My Story

An Amish boy's journey to peace



By Emanuel Schrock

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The Church

The steady beat of Betty's hooves on the pavement mingle with the rumbling din of the family buggy wheels. It's a sound that's so much a part of me it's like music in the background of my life, reminding me who I am, and what I belong to. I am Amish, not by choice, but by birth. Born into an Amish family of twelve, my lot seems to be to live a life that has already been decided by others. It doesn't matter if I don't want to be Amish. I already am, whether I like it or not.

To me it is strange how this works. One is Amish by being born that way. The only way to stop being Amish, is to become a sinner and turn one's back on everything one has been taught. It is as though a fold has been prepared in which exists the one true way to live and please God. To be born into that fold is to be privileged above the rest of the world, and one is on the right road to God by his Amish birth.

To be Amish then becomes your life, and nothing else matters more. Your life is a mission of preserving this precious heritage in which you were born, though you had no part in creating it. You must accept it without question as the right way, because your ancestors have always done it this way. You trust that somewhere in the history of your heritage, there was a person with the authority and information to know the right way in life. Perhaps he had some special revelation of God, or deep insight into the ways of righteousness, enabling him to create this blessed fold into which you were born. If you remain in it, you are assured that you are safely on the right road to favor with God. This is the Amish way. You must not question it but embrace it as your own.

It is Sunday morning, and my family is going to church. I am nestled in the front seat of the buggy with my two brothers and my father, who is driving. My mom and my sisters are in the back seat. Dad is sitting silently on his edge of the seat, staring blankly ahead. Mom is giving occasional orders to the young girls to behave and chatting with my older sister in anticipation of meeting with the other women at church.

I am secretly dreading the ordeal of church. Why couldn't today be an in-between Sunday? There are a few things about church that I don't mind. I enjoy some of the singing, and even the preaching, if there is a good preacher. But generally, going to church is a matter of waiting for the day to be over with. I don't fit in with my friends well, and I don't try very hard to. I'm a quiet thinker and prefer to be alone.

Today's meeting is no different than it has always been in the past. After waiting in the barn until it is time to go to the house, I follow the line of boys behind the grown men into the living room where the service takes place.

The German hymnbooks are passed and soon the singing starts. The slow, mellow singing drags on and I wonder what the words are saying. Sitting on the hard bench, my mind wanders to the two weeks that have passed since the last church service. Where did the time go? And what became of my promises to myself and God that I would do better after leaving church? Every time I hear the preachers speak of the righteousness and the judgment of God, I am reminded of my sins, and resolve do better. The bishop's thundering sermons on hell, and the awful fate of those who fail to please God, make me desperate to enter heaven, and I determine do whatever I must to make it. Yet, I can't put my finger on what it is that I need to do. Certainly, I know I have shortcomings and faults in my life for which I feel guilty. I am constantly angry with my siblings, and let my temper get out of control. I swear all the time, and my mind is often filled with awful thoughts of lust. I know all these things are bad. Still, I scarcely think of them as making me deserve hell. In my mind, I'm no worse than most of the Amish members of the church sitting in the room with me, and surely most of them will enter heaven. If not, what is the use of being Amish? Is this not what the Amish way is all about, to make a person good enough to please God? Yet I can't shake my uneasy fear inside. I feel distant from God, sensing his anger and judgment over me.

I promise anew that next week will be different. Surely now I will improve my life to a condition that is acceptable to God. Until then, I desperately pray that my life will not be snuffed out, and I must go to meet God. I shudder at that thought.

The singing finally ends, and a preacher stands to deliver the first

sermon of the day. He begins in the normal way: first the greeting, and the wish of God's blessing and grace on all present, and the reminder that we are still in the land of preparation. Then he quotes the familiar scriptures that are without fail recited by all the preachers. Though I've heard the words a hundred times, they wash over my soul with a glimmer of hope:

Psalm 106:1 Danket dem HERRN; denn er ist freundlich, und seine Güte währet ewiglich.

2 Wer kann die großen Taten des HERRN ausreden und alle seine löblichen Werke preisen?

3 Wohl denen, die das Gebot halten und tun immerdar recht!

4 HERR, gedenke mein nach der Gnade, die du dem Volk verheißen hast; beweise uns deine Hilfe,

5 daß wir sehen mögen die Wohlfahrt deiner Auserwählten und uns freuen, daß es deinem Volk wohl geht, und uns rühmen mit deinem Erbteil.

English:

Psalm 106:1 Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

2 Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? who can shew forth all his praise?

3 Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

4 Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation;

5 That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

"Thank God, for he is friendly, and his goodness endures forever." The words have a comforting reassurance. God is friendly and good after all? To me God is a reminder of my failure and guilt, and I fear him. Yet the scriptures say his goodness endures forever. I almost believe it.

"Blessed are those who keep the commandment, and always do right." This scripture always brings me both hope and despair. Hope, because it contains the answer that I've been seeking. If I could keep the commandment, and always do right, I'd receive God's blessing. But despair, because so far in my life I've not been able to keep the commandment to my own satisfaction, let alone God's. The

great mountain of doing right and keeping the commandment is always a steep climb ahead of me, and I never see the top. I desperately want to please God and want him to be pleased with me. Yet it always remains just outside of my reach, at the end of my promises to do better.

The preacher begins another familiar passage of scripture. The words flow from his mouth in simple eloquence; they are so familiar to him, he says them without thinking:

Psalm 103:1 Ein Psalm Davids. Lobe den HERRN, meine Seele, und was in mir ist, seinen heiligen Namen!

2 Lobe den HERRN, meine Seele, und vergiß nicht, was er dir Gutes getan hat:

3 der dir alle deine Sünden vergibt und heilet alle deine Gebrechen,

English:

Psalm 103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

The words of the bible again bring a ray of comfort to my tormented soul. "Who forgives all your sins and heals all your sicknesses." This sounds so much like what I'm looking for; it matches so perfectly what I stand in need of. I wonder what the conditions are to qualify for this blessing of having my sins forgiven. What gave the Psalmist the confidence to say that God has forgiven his sins? How did he know?

The words continue:

8 Barmherzig und gnädig ist der HERR, geduldig und von großer Güte.

9 Er wird nicht immer hadern noch ewiglich Zorn halten.

10 Er handelt nicht mit uns nach unsern Sünden und vergilt uns nicht nach unsrer Missetat.

English:

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

"Merciful and gracious is the Lord; patient, and of great goodness. He does not deal with us after our sins, and does not reward us according to our iniquities." I wonder if these

words are for me, or if they were just written for the rest of the world. Did God even care enough about me to know what sins I had that needed to be forgiven? Though I didn't dare believe the words, still they brought a sense of relief to me. It was comforting to know that, even though I didn't know how to make it happen, God was willing to forgive, and show mercy and goodness. It was good to hear from an authoritative source that God was willing to receive me and forgive my sins. I wondered how and when it would happen. How would I know? How long would I need to wait?

11 Denn so hoch der Himmel über der Erde ist, läßt er seine Gnade walten über die, so ihn fürchten.

12 So ferne der Morgen ist vom Abend, läßt er unsre Übertretungen von uns sein.

13 Wie sich ein Vater über Kinder erbarmt, so erbarmt sich der HERR über die, so ihn fürchten.

English:

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a Father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him." Again, the words are powerful, and sound wonderful, but I don't dare believe them. I have no trouble believing that God forgives sins and removes them from people. But I can't believe he'd do it for me. Certainly, I believe God could do it, but I just assume that is what God is able to do, if he wants to, and if the right conditions are met. I feel like I will never fear God enough for him to show mercy and grace to me.

When his sermon ends, the first preacher sits down, and after a portion of scripture is read by the deacon, the bishop rises to preach the main sermon. After repeating the same sayings and scriptures already quoted by the first preacher and the deacon, he begins to expound on the scripture that has been chosen by Amish tradition to be his subject.

Today's scripture readings are out of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The deacon has read one chapter,

and now the bishop is expounding on his portion of scripture.

Matthew 5:17 sollt nicht wähnen, daß ich gekommen bin, das Gesetz oder die Propheten aufzulösen; ich bin nicht gekommen, aufzulösen, sondern zu erfüllen.

18 Denn ich sage euch wahrlich: Bis daß Himmel und Erde zergehe, wird nicht zergehen der kleinste Buchstabe noch ein Tüttel vom Gesetz, bis daß es alles geschehe.

19 Wer nun eines von diesen kleinsten Geboten auflöst und lehrt die Leute also, der wird der Kleinste heißen im Himmelreich; wer es aber tut und lehrt, der wird groß heißen im Himmelreich.

20 Denn ich sage euch: Es sei denn eure Gerechtigkeit besser als der Schriftgelehrten und Pharisäer, so werdet ihr nicht in das Himmelreich kommen.

English:

Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The words press down on me, and I squirm with discomfort on the hard bench. Not a single letter will pass from the law till all be fulfilled. I wonder what Jesus meant when he said that. Who was he speaking of? Am I the one responsible for fulfilling the law to the letter? This seems like a mountain of impossibility. No one I know is able to keep the law, especially not to the letter. No one even claims to; in fact, everyone, including the bishop, readily confess falling far short of keeping it. If even the preachers are sinners, failing to keep the law, what hope is there for

me? The reality of eternity presses hard on me, and I desperately want to do something; anything, to make sure I end up in the right place.

Except your righteousness is better than the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. These words add to my feeling of hopelessness. I know I'm not better than the Pharisees, and how would I know when I was? What could I do to make sure that I'm better than they were? I don't know, except to keep trying. Again I vow to become more earnest in living a better life.

The bishop continued, quoting the words by memory:

Matthew 7:13 ein durch die enge Pforte. Denn die Pforte ist weit, und der Weg ist breit, der zur Verdammnis abführt; und ihrer sind viele, die darauf wandeln.

14 die Pforte ist eng, und der Weg ist schmal, der zum Leben führt; und wenige sind ihrer, die ihn finden.

English:

Matthew 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Enter in at the narrow gate. For broad is the road that leads to damnation, and many there are who walk on it. And the gate is small, and the way narrow, that leads to life, and few there are, that find it. My life question is whether I'm on the narrow road that leads to life, or on the broad one that leads to damnation. The problem is, I don't know. Certain days I'm satisfied enough with my life to think maybe I'm on the right road. But then I do or say something that causes me to question whether I am. Sometimes I wish I knew I was on the broad road, that way I'd know where I was headed, and could do something about it. This uncertainty whether I'm headed for heaven or hell is miserable and hopeless, and I long for a way to know.

I'm told that the Amish way is the narrow road to life. Sometimes I believe it, but mostly I question it. If it is, why can no Amish person know whether he's going to heaven or hell? And, more personally, since I'm Amish, why don't I have confidence that I'm on the right road? Maybe I'm not a good enough Amish person, or maybe it's

because I'm not a member of the church yet. Still, when I see my Amish friends and neighbors, I sense they don't know either. I hope the Amish way is not what Jesus meant, because that's what I am, yet I'm not convinced that I'm on it. I don't want my entire life to be a question of where I'll spend eternity.

Finally, the bishop reaches the close of his sermon, and begins to read the customary chapter to finish with. I know the words by heart:

Matthew 7:21 werden nicht alle, die zu mir sagen: HERR, HERR! ins Himmelreich kommen, sondern die den Willen tun meines Vaters im Himmel.

22 Es werden viele zu mir sagen an jenem Tage: HERR, HERR! haben wir nicht in deinem Namen geweissagt, haben wir nicht in deinem Namen Teufel ausgetrieben, und haben wir nicht in deinem Namen viele Taten getan?

23 Dann werde ich ihnen bekennen: Ich habe euch noch nie erkannt; weichet alle von mir, ihr Übeltäter!

English:

Matthew 7:21 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.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

These verses always scare me. I know that someday I'll die and stand before God to be judged. I try not to think about it much, but I know I can't keep it from happening. Time will tick away, and even if I live to be old, death will get me sooner or later. When I think of the judgment, I search my mind to know how to be ready for it. I'm desperate not to arrive there unprepared. I want nothing more than to be in the small crowd on God's right hand, hearing the words "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." But when I search my life for assurance that I will, I can't find enough evidence to convince me. Not everyone who says LORD! LORD! will enter into the kingdom of

heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. I want to do the will of God, but I don't know how. I know he requires me to live a good life, but how do I know whether I'm good enough? Looking at the list of people who didn't make it makes me nervous: Have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not cast out devils in your name? Have we not done many wonderful works in your name? I don't come close to doing those things. If they were spiritual enough to do the good things they did, and still God didn't know them, what hope is there for me?

I long to know God. I want him to be more personal and approachable. I wish for a way to get on his good side, and know that I am. I want to be accepted by him; to know that he is pleased, and not angry with me.

The bishop finishes the chapter, and after some closing remarks, sits down to hear the other ministers testify that what he had preached was founded on God's word. When they finish, he stands again, and after a few closing remarks, we kneel for the long prayer.

The long prayer means different things for different people. For some, it means a good time to take a much-needed nap. For others, it's a time to whisper and poke each other, like you're expected to if you're cool. For me, it's something to be endured. The prayer is read from a book, in words that are difficult to understand for most people. It's a better prayer than I could pray (or the preacher, for that matter), but it's read in a tone that makes God seem far away, and out of touch with reality. I want God to be near, not some distant God that must be approached with a perfect prayer from a book. Yet, I myself don't know how to pray. I don't even know if God hears my prayers.

After the bishop's blessing to the congregation, another slow hymn is sung, and church is dismissed. Like a tidal wave, black hats fly to the heads of their owners the instant the last word of the song is finished, and the boys and young men are out the door. We wait around the barn, trying to tell jokes and laugh, until lunch is announced. After eating bohne soup und lattveig brott, and waiting impatiently till Dad is done visiting with the men, the family is once again seated in the buggy, and Betty is trotting patiently homeward. I'm once again in the front seat, as I've been so many times before, thinking about the

day, and what's been said. The questions push to my mind, and I wearily shove them aside. Already, I sense my resolutions of doing better fade and become weaker. The timely warnings, and the reminders of righteousness and judgment somehow seemed less serious now that church was over. The strange and scary thing is, I find that I don't care.

Lost and Hopeless

I longed for God, but the desires of the flesh drew me away from him. Every day I faced strong temptations in all areas of life that I could not resist. I was Amish: everything I did and everywhere I went, I could not be anything else. My clothes and house were Amish, my family was Amish, and above all, my church was Amish. But I did not know God. I heard and read about Him, but I didn't know who He was.

My body didn't care that I was Amish. When faced with temptation, I did the same as the rest of the world, giving up on righteousness and choosing sin over God. My straw hat didn't keep the vile thoughts and pictures from floating inside my brain. My suspenders and homemade clothes didn't keep me from outrageous fits of anger, cursing, and swearing. They couldn't control the evil lust that burned in my heart after seeing that first glaring page of pornography. I was taught to obey my parents because that is what Amish do, but I didn't love them. Often I hated them.

In short, being Amish did not change who I was as a person. I knew that someday I would stand alone before God, and I wondered if it would matter then that I was Amish. I had a foreboding feeling that, though I looked different and more religious than the rest of the world, I was of the same class as they, and would be judged by the same law. I sensed that the law of God would cut through my Amish cover, and the sinful person I really was would be exposed for God and the world to see.

Life continued, and there were some changes in the family. My oldest brother, Mose, left home and the Amish church when he was 18, just before he was to be baptized.

He had searched the Bible with questions the church could not answer. Convinced that the church could not offer peace with God, he decided to search outside the box. Having forsaken the Amish way, he was believed to have fallen into the devil's hands. He was not only deceived himself, but was now a threat to the family, because he might lead us astray too. An Amish person may not know whether he'll go to heaven or hell in this life, but the surest way to miss heaven is to leave the church. In keeping with tradition, Mose was mourned over as a lost sheep who had left the fold and was in the devil's hands.

I was young, but I well remember the confusion and turmoil our family went through when my brother left. To have a family member leave the Amish faith is almost like a funeral. Dad retreated into a major state of depression. Mom's grief showed constantly on her face. My older sisters walked around with red and swollen eyes. My older brother was angry.

I wasn't sure what to think. I knew that what had happened was serious. Yet strangely, there was a secret feeling of excitement. Something new was in the air, and as a young Amish boy, nothing was ever new, nor did the future hold any promise of anything new. As I grew older, I often scorned him for deserting the faith before my friends, but secretly I wondered if he wasn't closer to answering questions that troubled me. Questions like "How can I know that I am right with God?". I was secretly jealous of him at times, because he had the advantage of searching for answers outside of the box of the Amish religion; an advantage that I was told is sin and deception. But in the back of my mind I knew that he was probably closer to finding the answers than I or my parents and church were. At least for him there were no limits to hold him back from pursuing the answers. For us, there was the constant barrier called "Amish" that loomed in front of us, beyond which we were forbidden to go. It's like being fenced inside a little pen, kept from looking outside. You sense there's something missing inside the pen, but you may not venture outside.

Mose often wrote home, and we read his letters eagerly. He stated his reasons for leaving, pointing out areas where the Amish church did not agree with the Bible. He pointed out that if being Amish wasn't able to give victory over sin, and peace with God, why were we asking him

to come back? If the church could not prepare a person to meet God, why go back to it? If the best Amish man can only hope for heaven, what was the use of being Amish? Surely there was a better way than to rely on chance.

Five years after Mose left home, my next older brother also lost faith in the church, and he too left. His departure sent a wave of shock through the community, since he had been a faithful and respected young Amish man. He was soon dismissed as another deceived young man who wanted to go out into the world for pleasure and used the Bible as an excuse. Yet, we who knew him knew that he was only following the truth as he found it in the Bible. He cared more about God and righteousness now than he did when he was Amish.

An even bigger shock was in store for our Amish community. Six months later, my parents also left the church, along with all the children that were home. Within a year, three more families left the church we had gone to for years.

I was 15 when this major change took place in my life. Suddenly, an entire world opened before me. The fences in which I had felt so confined were removed, and I saw the world in completely new light. Before, the church had always decided what was right or wrong, but now I had to decide for myself what the truth was. I was now responsible for my own life; no one else was telling me how to live and what to believe. I was forced to choose whether I would serve God or sin. This was harder than following a set of rules already decided to be right for me. I must now depend on my conscience and the Bible, and it forced me to seek for the truth in earnest.

This new change drove me to the Bible. I began reading it in English, which had been strongly discouraged by the Amish. I read the familiar passages that I had heard preached all my life in church, and the words came alive with meaning. I discovered that the Bible in English was saying the same thing as it did in German, only now I understood it better. I was now free to let it say to me what it was trying to, instead of what others wanted it to say.

The new change in life, and relationship problems between my parents made life confusing and unstable at home. I longed more than ever for the answers to life, and more and more I found myself going to the Bible. The fierce temptations

of lust that all young men are faced with drove me in desperation to find some source of power and victory that would help me overcome. I turned to the Bible as that source.

The question of where I was headed still loomed before me, and I could not avoid it. Now that I was no longer Amish, I could not rely on the church to make me good enough for heaven. But where was I supposed to turn to find peace with God? What was it that I needed to do to be saved?

As I read the Bible, I was faced with a few questions. I had grown up hearing that it is impossible to know that you are saved. It was considered pride for a person to say that he knows he will make it to heaven. But if that was true, why did Jesus say "You must be born again, or you cannot see the kingdom of God."? Why would he tell me I need to be born again, then say I could not know whether I was? It would be like a father telling his son he must go to the grocery store, but that he couldn't know he was on the right road to get there.

1 John 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; <u>that ye may know that ye have eternal life,</u> and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

I became convinced that I could definitely know I had eternal life. If Jesus died for me to give me eternal life, why could I not know that I had it? If I have the Son, I have life, but if I don't have the Son, I don't have life. But how could I know that I had the Son?

I studied other verses that mentioned being saved:

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

This was scary stuff for me. I realized I could not get to heaven by being good enough. I became frustrated, because now I didn't

know what to do, since God would not accept my works in exchange for salvation. Being good was the only way I knew to please God, and if that didn't work, what else was there? I felt like my salvation was outside of my control and there was nothing I could do to get God to save me.

I tried all the things people told me I needed to do. I confessed my sins, feeling as sorry for them as I could. Over and over I asked God to forgive me. I often prayed until I felt better but was never sure whether God heard me. I always felt I wasn't sorry enough for my sins for God to forgive them.

I read that I must believe to be saved:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Though I had heard these verses in German many times, I didn't understand them. I had heard about der glauben (faith) growing up, but I didn't know what the Bible meant when it said I must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. To only believe was too simple; there must be more to salvation than that. Surely there was some work I must do to cleanse myself before God would save me.

Yet, the words kept coming back to me: "He that believes is not condemned." That sounded so easy and was exactly what I was looking for. I wanted to be free from my condemnation and fear of death and hell. I wanted to be delivered from the judgment that hung over me, and in this simple verse, I saw a way out. Often I thought, "If only I could believe." But I didn't know how. When I tried to believe, I looked inside my heart, trying to make faith rise inside of me, and searching for a feeling to tell me I believed. When it didn't come, I gave up, thinking I must not have truly believed. Therefore, believing remained just outside my reach, until I thought I would never truly believe and be saved.

I hated this feeling of helplessness.

I wished God would just save my soul because I asked him to. Didn't he see I wanted to be saved? Didn't he know that I was trying to be a Christian, and wanted to do what was right? Didn't he see that my heart was sincere, and that I truly wanted to know and serve him? Why then could he not do the miracle that it took to save me? What more could I do to show him I was earnest about following him? I felt I was doing my best to do my part, but God was not doing his. I did all the things I knew to be a godly young man, but it seemed like God didn't care. I fought sin as hard as I could, and did my best to be righteous, but none of my efforts brought me peace with God. Often the full weight of my need to be saved was so heavy upon me, I cried out to God for mercy, because I had no other hope. But it seemed like God didn't hear.

I was in this state of despair for so long I wondered if I would ever see the light. I envied others who rejoiced in the peace and forgiveness they had found in Christ. Seeing their freedom exasperated me. It was frustrating to see others possess the peace that I was looking for, and which the bible said I could have, but they had it, and I didn't know how to get it. In my mind, I put far more effort into my salvation than many of them did. I couldn't understand what they did that I wasn't doing that worked for them. It seemed to me that God was being partial, only giving salvation to those who were lucky enough to meet the requirements. And how I longed to be one of those lucky ones.

The Answer

One day I was listening to a man preach from the book of Hebrews. By now I was desperate to know the truth. I had worn myself out trying to please God, and I still didn't have peace. I listened to the words being preached, ready to let the Bible say what it had to say. I was done trying to figure out what I needed to do. I had tried all that I knew, and all I had to show for was a history of failing, and a miserable future of unending efforts that could only ease my conscience while I waited in vain for the miracle of salvation. At times I thought perhaps I must resign myself to hell. That thought drove me in anguish to grab on to the only

life-line I knew: to pray and beg God to save me until my conscience was eased, so that at least if I did end up in hell, God couldn't blame me for it, since I had tried my very best. I knew it was a fragile thread, but I clung to it. I knew that everything I had tried so far hadn't worked, but I didn't dare let go. My soul hung suspended over the lake of fire, and my fighting strength was nearing an end. I longed for something new to present itself; a method of salvation so powerful and effective that it would swallow up everything I had tried without success. I longed for a salvation so high and powerful that my own efforts could not interfere with its effectiveness.

As I listened to the book of Hebrews, I thought perhaps there was such a method available.

The man was preaching from Hebrews chapter 10, where it states that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins in the Old Testament, because God had no pleasure in them. Something greater than animal sacrifices was needed to take away our sins.

Hebrews 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Earlier in this chapter the writer of Hebrews pointed out that if the Old Testament sacrifices had been able to take away sins, they would not have needed to be repeated each year. The thousands of blood offerings made each year for sins could only make a temporary payment; they could not clear the conscience of the people.

As the preacher explained the meaning of the passage, it struck me that my own ability to please God wasn't included. Instead, my attention was drawn away from my own efforts, to an event in which my performance could not interfere. The bible was not giving me something to do, but something to believe. It spoke of events that took place before I was born and challenged me to believe it. I realized that my response would not change the outcome of the passage. What these verses were teaching was independently true and real, regardless of my condition or feelings. No matter my efforts or lack thereof, I could not change these truths, nor the authority that the Bible gave to them.

5 Wherefore when he (Jesus) cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

I sensed that this passage

contained my answer. Slowly, hardly daring to, I pushed aside my problem of sin and focused on what the words were saying.

My attention was drawn to two realities in the passage. One was an ancient system of blood sacrifices that had failed to provide a perfect payment for sin. The other was a man who was given a body so that he could come into the world to replace that system. I and my own experience were not included in either of these realities.

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

All my life I had tried to do God's will and failed. But here was a man who had arrived on earth two thousand years ago, and, where all men had failed, he was said to have done the perfect will of God.

8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;

9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

Now I saw that the matter of my sins being forgiven did not depend upon me. Being a sinner, I was too far gone to have any part in my salvation. Instead, my forgiveness depended on whether this man would succeed in his mission of earning complete and perfect salvation with the power to save me. If he would fail, then there was no hope for me, no matter how righteously I lived.

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

In German:

10 "In velchem villen vir sind geheiliget, Einmal geshehen durch das opfers des Leibes Jesu Christi."

It dawned on me that the reason Christ had come into the world in a human body was to offer it as a sacrifice for my sins. The words brought a ray of hope to my soul. This sounded like something that God would accept on my behalf, since he did it himself. Since he provided it, then surely he would be satisfied with it. I began to see that while I had been trying to make

myself acceptable to God, He had already done what it took to make me righteous by having his Son offer up his body for me on the cross. Relief came over me as I realized that it was not my holiness that made me right with God, but the fact that Jesus offered a holy sacrifice. The work necessary for my salvation shifted from my hands into God's, bringing peace, because he knew what was required, and was able to do it. And the amazing thing was, he had already done the work by having Jesus die on the cross.

"Once for all.."

The words carried a powerful force of persuasion. Since Jesus was perfect, his one sacrifice met all that was required, and nothing more was needed. My sins had been paid for by Jesus Christ himself! My own efforts were useless, because Jesus had already done everything necessary for my salvation.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

The priests in the Old Testament offered hundreds of sacrifices every day for the sins of the people, and even those could not take away their sins.

12 But this man, (Jesus) after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Once again, the words of the bible hit home. The words "once" and "forever" kept appearing: Once for all.. One sacrifice for sins forever.. By one offering.." Slowly the truth dawned on me. Christ had made one sacrifice for my sins, and that was all it took. Nothing more was needed to pay for my sins, because he had finished the job. My own puny efforts at pleasing God were lost in the excellence of his perfect offering, and I knew I could add nothing to it. All the months and years of trying to please God by living a Christian life had zero value in paying for my sins. While I was waiting on God to forgive my sins, he had already paid for them through the death of Jesus and was waiting for me to believe it. The problem had not been God not wanting to save me, but me being so busy trying to move God with my efforts

that I didn't have time to accept his gift.

I now understood that my salvation was sure because it rested on what Jesus did. As I continued to study the bible, I became more persuaded of this. Often I took my eyes off of Christ and his sacrifice, trying to appease God by being a good Christian. But when my heart longed for the peace that came with simply trusting in Jesus, I returned to the cross where I was always guaranteed to have freedom. All my life I had been taught that I must be a good person to please God, and now I had to retrain my mind to rest in the work of Jesus instead of my own. It took some time for me to learn how to live in this new reality. Often in desperation I came back to the bible to find the answer anew, and each time it pointed me to Jesus. Slowly, I learned to walk by faith in him; to day by day trust him as all that I needed before God. As I grew in this faith, I became more confident and bold in Christ, learning how to stand strong in faith against the doubt and fear trying to creep in. I learned to love Jesus, and as I followed and believed him, I discovered that sin, although as much of a temptation as before, was losing its power over me.

Today, I testify that I have peace with God because of Jesus Christ. I can look death square in the face without fear, because Jesus has gone before me into death, and taken the keys of death and hell from Satan. He has finished all the work that was required to pay for my sins, and to get me into heaven, into the very presence of God. He is sitting at God's right hand, and is praying for me before the Father, waiting for me to arrive safely in heaven. I do not simply hope that I will be lucky enough to make it; I know I will, not because I lived a good enough life, but because Jesus made a good enough sacrifice for me. I do not trust in my own righteousness; I trust in the righteousness of God, given to me on my behalf.

John 3:35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

A Note To The Reader

Perhaps you are in the same condition I was in. Perhaps you too would like to be saved, and have tried to persuade God to save you, but He seems to remain distant. Perhaps your conscience, like mine did, is pressing down on you with guilt. Maybe you are stuck like I was, and you feel like you have tried so very hard to please God, but He doesn't seem to care. You have tried your institution's prescribed way of reaching God, but somehow you fell through the cracks, and the formula didn't work for you as it seems to have worked for others. Maybe you are terrified at the thought of meeting Christ, as I was. And maybe, just maybe, you hate the sin that you are living in, like I did, but you keep going back to it. Maybe you too fall asleep on a wet pillow, praying that you will not die, because it is the only prayer you dare pray.

I know all about that. Fear and misery were my companions for months and years. The devil made me the object of his amusement, dangling my soul in that miserable space between damnation and salvation, where I had the knowledge of salvation, but not the faith to receive it. You and I both know the hellish torment of that space.

I have a few things to say to you, as a former companion of your misery. First, understand that there is nothing wrong with you. You are feeling exactly the way you should. You and I are sinners, and the guilt; the torment and misery; the separation from the God we long to know, should only be expected. Hell from beneath is calling our name, because we belong to it. It owns us, because of our sins and our filth. If home is where the heart is, then the only home we dare hope to find for our sinful hearts is hell. Perhaps you have told yourself to shake off this misery, and get a grip on life. No, my friend. You and misery belong to each other, because of your sin. You and I became the products of the sum total of all our choices in life: choices that we squandered and forfeited for moments of pleasure and enjoyment, at the high cost of disobedience to God. If God is indeed a God of justice as He claims, and as our conscience has been telling us all of our lives, then

there can be only one end for people like you and me. We dare not even implore the goodness of God, because His very goodness condemns our filth.

The Bible in the book of Ephesians gives us a perfect description of our serious condition: “That at that time ye were without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world:” The darkest, and most hopeless condition to be in, is to be without God. Without God, there is no hope, and sin, my friend, has cast you and me into that hopeless chasm of godlessness.

Hope

But there is hope, because there is still God. I will talk to you for a minute about hope, but do not dare ask what you must do to find or receive it. For now, you must stay motionless in your bed of despair. Your efforts to rise will only cause you to lose sight of the hope that you may yet find.

There was once a sinner like you and me on a cross beside the Lord Jesus. Sin had caught up with him, and now he was dying. He understood that the nails that held his hands and feet to the cross were the sharp, bitter claws of justice. He knew he belonged on that cross; that this was the end he deserved.

But there was a man on the middle cross, who did not belong there. The sins that held the man Jesus on the cross were not his own. In his dying moments, the sinner understood an eternal truth that is still ringing down through the ages, and now reaches you in your despair: the just was dying for the unjust. The sins of billions of lifetimes of sinners were being paid for as the perfect Son of God bled away his life on a cruel and bloody, Roman cross. With one shuddering sigh, he yielded his spirit to the hungry claws of death; the same claws that have been reaching for you and me. And in that instant, the awful deed was done. Sin’s sacrifice was made. Guilt and condemnation could not stand in the face of innocence crucified. Justice could find no fault with the death of this good man, and it was forced to agree to the terms of forgiveness that grace now offers to you, the sinner, for the contract was signed in blood. And on that mountain outside of Jerusalem, beneath the cross of Jesus, a holy and eternal agreement took place: sin, death, and hell had met their match, and they no longer hold claim to that miserable sinner lying in his bed of despair.

Do you see it now, my friend? Now, will you rise, and shake off the weight of sins, that are no longer yours to bear? Will you take a look at that bloody cross, and will you sign your own name in agreement that, yes, it is indeed true; that justice has been served, and you are free indeed? Can you dare look at the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross, and say, "No, I dare not believe that it is enough."? Do you understand that this is your final hope; that beside it, there is no other? If you will not have this righteous man as your sin-bearer, then you are forever left to your own devices, and you may not expect any help from God, because God has invested all his help into the Lord Jesus, and offers him to you. All that God wants for you, and what you have been looking for to make you perfect, is found in Jesus. You may take him or leave him; you do not make God richer or poorer by your decision. The choice is yours.

But don't take my word for it. Consider these words from the Bible, out of the book of Romans:

Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Do you see that God can remain just, and make you just at the same time? Do you understand that God is able to exercise the full force of his righteousness, and find you innocent? Do you know that you can now look the law square in the face, and say to it, "Justice has been served, and you can find no fault in me."? Do you, my friend, believe that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, has been given to you, for you to take shelter in from the piercing eyes of the law? If you believe these things, the devil has lost you, and you have passed from death to life.

But there is more:

Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Is there anyone greater then God? And if God has forever proven that He is for you, by not sparing His own Son, who or what has the power to condemn you? Your sins can't, because they have been buried in the death of Christ. The law can't, because it has been vindicated by the righteous blood of Christ. Your conscience cannot, because the sins that made it miserable are not to be found anymore. And finally, God himself can't condemn you, because He cannot condemn His Son.

There is still more:

Hebrews 6:17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

Do you know why God can offer salvation to you that is certain and guaranteed to work? It is because God himself has sworn with an oath that He is satisfied with that which Christ has done on your behalf. Christ entered into the place where sinful man was not allowed to enter: the Holy place behind the veil, into the very presence of God, where he reconciled you to God with his righteous blood. He now offers this hope as an anchor for your soul; a sure and steadfast stronghold of promise that will keep your soul safely secured to Christ; you must only lay hold of it and make it your refuge.

Consider this prophecy of the Lord Jesus:

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Do you see it now? That surely, he has borne your sins; that literally, he made your sins his very own, and he bore the shame, the guilt, and punishment of them on a lonely cross? Do you understand that when the Bible says Christ was stricken of God, it means that God struck him down, because in that moment, Christ became what you are: a sinner condemned to die? Do you see that the body of Jesus was wounded, and bruised to a bloody mess, so that the sins you committed in your body could be forgiven to the uttermost?

You see, the whole purpose from the very beginning: the baby in the manger, who was God in human flesh; the man, who was perfect in everything that he did; the man who was the first to not obey sin and

temptation, but to always obey God the Father every minute of every day of every year of his life; the whole purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ coming to the earth in a body of flesh, was so that for one moment in time, he could bear the enormous debt of sin you owed. He paid it all, therefore there is nothing left for you pay. You are made free, forgiven, justified, righteous, and fully accepted by God on the basis of that glorious and bloody sacrifice. Trust it now, and you are saved. Believe that it is true, and you have escaped judgment.

Are you still not convinced? Well, the bible is not finished with you yet:

Romans 5:6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Think about it. When you were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. Are you not ungodly? Is it not for you then, that Christ died? And when did He die? Did he wait until you had shown evidence that you would love him for it? No! He died while you were still without the strength to do anything to help yourself. He made the first move, because you didn't have the strength to. He opened the door you couldn't, and all that is left for you to do is to walk through it. He paid the price, and all you can do is to take it as your own. Will you? You would be a fool to stay wallowing in your doom as a condemned sinner when all you have to do is reach out and grab hold of the hand that will save you.

Repentance

Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke: ". .except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

For years I wondered what repentance was. I wanted to repent, because I knew that I would not be saved unless I would repent. But for

a long time, the issue of repentance is what kept me from coming to Christ, because I made it into a condition I had to meet before Christ would save me. It was another obstacle that stood between me and God, and I was confused on how to overcome it.

I thought repentance meant being sorry for my sins, so I turned my focus on trying to see how sinful I was so that I could be sorry. But when I tried to repent, I was scared at my lack of remorse for my sins, and I didn't dare hope that God would accept my repentance as genuine.

The bible makes it very clear that only those who repent will be saved. It's the dividing line between being a saint and a sinner. It's the difference between heaven and hell. But biblical repentance is not something you keep trying to accomplish, but never know if you truly did. If you have repented, you know it for a fact; it is not something you keep trying to reach, but never arrive at. There is a way you can know that you have truly repented.

Acts 20:20 ". . . I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice that repentance and faith are linked together. They are not a series of steps that must be followed in the right order; repentance and faith happen at the same time. Biblical repentance is a change in your mind and heart, not just in your feelings or actions. It is to change your opinion about something.

Repentance that leads to salvation requires a change of your mind and opinion concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul gives an example in his letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

The word repentance is not mentioned in this passage, but that is exactly what Paul is describing. He listed all the good things that he had done: he was an Israelite, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and a Pharisee. According to the law, he was blameless; that is, no one could prove him guilty of breaking the law. But there came a time when he heard about the Lord Jesus, and that Christ offered him a righteousness that was better than his own. At that point, Paul had to make a decision; he was forced to decide between two alternatives: he could keep trusting in the things he had to offer as righteousness, or he could cast those aside, and take the righteousness that Christ offered to him. This decision required a change of mind and heart toward Christ, and that is what repentance is about. It is to stop trusting in one thing, and begin trusting another. It may not be an easy thing for you to do, but it is not complicated. Repentance is not about changing your view or opinion about yourself. It is to change your view and opinion about Jesus Christ, and is therefore something you can immediately arrive at, simply by believing the gospel..

Conclusion

When I was a young boy at home, the man we worked for collected special stones called “fossils”. We children would spend hours in creek beds and gravel pits searching for them to give to the boss in exchange for candy and other goodies. It was a big excitement to bring him our finds, and to receive our rewards.

One day my brothers and I were in the log yard, which was covered with limestone gravel. Suddenly we noticed that many of the stones had special marks that looked like

fossils. Excited, we looked further and discovered they were everywhere. We quickly filled our pockets, then used our hats. As we gathered the "fossils", we chattered about how pleased the man would be, and all the goodies we would receive. With our pockets and hats full, we marched up expecting him to be pleased and amazed at our find. To our surprise and disappointment, he took one look at them, and began scolding us. "Those aren't fossils; they're gravel! Go put them back where you got them!" Gravel? No, it couldn't be. We showed him the marks, but it was no use. We had picked up gravel to give to the boss in exchange for goodies. As we carried our hats full of rocks back to their place in the log yard, we were not only disappointed; we were embarrassed and ashamed. Not only did we not receive the reward we were expecting; all the "fossils" we had worked so hard to gather had been rejected by the man we had gathered them for, and we were left with nothing. After all our efforts, we only had a pile of gravel.

When the great Day of Judgment comes, all people will be there. It won't matter what church or religion they are from, all will be judged by the same Judge. You will be there too. As you stand before Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and his eyes pierce into your soul, you will be alone. You will not stand there as a member of your church; you will only be another human, giving an answer to your Creator and Judge. Your church will not be with you; you will face God as the person you are under your religious cover. What will you answer when he points to your sins, and says you are guilty? What will you offer him that will be able to satisfy his justice, and allow you to enter into heaven? Will you offer your church membership? Your baptism? Your repentance? Your confession? Your good Christian life? And what if he still points at you and says, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you worker of iniquity."? Will you be like my brothers and I were, hoping to receive a reward for what you worked so hard to get, only to be rejected and turned away, discovering too late that what you brought has no value? The problem with our gravel was not that we didn't have enough; it was that we had the wrong kind. Will you have something to offer to God that will have real value, or will you be sent away with your hat full of gravel,

realizing that God would not accept what you had worked all your life to establish? That would be a tragedy.

You need something that you can be certain will pass the test of that day. Only one thing is guaranteed by God to do so: the blood of Jesus. It alone has the power to please God on your behalf. If you will place your faith and trust in it alone, you will be guaranteed to be accepted of God, for God accepts the blood of His Son.

I challenge you to think about the reality of these things. As each day passes, you and I are moving closer to that great day. It is the one thing we have in common. I am ready for it, and I have no fear, because I rest in Jesus Christ and his blood. I will meet God as my friend and Jesus as my Savior and Brother; death is only the door I must walk through to meet Him.

Are YOU ready? You can be.

1 John 4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

What You Should Know To Go To Heaven

First, you need to be saved:

Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Second, you cannot save yourself:

Titus 3:5 *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

Third, Jesus has provided for your salvation:

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Fourth, You must accept Jesus as your Savior:

John 1:12-13 *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Fifth, now is the time to accept Jesus as Savior:

2 Corinthians 6:2 *...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

What to do:

Romans 10:9 *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.*

Romans 10:13 *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

FREE Bible Study!

God's Word says: "Study to show yourselves approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Simply tear this page out, fill it out, and send it back to us. We will send you your choice of a free Bible correspondence course to help you see for yourself what the Bible really says. Complete all the lessons in the course, and not only will we send you a certificate of completion, but you will have learned more of the Bible and grown closer to God. We currently have seven different Bible study courses from which you can choose:

1. **ABC's of Christian Growth:** How well do you know the doctrines of the Christian faith? Have you ever sat down and studied God—do you know Him? What about Heaven? Jesus Christ? The Holy Spirit? The Church? The New Birth? Prayer? Return of Jesus Christ? The Bible? Satan? Hell? The Family? Communion? This course is one of our favorites!
2. **Basic Basics:** Does the Bible tell us how we can know we are going to heaven? The answer, of course, is yes! God is very clear about it. If you have any doubts at all about your salvation, please ask for this study.
3. **Foundational Study:** Is your heart set on the Christian home? How can you gain victory over a certain sin in your life? Do you have questions about the new birth? Brokenness? Biblical separation? This course provides you clear answers straight from the Bible.
4. **Book of Books Study:** How well do you know the history, customs, geography, and measurements of the Bible? Did anyone ever sit down with you and explain how the Old and New Testaments fit together? Do you understand how to apply God's word to your life today?
5. **Verse-by-Verse Study:** This course will help you understand various books of the Bible by taking you through an in-depth verse-by-verse study. The study includes the books of John, Ephesians, and Romans.
6. **Topical Study:** Many people struggle with fear, anger, pride, doubt, loneliness, and disbelief. Others struggle with worry, faith, and a healthy prayer life. If you fall into any one of these pits, please consider signing up for this course. Join others who have signed up and are receiving the spiritual help and encouragement they need.
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