

A dark, gothic-style altar scene. In the center, a wooden cross is mounted on a wall, with red liquid dripping down its front. To the left of the cross is a candelabra with five lit candles. Below the cross is a silver chalice. To the right of the chalice is a small, ornate cage containing a white bird. In the foreground, a human skull sits on the left, and a book labeled 'HOLY BIBLE' lies on the right. The background is covered in spider webs, with a single spider visible on the left. The overall atmosphere is dark and macabre.

DE'VANNON HUBERT

DON'T CALL ME A
"CHRISTIAN"

WHAT DOES THAT WORD EVEN MEAN?

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ME A
'CHRISTIAN'
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DE'VANNON HURBERT

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DEDICATION

This book is for the world and everyone in it. For we are all spirits on a journey through time and space seeking meaning and purpose. In a world full of religious and political chaos it is my hope to inject clarity, common sense, and wisdom which are commodities that seem to get rarer by the day. Lately, I feel as I get further away from denominations and churches, I am getting closer to God.

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. It is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”¹

-De’Vannon Hubert

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 ESV



FOREWORD

Many are drawn to the bright lights and the glitter of the world. Like “Pinocchio” we leave home for a great adventure. Along the way God calls to each of us as a prodigal child by sharing opportunities to come to know ourselves better in the light of His love. We are often reminded of our importance even as we are changed by the luminescence of our choices.

This book reflects a desire to respond to God’s call with an open heart. Spurred by motivations to serve others entangled by the puppeteer’s strings, the journey described by De’Vannon Hubert herein will help those searching and seeking to understand a place in their world, and at the same time, a truth within.

Self-reflection is a taproot of growth allowing one to mature and move from ‘milk to meat’ in the discovery of God’s Word². The light of knowledge encourages and allows believers and followers of Christ to know God’s character and nature. In turn, a beacon for new living, the Holy Spirit can provide guidance to each step on the path. By this book’s close, similar to the end of a sojourned walk, you too may be a soul won over.

-Branch Isole, Author & Poet

² Hebrews 5:13

CHAPTER 1:

WHAT IS “CHRISTIANITY” AND WHO ARE THESE “CHRISTIANS?”

The world has been questioning Christianity and Christians for more than two thousand years. One might have thought the debate would have by now been settled. Apparently not. The questions and controversies continue today as much, if not more than in the days of the movement’s original Christ following practitioners. Debates within Christianity, and by the world at large have been topics of conversations ever since Jesus called upon His disciples to join Him. Outsiders who doubt and question, even despise or hate Christians are often matched equally by the disputes within Christian communities themselves. Never before has the world of Christianity engaged or exchanged more time or energy for information and examples of who Christ was. And still disagreements abound while anger often persists.

As one of the world’s three largest religions, Christian history has been recognized as a theological belief system for about two thousand years. Its origins go back further in genealogical time to Abram (Abraham); however, its birth is attributable to Jesus of Nazareth. The other great and most attended religions are Buddhism, which started approximately six hundred years before Christianity. Hinduism, which began approximately six hundred years before Buddhism. And Islam, which was founded approximately six hundred years after Jesus’ life. Each of these major theology systems were spread globally by adherents, converts, or ethnic diasporas.

Christianity as the name implies denotes those who believe in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, or Messiah (Jewish Savior). Jesus was born into the Jewish religion and culture. His first disciples and apostles were practicing or recalcitrant Jews. Although Judaism remains small in numbers, its history and existence go back over five thousand years. Christianity’s birthplace was in the Judea/Samaria region of Palestine (modern day Israel and Syria).

Judaism, Islam, and Christianity were each an outgrowth of descendants from a nomadic Hebrew named Abram. Before Christianity began as a worship and practice, Abram was the father of Islam and Judaism. One might ask how can this be? Abram was the father of Ishmael (Islam) and Isaac (Judaism). Today these three religions are often at odds politically, socially, and scripturally. Biblical scripture credits Abram as being ‘righteous’ in the eyes of the Lord. His monotheistic belief was outside the norms of a day when cultures and ethnic groups practiced polytheism. It was from the descendants of Isaac (Abraham’s second son) that the Jews would genetically and culturally evolve. Judaism practitioners would make up the first of Jesus’ apostles, disciples, followers, and believers.

Christianity as an outgrowth of Judaism centered on the words and deeds of Jesus in the three years of his ministry. It is important to recognize that religions fundamentally start as ‘theological belief systems’ focused on the interpretive teachings of a single individual. To wit:

Jesus: Christianity

Siddhartha Gautama: Buddhism

Mohammed: Islam

Moses: Judaism

Hinduism: a combination of similar thought believers

None of these individuals thought of their teaching as ‘religions.’ Their instructional words pertained to ways of interacting with others in the daily process of existing within their culture in light of acknowledgment of a power or source greater than and outside of themselves. Early “religion” was not focused on ecclesiastic or dogmatic thoughts, ideas, or practices. It was more about relationships between people and their society, grounded in and tied to a conceptional relationship to a God or gods.

With the death of each original teacher their scriptural instructions were organized. Eventually canonical oral and written traditions made a direct connection between a religion’s founding teacher and a supreme altruistic and present cosmic/universal figure who provided a grounding structure for belief and adherence. This made expansion of belief and practice viable to vast numbers of people in larger geographic and cultural areas. We need to remember that aspects of cultural, political, social, economic, and religious life evolved progressively throughout and within groups of people with the beginnings of each civilization. Within every culture there were leaders and ‘heads of state’ responsible for life sustaining systems and order. When an enlightened individual enters the fray of his era to share and instruct esoteric understandings of spirituality there is always an innate emotional void to be filled or satisfied. This is what every religion attempts to do. Satisfy a longing need of connection outside the physical world.

What is it that makes Christianity as a theological belief system different from the others we are briefly citing? Christianity is the only ‘religion’ wherein its original teacher claims to be³, is recognized by others to be⁴, and is expressly validated by ‘God’ to be⁵ who He (Jesus) claims and is professed to be: The Christ, The Messiah, Savior, Redeemer, Reconciler, Agent, Mediator, and Conduit to, of and for God Almighty. This fundamental fact of truth makes Christianity unique and different from all other spiritual belief systems. No other scriptural leader/teacher of any spiritual/religious belief system ever claimed to be a messianic Savior for the world or more specifically, the Son of God, and God Himself. As enlightened thinkers of truth they could not claim this mantle or title. It would belie their own expressed belief, spiritual exploration, and sanctity.

This is not to say Christianity started or evolved without dissent, discord, angst, or peril. As with any new ‘thought’ movement there exists adversaries and opposition from within and without. The complexities of implementation of any belief system, particularly involving human relations with ‘God’ bring about both conflicts and collaborations. Even within each religion one finds different denominations, sects, or practitioners. From its very inception, expressions were conjectures as to how Christianity’s core understandings would be interpreted and practiced. Once the original teacher passes from this earthly realm those who fill the void left by his absence were often embroiled in power struggles. Change of what was and how it would be going forward came into conflict. In this way, Christianity is no different than any other religion or spiritual belief system. It had its difficulties even when Jesus Himself walked and talked among his disciples. No matter our religious affiliation or expression as spiritual adherents, most people want to believe in

³ John 14:6

⁴ Matthew 16:16

⁵ Matthew 3:17

and embrace a relationship with God. In many instances however, we wish to accomplish this advocacy more on our terms than God's desirous instruction.

Christianity has struggled from its inception. As a group it has faced constant attacks and questions. This is no different than any spiritual system. Believers commit, others doubt or question.

As Christians we strive for truth that we may enjoy its applications and how truth can affect our lives on a daily basis. As twenty-first century Christians our struggles continue. Sadly, even as we exult and attempt to emulate the teachings and words of Christ our lack of understanding and commitment often makes the Christian response to people and events less than 'Christ-like'. In the mid-twentieth century Mahatma Ghandi noted, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Many Christians today have readily replaced scriptural instruction and understandings with exultation of ecclesiastic clerics of their local or parochial church or denomination. Many put their faith in words or admonishments from pastors or priests rather than the actual words Jesus imparts to His hearers. As believers in Christ, we have direct and personal spiritual knowledge of God through the advocacy of Jesus, negating the need for intervention on our behalf. This is not to say that a church, synagogue, or mosque does not play an integral part in the lives of those who attend its calling to worship with desires to commune with God. Each can provide for its believers' knowledge and needed fellowship by those desiring expressions of scripture. People can go to where they feel spiritually fed to establish and build a relationship with God. For those searching or seeking a relationship with Christ wherever, whenever, or as often as they wish, it is very accessible to "be with God." He is always ready, willing, and able to commune with you.

Why do we 'label' others? What is it about identifying someone by a derogatory manner that makes the name caller feel better about themselves? What is revealed by this verbal action? What might we learn about someone who persists in using negative references about others? These can be difficult, often revealing questions to answer. By peeling away the layers we are able to find out more about ourselves and the groups we align with. As 'Christians' we claim to relate to and honor God, thereby reflecting the thoughts, words, and deeds of Jesus Christ. Vociferous Christians may go out of their way to make evident this belief about themselves. The reflective questions for us are, what is a Christian? And what does 'Christian' behavior look like? We each learn and grow from beliefs and childhood experiences in our formative years, which then become more 'hard wired' through use and application. In many cases remaining for a lifetime. Some find it hard to change, others simply do not want to.

Christians come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and degrees of religious and spiritual understanding. In a variety of opportunities one of our consistent struggles may be between the 'Christian' we claim to be, and the 'Christian' we are. In every aspect of life there is struggle for balance. We can be highly influenced by our core beliefs, as well as by the challenges we experience. Christians often add useable Biblical narratives heard, learned, or applied to one's current lifestyle and/or spiritual growth. The world's demands can be daunting to adjust to or understand. Like many aspects of life, for growth to occur Christianity must be practiced. The possibility of change comes with growth. Only within the satisfaction of experience is the mind open to reassessing or embracing new thoughts or behaviors. When we recognize the value of choosing to be a newer version of our old self, the Bible describes us a 'new creation'.⁶ Only then do our thoughts and actions align to benefit us and those we are in contact with.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17

Who are the ‘true’ Christians? If we consider the Bible to be the Word of God and therefore the example of righteous living, we must agree that the emulation of Jesus’ behavior is our aim. In other words, “Christ-like”. The whole premise of being a ‘Christian’ is to use our spiritual beliefs, doctrines, and principles as a guide to our behaviors and responses, to the people and events occurring in our lives.

What about today’s Christian? How should we hope, desire, and attempt to respond as ‘Christ-like’? What does Jesus say about that? He tells us exactly.⁷ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” And then, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

He goes on to say, “All the (recorded) Laws and (the words of) the Prophets hang on these two.” Meaning everything learned, assimilated, or ingrained about our relationship with God *and* our relationships with other people (Christians or not) are superseded by these two. In these two declarative sentences Jesus Himself is describing the overarching foundations of Christian life and behavior. Jesus says to His readers, followers, and believers, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”⁸ This ‘cross’ being the burden(s) which keeps us separated from Christ as our example of righteous living. This ‘cross’ is the daily challenge of expressing our love for God’s Holy Trinity *and* behaving toward others in the same manner we want to be treated. The question for each of us remains, will I choose to respond to the people and events of my daily life the same way Christ would if He were here, in my place? Will I choose to be a “Christian” by living more ‘Christ-like?’ Or will I ignore that which I claim to be in thought and mouth by continuing to respond as though influenced by my past life and long held ingrained and worldly influenced beliefs? Am I willing to be a ‘new creation’ in Christ, or not? Whether entering Christianity anew or as a redeemed ‘fallen away’ believer, how does one become this new creation in Christ? The love of God is so great that He has provided five simple steps to establish or reestablish a personal spiritual relationship with Him through the advocacy and belief in Jesus as the Christ. By knowing and instituting these five steps, we gain or regain the right and privilege to commune with God personally, on a direct and engaged level.

If you know nothing else about a spiritual relationship with God, know this, these steps fulfill the need and desire to be one with and grow in a spiritual relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ, His Son. The five are as follows: First, we must *invite* Jesus into our life.⁹ We ASK, that is we ask, seek, and knock. We ask Jesus to be part of our life, our existence in this time and place. We seek His spirit and being, and we knock on the door which shall be opened to us.

This invitation must be a voluntary request. God’s love is great, but He will never force Himself on us. That would go against His very nature of granting His unconditional love through ‘Free Will’. If God were to demand obedience from people, our service and moral/ethical obedience would have been coerced. There could be no unconditional love passing between Him and us. Love must be voluntary and therefore its actions true and heartfelt. By inviting Jesus into our life, we are opening the door to His embrace, protection, and guidance within our life.

Step two after this invitation is His response.¹⁰ Jesus states He will send the “Spirit of Truth” to live and abide with our spirit. Our invitation given and accepted, Jesus sends His Holy Spirit of Truth, the same Holy Spirit that is God the Father, to dwell with our spirit. The third step is to engage this newly acquired spirit of truth actively in our life whenever we desire. Every time we

⁷ Matthew 22:37-38

⁸ Luke 9:23

⁹ Matthew 7:7-8

¹⁰ John 16:13

have a decision or choice to make that bears a consequence, we now have the right, privilege, and opportunity to call upon His Spirit in ours for guidance and instruction. Jesus states that His Spirit is now available for advocacy, instruction, and guidance.¹¹ Therefore, whenever we ask for His assistance, it will be given freely.

Step four is to emulate the thoughts, words, and deeds of Jesus as our moral and ethical example of response, action, or behavior. Jesus tells us He is “the way, the truth, and the life.”¹² By being ‘the way’ and making His path our path, we can (and should) emulate His responses to the people, events, and circumstances of our life that test, tempt, or challenge our spiritual strength.

Finally, we are told the simple step guaranteeing our relationship with God through Jesus Christ here and hereafter.¹³ Using these five scripturally sound action steps we can obtain, ignite, possess, and use God’s spiritual presence and strength every day by embracing and engaging God’s Spirit within ours.

Christianity in the twenty-first century is grounded in the same Jesus Christ who was recognized, lauded, and followed in the first century. Christianity today faces many similar struggles and questions, from within and without that Jesus’ original disciples and adherents were confronted with. The key element is to establish and use His spiritual strength in a personal relationship to ultimately continue to come closer to Him, by being more like Him. The goal for the Christian is to respond as Christ-like as possible in every situation. To know Jesus Christ is to know ‘how’ and more importantly, ‘why’ He did and would respond as He did. This can be discovered, learned, and used by simply inviting Him to be with us once again spiritually, as we were in our spiritual state of origination.

¹¹ John 14:16, 26

¹² John 14:6

¹³ Romans 10:9,10,13,17

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIAN HISTORY; IS IT REPEATING ITSELF?

Whether by choice and consequence or through actions and behaviors, repetition can often be non-productive, questionable, at times even dangerous. George Santayana was quoted as saying, “Those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it.” How many times have we planned or chosen to go ahead with an action we knew from experience would end in a response not in our best interest? The essence of ‘growth’ is learning from past experiences, which then offer up the option of a future choice resulting in more positivity. Repeating good past decisions helps to reap better future results. Inappropriate choices can end with caustic or even catastrophic outcomes. As Biblical scripture explains, “we reap what we sow”.¹⁴

For two thousand years Christianity and its adherents have been declaring their desire to be more like Jesus in their responses to people, events, and things of the world. For those two millennia Christians have at times been their own worst enemies. Christian behavioral instructions are intended to generally revolve around an awareness of Jesus Christ’s thoughts, words, and deeds. And yet, many struggle with understanding the ease of implementation of Christian attributes. The first Christians grappled and argued among themselves as to an outward appearance to validate the inward nature of being a Christian and being recognized as such. With all the importance of what Jesus taught and shared for three years of ministry, one of the first issues they confronted was whether one needed to be circumcised to be considered a ‘true’ Christian.

Early Christians were discussing and using the act of circumcision as a test of one’s desire to be recognized as an adherent worthy to express what Jesus had taught and shared. They were using the acknowledgement of circumcision as an outward symbol of one’s capability for inclusion into the new Christianity movement.¹⁵ Interestingly the argument hinged on interpretation of Jewish law. That is, they were trying to determine one’s potential spiritual relationship between God through Christ by injecting applications of Jewish legal code as the pivotal decision point.

After two thousand years many Christians today find themselves in similar circumstances. Acceptance of one or more ecumenical or evangelic ‘tests’ for inclusion beyond a heartfelt desire to recognize, acknowledge, and revere Jesus as the Christ and Savior of the world is on the hearts and minds of many. Some tests involve group alignments and agreements waged against ‘others’ in terms of what merits inclusion versus ostracizing exclusion.

Is it because we find faith in the unseen or unknown difficult that we layer over the essence of a spiritual relationship with codes and codices? Do we need to test ourselves as to the veracity of our belief? For many Christian church denominations it would appear so. Like our brethren of

¹⁴ Galatians 6:7

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:19

two millennia ago we often have a need to justify our understanding of a spiritual relationship by connecting it with something manmade, hierarchical, or humanly expressed. God basks in the glory of His unchanging attributes, character, and nature. We grapple and argue through our inabilities to accept change even as we declare a desire and intent to accomplish this transformation from the ‘old us to a new creation’ in Christ through knowledge of His instructions. Technology changes the lives of humanity, but mankind seems incapable of changing itself. If we closely examine the thoughts, words, and deeds between us as individuals and as a member of groups we often notice our behaviors and responses toward one another actually have not changed much over the past six thousand years. The ‘isms’ that have existed and have run rampant among people all over the world are alive and well and vibrantly practiced today. Those who often claim a desire to put discord asunder as expressed in their scriptures, live and breathe among us today. And yet from their ranks come hate, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and misogyny being quite prevalent and practiced today without abandon.

Many ‘Christians’ really have not changed much in two thousand years of professed praying and elevating Jesus Christ. Christians today readily embrace the human self-righteous tendency to want one thing and do another. We as Christians may claim a moral high ground due to our ‘belief and commitment’ to the One who knew, lived, and shared exactly what moral high ground actually looked like. Yet we continue to fall short using excuses or blame as to why we are unable to be more Christ-like in our own lives.

In His teachings, Jesus described the ‘Pharisees’ (religious and political Jewish leaders of His day) as “hypocrites”.¹⁶ In its original definition a ‘hypocrite’ was one who ‘acted’. The ‘hypocrite’ acts differently than they profess by their beliefs. Jesus was speaking of those who were ‘acting’ in their own behalf as opposed to their representations and communications with others regarding what was considered to be ‘right’ (vs. wrong) activities. Today we often observe ‘hypocritical’ actions blatantly on display in political or religious realms. This is not lost on the Christian community, particularly in American culture. Certain factions of America’s religious and body politic are prone to making and expressing statements regarding beliefs and actions they then ignore, being viewed as hypocritical Christians in the eyes of the world.

Much of this evidentiary hypocrisy revolves around the concept and interpretation of “sin”. What is sin? And what are sins consequences? Sin is one of those essentials within spiritual understanding that can take on immense power depending upon one’s interpretation. Let us first establish that in the eyes of God, a sin is a sin. There are no degrees of sinfulness for God’s Holy Trinity. Sin-filled actions are in their essence, disobedience to God’s holiness. God has provided guidelines of obedient behavior in His “Ten Commandments”.¹⁷

God did not create “sin”. He created the consequence of sin, which is death. For some ‘death’ is represented by a state of oblivion upon mortal passing. Others sense it as removal from or an absence of being in God’s presence. Still others believe death is a state of suffering or punishment. By His grace and unconditional love for His children, God has provided a remedy for sin’s consequence.

In contrast to God, the desires of men for power, position, and control in order to manipulate relationships are endemic. Men have birthed a connotation that sin can be moderated or exonerated by religions through their ecclesiastic practitioners as medium or conduit. It is the hypocrites (in every religious group) who constantly claim, ‘moral high ground’. Delineating sinful behavior or

¹⁶ Matthew 23:1-3

¹⁷ Exodus 20

identifying to whom it may apply through bias or self-serving interpretations have historically decided what sin

is, and what it is not. To whom it may apply, when and why. God desires obedience to His Word. Man wants obedience to his controlling power.

Humanity is sin filled and sin directed. As humans we want what we want, and desire.¹⁸ If in God's eyes a sin is a sin, then no degree of separation exists in our sinfulness. The goal and aim for each of us, Christians in particular, should be to reduce to elimination our sinful actions in order to come closer to God as obedient children. Through one's efforts on a path of obedience by righteous behavior the Christian can enjoy three elements of God's love and grace. First, sin can be reduced by thoughtful actions. That is, using God's Holy Spirit within to help direct our response to our desires. Second, by recognizing that God Himself has provided a remedy for our sins. That is, the sacrifice of and by Jesus for the redemption of our spirited soul. And third, the resurrection of Jesus after his human death validated God's Father relationship with Jesus as Son and Savior.

Only a Christian can enjoy and use these three. Why? Only a Christian recognizes the divinity of Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), and only a Christian by that recognition embodies the Holy Spirit of God as guide, counselor, and advocate. By His sacrifice through His own death and resurrection, Jesus has covered and 'paid the ransom'¹⁹ for the sins of all who come to recognize Him as the Son of God. Given that Christ has done this sacrificial act of unconditional love for His believers and followers, why is it so difficult for 'Christians' to act Christ-like? What is it about mankind's nature that puts us at odds with morality and ethics? Historical records reveal even those who lived and walked with Jesus had their doubts or denials. Those in Christian leadership who came after Jesus attempted to use their gravitas to urge and aid the fledgling movement through its infancy, yet even they were tempted to allow their personal bias and emotions to dictate the hierarchy, status, and influences of power that came to be the pillars of the early church.

Just as Christ Himself became a target of those who opposed Him, so too his followers became targets of not only Rome, but of Jewish and pagan communities. As it was in the first century, it remains for us in the twenty-first century. Christian's grapple and argue among themselves through their denominational understandings and practices. They remain at odds with those considered 'non-believers' of other religions. Christians even demean other Christians with whom they disagree about interpretations of the canonical texts, politics, and/or social constraints. The incessant need to be 'right' or 'more righteous' in the eyes of others, instead of in the eyes of God, has led to a complete up-ended reality within post-modern daily life of good and evil.²⁰

With energy and coercion to repeat continual elevation of self, similar to the rise of the Tower of Babel in its day, Christianity struggles to grow beyond its seminal footings of "us versus them." Christianity has found itself trying to sustain itself on milk, while abandoning the meat of mature spiritual understanding and practice. The power of love has been lost to each generation's Christians as we fail to embrace and practice acknowledgment of the precepts Jesus explained, taught, and shared. New Testament Pauline letters describe this as the 'spirit of Antichrist' which is and has been alive in our world.²¹ Every 'age' has had the presence and power of the Antichrist active and growing within its ranks. It is the continuation of this spirit of corruption and evil permeating mankind's directions and efforts that cause many to ask how do I come to know God,

¹⁸ Romans 8:5

¹⁹ Mark 10:45

²⁰ Isaiah 5:20

²¹ 1 John 4:3b

to regain my rightful place as one of His children? More importantly, how do I avail myself of His spiritual strength.

Like those who came before over two thousand years, through His abiding spirit we come to recognize truth. In so doing, we clearly see the fallacies of our world. By this observance through activated spirituality, we are privy to the on-going battle between the principalities of light and dark. We are more readily able to access an informed choice as to our actions and responses regarding the people and events in our lives. Following Christ or following the wiles and ways of the world are very real options. Due to our human nature and our growth within societies, our most natural path is to acknowledge and embrace the world's ways. Although we possess a spiritual connection to God through His role as creator, our spirit is at birth 'inactive'. It is there within our soul, but it fails to possess a capacity of response at a level deeper than 'right verses wrong' as reward and punishment are rooted in mankind's application of laws, codes, and legalities.

It is this reliance on 'laws' that subvert and oppress the spirit. We are not innately spiritual in our actions. We place our trust in manmade thoughts, ideas, and opinions which are easily coerced to convulsion by wealth and power. As it was in the days of Jesus and within the very advent of the Christian movement, people's focus is often on righteous malpractice instead of being guided by understanding the conditions of love and appropriate applications to daily life.

So, it is today in the world of both Christian practitioners and other religious claimants. The 'isms' of our day; racism, homophobia, misogyny, xenophobia, bias, and bigotry exist not only in full blown view, but are joyously embraced by many claiming to be 'Christians'. What is more disturbing are those who use Biblical scripture to uphold their beliefs and endorse their actions. First century Christians were at odds revolving around acts of the flesh such as circumcision, and meat consumption. Today some Christians (and others) use their catechisms and ecumenical counsels to embrace and support more psychological and emotional trauma, producing fear and anxieties. Physical, emotional, and mental persecution continues unabated among and by so called "Christians" just as Jesus said it would be.²²

Has Christianity changed in the last two thousand years? Yes, and No. Its expansion, archaeology, understandings, and values have grown and brought untold thousands to know Jesus Christ for who He was historically, and who He remains to be, spiritually. The Bible has revealed to mankind the connection God intended for His people, children, and disciples. Biblical texts have shown relevancy between mankind's history, present, and future. It has paved a path for every interested individual to establish and learn the merits of a personal relationship with God's Holy Trinity.

Similar to the thinking and methods used to target Jesus by His enemies, so it is today that Christians may be targeted by those within or outside their own group or denomination. An unassumed struggle between man and God continues. Many disdain this conflict on many levels. However, it is important to renew our knowledge that God's design for mankind has purpose. Spiritual reasoning offers opportunities for individuals to come closer to God through His Son and thereby His Spirit. The choice given each of us is to employ 'free will' in deciding if and when we may accept His offer of spiritual salvation.

Sadly, men continue to use God and His words as weapons to be wielded in pursuit of power, control, and influential intimidation. Far from the thoughts and actions spoken of and taught by Jesus grounded in spiritual connectivity for all to read, explore, and use, elements of abuse can bludgeon the unknowing and innocent. As it was in His day, the power of Antichrist as Paul described is alive and well in our world. The use of corruption by evil people is part of the battle

²² Matthew 24:9

of principalities described in the book of Ephesians.²³ Christians of every age need to be cognizant of evil's existence and power to influence and lead astray. This battle represents the epitome of God's granting of free will choice. Will we follow the examples of Jesus Christ in thought, word, and deed or will we succumb to the wiles and ways of the world?

This remains a pivotal question for Christianity today and going forward. As we draw closer to the 'end times' described by the prophets, as well as by Jesus Himself, the choice of obedience to Christ or allegiance to the world takes on literal Biblical proportions. As it was for early 'Christians', so it remains for those today.

What about Christianity's future history? What lies ahead for Christianity? Based on the past two thousand years of Christianity's evolution (or devolution) one cannot help but believe its decline in attendance, adherence, and faith will continue to deteriorate. But what does the Bible tell us about our future as Christians? If one believes the Bible's descriptions of prophecy, we can see that the future of the planet's inhabitants, including Christians will become increasingly dire.²⁴

If we examine the 'Church Age' (the two thousand years since the ministry and death of Jesus Christ) we also note that Christianity's missteps and abuses are glaringly evident. When self-righteous men and seekers of power eventually filled the ecumenical gap left by Jesus' death, Christianity, like all other religions, fundamentally failed its followers and believers.

Christianity's future, similar to its past, may continue to fulfill the spiritual needs of some, but with the current religious backlash of attitudes around the world, greater numbers than ever before may 'fall away' and subsequently stay away from the pews. The rise of antithetic attitudes toward religions today, coupled with harsh criticism of unrepentant clergy amid generational repetitive 'swept-under-the-carpet' accusations related to continued abuses globally by long running assortments of Christian "men of God" over hundreds of years, to include thousands upon thousands of instances of mistreatment, may well prove religions to be ineffective for legions of spiritual seekers and searchers in the future.

For those who understand the vibrancy of a personal spiritual relationship with God through the advent and advocacy of Jesus Christ, the 'church' is no longer a 'necessity'. With the application of technology in this day in time, the study, reference, and reverence of the Triune Godhead is deeply accessible, as never before. One does not need priests, pastors, or popes to come to know God, know of God, or to understand how to embrace His majesty, love, and truth.

²³ Ephesians 6:12

²⁴ Matthew 24:4,5,10,11,12

CHAPTER 3

TEACHING VS. INTERPRETATIONS

One of the struggles non-believers, neophytes (new believers), and even committed Christians may encounter on their journey is the dilemma of Bible teachings verses interpretations. Areas of contention can result because Bible content spans at least two millennia. Adding to this is the fact that Biblical texts are a compilation of different ‘books and writings’ by and from different authors. Many have difficulties reconciling the time span and authorships of these texts. A third issue arises in that there are canonical texts, apocryphal writings, additional letters, and commentaries from Christian writers and historians, as well as an entirely different collection of Jewish ‘Old Testament’ books, commentaries, and notations. If that were not enough to address, many of these written records evolved from even older previous periods of ‘oral traditions’.

The Bible is a ‘story’, but it is not a novel. It relates a collection of events, people, anomalies, antidotes, and history. One of its majesties is its cogent and conjunctive texts. Yet at the same time it has an ability to impart and teach in passages, paragraphs, even within sentences. No other book is as comprehensive in its physical, emotional, or psychological presence or existence.

The Bible’s complexities and simplicity within its coverage, authorship, direction, and purpose is unparalleled. This makes its content and context for many difficult to navigate or understand. Add to this the elements of interpretive angst and disagreements among readers and scholars, it becomes a book that is questioned or doubted with the slightest of motivations. As with any historical tome, the Bible is confronted with an existential question. What was left out? In the writing and editing of any extended work the perplexity is not what content to include, the difficulty is deciding what content will be excluded! It is impossible to know or record all of any subject matter, particularly history. At one point in history, it is said that much of the known world’s complete collection of writings was housed in the great library in Alexandria, Egypt. When it burned many of its writings were destroyed.

The ‘canonical’ Bible in use today is the result of selections made by Christian leaders in the second and third centuries. (A timeline of Bible scripture is available here-

<https://www.Christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-43/how-we-got-our-Bible-Christian-history-timeline.html>)

Only the Bible as a collected text contains history, archeology, literature, religion, emotional, and psychological stories that not only stand alone, but are each part of the tapestry that the Bible becomes for the reader. The Bible remains the world’s most classic book detailing teachings pertaining to life’s practical and spiritual employments for every potential reader. It is important to remember that in every endeavor and area of interest that those involved, as well as those in conflict, each may have agendas regarding beliefs and explanations. Perspectives and interpretations can lead to varied and untenable directions for those in opposition.

One aspect often overlooked in the contest for definitive pedagogical reckoning is the importance of faith. As the standard for Christian faith, like the Torah for the Jew, the Quran for the Muslim, and the Veddas for the Hindu, belief and faith are two pillars upon which the validity of moral and ethical instruction is essential. If one fails to believe or have faith in the words of his/her sacred texts, there is no reason for adherence.

From the dawn of human existence mankind has had the need to recognize a power outside of and greater than self. We have always had a need to understand and justify the consequences of the unknown elements that affect us. The first humans attributed their struggles with their environment to the powers of the 'gods'. We have always attempted to establish a place for beliefs and faith in our psyche, especially for the unknown or inexplicable. Belief and faith are integral in attempting to tie together instruction with understanding or interpretations.

For the Christian believer and follower of Jesus Christ, the essence of His (instructional) teachings can be seen and read in the synoptic gospel books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The fourth gospel book, John, rounds out Jesus' message of 'living with God and men'. The text and context of Jesus as Rabbi (Teacher) is evident. John's words and descriptions for daily life, guided by a spiritual relationship with the trinitarian Godhead, are in evidence by his Teacher's words. Jesus' sayings and comments have meaning for each of us today, much the same way and manner it did for those in his days on earth. It is His words and examples that remain unchanged and therefore relevant for His followers in every era.

It naturally becomes more important if Biblical texts are readable and apply as a constant in a world of continual change. The habits and inclinations of humanity are as common in the twenty-first century as they were in the first. "Christians" of all ages have varying interests, livelihoods, and behaviors. Just as 'tastes and proclivities' may be altered or morph over time, so too can the need for presentation of Biblical understanding in order to reach broader interests. Today, Biblical students of all stripes can discover a plethora of Bible 'editions' available for their reading. While the textual presentations may differ, the contextual fundamentals of the story and instructional lessons remain consistent.

The Bible itself warns of adding to or taking from the original text. Yet for those seeking to ignite and perpetuate a spiritual relationship with God through Jesus Christ, it is the application of Biblical instruction along with moral and ethical tenets that hold purpose and importance for the reader. Learning is most valuable when it is transferrable to future use. The entirety of God's spiritual presence for and with the individual is to encourage and provide for the spiritual battle of one's soul and its reunification with the holy Trinity of the Godhead.

Life changes. It therefore becomes necessary that applications remain relevant. As language and meanings change with age it can be that didactic interpretations are no longer relevant for readers. Anyone who has tried to read the King James version of the Bible can attest to its inherent difficulties for many of today's readers.

No matter the content or subject matter there are accepted fundamental truths. There can be interpretive and additional or extended revisionist attempts to alter tradition or facts. This is noted and observable particularly in history, politics, and religion. The influence of social movements, culture, and economic swings can by themselves or collectively produce cause and effects that may change outlooks or perceptions. We live in a dynamic world of change. As much as our individual lives may appear to crawl progressively forward the fact is that within years, decades, or eras, particularly those influenced by industrial or technological advancements, life can be altered dramatically in bursts over short periods of time.

Although the Bible as a text encompasses all elements of life within its tome, even it has been open to and under the constant scrutiny of interpretation. For this reason alone, it remains imperative for the reader of scripture to have a rooted position and grounding. As with all written works having longevity, revisionist opportunities, or needs, the key is in its interpretations. The question remains how much interpretative license can be taken or applied?

One province for the Bible remains intact through all its instructions. There is a core of truth in the Bible for every reader, disciple, or interest. Those are found in the words of Jesus Himself. These can be found in 'red letter' editions of the Bible regardless of a designated group identifier. 'Red Letter' editions highlight the words of Jesus Christ. By reading the red-letter passages in the synoptic gospels one is able to hear what Jesus told His listeners. More importantly, today's reader can gain an understanding of what a spiritual relationship with God the Father through Jesus the Son offers. Interpretative meanings may differ, but the words of Jesus do not.

What are the distinctive teachings of Christ Jesus? For the Christian believer Jesus Christ is the focal point of the Bible. His presence throughout time, as well as within the historical records in both the 'Old and New' Testaments are in evidence. Jesus is the epitome of unconditional love *and* its potential disappointment from God's viewpoint. Jesus is truth, therefore in Him truth is recognizable. His instructions and teachings are rooted in truth tempered by love. Applications of His character and nature can be identifiably read, pondered, and used for instruction. People ask how the details of Christianity, and its teachings can be understood? Within the complexity of the Bible's stories how can one uncover the essence of what Jesus is trying to relate to the reader? In both Old and New Testament texts we find answers. Once the Christian is on the path that embraces a spiritual relationship with God the Father through Jesus by way of His Holy Spirit as conduit, the simplicities of God's desire for His children become self-evident. God makes His ways easy to know, understand, accept, and follow. Its man and man's desire for power and control under the guise of religion that co-opts or morphs God's intentions for a spiritual relationship. God in His role as loving parent provides through Jesus a personal one-on-one relationship opportunity. Jesus serves as Mediator for our existence and Arbitrator for our sinful nature.

Texts and intents remain in the Bible's content irrespective of any group interest label on its cover. Different interests may be mollified but the essence of God's Word remains unchanged. Teachings instruct, interpretations provide relevance to reader's needs. Both can work together to support and boost understanding of spiritual grounding as a pillar of strength for every believer.

Trust in the words and examples of Jesus for the truth for He is the manifestation and human embodiment of truth and love. By truth we are able see the world with its veil pulled back. Then we have a choice to make. Even as Christians we must choose if we will embrace truth as our beacon for the future, or not. Trust in Jesus reveals truth beneath the undergirded fallacies purported as valid by the world. Know the teachings and instructions of Jesus and you will interpret well the Bible's meaning for yourself.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS CHRIST LIKE LIVING?

What is “Christ-like” living? How do we know? Were early ‘Christians’ more Christ-like than Christian believers today? Christ-like living is exactly what it describes. Behavior and actions emulating the thoughts, words, and actions of Jesus as the Christ. As readers of Biblical scripture, we see, hear, and learn from Biblical text but how do we translate those written directives and information into behaviors, actions, and responses? First, we need to know who Jesus was and why He showed up to live among humanity. And then, what does a spiritual relationship hold for today’s believer? (Hint- ‘Christ-like’ daily life opportunities). However, there is also a “Catch-22”.

To know and understand the Holy Trinity of God we must accept who Jesus is. That is, who He claims to be and who His apostles, disciples, followers, and believers profess Him to be. We cannot be Christ-like in our lives if we don’t know more about Jesus’ life. More importantly once we know Jesus, we can hopefully learn from His thoughts, words, and deeds. We are unable to exhibit Christ-like behavior unless we know and believe that *Jesus Christ is God* in character and nature.

The answer is easy although it may not appear simple. God wants to ‘commune and communicate’ with us. He wants us to understand the ‘Holy’ relation between His three personalities (Father, Son, Spirit) and further, how, and why to apply this new relationship understanding to us directly. God desires for us to recognize this spiritual relationship, and then by extension, His spiritual path for each of us to each other.²⁵ As Creator, God (Father and Spirit), is the source of our spiritual creation. Therefore, we each have an innate spiritual connection of originality to and with Him.

One of the difficulties for many to understand is how God can be three ‘persons’ in one? How can God be a Father, a Son, *and* a Spirit? More importantly how can Jesus be God? Let’s first understand and agree to use the term “personalities” instead of ‘persons.’ Let’s define personality as one’s ‘Character and Nature’.

Each of us contains three personalities. We are the product of our mother and father as a combination of their physical, spiritual, and any/all-inclusive other DNA personal characteristics and natures they possess. We add our own personality traits as we develop and grow from experiences and within a family, community, and environment. Yes, we are a physical offspring of our parents, but we are also much more. We are an on-going partial and total culmination of our entire life actions, behaviors, and experiences. We are three personalities in one (body).

²⁵ Matthew 22:37

In the book of John, we are told of the three personalities within the Godhead Trinity. Their interactive 'beings' and roles are illuminated. We are told in John 4:24, "God is Spirit". God in His eternal essence is 'Spirit'. From His eternal Spiritual existence comes His identities as 'Father' and 'Son'. He employs His Holy Spiritual essence as the conduit for His spiritual presence. Through His omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (all present), and omnipotent (all powerful) spiritual strength, He is all three traits in all three personalities. He affects creation and all that is. God as Spirit and Father is unseen. His presence, however, is in all that He has made. Creation manifested in the physical and material was created through His 'Son' personality that would become the God-man or 'Son' of God in the flesh, Jesus of Nazareth.

The Spirit of God as Father (first personality) uses the outgoing of his 'omnipotence' as spiritual conduit (third personality) to beget and therefore give to (His Son) Jesus (second personality) life through His Spirit. In God's holiness as Father, He cannot be in the presence of anything unholy. Therefore, God the Father cannot be in the presence of mankind's 'sin'. God (as Spirit and Father) in order to have a presence in the physical and material world requires a human presence, possessing the holy Spirit of God without the sin of humanity.

How can Jesus be the 'Son' of God and God? Again, think of it this way. You are the son (or daughter) of your father and mother. At birth you are in essence the blended combination of all your parents' (and family tree descendants') physical, spiritual, character, and natural traits. In this same way, Jesus at birth was the combination of the physical, spiritual, character, and natural traits of both His mother (Mary) and His Father, the Spirit of God's holiness. Jesus is human, but He is also God, Jesus is the God-man. He is both the "Son of Man" from Mary²⁶ and the "Son of God"²⁷ from God's essence as Spirit.

Jesus' Spirit is directly from God (as Father) therefore his Spirit has been in existence forever as God. God's Spirit was used miraculously to impregnate a human woman, Mary. In this way Jesus became the "Son of Man" and at the same time, was and is the "Son of God". Because Jesus' Spirit is the same Spirit that has existed forever as God; Spirit *and* Father, Jesus is therefore God in Spirit, Character, and Nature.²⁸

Now that we better understand who Jesus is and was, in relation to and as God, we are better able to emulate the actions of Jesus as the Christ. Knowing His actions and His reasons (truth and love), we now know how to respond as He did, or would if He were in the same situation we might find ourselves in when we need Him or call upon him. We therefore can start responding the way He did/would, which is, "Christ-like".

How do we become Christ-like in our actions and responses? We can become more like Christ by acquiring His Spirit. Not only can we avail ourselves of His character and nature, but we will also come closer to embracing daily the trinitarian Godhead through our belief, faith, and worship.

God in His infinite wisdom has made acquiring and starting a personal spiritual relationship with Him easy to understand and accomplish. He has laid out this simple process in the five easy steps referenced earlier. He waits patiently for every individual to initiate this process. How do we accomplish this? Remember, we must invite Jesus into our lives. God never forces Himself on us. His desire is that our wish and goal is to be close to Him spiritually, complimented by our responses and actions. This invitation must be a voluntary action on our part. Otherwise, what is the point? If we are forced to believe, then there is no desired choice on our part. Once we have extended the invitation to Jesus to become an active part of our life, He responds immediately by sending

²⁶ Mark 6:3

²⁷ Matthew 3:17

²⁸ John 1:1-18

His Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that is in Him and in God the Father to be with us. To be joined and aligned with our spirit already existing in our soul. By sending His spirit to guide, instruct, and counsel us in our choices and decisions going forward when we ask, He is assuring us that He will hear our pleas for help and intervention, and will respond to our requests.

Next, we embrace His ‘Spirit of Truth’. This is particularly important for believers as it guarantees that not only will God’s Spirit hear and respond to our requests; it is in this short statement that Jesus promises that His Spirit will also aid us in moving forward into our future.

The next step is one of surrender. By surrender we mean an understanding and recognition that we must surrender or give up the ‘little god’ within us. You have most likely seen cartoons or comical visual representations of someone with a ‘little angel’ on one shoulder, and similarly, a ‘little devil’ on the other while attempting to decide. The angel represents our conscious acceptance of God’s guidance, whereas the little devil represents our carnal or worldly desires to do what we want to do in a particular instance of choice. The little devil is the ‘little god’ of our human temptations and desires, encouraging us to throw caution to the wind and give in to our most base carnality, which is promoted by the ways of the world.

Even for many Christians, and in some cases most Christians, the world’s tests and temptations can be overwhelmingly desirable. The conflicting thoughts between the two little characters on our shoulders are both engaged in encouraging us to listen and act. This is also the moment when our voluntary surrender to walk a path of faith and trust in Jesus is tested. The love of God is so great that even at those times when we acquiesce and listen to the little devil, at the other end of the consequence of our choice, be it good, bad, or ugly, Jesus waits with open arms to embrace us once again as part of His family because we have invited and accepted His Spirit. Once invited and accepted by us, Jesus will never turn His back on us. He will always be there for us and will continue to be our Mediator and Savior.

The spiritual path is an opportunity to learn, grow, and become more spiritually grounded as we walk with Jesus and receive His Spiritual guidance. As with any ‘skill set’ it takes patience and perseverance. We do not automatically understand or succeed with our first step on any path. The further down the path we travel the more clarity is granted and the easier we find it to emulate Christ-like responses and actions.

If we have stepped on the path of faith with our first four steps of invitation, embracing, acceptance, and surrender, the fifth is our guarantee not only of eternal life but also of God’s intervention into our life here and now. When we have embraced with our heart and announced with our mouth that Jesus is indeed who He claims to be, we come to truly understand His revelation that He is ‘the way’.²⁹ Within these five steps anyone can go from doubter, denier, or unbeliever to a child of God who is welcomed, loved, and protected by and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The final question of our newfound spiritual strength in and through Christ, transferred to us by His Spirit abiding with ours, is how do we use this spiritual strength in daily living? Just as God has made its acquisition easy for us to understand and possess, its use and application in our life is just as easy. When we find ourselves in a situation where a choice or decision must be made, instead of going through the little angel/little devil conversation we ask, “In this situation how might Jesus respond?”

Perhaps you are old enough to remember the fad of the early 1990’s when young adults were wearing beaded wrist bands with the letters “WWJD?” Within every generation there seems to be

²⁹ John 14:6

a resurgence of interest in Christianity quickly followed by the world regaining its rightful place of initiator of carnal and material interests and temptations.

The “What Would Jesus Do?” question was originally introduced globally in 1896 through a book titled, “In His Steps” by Charles Sheldon, a proponent of ‘Christian socialism’. As one of the best-selling Christian books of all time it posited a question for the ages and for every Christian. “What Would Jesus Do?” When we walk with Christ, we are granted the right to ask this question and we are guaranteed to receive an answer from His spirit within us, providing strength to act upon our decision with His guidance.

If you want to change your life for the better, to be more fulfilling and grounded in truth, follow these five steps to acquire and use God’s spiritual strength. Then take every opportunity to ask, What Would Jesus Do? How might Jesus respond? The answers you receive will guide and strengthen your resolve, as well as your actions. Emulate Jesus’ thoughts, words, and deeds with your actions and behaviors. By doing this you will lay out a path of Christ-like living.

Life is about relationships. Healthy relationships are built upon stability to promote balance. Stability is grounded by the four cornerstones of who we are. Mind, body, soul, and spirit. Balance is understood and achieved when we become a singularity of cognition between our physical presence and our spirituality. As humans we easily embrace the physical world and our part in it. We may or may not be as aware of our spirit existence. The universe is a combination of both physical and spiritual. As part of the universe, we are also represented by this combination.

We are told God is Spirit.³⁰ Since He is the Creator of the universe and all that is in it, as part of His creation, we are therefore also spirit. Each of us is a small, cosmic, and electrically charged unit (a soul). When we are born our existence is that combination of mind, body, soul, and (in that soul now dwells our) spirit. Because our spirit is from and of God (as Spirit) we can innately come to know ‘right from wrong’. Our spirit is there but it is ‘inactive’. Actualization of this knowledge takes root and grows within us. It slowly becomes evident in practice within our family dynamics about age two when we start to understand the conceptual relationship between ‘right and wrong’ by a new awareness of ‘reward and punishment’. We come to accept this as we grow because the judicial and legal systems under which we live have been established and grounded in ‘reward vs. punishment’. Our immediate acquired responses grow with an understanding that right and wrong are to be equated with reward and punishment.

When we invite Jesus and accept His Spirit to dwell in our soul with our inactive spirit, His Holy Spirit’s presence ‘activates’ our inactive spirit. That is, because we now possess the Holy Spirit of God living with our spirit, our spirit is ‘sparked to life’ with a new and now awareness of truth, enabling us to realize the moral and ethical implications of our existence in our physical world. When our spirit is inactive, we know the ‘How’ (right and wrong). With an activated spirit we now know the ‘Why’ (moral and ethical implications). Morality and Ethics are at the core of God’s character and nature. Our inactive spirit (originally from God) becomes activated with His Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ to enable us to now have His moral and ethical presence within our lives.

When we operate within a ‘right or wrong’ moment our focus is always on us. ‘How’ every decision will affect us in that moment, or the eventual consequences of our choice. When we are awakened to the morals or ethics by an activated spirit, the ‘Why’ can affect not only us as individuals, but others in our lives who may also be recipients from our decision. Right vs. wrong is about what I think is best for me. Morals and ethical decisions are about ramifications to all those in my world.

³⁰ John 4:24

Why do we respond and behave in the ways we do? We respond in the world's ways because the ways of the world are what we know and who we become. We are buried under layers of time and influences having grown up in and grown accustomed to the ways in which the world operates. We learn and embrace what we have known our entire lives. As Buddha poignantly pointed out, the ways of the world are tied to struggle and suffering. We often come to believe that life's difficulties are all there is. The saddest part is that the deeper we dig in the holes of adversity the more mired we become. The longer we are immersed in difficulties the more we tend to accept and regard these trials and tribulations as our only options.

As touched on above, every choice or decision has two separate and distinct parts. The 'How' and the 'Why'. The how we know from a life on earth. The why becomes the real question. Why do we respond as we do? Those with an inactive spirit, or no recognition of spiritual connection, operate in, by and of the world. Often relishing the options and varieties of choices and outcomes, many become caught up keeping score with 'wins or losses'. Many of these people have little or no interest in adjusting or establishing balance between their physical and spiritual side of being. So be it. For those interested in making their life balanced within themselves and to better their relationships at home or work, the opportunity to learn, embrace, and grow spiritually is always an open option.

Here are the five pillars of spiritual strength for continued growth which one can anticipate, enjoy, and use as a result of a reborn relationship with God through Jesus Christ:

Acquisition of Truth when the Spirit of Truth is sent and received.³¹

New understanding of Love.³²

Knowledge of the Spirit.³³

Revelation of Faith's meaning and expression.³⁴

The element of the power of Hope.³⁵

Use these five pillars to their fullest during and after you have employed the five steps of spiritual advent, acceptance, and initiation. You will discover your life will never be the same as it was in the past. Now you have the tools and methods to respond and live Christ-like.

³¹ John 3:33-34

³² John 4:7-9

³³ John 4:24

³⁴ Hebrews 11:1

³⁵ Romans 5:1-5

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS AND POLITICS

Separation of ‘church and state’ is a concept and prescription found in the U.S. Constitution, as well as a commonly agreed upon understanding originated by the thoughts and decrees of the country’s “founding fathers” in the American Colonies. As the country evolved and grew so too did it embrace the notion of religious freedoms for worship and expression through and of various religious beliefs, systems, or denominations, separate from the branches of government by oversight or inclusion.

Identity and practice among differing denominations or sects may vary but the generally accepted implementation of parochial or providential beliefs have remained supported by state, federal, and municipal governing bodies for over two hundred years in these United States.

Ecumenical revisionists, revivals, and revelers have come and gone while swaying, engaging, and abandoning untold numbers of ‘believers’ and followers. Not in our entire history has the religious fervent melded with ideological beliefs and actions of particular groups in order to press for legislative application of their religious ways, and to force or pressure with and without intimidation or violence the influenced thoughts and practices of others.

While religious tolerance has been a hallmark of American constitutionality, as we enter the twenty-first century we are beginning to see and feel hatred for and of “others” and their beliefs. While these expressions of disdain have always been present, they have generally been behind closed doors or held in check from public view, bubbling beneath the surface for decades if not hundreds of years. With the elected administration of Barrack Obama and certainly through the Trump years, religious, racial, and personal hatred of many others has come out of the shadows, seeking the light of day coupled with approval far and wide.

The over-riding cooperation and tolerance of the “greatest generation” with and within the struggles of their time, having had a glimmer of hope to resolve itself, proved inadequate. America, nor any nation in the history of mankind, has ever come to grips with diversity among its populations. It is who we are as humans. Declaring our love, devotion, and allegiance when it behooves us and our personal or group interests but absent in its reality. Hatred, racism, homophobia, misogyny, bias, and bigotry are part and parcel of our humanity, our up-bringsings, and our self-righteous need to never be bested by another or even give quarter. Our ability to respond from a higher self, guided by truth and fellowship, can seem to be non-existent at times. The Christian who finds him/herself unable to respond and behave in a Christ-like way will need to wait for Christ’s millennial reign to partake and enjoy the peace of lion and lamb lying together.

Now out in the open with a badge of plundering courage pinned on breasts and chests are those who feel cheated by the very state political systems they laud on a regular basis. But cheated out of what? If we look deeper, we see this sense of abandonment by political and governmental

institutions runs rampant, exposed and pillared by men in the name of God. The true thorn is those who now feel compelled to show their long-rooted thoughts and actions yet feel no remorse, no shame for their Christian hypocrisy. Reminiscent of the Pharisaic days of Jesus, many of His ardent twenty-first century following believers have turned a blind eye, ear, and all sensible recall to His teachings. As ‘Christians’ we should be ashamed but not shocked by these developments. Why? The true Christian knows who the prince of this world is. The true Christian believer is cognizant of Satan’s wily ways to tempt or challenge both believing followers and nonbelievers alike. A variety of human discomforts spawned by ignorance, dislikes, and phobias for “others” which existed in Jesus’ day still clings and grasps tightly in the psyche today.

Technology has changed the world but mankind, not so much. Hatred is alive and well. The torments and tortures of people at every level and in every society continues as unabated today as ever. Mankind’s injustice toward its fellows is as harsh and caustic as ever. It remains an “all about me world” regardless of the sweetness of our talk and the magnanimous platitudes we give ourselves about our graciousness and dedications to ‘brotherhood’.

The body politic and legislative arms of governing bodies throughout history have been part of societies since the beginning of civilized life. There have always been processes by which people make and keep laws. Although the separation of church and state is a relatively new concept applied within a society, at its core remains the pull and push of moral and ethical understanding, acceptance, dignity, and practice. The farther from morality or ethics we move, either as individuals or groups, the less influence our religion and spiritual belief systems have over our choices and actions. Unless of course we deliberately use our religious affiliation as

a tool of motivation or manipulation to justify our unethical and/or immoral actions. Then our religious beliefs have been massaged to give us justifiable rationale for our misdeeds.

Coming into the light of day this has been the evolving erosion of the Republican Party body politic in America since the advent of Richard Nixon’s political “Southern Strategy” in the mid 1960’s. Over the past sixty years, like a virus that takes over and eventually consumes the host, the Republican Party in America has courted and kowtowed to Evangelical Christians. Together the party and its base of constituents and voters have consistently genuflected in reverence to each other’s goals and obsessions. This is not to say the Democratic party has been void of its own backdoor antics. In many more cases however, the Democrats have been less caustic and more accommodating to entertaining progress for the population and groups within the country.

What once was not said directly and winked at among small groups of like-minded Republican racists and bigots is now in full view in twenty-first century politics. Republicans proudly take center stage and elect ‘leaders’ ready, willing, and desiring to put asunder governing institutions to be replaced by banners of Christian fascist and white nationalist with violent consequences.

Abuse and misuse of authority has been endemic in every society throughout history. Religion as a microcosm of man’s nature is not and has never been void of abusers. It is the nature of man to respond as though guided by our basest of instincts and actions. Many forget that religions are merely a collection of likeminded and supposedly dedicated people of principles as set forth by their religious or spiritual belief, codes, and codicils. However, they are still humans with the same failures, foibles, and faults as others in the general population they serve.

One can and should expect that those groups with greater numbers of followers and adherents would also have the greatest numbers of social deviants or offenders in their ranks. Case in point would be the Catholic Church. With centuries of abuse, misbehavior, and tyranny combined with penchants for power by greedy individuals in hierarchical positions of authority within villages,

cities, regions, and countries, the Catholic Church stands above many others in Christianity in the worst way.

Religions and their adherents crave forgiveness from their ecumenical leadership. Believers and followers of Jesus Christ seek forgiveness tied to repentance and a turning away from future repeated recriminations of disobedience to His word. We should remember that God did not create 'sin'. He created the consequence for sin. Because God is God, and Holy, He cannot be in the presence of sin. And to God, a sin is a sin, without degree or power. To God every sin is a moral or ethical disobedience to His Holiness. He neither gets caught up in the concept of severity, nor the adjudication for punishment. For God, there is only forgiveness and appreciation for those who truly repent by turning from future sin.

People choose political parties pretty much the same way they do anything they own or believe. Right or left, conservative or liberal, religious, or not, people trust in those they identify with in purpose and power. Politics is an avenue which allows and often encourages expression of self-righteous feelings and self-indulgent emotions in a realm of actionable consequences. Jesus shares in multiple Biblical passages the struggle between moral and ethical behavior, tainted by applications of the 'law'. While "one man, one vote" may be its premise, the fact that those in leadership use, abuse, and/or misuse their authority to harm others they have vowed to serve is a fact of political life.

This is not a new revelation. Political manipulation spurred by power and greed is as old as Satan's fall from grace. For thousands of years political gamesmanship existed and played itself out behind those closed doors. With the advent of worldwide hand-held technology, both the truth and its nemesis are available instantaneously. The accessibility to right or wrong, or its evaluations, does not mitigate moral and ethical turpitude. Manipulation in and by mass media technologies has made 'good appear as evil and evil look like good'.³⁶

This reality, and its buy-in by so many in the viewing and receiving of information, is laying the groundwork for the coming of the Antichrist. When we are unsure as to the veracity of what we see, hear, and believe then anything seems plausible. Anyone can be technologically or electronically manipulated. Politics is the perfect venture to hone the lies and distortions of belief. Haven't we entrusted our lives and livelihoods to those we elect to high office? We have granted to them powers of the state to be used in our best interest, as well as against our most basic needs through legislation. Politicians make and propose to enforce laws that dictate behaviors and outcomes. This is an essential part of civilized interactions between neighbors, communities, and nations. At one time eons ago, the tribal good was in the forefront of discourse and efforts. After six thousand years of practice, humanity still reserves the right to turn its collective back on the needs of the most vulnerable and to force or coerce others into obedience by reward or punishment. No matter who the group of people being stigmatized and labeled may be, the undertone is the same; subjection of many by the few in the name of codes and codices for the greater good. Yet just beneath the surface abound the disciples and minions of the prince of this world.

Politics and religion are two pillars of strength often used to undermine the moral and ethical truths that God's character and nature represent. In this vein we might think of today's American Christian denominational politics as opposing factions in pursuit of the same golden ring of control. This is not a new revelation. Those in political power throughout history have used the manipulation of laws and standards against people in order to oppose, suppress, and literally get away with murder. We need to recall the battle of principalities described in the book of Ephesians (chapter 6), the struggle of light and dark, between good and evil, righteousness and corruption,

³⁶ Isaiah 5:20

the physical and the spiritual. Politics is a venue of ‘corruption in action’. The conflict between serving and self-serving is very real and evident in the world’s game of political intrigue and power.

This could not be more obvious than in twenty-first century America. For millennia, the pursuit of political dominance has been played out and accomplished behind the veil. With whispers and subtleties, the wielding of power has been traded and sold. With the advent of our ‘Information Age’, technologies in the hands of millions have made the transmitting and receiving of privacy and secrets instantly accessible.

One would be led to believe this type of transparent access would cause a backlash of righteous indignation as never before. Nothing could be further from the truth. Shame, embarrassment, and consequence for inappropriate, illegal, amoral, or unethical behaviors are out in the open. In fact, there are individuals and political groups today who blatantly commit crimes and broadcast the braggadocio of their actions. Some bold enough to announce them before those same intents or responses are put into action.

Sadly, many individuals (in politics, as in every level and endeavor of life) claim to be ‘Christians’ with a knowledge of right and wrong, morals and ethics, as well as appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. However, their lives and activities make one question their possession of spiritual understanding and a dedication to follow Jesus Christ as their spiritual compass rose.

In His day, Jesus called out the Pharisees as “hypocrites” for saying and guiding the actions of people according to Torah laws and codes, yet living and behaving in opposite ways. The same might be said of our similarly hypocritical ‘Christians’ today. This fact can be frustrating, even infuriating. We usually do not have the strength or power to change peoples’ minds or attitudes which have been ingrained for years or a lifetime, but we can respond in the way that Jesus taught and shared; with love and compassion. Does that mean we must agree or coddle their actions? No. By no means, No.

Our ‘commission’ and dedication as followers of Jesus Christ is again, to respond in a Christ-like way. As ‘new creations’ in Christ we are in the world, but we are not of the world. Evil and corruption are the world’s way and will continue to be so until our Lord’s return at His “second coming”. A major challenge for Christians is being and behaving in a Christ-like manner while being part of a physical, materialistic, and corrupt world. Politics is and has always been the fundamental stage of the world’s ways for it decides, uses, and controls through laws, wealth, and favoritism. Its premise is theoretically grounded in ‘service’, but its applications become morphed, influenced by self-indulgence, personal avarice, and collective greed. One of the hardest and yet easiest aspects for a true Christian to reconcile is the fact that the world and its disciples have no interest in changing. Remember, each of us who are now ‘believers’ were once part of the world by its ways we embraced. It is therefore easy for us to recognize those who may be struggling with a heartfelt desire to fill the void they are experiencing, while at the same time pursuing and rejoicing in the world’s ways. We often fail to consider moral or ethical tenants (the why’s) hidden behind the veils of correction. This abandonment or ignorance of these ‘why’s’ delays and can often preclude our understanding as to the depth or range of harm that can be perpetrated by dismissing morals and/or ethics for the greater good.

Politics is on its face, and behind its closed doors, generally corrupt by its pursuit and control of money. Most of those who enter its fray with pure hearts and minds for service to their fellow citizens are quickly turned. The temptations of this world are a powerful draw and they are

seductively attractive. As scripture reminds its reader; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.³⁷ This is the fundamental premise upon which Satan is building his kingdom.

³⁷ Mark 14:38

CHAPTER 6

SPIRITUAL CHRISTIANS VS. THE CHURCH

Having touched briefly in the previous chapter regarding the Catholic faith let us look at the similarities and differences within the “Christian church”.

You may have heard before, “I’m not religious, I’m spiritual”. What does that mean?

When a person says this, what are they telling us? Are they saying, “I know what religion is and it is not for me” or “I believe there is a God therefore I’m spiritual”?

Knowing and believing are not always in sync. What would God want us to know about religion? What does He want us to know about a personal and spiritual relationship between Him and us? How about relationships between each of us and ‘others’? Why are we here? What is the fundamental pillar of life? Put aside all those things that just flashed in your mind! Ask, why are we really here? Why are we alive? What could possibly be the meaning of life? What is the meaning of my life, of your life?

If God is the Creator of all there is, He does not need us to be the “i am”. Before we were, He was, and He was able to be fulfilled, alone. The absence of mankind (and possibly other living beings/things) does not change God’s character or nature. However, knowing the feelings of completion in the presence of and with others, imagine the magnitude of God’s emotions of aloneness.

Part of God’s plan of creation included humans. Being His creatures, perhaps our greatest nugget of knowledge would include the realization that God exists. Most people have a concept of what ‘religion’ is. Untold numbers have had an experience with one or more religions, denominations, or sects. We may wonder about the failure of religious attendance, particularly within Christianity. Revelations and exposure of abusers within Christian groups and churches, as well as other “missteps” or “errors of judgment” illuminating immoral, unethical, and/or moral and ethical illegalities, as well as improprieties by a plethora of Catholic and Protestant denominations have managed to show the world the hypocrisy of Christians. This is not to say Christians have a monopoly on “saying one thing then doing the opposite”. Self-righteous indignation and hypocrisy are part and parcel of every religion or human embraced spiritual belief system. Why? We are humans. Our nature and character are self-centered choices and actions. We whole heartedly embrace the world and its ways. It is who we are. This is “man’s world”. Lying, cheating, and stealing from ourselves and others is the ‘way we roll’ in our post-modern world.

Religions are man-made entities and organizations that promote the idea that God exists. God is a ‘sometimes’ thought for many people. In His magnificence as a loving Parent, He wants His presence known, but only when voluntarily recognized as we mature in our spiritual growth, ‘milk to meat’. God knows we need direction. In its ways, religion is similar to other endeavors as it is

a business of information, products, and services, and therefore consistent with the ways of our world. God uses what we are familiar with to introduce or reintroduce Himself to each of us.

Being alive, we crave love and attention. As God is alive, He also embraces love and recognition. God has granted avenues of knowledge about His character and nature. Across the expanse of time, He has chosen to touch, as well as teach about His morals and ethics of living. At various times there came messengers from whom the world's religions came to be. (i.e., Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed). Like newborn babes, religions were pure of heart in their inception and origin. Once their momentum was passed from the initial teacher to those waiting in the wings, the origins were soon corrupted. Religions co-opted their original design and purpose in an attempt to reach all of creation. God has allowed religions to make Himself known to the world. As men garnered the power, wealth, and control of religions, God continued to call individuals through the Spirit to teach, share, serve, and mentor His true design and path for reconciliation to humanity, the fulcrum point being the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we finally recognize His spiritual existence and its revelatory relation to us by the words and actions of Jesus Christ, with this single admission, our life takes on new consequences for every future choice we make.

As a loving parent God does not want to lose any of His created children. He wants each of us to return home to Him after our life's journey of discovery, growth, and learning. Like the "Prodigal Son"³⁸ and our own animated "Pinocchio" fable, we are changed by our adventure. Through our spiritual connection to God, Father, Son, and Spirit we become privy to the character and nature of truth in its moral and ethical applications.

Without morals or ethics, inappropriate actions are often explained as 'missteps and errors in judgement'. We have become a society of excuses, avoiding responsibility. While we continue to reward negative behavior and refuse to hold accountable those who pursue and use immoral and unethical actions as the norm, many will fall away from spiritual understanding. Where is the 'church' or Christian leadership from Pope, pastor, or priest on real life daily moral and ethics questions? They are silent, or worse, perpetrators. There is little wonder as to why people have left the pews. Hypocrisy is as rampant today in churches, synagogues, and temples as when Jesus Himself called it out on the steps of the Temple and in the streets of the cities.

This is not to say we should be surprised. Throughout history in every industry, endeavor, business, group, association, or walk of life there have been and are abusers. It is in our nature as humans to embrace self-centered thoughts and selfish actions. We are often incensed when amoral or unethical misbehavior and abuses involve those with religious standing, ecumenical leadership, or trust in faith. Of one thing we can be assured, whatever is allowed to continue will continue.

As we continue to see much revealed in this post-modern age, we may have reached a zenith of brazenness for our times. We live in an era where abuse at all levels exists, while manufacturing excuses, casting blame, and abjectly disregarding personal responsibility persists.

Who is the 'prince of this world'? It is through his efforts our world was filled with distrust, discord, disputes, corruption, and evil. Interestingly enough, the struggle between good and evil in scripture describes a battle of principalities raging unabated in the physical, as well as spiritual realms. Being mortals inhabiting this physical world we are caught up in and part of its struggle. Not only does stress and conflict become obvious between peoples of communities, regions, and nations, but it also exists between neighbors, families, and even within us.

The keys to understanding how to navigate this expanding matrix of experiential lessons is grounded in three steps. First, understanding the three cornerstones of interpersonal relationships.

³⁸ Luke 15:11-32

Second, identifying the four block-chain elements of success. And last, knowing why people respond in the ways they do. Let us look at each of these.

There are three cornerstones of interpersonal relationships: love, approval, and agenda. Imagine these as three legs of an easel holding up the picture of your life. Everyone has the capacity to give and receive love. Each of us needs and craves approval. First from our parents, next from our peers, and then by our world at large. Finally, everyone we come into contact with has an agenda. Something they want from us or want us to do for their benefit.

Next, are the four block-chain elements of success. These are movement, direction, stability, and applied power. Think of it this way. You go to a marina to look at sailboats. You see four identical boats moored side-by-side. All appear to be exactly the same, but upon further examination you discover the first vessel has forward movement only when its sails are extended and there is adequate wind. The second has movement with its sails but also has a helm for steering in the direction you wish to go. The third has been built with a keel for ballast and stability, and the fourth has an outboard motor attached that will give power when there is no wind available. All four provide your need or desire for a sailboat, but only one is built and equipped to use and enjoy in all conditions.

Finally, everyone we encounter has an agenda. These are the motivations for or behind every relationship we have whether it is personal, business, political, religious, or spiritual. There are five motivators that determine every response we encounter by our relationships with others. These five are “Need, Want, Status, Love, and Fear of Loss”. Since their founding, every religion or spiritual belief system at its core was motivated to find and apply a path of belief and worship in a power or source greater than mankind.

As we examine more closely the similarities and differences between Christians, their beliefs, and their actions we need to keep in mind the structures that promote success in a spiritual relationship. Think for a moment about your spiritual walk. Is it connected to and furthered by a church setting and participation? Is it a solo or partnered journey guided only by the information and knowledge you seek and find? In either situation the quintessential question is, Will I choose to live according to truth?

Remember, whether we are Christians with a personal relationship with Christ or not, each of us reap what we sow. Whether inside or outside of a church setting, when we pursue a Christ led decision, we reap blessings. When we turn away to pursue our carnal and human self-interests, we reap other.

CHAPTER 7

CAN WE GET ALONG?

Is it possible for people to get along? This is an existential question similar to “Why are we here?” We must each dig deep within ourselves if we choose to not only answer this query, but also to examine what, why, and how we might realize our answer.

Since the dawn of mankind and its attempts to live communally, within civilly agreed upon norms, people have been at odds, similar to all species and individuals in nature. The primary difference, of course, between humans and other creatures is our ability to reason, rationalize, and analyze ourselves within our environment at a higher level of cognition. However, after thousands of years living and working together, it is evident by our daily interactions that peaceful and harmonious existence still eludes us as individuals, groups, tribes, states, regions, and nations.

Each of us are socialized to want, need, and desire differently. Depending on our goals, aims, ambitions, or limitations, we face each day with opportunities to grow while under stress, struggle, and disruption by people, events, or circumstances. As technology and scientific advancements have moved civilizations forward through the ages, humanity’s humanity toward their fellow human continues to fall behind. Even with intellectual and compassionate leaders reminding us of a deeper purpose, mankind in general continues to cling to the ideas and elements of ‘self’, influenced and tempted by evil and corruption. To better understand this inherent desire to embrace the darkness we should remember who the ‘prince of this world’ is and his role as the fallen angel. Satan was banished from God’s presence yet serves as God’s conduit tool for the purpose of testing our free will to choose good or evil. Having been granted sovereignty over the world of men, Satan’s power, tests, and temptations induce humans away from the path of light and enlightenment. The devil and his minions enjoy the narcissism, blindness, and darkness that are readily embraced by the world.

This eternal struggle plays out on the stage of “Free Will”. For it is God’s purposed reason to allow humans to make their own choices as to which path they will experience. We must remember that God never coerces, threatens, or induces us to choose whether or not we will become obedient children. We are each like the ‘Prodigal Son’ in that we have been set free to experience the options of this world, to be enticed by the ways of this world and to also overcome the world.

We come into the world as newborn babes dependent on the people and methods of the world. It is this world that we know, become comfortable with, and embrace as our own. The more success we experience as part of the world the more layers of its existence settle onto us like veils of fine dust, obscuring our senses and blinding us to other choices beyond visions of ‘self’. We come to know the world’s ways so well that we begin to believe and see every opportunity as a bolster for our focused attitude of “It’s all about me”. The further down the world’s path we trod, the deeper the holes of adversities we dig. Why? We begin to feel or imagine the only choice in our life is to

forge ahead. As Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) explained, the journey through the world is one of suffering. He readily recognized the world for what it is and why it was designed as a testing ground of choices to help refine our understanding.

The Lord God has used many thought leaders throughout history to share His instruction concerning relationships with the world's inhabitants. Said instruction has the core grounding of "Love God first and most" and then, secondarily to "treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated".³⁹ It is through this simple instruction that God communicates to all listeners about relationships. If the words concerning relationships come from God through 'masters' of religion, faith belief systems, and spiritual understandings, how is it we still fail to recognize these simple steps?

The answer must be burning like an inextinguishable ember deep within our heart, psyche, and spirit. The flame from this inferno of self is fanned by lusts of sin devotion (moral and ethical disobedience) emanating to elevate self above all else. It is 'the little god' of self, residing within each of us that spurs us on while embracing that same attitude and disdain that Satan had for God's preeminent position of authority and worthiness. We come from God's Spirit as part of His creation, supplicant in our existence yet rebellious by our nature. We forget we are here to know of Him. His character, nature, and ways. We instead embrace cruel and corrupt ways of men. As with the "Tower of Babel" we strive to reach into the heavens by our own means and ways regardless of the harm and pain we may cause, even to those closest to us whom we claim to love or care for. Division is part and parcel of the world's ways. Keeping us separated and at odds causes us to forego love and cooperation, to concentrate on our wishes and desires. God's grace is so abundant that He has given us inner subconscious foresight to automatically know and recognize loving behavior versus unloving behavior. We speak of the first yet practice the second, putting aside inherent knowledge that we reap what we sow. Like Satan's example, we are continually on a path of destruction and slavery, by believing and perceiving that in every instance we should get what we covet. We may be unaware of our self-sabotaging ways which have been prepared in the dark recesses of our mind. At our spiritual core, because it comes from God Himself, our innate desire is to be like Him for we are part of His creation.

With similar goals as Satan, to be like God, we entrust our future to the 'little god' of selfishness dwelling within by embracing the ways of the world under the mental guise of right verses wrong. Afterall, mankind's legal systems are founded and function on the conceptual application of reward and punishment. In such a scenario we as people are automatically pitted against one another, based on a singular perception of our actions in the eyes of another. Laws, codes, and codicils are essential for people to live together civilly with boundaries and protections. However, humans embrace the corrupted and corruptible because it is our natural state of existence. In our twenty-first century lives our mental derivatives and desires not only keep us at odds, but they also promote division among people as never before. Society has been debased to the point that trust has been lost in systems, institutions, and foundations. What is missing are functional, moral, and ethical implementations, as well as truth behind action.

What is missing in this scenario? What is missing in many lives today? What is missing is that spiritual re-connection with God. An absence of moral and ethical understanding and application is one reason people find it hard to get along within families, neighborhoods, states, regions, nations, and globally.

When we 'go all in' on right and wrong our focus is singular, "What's in it for me?". When we recognize the moral and/or ethical implications of our choices we can see how far reaching the

³⁹ Matthew 22:37

reverberations can be. The consequence of our choice is realized to affect not only ourselves, but also our families, our communities, and possibly our world. In fact, moral and ethical responses do affect our world, our own personal sphere of influence. Morally and ethically grounded decisions may not prod the world at large, but guided moral and ethical sensibilities can change in our personal lives.

Can we get along? Possibly, but probably not. The farther down the path we go guided by and embracing a world designed to put asunder peace and harmony, the greater our struggles become. Many promote and welcome divisions, especially in our current age.

How do we incorporate ethical and moral changes that will move us forward as individuals, and even further ahead as couples, families, tribes, groups, states, or nations? We must reconnect with God spiritually through a renewed or reborn relationship with Jesus Christ. Why? Because God's Spirit within and through Father and Son is grounded in truth and love as their character and nature. This is then exhibited and affected by and through actions rooted in morality and ethics.

Why is our world full of struggle, stress, and conflict? The world keeps us focused on the things of the world; need, want, status, possessions, ambition, personal fulfillment. Can we change the world? No. Can we change our life? Possibly. Can we change our relationship with God through Christ? Most definitely. No matter the timing of your death, when you are aligned spiritually with Christ Jesus, your spiritual life will continue. This is His promise to you personally as one who believes in His life, death, and resurrection.

God's love for each of us is true and constant no matter who we are, what we believe, or how we act. We are each a creation of His and therefore we are each important and special to Him. God's desire is that each person on the planet come to know of Him, (God the Father) and then to know Him again through His Son, Jesus. When we establish our spiritual relationship with Jesus, all of our 'sins' are forgiven. 'All' meaning past, present, and future. How can that be you might ask? In His loving grace, once we have elected to become one of His children through Jesus, like a loving parent His desire is to guide and forgive. Like every parent, He understands the pull of the world's ways, as well as our human desires and frailties.

It is within our spiritual growth that we begin to learn the blessings of a spiritual relationship with God. The more we choose to emulate Jesus in our responses and actions the closer to being like Him we can become. This is God's desire for each of us.

We begin to take solace in denying ourselves of the world's ways (and its dire consequences) as we begin to live more peaceful and calm lives. God is not a punisher. He takes no pleasure in our mistakes and discomforts be they small or enormous. He does however detest sin.

Why is it that only through Jesus Christ this spiritual connection works and has validity? If God is the Creator of the universe and all that is in it, including each of us, doesn't everyone have the Spirit of God within?

Yes! Most definitely.

What if one has an active spirit but chooses not to listen? What if one ignores the counseling of the Lord's Spirit within? What if one chooses to not have 'spiritual ears' to hear? Does the Lord care? Of course. Does the Lord abandon? No. Once we have accepted Jesus as the Christ, as our Lord and Savior, He will never leave or abandon us. He will never turn his back on us. He will always be ready to accept us back into His loving and open arms. So why not invite and accept Jesus? Whether we listen, hear, heed, or respond to His loving advice and counsel or not is our free will and choice. He always grants us free will to choose.

In either case, in every situation we find ourselves, we will reap what we sow. We reap and sow consequences if and when we choose the world's ways. We reap and sow blessings when we choose to follow the Lord's spiritual guidance. It is that simple. In either case He still loves us. In

either case He still has our best interest at heart, and in either case He will continue to be there for us and be prepared to help us when we ask.

You may have an inactive spirit. The question is do you want your spirit to be 'activated' or not? If the answer is Yes, you now know how to accomplish this. When you possess an activated spirit, you need not fear death. Your expressed belief in Jesus Christ as Savior of mankind guarantees eternal spiritual life. What I have shared with you is an option, a choice, and a decision for you and you alone to make, starting today until your last breath.

We each will experience a last breath, a last thought. What will yours be?



EPILOGUE

Every believer, every non-believer. Every Christian, every non-Christian. Everyone who struggles in their daily life with choices to be made has opportunities to change. Opportunities to alter those choices, decisions, and outcomes.

The questions become: Are you happy, content, pleased, and satisfied with the life you are living? How do you know? Are you where you imaged or dreamed that you would be at this point in your life? If the answer is ‘No’...Why Not?

Are you interested in changing your circumstance or life situation? Really? Do you have a plan to make that new life your reality? And finally, the quintessential question: Are you willing to allow God to be part of that plan?

Without spiritual grounding and without God’s Spirit living within your soul, alongside your spirit, your life and path will pretty much be like it has been for your entire life’s journey. How would you know this to be true? You have been making the choices that have brought you to this place and point.

With God’s Spirit through Christ abiding within you, your entire life can change. How do we know this? Every person on the planet who has a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ was once where you are. Making choices, making decisions. Suffering or basking in the outcomes be they rewards or blessings, negative or dangerous fallout, or personal, career, or family catastrophes. Every person alive or dead has walked the world’s path. Many took their first, every, and last breath without knowing or enjoying a relationship with God, the Creator of life. Others came to know the harsh and punishing God of church theology and ecumenical liturgy. Some came to know, understand, and embrace the character and nature of the Trinitarian Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit). A relative number of others found the path and stayed on it by emulating the thoughts, words, and deeds of Jesus Christ. Applying them in their own lives with His Holy Spirit guiding, aiding, instructing, and counseling their steps along the way.

If your heart has been empty and your desire to fill the void keeps beckoning your mind as to how this transition can happen, to make your life more worthwhile, here are the steps you can take today, right now to change your life’s future and direction once and for all.

Invite Jesus Christ into your life. Ask Him to hear your invitation and plea.⁴⁰

Embrace the Spirit of Truth (His Spirit, and the same Holy Spirit of God the Father).⁴¹

Engage His Spirit who now abides within you.⁴²

⁴⁰ Matthew 7:7-8

⁴¹ John 16:13

⁴² John 14:16, 26

When you ask, “How would Jesus respond?” in this situation I now find myself, His Spirit living within you will reveal outcomes to avoid before deciding to go ahead. Emulate the character and nature (love and responses) of Christ. Jesus declares for us that “He is the way”. This means not only is His path to be our path, but He is also assuring us that ‘His Way’ (His character and nature) should and can be ours as well.⁴³ This scripture and its understanding are reinforced by two additional scriptures that many people read, misinterpret, or misunderstand.

These two sum up and explain the benefit of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and what we can therefore expect.⁴⁴

Believe, before your last breath (the sooner the better), read, think about, and understand the scriptures. These simple instructions will guarantee your eternal salvation of your spirit filled soul.

These are the five steps on the ‘stairway to heaven’:

(1) Invite (2) Embrace (3) Engage (4) Emulate (5) Believe

God has made reconciliation with Him accessible and easy to accomplish. Once you voluntarily decide this is the path for you, for your future, for the rest of your life, your life will be changed here and hereafter.

God Bless, today and all your tomorrows.

⁴³ John 14:6

⁴⁴ Matthew 4:4, John 14:14

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

De’Vannon Hubert is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but his favorite city is Los Angeles, California. He is a graduate of Baton Rouge Magnet High School and an honorably discharged veteran of the United States Air Force. Aside from this, De’Vannon is a graduate of both Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the Hypnosis Motivation Institute. He also graduated from the Medical Training College of Baton Rouge and is a Licensed Massage Therapist. He is the host of the Sex, Drugs & Jesus podcast and is the owner of DownUnder Apparel. He also enjoys spending time with his two Maine Coon Mix cats, the amazing Mr. Felix D’ Kat & the lovely Ms. Felicity Cleopatra.

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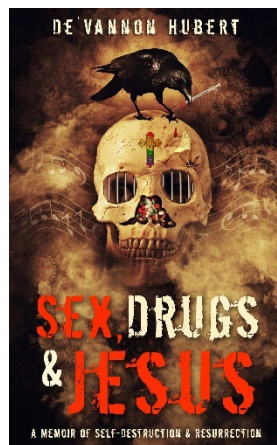
www.DownUnderApparel.com

EMAIL

DeVannon@SexDrugsAndJesus.com

ALSO BY DE'VANNON

[Sex, Drugs, & Jesus](#)



Transparency is one of the most effective tools we have that can help us heal. It can also help us understand ourselves better as well as other people. What would you do if you believed you only had months to live? How would you feel if your community was stolen from you? Could you survive living on the streets for any length of time? Can you imagine what it's like to try to find a job when you have felonies on your record? Are there any words to describe the heart of a mother as she watches her youngest child die?

"Sex, Drugs & Jesus is a riveting memoir that will capture your heart and take you inside the trials and tribulations of Mr. Hubert's life. I was hooked from the first page."

- USA Today Bestselling Author, Theresa Hissong