very much spiritual progress. There are very few Christians whose lives reflect in any significant way the pure life of Jesus Christ.

There are several doctrines common among us today which seem to be good and even attractive but they are not completely true. They do not accurately reflect the heart of God or the gospel message. They are a subtle twisting and therefore a corruption of the truth. They are ways of thinking, quasi-biblical concepts, which have crept into the body of Christ and robbed her of her spiritual vitality and power.

The reason for exposing these errors is not merely to discredit them or to try to show that this author is "more right." This examination is exceedingly important because these teachings all have a similar effect.

Such doctrines all serve to diminish conviction of sin. They work to deceptively free believers from any and all sense of guilt when they have not truly made things right with God. They provide Christians with many plausible excuses to justify the fact that their lives do not reflect the nature of their holy Creator. They combine to form a web of theology which elim-

inates almost completely any need for a deep, heart-searching repentance.

Therefore these errors are responsible for much weakness in the church today. They turn people's hearts from real repentance. They justify continued sin. They "superficially heal" the sin of God's people (Jer 8:11) providing a kind of spiritual Band-Aid for their unholy condition, therefore retarding the cleansing from sin which we so desperately need to become really intimate with God. These erroneous doctrines are like malicious computer code which have invaded the church and robbed it of its overcoming power.

TODAY'S CHURCH IS NOT HEALTHY

If we are honest we must admit that the spiritual health of today's church is not good. She is not well. The proof of this is the rampant sin in today's congregations. Adultery, sex outside of marriage, lies, deception, abortions, cheating, power struggles, gossip, backbiting, hatred, envy and self-seeking of every kind is abundant. The dress, habits, values and sins of the world are invading the church.

In the struggle for righteousness, the world is winning. The influence of the world over the church is far greater than the influence of the church on the world. Instead of the world becoming ever more righteous, the church is becoming ever more worldly and sinful. Although there are a few precious exceptions,

the general trend is obvious. Anyone who cannot admit this is simply being willfully blind.

Something is definitely wrong. But what is it? It is that Satan has succeeded in insinuating into the church some ideas which are erroneous. He has managed to twist some fundamental Christian truths into partial lies which rob believers of their relationship with Christ.

Instead of deep repentance we have a weak-kneed, watered-down, pusillanimous sort of message which makes God into the one who is seeking people to accept Him. No holiness is demanded. No fear of God is sought or taught. We have accepted a variety of "easy believism" which all but eliminates the question of sin from our thinking.

How did this happen? Where did the church go wrong? Since these errors about which we are speaking are deeply entrenched and have been instilled into the church over a long period of time, our discussion of necessity will take some time and thought. There is no quick, simple answer to our present dilemma.

Yet I believe as we look into the word of God together, His light will shine upon us to show us a new and living way. We will try to take each false idea in its turn and show how the scriptures have been insidiously twisted to eliminate the power of God and keep it from impacting our lives. By the grace of God, we can come to a new understanding of His will which will impel us into His arms.

ELIMINATING SIN

God's plan for sin is to eliminate it from our lives. The devil's tactic tries to eliminate it from our vocabulary and our minds. God's idea is to change us into His likeness so that we no longer sin. He intends to actually make us holy. The enemy's diversion is to make us imagine that Jesus is no longer worried about what we do, think or say. The devil would like us to believe that no matter what the real situation is, God thinks that we are holy.

Today's church seems to preach a message that God is not very concerned about your sin. Perhaps this is not something directly stated, but there is a generalized, subtle thought conveyed that perhaps previous generations of Christians were too severe. Maybe things in the past have been too legalistic.

Perhaps the God of the Old Testament who appeared in fire, smoke, earthquake and an insupportable trumpet blast on Mount Sinai has changed. Maybe He has rethought His position and has decided He would be more acceptable and popular if He simply became more lenient. Possibly He has "moved on" from His previously intolerant attitude.

Contributing to this impression is an errant understanding of forgiveness. The church's general teaching concerning this theme has stretched God's forgiveness far beyond what He meant it to be. Today it seems if we will only

receive Jesus, He will immediately forgive all our sins – past, present and future. Further, once we do this “accepting” He no longer pays any attention to whether we sin or not but has suddenly become blind to what is going on. According to the doctrine which is so popular today, once we become God’s child then sin no longer is of any consequence to us or to Him.

While it is true that Jesus can pardon any and all sin, it is not equally true that He will do so without regard to our motives. The blood of Jesus is of the highest value to us and to God.

This blood is a result of the death of God’s only Son, the most precious, intimate, special thing to Him. Jesus did not donate blood as someone might do at the Red Cross. He was tortured, suffered and died to shed His blood. It came at the highest cost. Therefore, this blood is invaluable in God’s sight.

This means that when we apply to God for forgiveness on the basis of this blood we must do so with the utmost sincerity. There can be no playing around. We cannot be partially repentant or not be wholly willing to forsake our sin.

God knows the motives of our hearts. He understands our secret thoughts from afar off (Ps 139:2). This means then that without sincerity of heart in our asking for forgiveness, we cannot be forgiven. We read: “...let us draw near [to God] with a true [sincere] heart...” (Heb 10:22). Anything less than this will not work.

God will not forgive a hypocrite. Anyone who thinks they can fool Him or simply use His

forgiveness as a way of escaping the consequence of their actions is in for an unpleasant surprise. "God is not mocked" (Gal 6:7). There can be no forgiveness without one hundred percent sincerity. We read: "And you will seek Me and find Me, *when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jer 29:13).

We also read of King David admonishing his son saying: "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts" (1Ch 28:9).

LACK OF REPENTANCE

It is also true that God will not forgive sins for which we have not repented. If we have in our lives, either in our past or present experience, sins for which we have not yet repented, they are not forgiven. It is not true that once we "receive Jesus" the heavenly slate is wiped clean and we can just start over as if nothing had ever gone wrong. Instead, we must repent of those sins of which we are conscious.

Further, we need to repent of those hidden or forgotten things which He brings to light as we walk with Him. Then and only then are they forgiven and forgotten by God. "And God requires an account of what is past" (Ecc 3:15).

I am not urging a whole lot of introspection here. I do not mean that we must spend a lot of time in digging around in our past to find every

tiny little error. I am simply saying the obvious. Nothing in the past or present is hidden from Him. We must be sensitive to His Spirit so He can convict us of our sin and our sins so that we can repent and be cleansed.

Further, it is important for us to continue to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit to bring these things to our remembrance so that we can enjoy further repentance and transformation. No known, unrepented sin is forgiven before God!

Sinning, unholy believers are NOT forgiven and will not be unless and until they repent. It is complete foolishness for us to imagine that they are. There is no possibility that the Father would accept the infinitely precious blood of His own Son as an offering to excuse an insincere, sinning believer: "...for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts" (1Ch 28:9).

JUSTIFICATION

Another doctrine which has been stretched far beyond the truth is that of justification by faith. Today, many seem to think that this means that if they believe a few facts about Jesus, such as things concerning His deity, His death and resurrection, etc. then from that point onward they are completely justified before God. They imagine that from then on, God "can't see their sin but only the blood of Jesus." Nothing could be further from the truth.

God always knows when we sin. That's right. Every time we sin, He knows all about it. Our Father keeps constant count of the number of hairs on our head (Mt 10:30). How could it be that He would not notice when we sin? Since this is true, just what does it mean to be justified?

To be justified means that God considers us to be just. He has a relationship with us and interacts with us as if we were, in fact, just. He has fellowship with us on this basis because of the blood of His Son. He does this, indeed He has "legal" grounds to act in this way, because of something which is called "faith." We are justified before God by our faith in Jesus Christ.

Just what then is faith? This is a subject which is extremely important for us to understand since it is by this we are justified. If we have it, then God will count us as just. Without it, He will not. So it is essential that we have this faith and know what it is so that we can continue to enjoy this blessed relationship with God.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Simply put, faith is our response when God reveals Himself. He shows us something about Who He is and we respond by affirming that this is indeed He. We read that Jesus: "...manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (Jn 2:11).

Please notice the order of these things. First Jesus manifested Himself. Then, the disciples

believed. Unless and until God reveals something of Himself to us, it is impossible to believe. We cannot define with human words just how God reveals Himself to each person. With Him there is an infinite variety of ways and means.

I firmly believe that each and every human being has had, or will have, the Person of Christ shown to him during his life in one way or another. Faith is when that individual has a positive reaction. Disobedience is when someone rejects what he perceives. When God reveals Himself, the human heart either loves and approves of what it perceives or hates it and rejects it.

Faith is not a mental exercise. It is not simply affirming some facts concerning Jesus. We are converted because we have somehow glimpsed and believe in the Person of Christ and not merely in some doctrinal truths concerning Him. We are saved by our faith in Him and not by a theology about Him.

True faith is our response to God's revealing Himself. When He does so and we affirm that it is indeed Himself, then, and only then we are justified. When He speaks, we listen. When He reveals His character, we love Him. When He shows us His ways, we approve of them. When He convicts us of sin, we agree with what we see. This is our faith response to His revelation. God, on His part, then interacts with us on the basis of Jesus' blood, considering us just.

But let us suppose that we sin. We do or say something which offends our Lord. In our spir-

it, God reveals His displeasure. We sense His speaking in our conscience. He reveals to us how our error has offended Him. But maybe we do not respond in faith. Possibly we reject His voice in our conscience. It could be that we resist what He is revealing concerning His justice and our failure in relationship to it. We, in our thoughts, justify ourselves. Instead of believing – responding in repentance and then being justified by Him – we reject His revelation.

Thus we are no longer living by faith. We are not responding positively to His revelation of Himself. He is speaking but we aren't listening. He is revealing something, but we are resisting this revelation. We are not believing and affirming what He is showing us. He is convicting us of sin, but we are rejecting this conviction.

Can it be then that He still considers us just? Are we still walking by faith? Is our past faith enough to fool Him into not realizing that we are rebelling against Him at this moment? Are we justified before Him in our current rebellion? Certainly not!

LIVING FAITH WHICH JUSTIFIES

In order for our faith to be genuine, it must be up-to-date. It must be active today, right now. James makes this very clear when he says: "...faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:20). What he means is that if our faith is living and therefore genuine, it will manifest itself today in our actions. Our "works," – the things which we do

and say – will reflect our living faith. They will prove that we are in living contact with our Creator.

Our present faith is alive when it brings us into an intimate relationship with God and God into communion with us. It is in this way that we “walk by faith” (II Cor 5:7). We walk in moment by moment communion with Him, responding continuously in faith to what He is revealing of Himself to us each moment. The results of this faith-generated communion are our actions or “works” which reveal that our faith is living.

On the other hand dead faith will not justify us! A faith that is not up-to-date, a faith which is not at this moment responding to what God is revealing, cannot please God. It is dead and useless. Even demons have a kind of faith, perhaps more than many Christians. They believe many facts about the Most High. They even have the good sense to tremble when they think about them. But they do not have communion with God. They are not in a faith relationship with Him. They are not responding moment by moment to His leading. They are not being justified. In the same way, a Christian’s dead faith cannot justify him or her before God either.

Dead faith is something merely of the past. It is something which we once believed when we responded to the Lord. Dead faith is a static, mental thing of which we were once convinced. But such facts of the past do not constitute a faith which justifies us right now before God.

For example, let us suppose that one day you believed in Jesus. He revealed Himself to you and you responded positively to this revelation. You believed into Him and became born again. At that time, your faith was living. You were justified by Him.

But how about today? Is your faith still active and living. Are you still responding to all that He is revealing to you concerning Himself and His will? Are you enjoying living communion with Him? Is your faith at this minute the kind which is justifying you? Or do you find yourself in a position of being somewhat distant from Him?

To be justified by faith today, you must have a faith which is active today. Let us take as an example someone who received the Lord some years ago. But in the interval between then and now, they began to live in sin. Let us suppose that they began having sex outside of marriage, began lying about something, started cheating or stealing money at work, began using drugs and/or any number of other such things. Can it be that God considers this person just and righteous? Has He gone blind and become a fool?

In order for this person to again be justified, they must repent. They must reactivate their faith and become obedient. They must respond to what God is speaking to them in their spirit at this moment and repent. If and when they do so, then God will again consider them justified. He will again have communion with them based on the blood of Jesus.

But if and when someone continues on in sin, if they oppose the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, if they resist His conviction, then they do not have a living faith. Therefore, they are not being justified.

Such persons need to repent. They need to seek forgiveness from God by repudiating their sin and seeking for that part of their sinful soul to be put to death together with Jesus. Then, and only then, can they again qualify to be considered justified in the eyes of God. This is genuine justification by faith.

We are told clearly: "The just shall live by faith" (Gal 3:11). It is only when we are "living by faith" in the manner which we have been discussing that God considers us just.

CAN WE GO TOO FAR?

This then raises an important question. Can someone go too far? Can a child of God sin and keep on sinning in such a manner that he or she can no longer repent? The answer seems to be "Yes." It appears to be possible for people to harden their hearts, go against their conscience and resist God to the point where they can no longer repent. They can no longer be sorry before the Lord with sincerity.

We read in Hebrews 6:4-6 and verse 8: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the pow-

ers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame...whose end is to be burned."

Please notice here that the end of such believers is "to be burned." Perhaps you will remember the beginning of this theme when we spoke of the intense, burning presence of God. Also, you will recall how anything sinful and not transformed will be consumed there. The presence of a Holy God will burn up anything which does not correspond to His nature. This verse verifies the truths about which we have been speaking.

Therefore, we all should have a good amount of godly fear. We should treat our precious relationship with Jesus as a serious and extremely important thing. We should never play with sin or with our Lord's sacrifice for us.

Let us live with an awareness of the serious consequences. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor 5:11). (Please note that the context of this verse is speaking only about believers.)

Esau is an example of someone who could not repent. He had come to this point of hardness of heart where he could not make himself genuinely repentant. His heart was not soft toward the Lord. He had treated the precious things of God lightly and traded them for temporary, earthly gratification. Yet one day he realized what he had lost and wanted it back.

However, it seemed as if he wanted it back without truly recognizing his sin. Perhaps he was sorry he had lost something but was not willing to humbly confess his error in doing so. He was willing to tear his garments, but not rend his heart (Joel 2:13). Even crying and weeping before God could not get him back what he had lost. He could not bring himself to genuinely repent. "For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears" (Heb 12:17).

This terrible story should be a warning to us all. We never should play around with the precious things of God. We must come to Him with reverence and godly fear. We must pay the highest respect to what He has done for us. Our repentance must be sincere. Our faith must be living. Only in this way will we be found to be pleasing to Him when He comes.

Still another passage from the Bible confirms this same truth. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and *fiery indignation* which will devour the adversaries."

"Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the

Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:26-31).

This passage is clearly speaking about Christians. Only they could qualify to be "we," already having "received the knowledge of the truth" and being "His people." Once again we are told of the "fiery indignation" of Jesus toward the unrepentant and the "devouring" of those who are disobedient. The word "adversaries" here does not have to be "enemies" or unbelievers but those who have set themselves against or in opposition to Jesus.

The "sinning willfully" about which we read here cannot mean that we occasionally do things which we know are wrong. The truth is that all believers do this once in a while. It must mean that this individual persists in known sin. He or she continues rebelling, resisting the conviction of the Holy Spirit, over a long period of time. Such stubborn rebellion seems to produce a hardness of heart which, over time, makes it impossible for such a believer to repent with sincerity.

A MODERN EXAMPLE

We have had a recent experience with someone in a similar situation. A man we know committed adultery with another man's wife, a sister in the church. When we went to speak to this

brother, we urged him to repent – not just to say a quick “I’m sorry” but to arrive at remorse and self-abhorrence. We suggested that his actions might, as other similar situations have done: destroy the marriage of this other woman; precipitate divorce; leave children without one parent and perhaps without financial support and cause any number of other devastating, painful, evil, long-lasting consequences. Like ripples in a pond from a thrown stone, sin, any and all sin, has consequences which impact many other lives around us.

As our conversation progressed, it came to light that this man’s life had a long history of adultery and sexual sin. It was something which had dominated him for a significant number of years. It seems that he had never been able to arrive at a profound, genuine repentance which would have enabled God to cleanse him. So we suggested that this was his need – to arrive at an abhorrence of himself and his lusts and truly repent.

His response to us was something like this: “I’m already restored.” “I’m already back with God.” “I don’t need anything like you’re suggesting.” “I reject this idea!” Sadly, we had no choice but to leave him with his rejection of a heart-rending, soul-searching repentance.

It seems entirely possible that without such a repentance, this sin will continue to operate in his life and impact the lives of others also. The latest news I have heard about him is that he is now pastoring a church in a nearby city.

John teaches that there "...is sin leading to death" (I Jn 5:16). This does not necessarily refer only to physical death, but could certainly also refer to the ultimate destruction of the sinning soul. It seems that there is a point beyond which a Christian can go which makes them unable to repent any more.

John explains that we do not need to pray for such a person. Any such prayers would be of no use. Their destiny is sealed. While prayer for other sinning believers will result in God's "life" growing in them (as we also see in this verse), prayer for such an unrepentant person would have no positive result.

The truth is that it is almost impossible for us to know when someone has gone too far. There is no humanly definable point when we can be sure that someone can no longer repent.

Only God knows our hearts. Only He knows where that point is. So, dear brothers and sisters, let us stay away from that line. Let us not let our faith waver. Let us maintain a living faith relationship with our Creator and let Him lead us in ever deepening repentance.

YOU CAN'T REALLY BE HOLY

Still another untruth which is very common today is that Christians can't really be holy. It seems that many, if not most believers think we can put aside a few of our grosser sins, but actual, visible holiness is not possible. They seem to believe that they can be improved a little in this

life, but to be genuinely holy is just a pie-in-the-sky dream. Combined with this belief seems to be another thought that God doesn't really care. It doesn't matter very much to Him if we are completely holy or not.

This lie then disarms believers from ever achieving the goal. They never hope to be truly purified from sin. They never expect to be changed dramatically and so they simply accommodate themselves to a life of imperfection and sin.

Yet God in His word admonishes us to be holy. We read: "...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in *all* your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy' " (I Pet 1:15,16). We also are taught to: "Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). II Corinthians 7:1 admonishes us to be: "...perfecting holiness in the fear of God." These are just a few of the many verses in the Bible exhorting us to righteousness and holiness.

This holiness to which our Master is calling us is not something which only exists in the mind of God. It is not something merely theoretical, mental or doctrinal. It is not merely "positional." This is a kind of holiness which is real, tangible and lived out through us. It is a purity which others notice. It is a righteousness which is visible to those who live with us and in relationship with us.

Such superhuman living, such genuine righteousness, is not something which we can

produce. It is not a result of human effort. It is not gained by will power, determination or dedication.

The standard of righteousness which is required is far too high for any human being to attain. Instead, it is the result of another Life. It is accomplished by Someone truly righteous living in us and manifesting Himself through us.

As we have been seeing, God's plan is to give us His own life. Next, His life will grow up inside of us. As it grows, it will express itself more and more clearly. His own nature, which is supremely holy, will begin to be seen in us. Thus, we will begin to exhibit a genuine, visible righteousness. We will actually think, say and do holy things.

Yet this righteousness is not something which "we" do. The source of it is not ourselves (Php 3:9). It is something which comes from God. It is the result of His own life living, moving, thinking and feeling inside of us. This is His plan.

To insist that we cannot be perfect is to insist that Jesus' work of salvation was also imperfect. It is to say that it was incomplete. Thinking in this way, we affirm that although we can perhaps be changed a little, God's work on the cross lacks the force and potency to complete the job in our lives. This of course cannot be true. He clearly said: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

Further, to imagine that we cannot be perfected is to declare that Jesus' life is not perfect. This is because it is actually *His* life which

should be lived out through us. If the demand were for us to work up some kind of personal righteousness, then of course, we could never be perfect. But since it is *His* perfect life which will live in us, then certainly we can reflect His nature in every way. Our old life has been completely crucified with Him and His new life has been made one hundred percent available to us.

The way to obtain such an exalted life is repentance. All of us need to experience an ever deepening repentance unto life. The more God enables us to repent, the more we will experience His death and resurrection. The more His life grows within us and begins to predominate in our interior, the more we will have the privilege of enjoying genuine holiness.

We must never look at the behavior of those around us and justify our sins by their failure to be holy. We must look only and intently into the face of Jesus Christ, allowing Him to transform us into all that He is.

INSTANTANEOUS TRANSFORMATION

Another common error found in today's church is the thought that our present condition is not important because we will be suddenly changed later on. Many believe that when Jesus returns, we will all be instantly transformed to be like He is. Perhaps He will touch us on the head with a magic wand, and poof, we will be immediately changed to be holy and righteous.

So, many reason, why should we need to be holy today? It seems "so hard." What difference does it make if we are still somewhat sinful; if we indulge ourselves in a little sensual pleasure; if we slip up once in a while; if we let ourselves go and do things which we know are wrong? If we are all going to be transformed instantly later, what possible difference could it make today if we are holy or not?

This error seems to be largely based on the following verse. We read: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"(1 Cor 15:51-52). Certainly, this is a true verse. This will happen.

But, we must realize the context. This passage is speaking about the glorification of our body. It is not addressing the question of our soul. Our *bodies* will be immediately and instantly changed. But concerning our interior, our soul, everywhere the Bible speaks of this being a process, not an event. It is an operation which we need to "work out" with fear and trembling in cooperation with God (Php 2:12). It is something which takes time.

There is nowhere in the Word of God the notion that the transformation of the soul is a future, instantaneous event. Throughout the New Testament, we are urged to press on, to obtain, to carry the cross, to deny ourselves, to become holy here and now.

The life of God must grow up and mature in us. This process takes time and our willingness. No life matures instantly. Only a mushroom, an inconsequential, mushy fungus, sprouts overnight. It is only through our ever-deepening repentance that we can be full of God's life and not be ashamed to meet Him when He comes.

Since true holiness is a result of the divine life of God growing in us, how could it be possible that this life would grow instantly? How could we imagine that, after resisting transformation for many years; after being unwilling for our own life to be put to death; after stubbornly refusing to yield to Jesus' words; suddenly, at the coming of Christ, He would overpower us and change us instantly? Surely this is only foolishness and wishful thinking. It is a misunderstanding of the how the transformation process works.

MISUNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. We all need it. We are blessed that our God is a God of compassion and forgiveness. Without the forgiveness which Jesus provides for us, we would be completely lost. The forgiving power of the blood of Jesus is beyond estimation. It is of truly unimaginable value.

Even though this is true, many believers misunderstand forgiveness. They suppose that Jesus' mission in coming to earth and dying for our sins was merely to forgive us. Perhaps they

imagine that the coming new creation will be filled with a bunch of sinners who still sin and will still be needing to be forgiven every day. Maybe they think that they will just go on sinning forever and God will just keep forgiving them forever and ever.

But the truth is that anyone who sins cannot enter into the future new world. They are totally and completely excluded. If they did enter, they might sin. In fact it is inevitable. Sooner or later they would sin. And this sin would destroy God's new creation. Therefore, they won't be allowed in.

Let us look at the example of Adam and Eve. How many sins were necessary to destroy God's present creation? Just one. But this one sin perhaps doesn't seem too bad in our eyes. Eve did not murder anyone. She did not commit sexual sin, as many try to believe she did. She stole nothing. Instead, her sin was a simple disobedience.

Even though this sin seems relatively "small" it was enough to devastate God's newly created earth. Everything went bad. Death began. An infinite variety of sins began to grow in men's hearts and eventually express themselves. Murder came shortly behind. War, rape, stealing, hatred, strife and all the evil which fills our world today came from this one "small" event.

Even the course of nature was changed. The earth grew weeds. Animals began to kill and eat one another. Insect pests began to torment man

and beast. Diseases sprung up. Famines and plagues occurred. Wickedness of every kind appeared.

So it is easy to conclude that no sinner will enter the new creation. They simply cannot be allowed in. If they were, they would soon sin and demolish it as our forefathers ruined this one.

Therefore, before the new creation begins, the problem of sin in our lives must be resolved. Something needs to happen. We must be changed so that we no longer sin. We need to be transformed into the image of a holy Christ.

Blessedly, our loving God has a plan. He has made complete provision for us so that we can be transformed absolutely. His plan is called: "repentance unto life."

We read: "If we confess our sin He is righteous and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This verse shows us that God will do two things. When we repent, i.e. "confess," He will certainly forgive us. Yet He will also do something more. He will "cleanse" us.

This word "cleanse" is not just a synonym for "forgive." This means that He will work in our lives to clean us up so that we no longer sin. The sin, which contaminated us, will be cleansed from our lives. God will co-labor with us to crucify our sinful life and nature and replace it with His own holy life and divine nature. This is exactly what His plan is for every believer.

You see, forgiveness is not God's ultimate purpose. It is not the end. It is not His final intention. Instead, it is the means to an end. This "end" is the complete transformation of our soul. He forgives us so that He can enter into a relationship with us. His pardon, based upon the blood of Jesus, permits His holiness to interact with us.

But this interaction is not simply to tolerate or overlook our sin. There is a much higher purpose here. It is to change us, to cleanse our lives completely so that we no longer sin. It is to make us like Himself. It is to prepare us for His appearing. Praise God, He promises to cleanse us from all sin!

Forgiveness, which is abundantly available to everyone, is what opens the way for us to enter into God. It can be perhaps be compared to a kind of ticket which gets us into a show or sports event.

It is through the forgiveness of God that we have access to His salvation. Forgiveness is the avenue through which we enter into all that Jesus has for us. May we not abuse this forgiveness, but rather use it to obtain all that He has made available to us.

