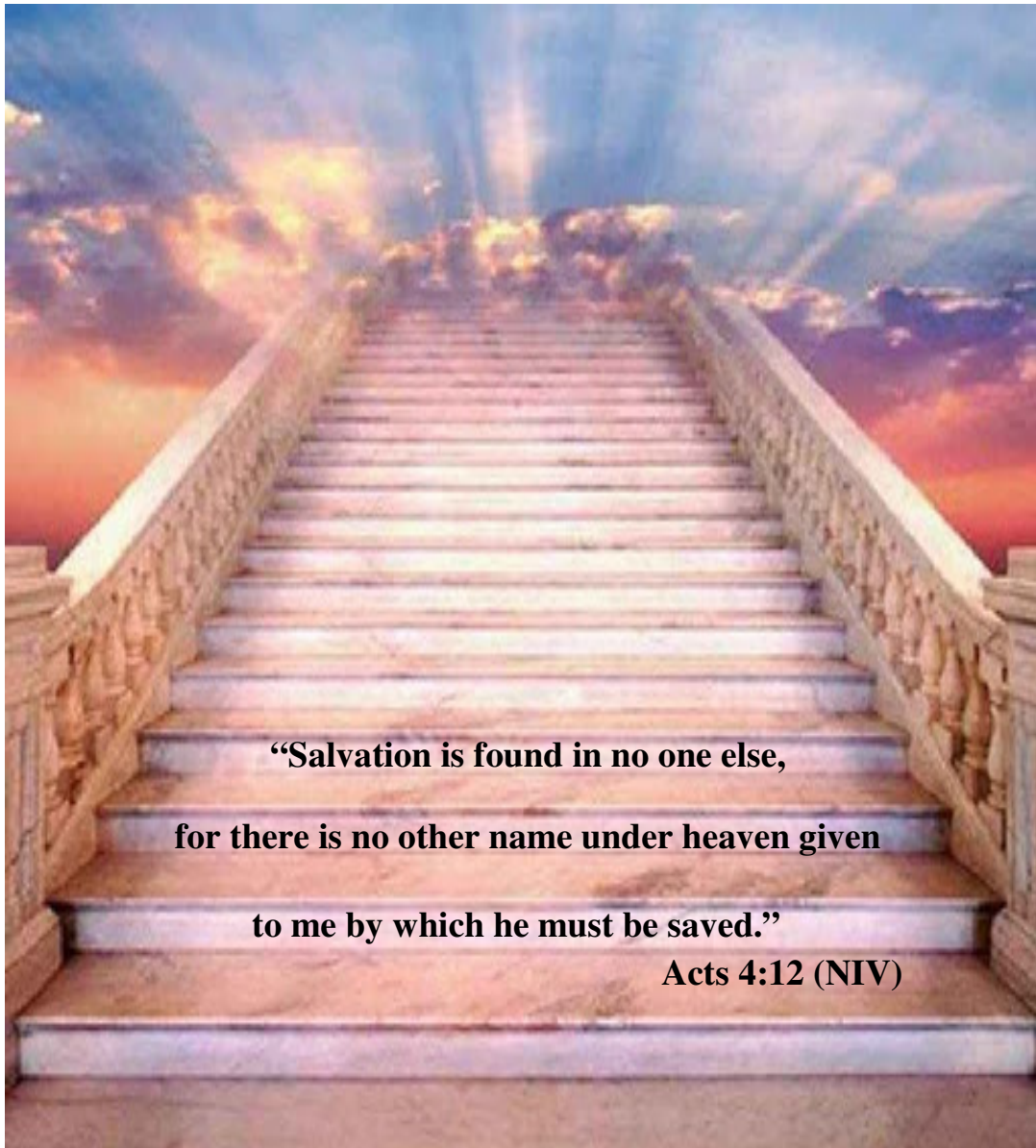


The First Steps on Your Christian Journey



**“Salvation is found in no one else,
for there is no other name under heaven given
to me by which he must be saved.”
Acts 4:12 (NIV)**

*Author:
Pastor D. M. Duncan, B.Th., M.Th.*

March, 2012

This book belongs to:

Copyright

The material in this course was written by Reverend D. M. Duncan, B.Th., M.Th., Pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Jamaica, NY Copyright © 2011.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - for example, electronic, photocopy, recording - without the prior written permission of the author. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

It is the expectation of this author that children of the most-high God would never violate the copyright laws by copying any portion of this course without the permission of this author.

Index

Introduction	i
Chapter 1: Welcome to the Family of God	1
Chapter 2: What Does Your Salvation Mean?	8
Chapter 3: What Should You Do Going Forward?	10
Chapter 4: Scriptures for Your Daily Walk with the Lord.....	18
Chapter 5: The Bethany Baptist Church Statement of Faith	24
Chapter 6: Study Tools You Need.....	29
Chapter 7: What About Other Religions?	31
Chapter 8: Why the Bible?	33
Chapter 9: What About My Past?.....	35

Introduction

Down through the years, I have personally witnessed many give their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some respond to the gospel invitation with excitement while others with tears. Whichever the case, from the moment they accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they will need to better understand their new faith in order to stand firm on it. That said, this workbook was designed to help new converts and old converts better understand their faith. In addition, this workbook will give the reader clarity on Christian teachings and principles that are usually the source of confusion for new converts as well as some old converts.

In the past and currently, the universal church has been divided by traditional and/or denominational teachings and/or principles. That said, this workbook is free from sectarian bias. That is to say, denominational beliefs, teaching and/or principles have not been used to ascertain the truths found in its pages. For this author, there is only one source of truth for the Christian, the Bible. Therefore, each subject addressed in this workbook will be discussed in light of the plain teaching of God's word, the Bible. Traditional views and/or denominational teachings are not necessarily bad, however, I believe new converts should learn what God's word says first. In the case where there is no specific passage of scripture to give direction, I will always say, "this is my opinion," rather than to mislead the reader into thinking my opinions are what the Bible is specifically saying.

It is my prayer that this workbook will ignite in every reader a fire to learn more about their faith, God's word and Christian living.

May God richly bless you,
Pastor D. M. Duncan

Chapter 1

Welcome to the Family of God

Welcome to the family of God. As a new born babe in Christ, you are probably a little puzzled and/or confused about your new life in Christ Jesus. Don't worry, it is not unusual to be a bit puzzled or confused because of the uncertainties and/or questions you may have about your new life in Christ.

Whichever the case, you need not think any of this to be strange, it comes with the territory. To better understand where you are right now as a spiritual babe in Christ, consider a newborn baby in the natural. A newborn baby in the natural knows nothing when he/she is first born, but as they grow they begin to learn things. In a few months they begin to crawl, in a year or so they begin to walk. As time continues to pass, they begin to understand more and more about life and eventually they become adults, capable of reproduction. Like the newborn baby in the natural, you too will learn as time passes, you will grow into a mature Christian capable of leading others to Christ. Therefore, you must understand that the step you made to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior is just the beginning of your new life in Christ Jesus. It is here where your growth begins.

That said, do not worry if you do not understand everything at once; you are a babe in Christ and it will take time to learn and understand your new Christian faith. However, you can be comforted by the fact that God will be with you every step of the way from here on as you grow and learn more about Him. In addition, you need to be attached to a healthy well-balanced ministry that will assist you in your learning and growth.

Because you have made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are now a son or daughter of God and part of the family of God. It is by God's grace and through your faith that you have become a son or daughter of God. In **Galatians 3:26** (NIV) we read, "***You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...***" As a result of your faith in Christ Jesus, you have received the Holy Spirit. In **Ephesians 1:13-14** (NIV) we read, "¹³*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,* ¹⁴*who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.*" In addition, in **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** (NIV) we read, "²¹*...he anointed us,* ²²*set his seal of ownership on us, and put his spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*"

Without the Spirit of God indwelling in us, we cannot be a son or daughter of God, in the unique sense as a Christian. In a general sense, all are sons and daughters of God through creation, but not all are sons and daughters of God in the unique sense as Christians. The difference is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that each believer/Christian receives the moment they believe and/or accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Therefore, each son or daughter of God must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, without it, you cannot be a son or daughter in the unique sense. In **Romans 8:9** (NIV) we read, “*You however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. **And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.***”

The evidence for the Holy Spirit’s presence and/or indwelling in your life has been limited by some denominations to the speaking in of “other” tongues. In truth, some people will speak in tongues the moment they believe or later in their walk with the Lord. However, some do not speak in tongues the moment they believe or at any time in their walk with the Lord. To support my position, I submit the following scriptures:

Believing and/or Baptized With No Tongues

Acts 18:8 (NIV) “*Crispus, the synagogue ruler, **and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.***”

Acts 17:34 (NIV) “*A few men became followers of Paul **and believed....***”

Acts 9:17-18 (NIV) “¹⁷*Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here– **has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**”* ¹⁸*Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. **He got up and was baptized...***”

Acts 8:36-38 (KJV) “³⁶*And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, **See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*** ³⁷*And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, **I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*** ³⁸*And he commanded the chariot to stand still: **and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.***”

Acts 16:30-33 (NIV) “³⁰*He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’* ³¹***They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.’*** ³²*They then spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his*

house. ³³At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

Acts 2:38-41 (NIV) ³⁸**Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** ³⁹*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.*’ ⁴⁰*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’* ⁴¹**Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”**

While it is possible that those who believed in these passages may have spoken in tongues later after having hands laid on them by an apostle, it is also possible that they might not have spoken in tongues since it is not mentioned in these passages. Therefore, the honest, unbiased student of scripture must conclude that some speak in tongues while others don’t, there is no honest way around this conclusion.

(Note: In **Mark 16:16** (NIV) we read, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** No where do we read that speaking in tongues is a requirement for our salvation.)

The danger in limiting the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence and/or indwelling in the lives of believer’s to speaking in tongues alone is seen in the fact that speaking in tongues is and has been in the past, very easily duplicated and/or faked by some to appear to be children of God when they are not. Sadly, some churches will try to teach new converts how to speak in tongues in order to verify their salvation and the Holy Spirit’s presence. However, there is no biblical support for teaching or forcing people to speak in tongues. Because these churches insist their members speak in tongues to verify their salvation, many will be compelled to “fake it” so they can fit into that particular church. The practice of forcing and/or teaching people to speak in tongues is both misleading and harmful for the new born babe in Christ. It’s misleading because the new born babe in Christ is lead to believe they need to fake an experience in order to be a Christian. It’s harmful because a new born babe in Christ may doubt their salvation if they do not speak in tongues and as a result, walk away from the Lord.

Therefore, it is best to look for the clear biblical evidences for the Holy Spirit’s presence and/or indwelling in a believer’s life and not focus on tongues alone, although tongues are a legitimate sign. These biblical evidences should be seen in a mature Christian’s life whether they speak in tongues or not. For the new babe in Christ, these evidences should

begin to surface in your life as you grow in Christ. For some they will begin immediately, while others will wait a while. In truth, there is no specific time frame for these biblical evidences to be made manifest in a new babe in Christ's life, so be patient, they will begin to be seen, usually by others before you see them. Here are some evidences that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the life of any Christian:

1. Love – For many, carrying a Bible, going to church regularly, quoting a few scriptures and dressing sharp is an indicator that a person is a Christian with the Holy Spirit active in their lives. However, Jesus says something completely different. In **John 13:34-35** (NIV), Jesus said, ³⁴*"A new commandment I give you: love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another, ³⁵by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* Although carrying a Bible, going to church regularly, quoting a few scriptures and dressing sharply are part of a Christian's conduct, Jesus says the real indicator is the love shown to one another.

The Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** (NIV), ¹*"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."*

Love is your acid test for true Christians as opposed to pseudo Christians. Satan will imitate a lot of things to deceive you, but not true Christ-like love, that selfless kind of love that considers others.

For the new born babe in Christ, your capacity to love comes at the moment you believe, and thereby accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior and becoming a child of God. It is at that moment that you received the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Romans 5:5** (NIV) says, ⁵*"...because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."* In **John 4:7-8** (NIV) we read, ⁷*"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God ⁸whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

True Christ-like love is best seen in what we do, not only in what we say. Simply put, love is best seen by what love does. In **1 John 3:16-18** (NIV) we read, ¹⁶*"This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material*

possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*”

Finally, love for others is an indicator of your love for God. **1 John 4:19-21** (NIV) says, “¹⁹*We love because he first loved us.* ²⁰*If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen* ²¹*and he has given us this command: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*”

2. Fruit – Jesus, referring to false prophets said, “.... **by their fruit you will recognize them.**” (Matthew 7:20, NIV). Likewise, those that have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit will bear fruit that verifies the Holy Spirit’s presence and work in their lives.

That said, **Galatians 5:22-23** (NIV) says, “²²*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³*gentleness and self-control...*”

In addition to love, these fruits must be evident in the life of a mature Christian. However, the new born babe in Christ will begin to bear these fruits in his/her life immediately after accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. These fruits come with the territory for all who believe (See also **2 Corinthians 6:6-10, Ephesians 4:2 and Colossians 3:12-15**).

3. The Removal of Sin – Sin may best be defined as “a failure to conform to the standard of God in any capacity.” Therefore, every Christian, new born or mature, should do their best to conform to the standards of God. In **1 John 3:9-10** (NIV) we read, “⁹*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.* ¹⁰*This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.*”

These verses do not say you are to be sinlessly perfect, nobody is perfect. However, as a new born babe or mature Christian, you will not be able to “continue” to commit the same sin(s) you were committing before you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and not be convicted by the Holy Spirit to stop. For example, if you were living with someone you are not married to, having

sexual relations (fornication) with them, you won't be able to continue in that sinful lifestyle. The same will hold true for any other sinful lifestyle you lived before you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit within you will begin to convict you of your sin until you stop. That said, any sinful behavior that is still present in your life must be prayed about regularly. Because some sinful behavior is more difficult than others to abandon, you must continue to ask God to deliver you. Paul drives this point home clearly in **2 Corinthians 5:17** (NIV), where we read, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: **the old has gone, the new has come!**"*

The idea of removing sin from your life should not be understood as a means of "earning" or "working" for your salvation. Your salvation is the gift of God, no works or abstaining from sin(s) can earn it. (See Chapter 2, "What does your salvation mean?")

4. Church Attendance / Fellowship – One of the enemies (Satan) strategies that have worked so well on new born babes and mature Christians is to get them to think they do not need to be part of a church or have any fellowship with other Christians. By implementing this strategy, Satan has destroyed the lives of countless new born babes in Christ and mature Christians.

When a Christian is alone, he/she is in their most vulnerable position. It is while they are alone that Satan slowly but surely pulls them away from God's will for their lives. That said, as a new born babe in Christ, you need to find a healthy, well-balanced church immediately after accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If you are incarcerated, you should attend the Protestant Christian services and/or spend time fellowshiping with Christians in your facility.

For every Christian, I remind them of the clear teaching found in **Hebrews 10:25** (NIV) that says, *"**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see day approaching.**"*

Every believer indwelt by the Spirit of God should desire to be amongst the saints of God in church and/or in some type of regular Christian fellowship. God never created "lone range" Christians, His plan was for the saints to have regular fellowship. In **Acts 2:42-44** (NIV) we read, ⁴²*"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

⁴³*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were*

done by the apostles. ⁴⁴**All the believers were together** and had everything in common.

5. Prayer – When we met our first love we could not talk to them enough. We would be on the phone with them for hours at a time. We could not miss one day of communication with them, if we did, we felt pain in our hearts. The same should hold true for the new born babe in Christ, they should desire to communicate with the new love in their life, Jesus Christ. The only way to communicate with him is through prayer. Daily prayer is essential to the growth of the new born babe in Christ and should never be neglected.
6. Bible Reading – Jesus said in **Matthew 4:4** (NIV) “...*man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” As new born babes in Christ, you need spiritual nourishment that comes from the word of God. New born babes in Christ will crave their spiritual food, God’s word. In **1 Peter 2:2** (NIV) we read, “*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*” These are the unmistakable evidences that will be present, in varying degrees, in every believer, there are no exceptions. Therefore, the new born babe in Christ will do well to look for these evidences in their lives and in the lives of those they surround themselves with and/or receive godly advice from.

Chapter 2

What Does Your Salvation Mean?

The day is coming when all humanity will be judged by God. However, Christians will not be judged by God for sin because Jesus paid for their sin on the cross. For the Christians, only their works will be judged to determine their rewards. Simply put, the moment you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you became a believer which also means you are saved from God's coming judgment for sin and His wrath upon sinful humanity.

Rather than to confuse you with a lot of hard to understand theological terms, I will focus on the simple but factual information you need to understand right now. With that said, consider the following:

- All are sinners – Many people think because they do not smoke, drink, lie, steal commit adultery or fornicate they are not a sinner in need of a savior. However, that is not the case. **In Romans 3:23** (NIV) we read, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” Whether a person thinks they are a sinner or not does not matter, all are sinners at birth.

There are two (2) things every human being can rest assured of the moment they take their very first breath at birth. They are:

1. They are a sinner in need of a Savior. David acknowledged this fact in **Psalm 51:5** (NIV), there we read, “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*”
2. They have taken their first steps toward their grave. Unless Jesus returns first, all humans will someday die. In the Bible, there are only two (2) men that never tasted physical death. Enoch is one (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah is the other (2 Kings 2:11). No matter what we do to continue living, we cannot do anything to change the day God set for us to die. (See Job 14:5 and Ecclesiastes 8:8)

The fact is, we are all sinners at birth because of the sin committed by Adam and Eve. In **Romans 5:12** (NIV) we read, “*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*”

- God has only one plan of salvation – Although many religions claim to have a plan of salvation that places its members in right standing with God, the Bible says there is only **one** true plan of salvation.

In **Acts 4:12** (NIV) we read, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

To some, this is a politically incorrect passage of scripture since it excludes other religions by saying, **“salvation is found in no one else...”** The person the author is referring to is Jesus, the only “name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Jesus himself in an even more politically incorrect statement, delivers a death blow to all other religions in **John 14:6** (NIV) where we read, *“...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

By saying “No one comes to the Father (God) except through me,” Jesus is saying other religions are not accessing the true and living God since they are not going through him. Furthermore, Jesus said that he was **“the way,”** not one of many ways to access the true and living God.

Because of sin, all human beings are spiritually separated from God. In order for mankind to be reconciled back to God, we need a mediator. Jesus is that mediator. In **1 Timothy 2:5** (NIV) we read, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*

This passage confirms Jesus’ words in **John 14:6**, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” By saying, “there is one God and **one mediator...**” A mediator is one that brings two opposing parties (in this case, God and man) together.

Because you have accepted Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior, you have been reconciled to God and your sins have been forgiven. This means you will spend eternity in the presence of God. In addition, consider the following:

Physical Death – Biblically, when physical death occurs, your spirit/soul separates from your body. Therefore, death is best described as “separation” of the spirit/soul from the body. For the Christian, when death occurs, their spirit/soul goes immediately to be with the Lord. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 5:8** (NIV), *“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*

Chapter 3

What Should You Do Going Forward?

Now that you have accepted Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior, your first act of obedience to him is to be baptized. It should be noted that baptism has no saving power. That is to say, you are not saved by getting baptized; you get baptized because you are already saved by God's grace through your faith in Jesus Christ. When you prayed the sinner's prayer, you were saved and guaranteed an eternity in the presence of God. However, as an outward sign to the world and your first act of obedience to God, you are baptized.

For many the mode of baptism and who should be baptized has become a source of much confusion. For some "sprinkling" water on a person is an acceptable form of baptism. While others maintain that baptism is by immersion only. For some infant baptism are acceptable, while others maintain that baptism is only for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

To eliminate the confusion that exists surrounding the subject of baptism, we shall consult the only reliable source of truth the Christian has, God's word. That said, consider the following:

- Mode of Baptism (Sprinkling or Immersion)

In Matthew 3:16, we have recorded the baptism of Jesus by John. If we are seeking the correct mode of baptism, Jesus' baptism should serve as our example for all baptisms. In **Matthew 3:16** (NIV) we read, "*As soon as Jesus was baptized, **he went up out of the water...***" If Jesus was sprinkled and not immersed, there would be no point in saying "he went up out of the water." Therefore, this passage clearly teaches immersion and not sprinkling. Another example is found in **Acts 8:38-39** (NIV) where we read, "³⁸*And he gave orders to stop the chariot. **Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*** ³⁹*When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away...*" Again, it is immersion that we find in scripture, not sprinkling.

- Who Should Be Baptized?

In **Acts 18:8** (NIV) we read, "*Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him **believed and were baptized.***"

In **Acts 16:30-33** (NIV) we read, “³⁰*He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’* ³¹*They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.’* ³²*Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.* ³³*At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”*

In both passages, baptism came after believing in the Lord (See also, Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12-13 and Acts 16:14-15). Therefore, it is only those who believe in the Lord that are baptized. That said, how does an infant “believe in the Lord” and qualify for baptism? The fact is, they cannot and should not be baptized. When any child comes to the age where they can “believe in the Lord,” they can be baptized. However, I do not know of any biblical age limitations for baptism, the child need only be at an age where he/she can understand and believe in the Lord for themselves.

Since you have “believed in the Lord” and have accepted him as Lord and Savior, you must be baptized by immersion as soon as possible. However, there are some who, because of their circumstances and through no fault of their own, cannot be baptized. This includes but is not limited to the terminally ill, those incarcerated and those in senior care facilities and cannot leave them.

In the Bible there is only one example of a person believing in the Lord, but unable to be baptized. However, Jesus assured him that he would be in “paradise” with him after his crucifixion. In **Luke 23:40-43** (NIV) we read, “⁴⁰*But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘Since you are under the same sentence?’* ⁴¹*We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’* ⁴²*Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’* ⁴³*Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’ ”*

Paradise in this passage is referred to by Paul as the “third heaven” which is the dwelling place of God. In **2 Corinthians 12:2-4** (NIV) we read, “²*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows.* ³*And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows –* ⁴*was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”* Therefore, even without being baptized, this man on the cross next to Jesus went to heaven (See also Revelation 2:7).

Secondly, you must become part of a healthy, well-balanced church. That said, there are several characteristics you should look for in a healthy, well-balanced church. Consider the following characteristics:

- Healthy, well-balanced churches are doctrinally sound churches. That is to say, they are teaching and/or preaching the essential Christian doctrines that have always been taught by the Church since its inception. These essential Christian doctrines leave no room for compromise or differences of opinion. In truth, these essential Christian doctrines are the very foundation of the Church. Any group that preaches or teaches something different, cannot call itself a Christian church, since the Christian Church is built on these essential truths. Here are the essential truths that you should look for in a church **before joining it**:

1. The Bible – They must believe and teach that the Bible is the inerrant, inspired word of God. Simply put, they must believe and teach that the Bible does not contain any error in its original manuscripts (This does not apply to translations; translators make mistakes but God does not). By inspired I mean the Bible is God-breathed. That is to say, God revealed his word to authors of scripture, while they in turn recorded it in writing using their own personal styles, creating the very words of God. In **2 Timothy 3:16** (NIV) we read, ***“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...”*** Keep far away from any church or ministry that says God’s word, the Bible contains errors or teaches things that are untrue.

2. Jesus Christ – The million dollar question for a church or ministry to determine who they are and whether or not you join them is, “What do you think of Christ Jesus?” The Bible is crystal clear concerning the person and nature of Jesus Christ. In **John 1:1** (NIV) we read, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”***

The “Word” from John 1:1 is Jesus before he became flesh. In other words, before Mary gave birth to Jesus, he existed as the “Word.” John says something about the “Word” (Jesus before being born) that cannot be denied. John said, “the Word was with God **and the Word was God.**”

Therefore, the Christian church has always taught that Jesus was God (deity).

John 1:14 (NIV) says, ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”***

3. The Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus – Christianity hinges on three essential facts, without them, Christianity disappears. The essential facts are the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel message Christians preach is based on these three essential facts. The gospel message the apostle Paul preached was also based on these three essential facts. In **1 Corinthians 15:1-5** (NIV) we read, “¹*Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.* ²*By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.* ³*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,* ⁴*that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures,* ⁵*and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve.*”

The New Testament is crystal clear on these three essential truths, consider the following:

- His Crucifixion – In **Luke 23:32-33** (NIV) we read, “³²*Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.* ³³*When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.*” (See also John 19:16-18, Mark 15:22-27 and Matthew 27:30-38)
- His Death – In **John 19:31-33** (NIV) we read, “³¹*Now it was the day of preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.* ³²*The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.* ³³*But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.*” (See also Matthew 27:46-50, Mark 15:34-37 and Luke 23:44-46)
- His Burial – In **Luke 23:50-53** we read, “⁵⁰*Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the council, a good and upright man,* ⁵¹*who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathe and he was waiting for the kingdom of God.* ⁵²*Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body.* ⁵³*Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.*” (See also Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:43-46 and John 19:38-42)

- His Resurrection – In **Matthew 28:5-6** (NIV) we read, “⁵*The angel said to the women, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see t he place where he lay.*” (See also Mark 16:1-6 and Luke 24:1-6)

(Note: Because some cults teach Jesus was not resurrected from the dead in the same body that he was crucified in, or the resurrection was spiritual and not bodily you must ask specifically, “was Jesus resurrected from the dead in the same body he was crucified in?” The correct answer is “yes”)

The resurrection of Jesus is the very nucleus of Christianity, without it, Christians have nothing. The apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:14** (NIV) Paul said, “*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*”

In verse 17 he says, “*and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*”

Any church or ministry teaching something other than this is to be avoided!!!

4. Salvation By Grace Through Faith – In Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV) we read, “⁸*For it is by **grace** you have been saved, **through faith** – and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God** – ⁹**not by works, so that no one can boast.***”

From these two verses we glean at least four (4) very important facts about salvation, consider the following:

- 1) We are saved by “**grace.**” Grace is the unmerited or underserved favor or kindness that God has extended to us.
- 2) It is “**through faith**” that we tap into the grace God has made available to us.
- 3) Our salvation is “the gift of God,” meaning we do not pay for it in any way. If someone gives you a gift, and you in turn give them some money for it, it’s no longer a gift, you bought it. The same holds true with our salvation, it’s a gift; if we gave God something in return for this gift it is no longer a gift, you bought it with whatever you gave God in return for your salvation.

- 4) Our salvation is “not by works, so that no one can boast.” Simply put, being good or going to church every Sunday (which you should) does not earn our salvation. Being good and going to church every Sunday is “works.” God is telling us that our “works” cannot do what Jesus already did on the cross for us. No Christian can never boast by saying, “I did this or that to earn my salvation.” The song writer expresses Jesus’ finished work on the cross as it relates to us this way, “All to him I owe, sin has left a crimson stain, but he washed it white as snow.”

A healthy, well-balanced church acknowledges these four facts about salvation. Any church that tells you that you are not saved until you follow all their rules is a church you should avoid!! So there is no confusion, I am saying you should follow the rules you are given from any church. However, following rules cannot save you, it is only by God’s grace, through our faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved.

5. The Trinity – Although the word “trinity” does not appear in the Bible, the Bible does teach that God exists in three (3) separate and distinct personalities; the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. There are some who deny this biblical truth in favor of other opinions or theories. The most common opinion in opposition from the biblical teaching on the trinity comes from the “Oneness Pentecostals.” They believe that God does not exist in three (3) separate distinct personalities. Instead, they believe that God becomes the Father, Son or Holy Spirit when needed. That is to say, today God is only the Father, tomorrow he is only the Son and the next day he is only the Holy Spirit.

In essence, they are saying God does not exist at all times in three (3) separate distinct personalities, he simply becomes either Father, Son or Holy Spirit when needed. However, this is not what the Bible teaches. In **Matthew 4:16-17** (NIV) we read, “¹⁶As soon as **Jesus was baptized**, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God descending** like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷**And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my son, whom I love; with I am well pleased.’**” From these verses of scripture we see the trinity clearly. In verse 16 God the Son is being baptized, while God the Holy Spirit is descending on him. In verse 17 God the Father says, “**This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**” Since all three (3) Father, Son and Holy Spirit are here working at the same time

during the same event, it is clear that they are in fact three (3) separate and distinct persons within the Godhead. It must be understood that there is only one God that exists in three (3) separate and distinct persons. Those persons are Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See 1 Corinthians 8:6, Hebrews 1:8 and Acts 5:3-4). The church and/or ministry that teaches a different view of the trinity or denies the trinity is to be avoided!!

6. The Second Coming of Jesus – Jesus’ literal, physical return to the earth is clearly taught in scripture. In **John 14:3** (NIV) Jesus told his disciples, “....*If I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.***” After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension two dressed men in white told his disciples, “...’Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, **will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.**’ ” (Acts1:11)

The second coming of Jesus is an event that will someday occur. However, there are two (2) facts to be considered when asking a church or ministry about their views concerning Jesus’ second coming. They are the following:

- They do not know when Jesus will return - The Bible says nobody knows when Jesus will return. In **Matthew 24:26** (NIV) says, “**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**” In 2011, Harold Camping created a lot of fear and/or concern in the minds of many by saying Jesus would return in 2011. At the time of this writing (2012) Jesus still has not returned. Harold Camping, like many others (Jehovah’s Witnesses for example) have tried to pinpoint the time of Jesus’ second coming. Needless to say, they were all wrong.
- Jesus’ return will be seen – According to some of the cults in America and abroad, Jesus has either already returned to earth invisibly or he has returned physically and is the leader of their cult. However, in **Matthew 24:30** (NIV) we read, “*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, **and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky...***”

The second coming of Jesus will not be a secret event that is witnessed by only a few, nor will his coming be invisible. In **Matthew 24:26-27** (NIV) we read, “²⁶*So if anyone tells you, there he is, out in the desert, do not go*

out; or, here he is, in the inner rooms, do not believe it. ²⁷**For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**”

The message in these verses is very clear; Jesus’ second coming will be visible!! Not only will his coming be visible, we will also hear his coming. In **1 Thessalonians 4:16** (NIV) we read, “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*”

Any church or ministry that teaches any of the following is to be avoided:

- 1) They know when Jesus will return.
 - 2) He’s not going to return physically.
 - 3) He’s already here invisibly.
 - 4) He’s already here physically as their leader.
7. The Rapture – Like the word “trinity,” the word “rapture” is not found in the Bible. However, the Bible does teach that Jesus will return and “rapture” his church. The word “rapture” is defined as “being caught up” or “taken up.” The idea of Christians being “raptured” or “caught up” in the air to meet Jesus comes from the Bible. In **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** (NIV) we read, “¹⁶*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷*After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*”
- Healthy, well-balanced churches are praying churches that prayerfully bring restoration to troubled or broken marriages. They will prayerfully bring families closer; they will prayerfully cultivate the Spiritual Gift(s) in every member. In short, they will not allow you to sit idle, they will gently steer your hands towards the plow for the sake of the kingdom.
 - Healthy, well-balanced churches will have some form of outreach. They will seek the salvation of the lost through some type of outreach.
 - Healthy, well-balanced churches are not controlling in the sense that they will demand more of your time than you give to your wife/husband or family. Instead, they will help you to balance your time with the church and your family.

Chapter 4

Scriptures for Your Daily Walk with the Lord

(All scriptures are from the N.I.V. Bible)

1. **The Lord is our shepherd, always leading us in the best way and protecting us.**

Psalms 23. ¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

2. **As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, so God cares for his own.**

Deuteronomy 32:10-12. ¹⁰...He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, ¹¹like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. ¹²The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him.

3. **As a father cares for his children, so God cares for his own; his love is everlasting.**

Psalms 103:8-18. ⁸The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. ¹⁷But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children – ¹⁸with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

4. **God always shelters those who put their trust in Him.**

Psalms 91:1-2. ¹He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ²I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

5. God knows us most intimately; he holds and guides us by his hand.

Psalm 139:1-12. ¹O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. ⁵You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” ¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

6. The wicked appear to prosper for a time, while the righteous suffer; but actually God is always leading us in the best way; he comforts us with his presence.

Psalm 73. ¹Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹They say, “How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?” ¹²This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth. ¹³Surely in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed our children. ¹⁶When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ²¹When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²²I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷Those who are far from you will perish;

you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

7. The sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the coming glory.

Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

8. God works all things together for our good.

Romans 8:18. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

9. If God is for us, nothing can separate us from his love.

Romans 8:31-39. ³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

10. Jesus, the good shepherd, died for his sheep; he knows, leads, and protects each one; he gives us eternal security.

John 10:11. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:14-15. ¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:27-29. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

11. God's grace is sufficient for every need.

2 Corinthians 9:8. God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

12. Paul had a thorn in the flesh; God's promise: My grace is sufficient for you.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10. ⁷To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

13. Jesus rebuked the disciples for their little faith and calmed the storm.

Matthew 8:23-27. ²³Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" ²⁶He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. ²⁷The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

14. God directs all things by his infinite wisdom and his ways are beyond tracing out.

Romans 11:33-36. ³³Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

15. One day this life of suffering will be over and all will be made new.

Revelation 21:1-4. ¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

16. Cast your concerns on the Lord, for he will support you.

Psalm 55:22. Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

17. God is the source of all comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4. ³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

18. God is unchangeable and faithful.

Psalm 89:1-8. ¹I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. ²I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. ³You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ⁴"I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'" *Selah* ⁵The heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. ⁶For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? ⁷In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. ⁸O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

19. The Lord tends his flock like a shepherd.

Isaiah 40:10-11. ¹⁰See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and he carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

20. God's favor lasts for a lifetime. He turns weeping into rejoicing.

Psalm 30:4-5. ⁴Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name. ⁵For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

21. God has made a commitment to supply all your actual needs.

Philippians 4:19. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

What to do with the Word of God

Luke 11:28 “He replied, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

Psalms 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

Psalms 119:9 “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

Psalms 119:114 “You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.”

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Matthew 4:4 “Jesus answered, it is written: man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

What to do When Others Wrong You

Matthew 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”
(See also verses 16 & 17)

Romans 12:17 “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, be careful to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, and He will deliver you.”

Proverbs 20:22 “Do not say, I’ll pay you back for this wrong, wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.”

1 Thessalonians 5:15 “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.”

Romans 12:21 “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Colossians 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Matthew 6:14-15 “If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Chapter 5

The Bethany Baptist Church Statement of Faith

The Bible – We believe in the verbal, plenary, infallible, inerrant inspiration of the Bible. We believe in the unlimited inerrancy of the Bible. That is to say, we believe all historic facts, genealogies, account of creation and etc. to be true and without error as they appeared in the original manuscripts. We believe the bible supersedes all other writings or books in revealing God and His plan of salvation for mankind (Koran, Book of Mormon and etc.) and is God's love letter to mankind. We believe the bible is human in its penmanship but divine in authorship (2 Peter 1:21).

The Triune God - We believe that there is only one true and living God revealed in three separate, distinct, co-existent, co-equal and co-eternal personalities (Matthew 3:16-17). That is to say, we believe God is composed of three united persons without separate existence – so completely united as to form one God. We believe the three united persons exist as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 1:1, Acts 5:3-4 and John 10:30-35).

God The Father – We believe God, as Father, reigns over his entire universe with providential care. He is omnipotent (all powerful) and able to do anything consistent with his own nature (Genesis 17:1, Exodus 6:3 and 2 Corinthians 6:18). He is omnipresent (everywhere present at all times) and there is nowhere mankind can go to escape His presence (Psalm 139:7-11). He is omniscient (all knowing) and knows all things actual and possible, past, present and future, in one eternal act (Psalm 139:1-4 and Hebrews 4:13). We believe God to be Father of all through creation, but Father spiritually only to those who have become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:10-11).

God The Son – We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, pre-existed prior to his incarnation as God, was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (John 1:1; 1:14). We believe in the vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the cross. That is to say, He died in the place of sinners, representatively, bearing the punishment they deserved, thereby satisfying God's righteous judgment against sin. We believe that after Jesus' bodily resurrection from the grave, He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes on behalf of all believers (1 John 2:1, Colossians 3:1 & Hebrews 12:2).

God The Holy Spirit – We believe the Holy Spirit is the third person within the godhead. As such, He has intelligence (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), He possesses a mind (Romans 8:27), he is able to teach (1 Corinthians 2:13), He directs the activities of Christians (Acts 16:6-11), He is to be obeyed (Acts 10:19-21), He can be lied to (Acts 5:3) and He can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29). We believe all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit as a gift at the moment of conversion (John 7:37-39; Acts 11:16-17; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:5). We believe that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is permanent and can not be lost. We believe that because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, every believer has his or her own unique gift(s) for the edification of the body of Christ, which is the Church (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and Ephesians 4:11-12). We believe that it is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that places those who believe into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). We believe that there are many fillings of the Holy Spirit throughout the believer's life, but one baptism of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the filling, not the baptism, is lost when believers sin.

Creation – We believe that man, the earth, the heavens and all life was created by God (Genesis 1:1, Isaiah 44:24 and Colossians 1:16-17). We believe micro evolution is provable and observable while macro evolution is completely false. That is to say, micro evolution describes changes within a species over time while the species remains distinct and never evolves into something completely different. So, a cat will always be a cat although there may be observable changes in cats over years. Macro evolution, which we believe to be completely false, says one species can and does become a completely different species over lengthy periods of time. Furthermore, the fossil record proves macro evolution to be incorrect.

The Fall of Man – We believe that Genesis Chapter 3 describes the historical event of sin's entrance into the realm of humanity. We believe Adam and Eve were historical people who sinned against God in time and space. If Adam and Eve were not literal people who brought sin into the human race at one point in history, then there was no point in Jesus dying on the cross. We believe that as a result of Adam and Eve's sin, all are sinners from birth/conception (Psalm 51:5; Genesis 8:21 and John 9:34) and stand in need of a savior from birth.

Salvation – We believe that salvation is the free gift of God that can not be earned through any works of righteousness (Romans 3:23-24; Ephesians 2:8-9). We believe God's gift of salvation is bestowed upon all who put their faith in the finished work of Jesus on Calvary's cross. We believe that at the moment one puts their faith in the finished work of Jesus, they

are indwelt with the Holy Spirit and thereby placed/baptized into the body of Christ permanently. We believe that there is no salvation in any of the world's religions nor do they provide access to the true and living God. That is to say, we stand on the words of Jesus found in John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." (1Timothy 2:5 and Acts 4:12)

The Great Commission – We believe it is every Christian's duty, Minister and Laity, to seek the fulfillment of Christ's great commission. That is to say, every believer should be active in some form of evangelism to the lost, there are no exceptions (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Resurrection – We believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very nucleus of our Christian faith as it validates the claims of Jesus Christ while setting our Christian faith apart from any other religion. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity and other religions become like oil and water, they will never mix. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body that was nailed to the cross. That is to say, Jesus' resurrection was literal and physical, not spiritual (John 20:26-27; Luke 24:39).

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ – We believe in the literal, physical advent of Jesus, to the earth to establish His kingdom on earth and to reign in righteousness (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, Zechariah 14:4). We believe in the personal, imminent, pre-tribulation coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to rapture His church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Sovereignty of God – We believe that God is sovereign and He does as He pleases. God is not governed by any circumstances outside of Himself, but only by His own good pleasure. God thereby determines the result of all people, events and things. We believe that the result of God's sovereignty is that His purpose will be achieved no matter what. Nothing can thwart God's plan: history will be worked out according to the pre-determined will of God regardless to what we believe, think or feel.

Tongues – We believe that the tongues from Acts and 1 Corinthians were for the infancy stage of the church and are not normative in the current church. That is to say, that one may or may not speak in tongues at conversion or at anytime in their Christian walk (1 Corinthians 12:30). We believe that tongues is a evidence that one has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit but tongues are not the only evidence that one has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the manifestation of any spiritual gift is an evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-30). We believe in the Bible order given for tongues in the church. That is to say, when someone is speaking in

tongues there should be an interpreter and the number of those speaking should be limited to two or three at one time. If there is no interpreter, the one speaking in tongues should keep quiet in the church. (1Corinthians 14:26-28)

Homosexuality – We believe homosexuality is a sin and carries the same penalty as any other sin (Romans 1:26 and Leviticus 18:22). That is to say, homosexuality is not singled out a sin greater than another sin. We believe same sex marriages are unbiblical and should not be performed by the church. That is to say, same sex marriages go against God’s design for life long partnerships between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:18-25). We believe it is unchrist like, unloving and unbiblical to exclude or in any way deter any homosexual that has acknowledged their behavior as sin, from their God-given right to be a member of any church. That is to say, homosexuals must acknowledge the fact that their lifestyle is sin and come to any church looking for help and not think it is the churches responsibility to change their biblical position on homosexuality.

Political Correctness – We believe the church should avoid political correctness whenever biblical teachings/principles would be compromised to be considered politically correct. That is to say, the church will obey God and not man (Acts 5:29).

Healing – We believe that the context of Isaiah 53:5 (“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.”) is emphatically clear and refers to spiritual healing, not physical. That is to say, “transgressions” and “iniquities” are not physical illnesses but spiritual. We believe that Isaiah 53:4 (“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.”) does refer to physical healing. However, the physical healing Isaiah is speaking of is a reference to Jesus’ healing ministry (Matthew 8:16-17). We believe that God is still healing the sick and Jesus’ death on the cross made provision for physical healing. That is to say, although provision has been made for physical healing through the finished work of Jesus on the cross, God does not heal everybody (2 Timothy 4:20 and 1 Timothy 5:23). We believe that God is sovereign and may choose not to heal or he may choose to heal, there is nothing we can do to change the will of God for our lives.

Prophecy – We believe that God still speaks through prophets as he has done in the past. However, there are many charlatans that claim to be prophets but are not. We believe that true prophets of God prophecy in the name of Jesus Christ and what they say comes to pass, there are no exceptions. We believe false prophets, those whose prophecies do not come to

pass or are untrue, should be openly rebuked for the sake of the church. We believe the gift of prophecy is serious and not to be taken lightly. We believe that God is against those that prophecy falsely and speak lies in his name (Ezekiel 13:6-9 and Deuteronomy 18:20).

Prosperity/Word Faith Movement – We believe that the current Word faith/prosperity movement is preaching/teaching another gospel that is not taught in the Bible. That is to say, for example, the Bible does not teach the idea that we are little gods with the power to create our own reality by speaking words of faith over our lives. Nor does the Bible teach the idea that we have the power, with our words, “To call things that are not as if they already were.” According to the Bible, it is God who calls things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). We believe that a large number of preachers/teachers have crept into the church and are preaching/teaching another gospel that is harmful to the body of Christ. For example, one famous preacher/teacher denies the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, while another denies the trinity. Still another preacher/teacher predicted Jesus would appear physically in one of his crusades. We believe the church needs to develop a berean attitude towards all preachers/teachers and search the scriptures to see if what they are saying is correct/true.

Physical Death – We believe physical death can best be described as the separation of the soul/spirit from the body. We believe that reincarnation is not taught in the Bible. That is to say, we die one time and after that there is judgment (Hebrews 9:27). We believe the soul/spirit is eternal and never dies nor sleeps after separating from the physical body (Revelation 6:9-10; Luke 16:22-24). We believe that every believer goes immediately to be with the Lord when physical death occurs (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Chapter 6

Study Tools You Need

In order to better understand the Bible, know the difference between truth and error, and communicate biblical truths, you will need some basic study tools. However, you must always remember that no study tool or study material should never replace the plain teaching of the Bible. As you grow in your Christian walk, your Christian library will also grow. That said, the tools listed here are the first books you will need as you begin your Christian journey. These tools, listed in their order of importance, are the following:

1. Study Bible – Although most basic bibles are good to have, a study bible is a must have for the new Christian. Unlike the basic bibles, study bibles will have maps, footnotes, helpful charts and various study helps. In my opinion, those who avoid the use of study bibles in favor of using the King James Version (KJV) only are more likely to be in error in their interpretation of scripture than those who study bibles.

This is not to say that there is something wrong with the KJV, the KJV is a good translation. However, without the helpful footnotes, etc. Typically found in study bibles, it is easy to misinterpret. While there are many study bible available that are good, this author's preference is the "New International Version" (NIV) study bible. There are a few bibles that are to be avoided, they are:

- "The New World Translation" (N.W.T.) This is the standard Jehovah's Witness Bible. In this Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses have added words and removed words to make this Bible say what they believe.
 - "Dakes Annotated Bible"
2. Bible Dictionary – As you study the Bible, you will come across words that will need to be defined in order for you to grasp the meaning of a particular passage or teaching. A good Bible dictionary is a must have for every Christian that wants to understand God's word. There are many available, you might do well by asking the sales person at your local Christian bookstore which dictionary is best for you.
 3. Exhaustive Concordance – In the back of most Bibles there is a concordance that contains key words from biblical passages. However, these concordances are very limited. They usually list only the words most frequently used by Christians, leaving the other biblical words out. An exhaustive concordance will contain nearly every word found in the Bible.

The words usually not found in the exhaustive concordances are the words you probably will not be looking for anyway. For example, “if,” “is,” “the,” “it” or “can” are not words you would be looking for in the Bible. The exhaustive concordance is extremely helpful when you are preparing sermons or searching the Bible on a specific subject. For example, if you wanted to find out what the Bible says from Genesis to Revelation about the “soul,” you would use your exhaustive concordance to show you every place the word “soul” appears in scripture. You would then turn to each passage listed to see what the Bible says about “soul.”

4. Systematic Theology Back –

Chapter 7

What About Other Religions?

There are a lot of different religions in the world today. You have Islam, Mormonism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism secular humanism, etc. That said, many think that Christianity is just another religion or “ism” like the rest. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact is, Christianity is unique among the world’s religions, and here’s why:

- Unlike other religions, Christianity is historic and evidential. The fact is, Jesus himself is a figure of history. He was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of Caesar Augustus, and was put to death by Pontius Pilate, a first century roman governor. In addition, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection have come to us through eye witness accounts. In **2 Peter 1:16-18** (NIV) we read, “¹⁶***We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*** ¹⁷*For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’* ¹⁸***We ourselves heard when we were with him on the sacred mountain.***”

In **1 John 1:1-4** (NIV) we read, “¹***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the word of life.*** ²*The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.* ³***We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us.*** *And your fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.* ⁴***We write this to make our joy complete.***”

In **Acts 5:30-32** (NIV) we read, “³⁰***The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.*** ³¹*God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.* ³²***We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.***”

- One thing all the founders of major religions of the world have in common is the fact that they are all dead. Christianity is unique in that its founder is still alive. In **Matthew 28:6** (NIV) we read the words of the angel at the tomb the first Easter Sunday morning, ***“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”***

To be sure his audience knew that Jesus rose from the dead, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (NIV), *“³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”*

In essence, Paul is telling his audience that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brothers and many of them were still alive so they could go and ask those still living if they had any doubts.

- Unlike the founders of other religions, the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, claimed to be God. In John 10:31-33 (NIV) we read, *“³¹Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him. ³²But Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’ ³³‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘But for blasphemy, **because you, a mere man, claim to be God.**’ ”*

Chapter 8

Why the Bible?

Claim of the Bible

There are many evidences that the Bible is an entirely unique book, quite unlike any other book or writing. The unique claims within the Bible itself bear witness to its unusual character. Some thirty-eight hundred times the Bible declares, “God said”, or, “Thus says the Lord” (e.g. *Exodus 14:1; 20:1; Leviticus 4:1; Numbers. 4:1; Deuteronomy 4:2; 32:48; Isa 1:10; Jeremiah. 1:11; Ezekiel. 1:3; etc.*) Paul also recognized that the things he was writing were the Lord’s commandments (*1 Corinthians 14:37*), and they were acknowledged as such by the believers (*1 Thessalonians 2:13*). Peter proclaimed the certainty of the Scriptures and the necessity of heeding the unalterable and certain Word of God (*2 Peter 1:16-21*). John too recognized that his teaching was from God and to reject his teaching was to reject God (*1 John 4:6*).

In response to those who would reject the above-mentioned argument, it should be noted that the writers who made those claims for the Scripture were trustworthy men who defended the integrity of the Scripture at great personal sacrifice, some with their lives. Jeremiah received his message directly from the Lord (*Jeremiah 11:1-3*), yet because of his defense of the Scripture some attempted to kill him (*Jeremiah 11:21*); even his family rejected him (*Jeremiah 12:6*). Counterfeit prophets were readily recognized (*Jeremiah 23:21, 32; 28:1-17*). However, the Bible’s claims should not be understood as arguing in a circle or by circular reasoning. The testimony of reliable witnesses particularly of Jesus, but also of others such as Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, and Nehemiah in the Old Testament, and John and Paul in the New Testament; each of them affirmed the authority and verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

Continuity of the Bible

The divine origin of the Bible is further seen in considering the continuity of its teaching despite the unusual nature of its composition. It stands distinct from other religious writings. For example, the Islamic Koran was compiled by an individual, Zaid ibn Thabit, under the guidance of Mohammed’s father-in-law, Abu-Bekr. Additionally, in A.D. 650, a group of Arab scholars produced a unified version and destroyed all variant copies to preserve the unity of the Koran. By contrast, the Bible came from some forty different authors from diverse vocations in life. For instance, among the writers of Scripture were Moses, a political leader; Joshua, a military leader; David, a shepherd; Matthew, a tax collector; Luke, a medical doctor; Paul, a rabbi; and Peter, a fisherman.

Moreover, the Bible was not only written by a diversity of authors, but also in different locations and under a variety of circumstances. In fact, it was written on three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Paul wrote from a Roman prison as well as from the city of Corinth- both in Europe; Jeremiah (and perhaps Moses) wrote from Egypt and Africa; most of the other books were written in Asia. Moses probably wrote in the desert, David composed his Psalms in the countryside, Solomon contemplated the Proverbs in the royal courts, John wrote as a banished person on the island of Patmos, and Paul wrote five of his books from prison.

It is apparent that many of the writers did not know of the other writers of Scripture and were unfamiliar with the other writings, inasmuch as the writers wrote over a period of more than fifteen hundred years, yet the Bible is a marvelous, unified whole. There are no contradictions or inconsistencies within its pages. The Holy Spirit is the unifier of the sixty-six books, determining its harmonious consistency. In unity these books teach the tri-unity of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the fall and depravity of man, as well as salvation by grace through faith. It quickly becomes apparent that no human being(s) could have orchestrated the harmony of the teachings of the Scriptures. The divine authorship of the Bible is the only answer, this no reasonable person can deny.

Chapter 9

What About My Past?

Contrary to the world's opinion, there is only one (1) unpardonable sin recorded in scripture. In **Mark 3:28-30** (NIV) we read, *“²⁸I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. ²⁹But whoever blasphemies against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin. ³⁰He said this because they were saying ‘He has an evil spirit.’”* So there we have it from Jesus himself, **“All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them.”**

The only exception is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, for that, Jesus said that person **“will never be forgiven.”** That means the man or woman that has committed the most heinous sin(s) can be forgiven. The forgiveness for sin we received when we accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior goes against the world's idea of forgiveness. Some people will forgive the “little white lie” told to them or the small amount of money stolen from them, but they will not forgive the man or woman that murdered their family member, nor will they forgive the rapist or child molester. However, God not only forgives the murderer, rapist and child molester, he forgives “all” sin and blasphemies we commit. The only exception is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which none of us living could have committed.

To commit the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the following must be present:

1. Jesus must be present healing the sick and driving out demons
2. You saw Jesus healing the sick and driving out demons and you knew he was doing it by the power of God, but instead you said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub!” by the prince of demons he is driving out demons!” (Mark 3:22)

So unless you are 2,000 years old and you were there witnessing Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons by the power of God and you said he was doing it by the power of or through “Beelzebub, **you did not commit the unforgivable sin.**

That said, all the sins of your past have been forgiven by God because of your trust you put in Jesus Christ by accepting him as your Lord and Savior. Not only that, your present and future sins have already been paid for on the cross. Does that mean we can continue to sin deliberately? Absolutely not. In **Romans 6:1-2** (NIV), we read, *“¹What shall we say,*

then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Although our sins, past, present and future have been dealt with by Jesus on the cross, we sometimes have to deal with the earthly consequences of our sins. Yes we are going to heaven, yes we are a child of God, yes we are saved, but sometimes God chooses to let us suffer the consequences for our sins.

The biblical example is the thief on the cross. In **Luke 23:32-33** (NIV) we read, “³²**Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.** ³³*When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.*” Here, Jesus is crucified with two (2) criminals, one on his left, the other on his right. These two (2) criminals are being executed for their crimes. However, one of the criminals has a change of heart while on the cross and acknowledges Jesus as his Lord and Savior before he died. In **Luke 23:39-43** (NIV) we read, “³⁹*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”* ⁴⁰*But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”* ⁴¹*We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.*” ⁴²*Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* ⁴³*Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*