Christian Reflections in Old Age

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Christian Reflections in Old Age

Education

Most governments around the world make "education" compulsory for their children. Forced state education is a dreadful thing. Prizing children from their parents against their will and forcing them to sit for years in classes with children their own age, only engenders bullying, peer pressure and gang culture. But because this is both compulsory and free, most parents go along with it as the easiest option. Yet it's always the children that suffer in the end.

In the West, typically, governments would pay for their children to have a minimum of eleven years of education, between the ages of 5 and 16. And that doesn't include any pre-school nursery education or any education received as they start to specialise in subjects for whatever profession they choose to follow afterwards. That's an awful lot of time in education. Maybe even up to a quarter of an average lifespan. Only half of an average lifespan is spent actually working, and the other quarter in retirement. So we are faced with several fundamental questions:

Do we really need to be educated for such a long period of time?

What are they teaching us?

How much of what we are taught is propaganda, the government telling us what to think?

And, of all the subjects we learn at school, of all the facts we learn and have stored in our minds, how much of it do we really ***need*** to know?

Only reading, writing, and arithmetic are useful in this life. These basics can be taught in, maybe, three years maximum. Why do we need any more formal education than that?

On top of those subjects, only what we need for our profession is actually necessary, which we can learn on the job, rather than needing fancy educational establishments to do it for us. University professors: get a proper job.

The following subjects, amongst many others, are utterly, totally and completely useless:

Dance, Sport, Drama, Music, Art, Literature, Politics, Astrophysics.

Why study any of them? Why? Answer me. There's no point in any of them.

Other subjects can be very useful, but specialised, and only needful to be studied by those going in to such professions, for example:

Medicine, geography, engineering, technology, metalwork, carpentry, economics, science*.

[*By "science," we mean science doing something useful, such as developing medicines, or diagnostics (e.g. medical tests, forensic science etc.). Many stupid, ignorant people go into science thinking they can work out the origin of the universe, find out the age of the earth, find life on other planets, discover how the dinosaurs lived, or some other great thing. But such like investigations are totally useless, because there is NO POINT WHATSOEVER in any of them. Let's suppose for a moment that scientists can come up with definitive answers to all these things. So what? How is it going to affect our everyday lives in any way? It isn't. Such "knowledge" is a waste of time and effort. The use of "science" in pursuing such things is a completely wrong use of an otherwise useful subject.]

Millions are in the education system, as pupils or teachers, and most of it is pointless. And we wonder why youths end up hanging around street corners with nothing to do. They are cleverer than we think, because they've obviously realised already that most of what little education they have been given has been a waste of time. Thousands more are in our universities learning what? Most people fit into the system and think that what they are studying is important. But only a small minority of subjects have any real use. We are all expected to fit

in to a certain way of doing things, and it's the easiest thing in the world just to follow along, only to find out in the end that it has all been completely pointless.

Why do we do the things we do? Why? Why? What's the point in most of it?

We MUST answer this question. Otherwise, what's the point with our lives? We learn useless things, we are only here for such a short space of time, then we die and are completely forgotten about. Who are we? What's the point in any of it? Why don't we just despair and blow our heads off?

We don't despair exactly because we ***know*** that this is the absolute truth. We ***know for sure*** that this is the situation. If we don't come to realise that nearly everything we have done and learned has been pointless, and we are still trying to fill our lives with things of absolutely no consequence, scared stiff of realising the truth, then these are the poor people with the real problem. Because they are living a lie.

So, if life is pointless, then why continue with it? But it is not ***life*** itself that we are saying is pointless, rather it is most of what we have learned and done that has been pointless. And the finger needs to be pointed squarely at our educators. The whole system is wrong. Everywhere we look we are taught to live for self. Self-worth, self-acceptance, self-esteem. These are the buzz words with our educators. Me, me, me all the time.

But it's not all about me. If our lives were all about me, then indeed we could legitimately ask the question: What's the point? If life was all about me, then there really is no point in living, because, who am I? I'll be dead and forgotten about soon enough.

So, what is life all about, if it's not about me? Is it about others? Should I help others more? Well, yes, that would be useful. That would be an improvement, if we could have the opportunity to help others. But what are they seeking after? Are not they living for themselves as well? In which case helping them would be pointless too.

Should we serve a greater "good," like our country? Join the armed forces? Be loyal to the king? Something far greater than ourselves and our immediate surroundings? Well, no. Why should they be right? We could end up finding ourselves on the "wrong" side in a war. Except that we will have been whipped up to believe that our side is always right, and foreigners are always wrong. How stupid is that?

So we need to look for an even greater good than a country. Far above ourselves. How about humanity in general? How can we help humanity? But why should we help humanity? They are all self-centred, self-indulgent creature just like ourselves. Why should we help them? What "good" could that ever do? It couldn't.

So we are left with only one answer. We need to serve a greater "good" than even humanity. The greatest possible "good" is the One true living God, Lord of heaven and earth, who created us, and upholds all things in His providence. He is the only One worthy of worship, of service, and of living our lives for, because none of us are worth anything.

"But I don't believe in God," we may say. What do we believe in then? What our educators have taught us? That's not the answer. What our religious leaders are teaching us? No. How do they know anything? How do they know what life is like beyond this world? They don't. They're making it up.

"But they'll teach me about God, won't they?" Well, not necessarily. Most religious leaders just want to be looked up to. They want to be seen to be so important. Spiritual leaders over the weaker members of the community. We shouldn't give them the satisfaction of letting them think we need them. That's exactly what they want.

God can only be found out about in the Bible. "So I should go to Bible college, then?" No! For the same reason as above. People love being called "Professor" and "Doctor of Divinity".

The only way to find out about God for ourselves is to ask Him directly. If we are genuine with God, He will answer. And we can have a real, living relationship with the One true God. Forget men. Forget our "educators." Without God they know nothing. With God teaching

us directly, we can know everything we need to know to live a fulfilled, satisfied life. And not just in this world, but He will lead us beyond death to an eternity with Him. Who would not want this? Only those who think far too much of themselves. And I'm truly sorry if that is you.

Jeremiah 29:13
And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7,8
Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

A Message from that Kid You Bullied at School

Do you remember that weaker kid you bullied at school? That's actually a silly question. OF COURSE YOU DO. You continually bullied him and went off laughing with your mates every time. It was "fun" to you. And now you've grown up and are living a fairly clean, responsible adult life, that kid has been almost forgotten about. After all, we all did it, it was "harmless" fun, just a normal part of growing up. Really?

Actually, it wasn't harmless at all. You probably affected that kid for the rest of his life. Have you done anything about it since? Have you at least apologised? Maybe you've not had the opportunity, you've both gone your own separate ways. But whether you had the opportunity or not, have you ever thought for one moment about him since you left school?

Your actions changed a person for ever. He's not going to be the same as he could have been otherwise. He's not going to be like you, have the opportunities you had, do the things you do. He's scarred mentally for the rest of his life. Are you happy about that? You've not bothered doing anything about it since, so you must be.

Why are you happy having hurt someone so much? Is that a good thing? Of course it isn't. Think about him. Every day, think about what you did to him, constantly, maybe for several years. What a disgusting creature you really are.

"But that's his problem," you may say. But it's YOU with the real problem. Just because you and your classmates were in the majority, doesn't make it right. Do you understand that?

"But I'd never do that today, I've grown up," you may say. But you still step on people's toes when you can. It's still "me first" in your decision making in your life. You may not make fun of people in the same way you did when you were at school, but in adult life you simply find more subtle ways of getting your own way. Your life is still me, me, me all the time. Which affects others. They can't necessarily do what they

wanted to do because you got in the way. This is the same thing now, as bullying was then.

What is your life?

Do you really think you're just going to get away with your actions, the "harmless" fun you had at school bullying the weaker kids? The selfish decisions you make about your life even now?

Today, we have the streets full of knife crime, gang culture, hard drugs and sexual predators. Where do these all stem from? The human heart. That's also where bullying at school comes from. And bullying becomes a catalyst for all these other problems later on.

IS THIS YOU? "Of course not, I wouldn't do anything like that," you may say. To which I say, "Nonsense!" You'll at least watch porn, drink a little too much, especially with friends, and may even dabble in "recreational" drug use on occasions. So, that's all right is it?

Now, you may not go further than this because, after all, you want a stable society. And you want to avoid the possible consequences of being caught doing anything illegal. But if there were no consequences, as seems more and more to be the case in our country today, would you? When law and order breaks down in a nation, what happens? Looting, raping, pillaging and all kinds of other filthy practices. Because there's nobody to stop them any more.

This is what we're like by nature. And then people say they don't believe in hell. Of course there must be such a place. Eternal conscious torment in body and soul in hell fire forever is exactly what every one of us deserves for our disgusting behaviour on this earth. Right from when we were a child, bullying that weaker kid in our class. You remember him, don't you? Of course you do. Stop pretending you don't deserve to go to hell for ever, because you do. We all do.

So, how do we get out of this situation? We can't, unless we come to a Saviour. Only Jesus Christ can save us from our sins. And we don't just come to Him, saying, "Yes, yes, I believe." Words mean nothing. Lots of people do that and it makes no difference in their lives. We have to

genuinely mean it and ***want*** to repent and change our ways. But people are quite happy not changing their ways, so any words will make no difference at all. Words are meaningless. Only a real heart desire to change is the answer. And rapists, murderers and sexual predators don't want that. So they'll stay the same and go to hell in the end. And that's YOU.

Acts 3:19
Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord

Luke 13:3
Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Religion

We can't say that all religions are true, because they aren't. We need to stop pretending that all religions lead to God because they don't. All religions are different from one another. They all teach completely different things. There can be only one "true religion" or philosophy of life. That "true religion" must be the one that can both recognise the fundamental problem with this world, and have the correct solution.

This "true religion" is what we ought to understand as truth. All other religions and philosophies of life must be **rejected** because they either don't recognise the problem, or, if they do, they don't have the correct solution. In other words, they are **wrong**. Yes, the religion or philosophy of life that we hold, or were born into and brought up with, may be **wrong**. Have we ever thought about that? Believing a religion that is **wrong** is believing a lie.

(1.) Recognising the problem

If we don't think there is a fundamental problem with the world at all, then we need our heads examining. It is obvious that there is a problem in the world. A big problem.

What is it? Evil. The world is full of evil.

We can straight away **reject** any religion or philosophy of life that cannot see this. Consequently:
(a.) We need to define "evil" correctly.
(b.) We need to find out where "evil" comes from.

(a.) Defining "evil."

An atheist cannot define "evil" nor say where it comes from. It is a total mystery to him. In fact nothing is "evil" to him. Everything is the way it is just because it is the way it is.
– Therefore atheism has no morality.
– Therefore atheism is meaningless.

Atheism cannot even recognise that there is a problem, let alone tell us what that problem is. Therefore atheism must be **rejected**.

Neither a Buddhist nor an Hindu can define "evil" nor say where it comes from.
– Therefore neither Buddhism nor Hinduism has any morality.
– Therefore Buddhism and Hinduism are also meaningless.

Both these religions believe in reincarnation. Endless cycles of life. In these religions, "I" don't really exist as myself, rather "I" am just an incarnation that will disappear again shortly and become somebody else. Therefore:
(a.) Nobody has any responsibility for anything they do.
(b.) There is no incentive to say sorry to anybody for anything.
(c.) There is no incentive to help anyone in need.
(d.) If we don't know what we've done wrong in a "previous life," how can we ever improve? We are bound to make the same mistakes over and over again.

One look inside any Hindu or Buddhist temple and we will find statues of many "gods." But none of them can be a real "god" at all because none of them can be all-powerful. Just a bit bigger than us, that's all. And, in any case, any religion that has "gods" with elephant heads, blue faces, or any other frightening appearance, are figments of drug-induced imaginations and cannot possibly be real.

Neither Buddhism nor Hinduism can define nor even recognise the problem of "evil." And both are filled with so many other ridiculous ideas, therefore these religions must be **rejected**.

There can only be one God who is all-powerful. "Evil" can only be defined by reference to that One God. "Evil" is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of that God.

– If there is no God, "evil" cannot be defined, because there are no laws.

– If there is more than one "god," which one are we following? What defines "evil" would differ in each case.

– If we say that the law is defined by "the will of the people," then different people groups have different ideas. Cannibals think it's perfectly all right to eat people. And in any case, "the will of the people" always changes over time.

Therefore only monotheists can define "evil" correctly. So, "true religion" can only be found in a monotheistic religion. Every other religion or philosophy of life must be **rejected**.

(b.) Where does "evil" come from?

– "Evil" could come from a demonic spiritual world completely separate from ourselves. But we can't change a demonic spiritual world. And we can't know anything about such things anyway. So we must **reject** trying to solve the problem of "evil" by attempting to "exorcise" it. We don't know what we're doing.

– "Evil" is out there in the world, we read about it in the news every day. But we can't change the world out there. So we must **reject** trying to solve the problems of the world in political movements. If we form a political movement, we are adding to the world's problems, not solving them. Politics cannot change the human heart.

– "Evil" is far more local than that. It's in our town, in our street. We know of child abusers and sexual predators living near us. But we can't change our neighbour. We can advise him that what he is doing is not right, we can get him sent to jail, but we can't change his heart. We can't actually stop him doing what he does. So we must **reject** all forms of counselling, because outward help can only advise, not change anyone.

So, where does "evil" come from? From within ourselves. From the human heart. All we can do is deal with the problem of evil within ourselves as individuals. We can't deal with it in anybody else. Only people individually being changed from within can solve the problem of "evil."

(2.) Finding the Solution

So far, we have found out that the "true religion" must be a monotheistic religion that believes in each individual human being needing to be changed from within. Everything else must be **rejected**.

There are two popular ideas we now need to examine:
(a.) Many believe they have the one "true religion" by birth.
(b.) Many believe that "true religion" is living a "good" life.

(a.) Religion by birth

Millions believe they have been born into the one true religion, so they don't need to think any more about it. After all, their family has been in that religion for generations, so surely they must be right. And some are prepared to fight to the death if necessary to defend this idea. This is madness. It just isn't logical. Maybe we and our family have been wrong for generations.

And nobody can go back all that far into their family history anyway. For example, no Jew today can prove he is directly descended from Abraham.

Even if we have been born into the one true religion, surely we shouldn't just blindly accept that. We should always try to think things through for ourselves, and then believe what religion we conclude to be the truth. And we should all have every right to change our religion whenever we come to new conclusions. But many religions hate this idea and would throw us out of family privileges if ever we decided to leave the "family" religion. Some would even try to kill us if we left. How dreadful is that.

If we think that the one "true religion" is automatically the one we are born into, without any thought, then we are **wrong**. And if our religion seriously teaches that, then it should be **rejected**.

(b.) Living a "good" life

First of all we must ***define*** "good."
"Good" in any religion is all about keeping the laws of God, as defined in the religion's "holy book".

– Islam has the wrong "holy book." Its followers are told, amongst other things, "*annihilate the infidel*" and "*kill them wherever you may find them*." So "good" is defined completely wrongly. Therefore Islam is to be **rejected**.

– Judaism and Christianity have the correct "holy book." The difference being that Christianity claims to have extra revelation in the New Testament, which Jews reject. But, at least, in both Judaism and Christianity, "good" is defined correctly. Both have the moral law of God, summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments.

So we are only going to find the truth from somewhere within these two religions.

Secondly, we must ask ***how*** "evil" has come to be in the human heart? There are three possibilities:

– (a.) We are all born "good," and become "evil" simply by our own bad choices in life. This is so obviously wrong. We don't have to teach a child to be naughty, or selfish. He naturally is from birth. We need to teach him to be "good," because he naturally doesn't know how to be.

Muslims believe that we are all born "good." But we are not, and so Islam must be **rejected**.

– (b.) We are all born "neutral," and become "good" or "evil" depending on the environment we grow up in. This is wrong too, because poor and privileged alike are "evil." There is no distinction. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Jews believe that we are all born "neutral." But we are not, and so Judaism must be **rejected**.

Eastern Orthodox "Christians" of all persuasions (Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, etc.) also believe that we are all effectively born "neutral," albeit with a predisposition to sin. But we are not like this, and so we must also **reject** huge swathes of "Christendom" too.

– (c.) We are all born "evil." This is the only explanation for the world.

And, if we are all born "evil," it must follow that we cannot keep the law of God within ourselves, no matter how hard we try.

Many people think that true religion is about keeping the law of God by trying hard enough. But if we are born "evil" to start with, we can never do this. So any religion which seriously teaches that we actually have the ability to keep God's law and that all we must do is try hard enough, must be **rejected**.

The "true religion" must believe that we cannot keep the law of God no matter how hard we try, and therefore we need a Saviour to save us from this situation.

We are left with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. These two branches of Christianity have the problem correct. Every other religion on the face of the earth has the problem wrong, so we shouldn't even be going there. None of them know the first thing about human nature, so everything else they teach will never fit into place. **Reject** them.

So, truth can only be found somewhere within these two branches of Christianity. Let us examine them.

Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholics believe we are all born "evil," so they understand the problem correctly. But this problem is solved, in their eyes, by a priest simply splashing water in baptism. Easy.

After baptism, so Roman Catholics believe, we are no longer "evil." This is why they think it so important to rush a priest to a dying baby so it can be splashed in time. With regards sins after baptism, if we keep coming to mass and confession all our lives then all these sins can be removed by the priest pronouncing them removed as and when they occur. In other words we are under the church's control all our lives.

But, this means that, those who have been baptised are effectively the same as those who are supposedly born "good" or "neutral." But people are no different whether before or after their baptism. Splashing water by a priest, or anyone else, does not remove "evil." A

priest is a mere man. Therefore Roman Catholicism must be **rejected**. They had the correct problem originally, but have the wrong solution.

On top of this, Roman Catholicism is far too similar to Buddhism in many respects:

– Roman Catholic "meditation" is very similar to Buddhism – a withdrawing in of oneself away from the world, emptying the mind.

– Both Roman Catholic and Buddhist monks and nuns hide away in single sex monasteries.

– Both religions are full of superstitious practices, e.g. Roman Catholics genuflect and cross themselves. Buddhists always have to walk around a stupa clockwise (never anti-clockwise) etc. etc.

– Both religions engage in money-generating scams that play on our emotions for dead relatives. Roman Catholicism believes that after death they all go to a place called "purgatory," and time for dead relatives there can supposedly be shortened by paying money to the church. We can also pay the church to buy "leftover" good works from great "saints" of the past to help them along too. Buddhists worship their ancestors. People pay money to a "living buddha" to give them "advice." People pay money for rituals for dead relatives. All such practices are pure evil, squeezing money out of poor people by telling them things about their dead relatives in the afterlife that nobody can possibly know.

Roman Catholicism has the original problem correct, but they solve it wrongly. It is also filled with so many other ridiculous things, therefore it must be **rejected**.

None of these religions we have come across so far can help anyone solve the fundamental problem of our being born "evil." So the rest of what any of them has to say is not going to help anybody in any way. All must be **rejected**.

So we are left with Protestantism.

Protestantism

They have the correct problem. We are all born evil.

They have the correct solution. We are saved by grace through faith in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to save us from our sins, something we can never do for ourselves.

This is indeed the "true religion."

But, have we ever been to a Protestant church? Dear me! They are some of the worst places we could ever go to. What's wrong with them? Well, for example:

– Very, very light view of sin. "If Christ has saved me from my sins, I don't need to think about sin any more."
– Loud preachers exalting themselves.
– Men convinced they are right, yet all differ from one another.
– Thousands of tinpot little denominations going it alone.
– Aggressive evangelism.
– No seriousness. Too much frivolity, laughing and joking.
– No humility.

And the list goes on. How can anyone take Protestants seriously? Nobody can possibly condone any of these practices. They have "true religion," but completely wreck it. Why is this?

For the very same reason all the other churches wreck it. Because "church" is led by men, who, as we have shown, are born "evil" and cannot do "good" no matter how hard they try.

"Church" is not the answer at all. We should never trust in any "church." We trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Just read Scripture for ourselves. Read what the Lord Jesus Christ said and did. Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to reveal the truth to us. This will confirm the "true religion" in our hearts and help us grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, exactly as we are supposed to do.

"True religion" is a heart thing, not a "church" thing. And Jesus Christ alone is the answer. Never men.

The Necessity of Self-Loathing

Try this: Go to any crowded place, and take a good look at everybody's faces. They are all busy, busy, busy with their own little affairs, so confident in what they are doing and saying. Many of them are indeed positively taught to be that way. Americans in particular, and other nations who copy them, are taught from an early age to have such cocky confidence in themselves. How few in the world see that such a "me-first" educational philosophy is so foolish. And if we come to realise this truth and start mentioning it to anyone, it is we who will soon be regarded as having a mental problem. But in fact we are the only ones who are sane. It is the cocky, confident majority who are empty and deluded.

Or try this: Look around at everybody passing by, and try to spot one truly humble person. There aren't any. They are all full of themselves, busying themselves about all sorts of things of no consequence. Me, me, me all the time. Nobody, nobody, nobody humbles themselves to the dust. Yet that is the only way of being honest with ourselves. We are nothing. When we die, no one will remember us. So we need to stop thinking that it's all about "me," because it isn't.

Or try this: Look out from a high viewpoint. From such a height the tiny people on the ground look just like maggots crawling around. How small and insignificant they are! But at ground level, approach any of them, and they think that they, their opinions and their relationships with each other are so important. But they are maggots. They are nothing. The Bible teaches us how utterly insignificant we all are:

Psalm 8:4
What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Psalm 9:20
Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah.

Psalm 39:5
Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.

Psalm 39:11
When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah.

Psalm 62:9
Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

Psalm 146:3,4
Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Isaiah 2:22
Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

Isaiah 40:15
Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

Jeremiah 17:5,6
Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

All of us are really NOTHING! We must begin there. If we don't believe that, it is for no other reason than because we don't want to.

But that is not all. Not only are we so small and insignificant, we are also such vile creatures. Indeed, that's what living for self all the time inevitably makes us. We are no good to anybody in that state. The Bible teaches us about our utter vileness too:

Genesis 6:5
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21
….the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth….

Job 40:4
Behold, I am vile….

Job 42:6
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Psalm 5:9
For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

Ecclesiastes 7:20
For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Ecclesiastes 7:29
Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Jeremiah 17:9
The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Matthew 15:19
For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies

Mark 7:21-23
For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Romans 3:10-18 (quoting from various Psalms)
As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the

way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This is the absolute truth about every one of us. We are all so small, and we are all so vile. Forget self-worth, self-esteem, self-acceptance. All these are modern false humanistic philosophies of no consequence. Every philosophy men invent is a lie. They all exalt man far too highly. Look at the truth. After all, we can't get away from it, no matter how hard we try. The truth is that we are so small and so bad. Start there. Admit this, then we can start looking for a solution.

The solution to a world full of such small, vile, self-centred people like this, can be found nowhere else but in the Bible. No other religion teaches this or even believes anything like this about human nature. Not even churches believe it. Jesus Christ is the only one who has confronted this situation head on. And we can read about Him only in the Bible. The Bible alone is our manual of living in this corrupt, evil world.

Other religions may speak of how we need to do things to placate whatever god or gods they espouse. Priests or pastors in churches may speak about how "precious" we all are and how God loves us all just the way we are, regardless of our utter, wretched self-centredness. The Bible, on the other hand, speaks of our ***inability*** to placate God and our ***need*** of a Saviour.

Galatians 6:3
*For if a man think himself to be something, when he is **nothing**, he deceiveth himself.*

Surely King Solomon was right when he said:

Ecclesiastes 2:17
Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

But we think ourselves so wonderful:

Revelation 3:17
Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked

In our being so overly confident in ourselves, we can't see how stupid we really are. And as a consequence, we don't see the depth of how bad, and how selfish, we actually are at heart. That's why most people don't have time for religion. Because they don't want to come to any such conclusion about themselves. Most would admit to making a few mistakes in life, but they can't see, and don't want to see, how absolutely vile and self-centred their lives really are. We need to realise AND admit that we are all this bad. The more we look at ourselves, look back at our lives, and have a truly honest opinion about ourselves, surely, the more we will find the truth about how stupid we have been and how absolutely wretched we really are.

We must come to the point where we ***loathe*** ourselves, because we ***are*** like this, it's the truth, and we can't do anything to change that fact. We must be honest with ourselves about this. More to the point, we must be honest with God about it too. Then, and only then, can we truly cry out to Him. And He ***will*** hear us, because He is a merciful God.

Isaiah 55:6,7
Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 29:13
And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Filthy Rags

Isaiah 64:6
But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Everybody who professes to be a Christian ought to be living a life of good works.

We are called to keep God's Law:

John 14:15
If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 15:10
If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

James 2:17
Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

We are called to live a life worthy of our calling in Christ Jesus:

Ephesians 4:1
I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called

Colossians 1:10
That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God

1 Thessalonians 2:12
That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

We will be judged according to our works:

Psalm 62:12
Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

Proverbs 24:12
If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?

Ecclesiastes 12:14
For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Jeremiah 17:10
I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Jeremiah 32:19
Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Matthew 16:27
For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

John 5:28,29
Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Romans 2:6
Who will render to every man according to his deeds.

2 Corinthians 5:10
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

1 Peter 1:17
And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

Revelation 2:3
And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Revelation 20:12,13
And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

Revelation 22:12
And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

So, it is particularly important for every one who professes to be a Christian to do good works, works pleasing to the Lord.

But none of us can do this by nature:

Romans 3:10-12
As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Romans 8:8
So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

1 Corinthians 2:14
But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Hebrews 11:6
But without faith it is impossible to please him….

So, what can we do about this?

The answer to that question is nothing. All mankind is in a fallen state. We are all born with a sinful nature. In order even to begin to do good works, works pleasing to God, we must be changed from within. And we need God to do this for us, because we can't do it ourselves.

We must be "born again" of the Spirit of God, and become a "new creature" in Christ to be able to even begin such a life:

John 3:3
Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:7
Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Galatians 6:15
For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

The only way for this to happen, is for us, as individuals, to come to an end of ourselves and call upon God to change us and forgive our many sins through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:

Jeremiah 29:13
And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7,8
Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

If we are genuine with God, He will answer our prayers.

We are saved purely by the grace of God, through faith, not ***of*** any good works of our own because we don't have any, but ***unto*** good works, i.e. in order that we may begin to do good works, which we couldn't do otherwise:

Ephesians 2:8-10
For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus ***unto*** *good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

This is reality. This is the true Christian faith.

But we see all sorts of problems throughout Christendom with this.

Protestants emphasise the fact that salvation is by grace alone through faith. They understand, quite rightly, that we can't help or save ourselves, so we must be saved by the sheer grace of the Lord. They understand, quite rightly, that no amount of good works can save our souls, because we are by nature sinful creatures, and none of us can be good enough for God. We must be changed by Him in order to begin to do any good works at all.

However, it is also true, sadly, that most Protestants so emphasise salvation by grace alone, that they tend to neglect good works altogether.

And this is the caricature all other churches in Christendom have of the Protestants. The other churches all emphasise the necessity of good works so much, that they dismiss Protestants altogether as not being Christian, because they don't. They argue that, if Protestants believe that they are saved by grace alone, then they can do what they like and still get to heaven. So there's no need to bother doing good works. They're not necessary. And they see Protestants not doing many good works but simply emphasising grace, and that just confirms them in this erroneous belief.

But the truth is not like this at all. Most Protestants and all the other churches have got it completely wrong about the true nature of our salvation.

All Christians should believe in doing good works. All Christians should believe that we are saved by grace alone. But this free salvation by grace is always ***unto*** good works. The two always go together. Good works are the end of our faith, not the beginning.

Every non-Protestant church on the face of the earth believes that they need to do good works and then, maybe, just maybe, they have done enough to get themselves into heaven. In other words, they are trying to impress God all the time.

But God is not impressed with any of it. We must see our ***need*** of a Saviour before we can be saved to eternal life, and that means seeing the total inability we have within ourselves to impress God with anything. ***Then*** crying out to God for mercy:

Luke 18:13
And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I feel sorry for monks and nuns, priests and bishops, and everybody else who tries to impress God or climb the ladder of their church hierarchy in some way or other in order to try and gain God's favour. None of us can do it. Rather, they need to see their sin and inability instead. The way they dress alone shows their pride. I'm sorry, but I'm not good enough to be a monk or nun or priest or bishop. I don't dress up to try to impress others of my piety. I cry to God for mercy. I'm a sinner. I'm nothing, and God is everything.

We all need to stop showing off how pious we are to all and sundry, because we're not pious at all, we're all sinners in need of a Saviour.

A Bruised Reed

Matthew 12:20
A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

The older one gets, the clearer things become. The more we see:

– How big God really is.
– How holy God really is.
– How vile all of us really are. Vile enough that we deserve eternal conscious torment in body and soul in hell fire forever.
– How Christ is the most precious gift we can ever have, because He saves His people from their sins.

Unbelievers find these subjects utterly unpalatable. They think they're not that bad. But we all are. They think God doesn't even exist. But He does.

Young Christians acknowledge their own sin and God's existence, and they are thankful to Him for having saved them from their sins. That is all very good. But they still can't see the depth of their sin. In fact, they think that older people who do see the depth of their own sin, are just out of touch.

But they're not. As we all mature in the Christian faith, we slowly come to see all these things for ourselves. But it is a slow process. It is a gentle realisation. We all:

2 Peter 3:18
….grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.…

Christ asked the Father to:

John 17:17
Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

So, the more we read Scripture, the more we grow in grace and knowledge, the more we understand the things of God, some of

which we may have reacted against quite violently when we were a younger Christian.

So, young Christians, please don't react against older more mature believers. We don't have to agree with them all the time, in fact many of them do have cranky, wrong ideas which do need calling out, but that does not mean that they're all wrong. The longer that we're truly in the faith, the wiser we ought to be.

And, mature Christians, if we try to push new and young Christians too far too soon, by giving them too much solid meat all at once, they'll vomit it out. We have to be ever so gentle with them.

We must treat them as a bruised reed and smoking flax. We must not allow them to break or be quenched. If they are real Christians, they cannot fall away from the faith altogether, God will make sure that they grow in His own good timing, and He will keep them to eternal life:

1 Peter 1:5
Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Any wrong, forceful attitude on our part can push them away from the very truths that we are trying to get them to embrace.

And this is what the bulk of the church today is full of. Forceful, but still real, Christians who try too hard, and weaker, but still real, Christians who become disillusioned.

God treats us all as individuals. We are all at different stages in our understanding of the things of God. When we try to tell others about the truths we have discovered, we always need to treat them as a bruised reed or smoking flax and, at the same time as trying to educate them, without breaking or quenching them.

We need the Lord to give us the wisdom to be able to do this.

Ye Shall Be As Gods

In the beginning, God put Adam, the first man, in a garden to look after it:

Genesis 2:15
And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

And God told Adam that he may eat of every tree of the garden for his sustenance:

Genesis 2:16
And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat

And God gave Adam a wife, made from his side:

Genesis 2:22,23
And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

What more could Adam want? He had everything he needed to live a completely fulfilled life in the presence of God.

– ***But*** in the midst of the garden was a particular tree. It had a name. It was called *"the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."* And as soon as God pointed it out to Adam, He immediately told Adam not to eat of it, because if he did, he would surely die:

Genesis 2:17
But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Adam and his wife would not really have understood much about this tree other than the simple command not to eat of it. They would have had no idea about what the word "*die*" really meant, because in this

perfect garden, nothing died. They would just have vaguely understood that to "*die*" was something unpleasant.

They would certainly have had no idea what the words "*good*" and "*evil*" meant, because they hadn't eaten of the tree yet. In the original state in which God created them, they could only do "*good*." It would never ever have crossed their mind to do "*evil*" by sinning against God in any way. God's law would have been written on their heart, and they would always have done good without thinking, and without any thought or desire of doing anything else. Without the contrast against "*evil*," the word "*good*" cannot be understood.

– ***But*** God gave Adam and his wife a limited freedom of will, in one thing only – to decide for themselves whether they would eat of this particular tree or not. They didn't have any freedom of will to choose good or evil in anything else. They would only ever have done good in everything else, with no knowledge at all about any alternative.

– ***But*** a serpent came along and tempted Adam's wife:

Genesis 3:1
Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

We could ask, "Who put the serpent in the garden?" The answer being that it must have been God, because He created everything. We're told that he was one of the beasts of the field, so he was created on the sixth day, along with the other beasts, and man.

So, when God made the world, it was all "*very good*." But God put into that world three things that, in themselves were not bad in any way:
– the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
– Freedom of will in Adam and Eve whether to eat of the tree or not, together with a command not to do so.
– a serpent, albeit a subtile beast.

God did nothing wrong in creating any of these things. All were "*very good*." But with such things in place, in reality, man's fall into sin would inevitably happen.

So, God knew full well that Adam, and, in him, the whole human race, would fall into sin before He had even created anything. Yet this fall into sin was never God's fault, but entirely the man's fault. It was the man who freely sinned against his Creator when he didn't need to. So, God is not the author of sin. But why did God allow all this evil to come into the world when He could have prevented it? Because it would redound to God's greatest glory in the end.

God is glorious. He created all things and upholds all things in His providence. He is therefore the only One True Living God worthy of worship. And He is concerned that we should all see His glory displayed to its fullest extent. Adam and his wife saw this glory clearly in the garden. If God had just left them there in their original state forever, His glory would have been perfectly adequately displayed. He wouldn't have needed to do any more, and Adam, his wife and all their descendants would have been quite happily worshipping God in paradise on earth for ever without any problems.

But God had an even greater plan. God's Creation and Providence displays His glory perfectly well. But what if He let a world fall into sin, and then provided a Redeemer to redeem a people for Himself, a number that no man could number? All the while making sure that He was always in control of all things in His providence. Not letting this sin get out of His control in any way. Would that not display His glory even more than if the world had never fallen into sin at all? Of course it would. His mercy would be displayed in the salvation of His people, and His justice would be displayed in the damnation of the rest. These attributes of God, mercy and justice, could never have been displayed at all if the world had never fallen into sin. So allowing man to fall into sin redounds to an even greater glory to God in the end.

So that's what God did. God, before He created anything, had an eternal plan from the foundation of the world:

Matthew 13:35
That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter ***things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world****.*

Matthew 25:34
Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit ***the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world****:*

Hebrews 4:3
For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although ***the works were finished from the foundation of the world****.*

Revelation 17:8
The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, ***whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world****, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

God provided a Redeemer for His people. No created man could qualify for this task, as all men are fallen creatures. God would have to come to earth Himself as a perfect man, to die in the place of His people in order to atone for their sins. As a result of this, even His enemies are eventually going to have to bow down and worship Him in the end:

Revelation 13:8
And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of ***the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world****.*

And this would all happen fully under His control, knowing that the entrance of sin into the world would redound to His greatest glory. Hallelujah!

So all this mess we see now all around us in the world, was always in His plan. This is why it is so important to realise that God is in control of everything in His providence. We see the depth of depravity in this

world as a result of Adam and his wife eating of that tree, and it can seem quite overwhelming sometimes. But we must always remember that order and control, down to the very last fly, sewer rat, bullet and virus, is in Gods hands. So no matter how bad things seem to become for us, we needn't worry about anything. God is in control:

Matthew 10:29,30
Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Romans 8:28
And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

When the serpent came along to tempt Adam's wife, he first of all planted a seed of doubt in her mind by daring to question God:

Genesis 3:1
Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Questioning God. The fall of man is now started on an inevitable sequence of events.

The woman responds in all innocence with the truth:

Genesis 3:2,3
And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Some people make a big deal about the fact that we have no record of God telling them not to touch the tree. But the woman wasn't really lying or adding to the truth when she said this. The fact remains that God gave them a warning not to eat of the tree, and therefore the best thing they could have done would have been to keep well away from it. Touching it, or hanging around it, was a dangerous position to be in. But there was the woman, right next to it when the serpent came.

In reply, the serpent also responded to the woman with nothing but the truth. He never lied in any of this:

Genesis 3:4,5
And the serpent said unto the woman, ***Ye shall not surely die****: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then* ***your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil****.*

And we know this was truth because God confirms it later in the passage:

Genesis 22,22
And the LORD God said, Behold, ***the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil****: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.*

There are four interconnected ideas here, and all are true statements:
– Ye shall not surely die
– Your eyes shall be opened
– Ye shall be as gods
– Knowing good and evil.

We want to concentrate here on their becoming "*as gods*," but a brief note on each of the other three is also of interest:

Ye shall not surely die
Surely the serpent was lying to them here, because God had told them that they ***would*** surely die. But there is a sense in which the serpent was telling the truth, because the moment the fruit was eaten, they didn't actually drop down dead immediately. They were still in existence. But there is also a sense in which God was telling the truth too, because immediately upon eating the fruit they did die. Straight after eating, they died spiritually. They lost communion with God. He had become hidden from them. All they could see now was their own little world and nothing beyond it. A world without God. That is spiritual death. And their physical death became inevitable too, because:

Romans 6:23
….the wages of sin is death….

The fact that it took another 930 years for Adam to physically die is down to the sheer mercy of God:

Genesis 5:5
And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.

And we are all in a similar position today. Thanks to Adam, we are all now born with selfish natures:

Psalm 51:5
Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalm 53:2,3
God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Psalm 58:3
The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

But God in His mercy keeps us alive, each one of us for an unspecified amount of time, until the day of our death. And this is a mercy to us. It gives us time to repent of our sins and seek the Lord:

Acts 17:25-28
….he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being….

Life for everybody on earth, whether they realise it or not, is a mercy, until:

Psalm 146:4
His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Your eyes shall be opened
On the face of it, having our eyes opened sounds like a good thing. It was true that God was indeed hiding things from Adam and his wife, notably the "*knowledge of good and evil*." So it was true that, upon eating the fruit of this tree, their eyes would be opened to see something more than God was letting them see before. But God was doing them a favour. He was keeping the knowledge of evil from them. That could only have been a good thing, just as good parents keep knives away from their little children.

Knowing good and evil
Before their fall into sin, Adam and his wife were slaves to righteousness. They could do nothing else. They did not know what evil was. But after eating this fruit, they, and consequently all their descendants, now have a "*knowledge of good and evil*." So, does this mean that we all now have a free will to choose good or evil as we please? No. Far from it. Rather, we are now all slaves to sin. We can now only do evil. We cannot do good any more. We cannot please God:

Romans 8:8
So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

That's what inevitably happens when we are given a "*knowledge of good and evil,*" and become our own little "*gods*." We become selfish, self-centred. We're in charge now. We don't want to please God any more, we don't want to be bothered with Him. Being given a "*knowledge of good and evil*" also gives us a compelling desire to live for self in every decision we make. In other words, we are stuck in a condition where we can do nothing but evil all the time:

Genesis 6:5
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21
….the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth….

Job 40:4
Behold, I am vile….

Job 42:6
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Psalm 5:9
For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

Ecclesiastes 7:20
For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Ecclesiastes 7:29
Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Jeremiah 17:9
The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Matthew 15:19
For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies

Mark 7:21-23
For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

The only One who can have a "*knowledge of good and evil*" and not become an utter slave to self as a result, is God Himself. Which is why it is so important to realise that the Redeemer God sent into the world, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is truly God. He became a man and at the same time was sinless. No mere man could ever be like that:

1 John 1:8
If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

This means that the perfect righteousness of Christ can be imputed to His people, and their sin to Him, so they can be set free from the inevitable consequences of their sin:

2 Corinthians 5:21
For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Ye shall be as gods
What does it mean to be "*as gods*"?
– We are now in charge of ***our*** own little empires. We don't worship God any more, we go our own way in every decision we make.
– We want ***our*** glory to be displayed, not God's. We want a sense of self-worth and self-esteem. We want to be somebody in this world.
– We want to be ***our own*** boss. Make ***our own*** decisions about everything.
– We want a kingdom to rule over ***for ourselves***. With some, they become eccentric, each with their own peculiar ideas. With others, they have a frightening ability to be able to control other people, and will use it if they possibly can. We have domestic abuse situations. We have children rebelling against their parents wanting to go their own way instead. And we have grandiose people who want to control a whole nation under them. So they go into politics.

This is the world in which we live today. It's evil. And it all boils down to every one of us individually wanting to be our own little "*god*."

So, it is clear that wanting to be "*as gods*" is not the way we should be. It's certainly not the way God wants us to be. It's the way the serpent wants us to be. God wants us to return to Him in humility, and worship Him only. He is the only true and living God worthy of all worship.

The First Commandment states:

Exodus 20:3
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

We are commanded to repent of our sins and call on the One True God to give us a new heart, a heart to be finished with self and to love Him instead:

Isaiah 55:1-3
Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Ezekiel 11:19
And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh

Ezekiel 18:31
Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Ezekiel 36:26
A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Acts 17:30,31
….God…. now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Our becoming "*as gods,*" autonomous "*gods*" within our own individual bodies, apart from the One True Living God, is wrong. It is evil. It is from the serpent. It is Satanic. Only the One True Living God is worthy to be worshipped. Never, ever any of us. How dare we worship men. How dare we even want to be "*as gods*." The Christian's way is the way of self-abasement, not self-aggrandisement:

Matthew 5:5
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

We are called to get away from wanting to be "*as gods*," to flee from such a life and call upon the Redeemer, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to save us from this condition. Be finished with self-centredness and glorify the One True Living God instead:

1 Corinthians 1:29
That no flesh should glory in his presence.

But, we have a big shock in store here, because the vast majority of churches throughout history firmly believe that the ultimate goal of the Christian is that we ***should*** become "*as gods.*" This is exactly the same temptation the serpent enticed Adam's wife with. The mainstream churches are all copying him. True religion is exactly the opposite.

What do I mean? Well, many of the early so-called "church fathers" taught it. It was they who developed this false, Satanic idea. A few examples will suffice:

"*For we cast blame upon [God], because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence, that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness he declares, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are sons of the Most High.*"
— ***Irenaeus*** (c. 130-200) *Against Heresies* Book 4,Chapter 38

"*The Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God.*"
— ***Clement of Alexandria*** (c. 150-215) *Exhortation to the Heathen*, Chapter 1

"His is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills. Heraclitus, then, rightly said, 'Men are gods, and gods are men.' For the Word Himself is the manifest mystery: God in man, and man God"
— ***Clement of Alexandria*** (c. 150-215) *The Instructor*, Book 3, Chapter 1

"*Men were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments, and were deemed deserving of the name of His sons, and yet they, becoming like Adam and Eve, work out death for themselves; let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming 'gods,' and of having power to become sons of the Highest.*"
— ***Justin Martyr*** (c. 100-165) *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chapter 124

"*For if He had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but, as we have said above, capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become God...*"
— ***Theophilus of Antioch*** (c. 120-190) *To Autolycus*, Book 2, Chapter 27

"*If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be God. And if he is made God by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection from the dead.*"
— ***Hippolytus of Rome*** (c. 170-235) *The Discourse on the Holy Theophany*

"*For He was made man that we might be made God.*"
— ***Athanasius of Alexandria*** (c. 296-373) *On the Incarnation*, Section 54

"*Since the God who was manifested infused Himself into perishable humanity for this purpose, viz. that by this communion with Deity mankind might at the same time be deified, for this end it is that, by dispensation of His grace, He disseminated Himself in every believer.*"
— ***Gregory of Nyssa*** (c. 335-395) *The Great Catechism* 37

"'*For He hath given them power to become the sons of God.' (John 1:12) If we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods.*"
— ***Augustine of Hippo*** (c. 354-430) *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 50

"*He came down into our condition solely in order to lead us to his own divine state.*"
— ***Cyril of Alexandria***

"*Through the medium of the mind he had dealings with the flesh, being made that God on earth, which is Man: Man and God blended. They became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man.*"
— *Gregory of Nazianzus* *Orations* 29:19

"*becoming a god is the highest goal of all*"
— *Basil of Caesarea* *On the Spirit* 9:23

These are all our well-respected, so-called "orthodox," early Christian leaders, whom we read about in our books on church history. This is dreadful. The true Christian way is to practice self-abasement, not try, or even want, to become "*as gods*" in any way.

And all the various Eastern Orthodox churches go one step further. They don't even believe that men are born with sinful, selfish natures at all. They believe that we are all born "neutral." They may believe that we eventually, inevitably sin after we are conceived, but they argue that we are not guilty of Adam's sin, and therefore, in their mind, we aren't actually conceived in sin and sinners by nature at all. But we are:

Psalm 51:5
Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Consequently, in their belief system, there is no obstacle to our getting better and better, and becoming "*gods*" in the end. They call this process "*theosis*." To them, this is the main purpose of every believer.

Without the belief that we have inherently sinful, selfish natures, they don't even see our original problem in the first place, so how can these churches be of any help to anyone?

And becoming "*gods*" is also the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church:

"*The Word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature': For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that*

man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God. 'For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.' The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."
— Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 460

"*Now the gift of grace surpasses every capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of a partaking of the Divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature. And thus it is impossible that any creature should cause grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify, bestowing a partaking of the Divine Nature by a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle.*"
— Thomas Aquinas

On the other hand, the official teaching of Protestant churches is altogether different. They do not believe in this evil idea of becoming "*as gods.*" We are not called here to exalt ourselves to higher and higher levels of god-like self-importance, but, on the contrary, we are called here to abase ourselves to the dust and worship the One True Living God alone:

Westminster Larger Catechism:
Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man?
A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him for ever.

The promise God gives to the Christian in this life is not that he can become a "*god,*" a being worthy of worship. God forbid! Rather, the true Christian in this life is united to Christ, and is assured that in the next life he will become ***like*** Him, but he never becomes a "*god*" himself:

1 John 3:2
Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, ***we shall be like him****; for we shall see him as he is.*

Westminster Larger Catechism:
Q. 90. What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment?

A. the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and for ever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible Church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment.

Protestantism altogether distances itself from any concept of us exalting ourselves to become "as *gods*." The promise is that we shall be ***like*** Christ, not ***become*** a "christ" or a "god" in any way, shape or form.

However, it has to be said that most Protestant churches today would probably be quite happy to accept the early "church fathers" and these other churches as being truly Christian, when they are clearly not. And indeed, many Protestant churches today would try to ape the world in promoting modern humanistic self-esteem, self-worth, self-acceptance philosophies which are at least one step on the way to promoting the concept of our becoming self-centred, autonomous "*god-like*" beings, even if they don't recognise it as such.

So, we see that a large bulk of mainstream "Christendom" goes along with such a false, Satanic idea that we can, and ought to, become "*as gods*." But that's the last thing we should ever want to be. That was the serpent's idea. We should rather want to flee from such an idea, abase the self completely and worship the one True Living God, and him only:

Deuteronomy 6:4,5
Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Matthew 4:10
Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

The truth that we are all born with sinful, selfish natures, that we are all called to hate our sin and have a real living relationship with the One True Living God, who takes us to heaven to be with Himself despite our sin, has gone missing from the church completely. It has been replaced by a Satanic, man-exalting false religion believing that we can, and ought to, become "*gods*" at will, some even believing that we are not born with sinful natures at all. This is an altogether different religion to the one Jesus Christ came to give us. We cannot deal with any of these "churches." And it has all developed from too light a view of the depth of human sin, and a man-exalting desire to become little "*gods*," just as the serpent wants us to be.

Christianity versus the Church

Christianity

I am not from a church-going family. I am just like everybody else. One day, I picked up a Bible and started reading Matthew's gospel. It was wonderful. I couldn't put it down. It was so refreshing, describing a completely different way of life from everything I had ever known. So I did something I had never done before. I prayed to God, saying, "If this is real, let me know." That's the prayer we all need to offer. A cry for mercy to, at this point, an unknown God.

From that moment onwards I was changed completely. I stopped biting my nails. I stopped drinking alcohol. I started reading the Bible every day. I wanted more than anything else to live this new life. I couldn't explain what had happened to me, but knew that it hadn't come from within me. I couldn't have changed myself like that. It must have come from God Himself. And that, dear friend, is Christianity. Nothing more. A complete, internal change of life, which can only come from God. This change can happen to any of us, simply by reaching out to Him. The only thing we have to do on our part is to be absolutely genuine with Him.

I now had that most precious of things – a real relationship with the One True Living God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, who created us and upholds all things in His providence. I can communicate directly with Him. Tell Him everything. And the most wonderful thing is that God keeps and looks after His people. What a privilege! The world knows nothing of this. We should never take such a privilege lightly, but always take Him deadly seriously.

As I grew in this new faith, I began to learn more about God, and more about myself. Like most people, I knew I wasn't perfect, but I thought I wasn't too bad. But as I grew in the faith, the Lord slowly revealed to me how selfish and self-centred a person I really was. He shewed me that, underneath everything, I am a vile, stinking cesspit of iniquity deserving of hell-fire forever. And I can't get out of this mess. Everything I do is wrong. I don't want to be like this, but I am. I quite rightly hate this situation. And I suggest most strongly that, although

few of us will ever admit it, we are all in this very same condition. This is the fundamental problem with human nature. The more I understood this, the more I realised that if any good did come out of me, it would have to come directly from God, through the new life He had given to me. I couldn't possibly produce it myself.

There is only one place where we can find teaching and help to understand ourselves properly in this way, and that is in the Bible. Here is what it says about human nature:

Genesis 6:5
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21
….the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth….

Job 40:4
Behold, I am vile….

Job 42:6
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Psalm 5:9
For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

Ecclesiastes 7:20
For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Ecclesiastes 7:29
Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Jeremiah 17:9
The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Matthew 15:19
For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies

Mark 7:21-23
For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Romans 3:10-18 (quoting from various Psalms)
As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

What a breath of fresh air! A historical collection of documents telling the truth about human nature! I'm not going mad after all! Not only does our experience shew our own vileness, but the Bible confirms it to us.

The more we realise this about ourselves, the more we realise our desperate need of a Saviour. A Saviour who doesn't just lightly forgive sin and then forget about it. So many religions have that idea. A forgiveness of sin that is so easy. Sin is far, far more serious than that. It needs atoning for. We need One to die in our place, as the only way to placate the wrath of God. That is exactly what Jesus Christ came into the world to do. And not only that, but He comes into the hearts of His people and changes them permanently from the inside. Not that we become any better in ourselves, but rather we see more and more the truth about ourselves, and more and more our need of Him to do any good at all:

Matthew 1:21
And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

2 Corinthians 5:21
For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 2:20
I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

This is Christianity.

The Church

With this in mind, we ought to think that there will be some help in the church for wretched sinners such as ourselves. But we would be wrong.

The Bible is full of the subject of sin. The Old Testament is mainly the history of men rebelling against God time and time again. And the New Testament teaches us how God deals with sin and reconciles such rebels to Himself in Jesus Christ.

But, what have we throughout "church history"? Shockingly, to start with, many churches don't even believe that human nature is inherently sinful at all. All of the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Churches of the East simply don't believe any of this. They believe we are all born neutral. So huge swathes of Christendom have absolutely no idea about our fundamental problem, and so their solution will not be of any help to anyone.

Theologians prefer to invent many lighter "theories of the atonement" rather than accepting the plain teaching of the Bible. And it is obvious why this is. They don't ***want*** to accept the depth of how sinful they really are.

"Church history" has changed the real fundamental understanding of human nature to make it appear far more palatable. Sin needs to be dealt with, but then the excuses would come to lighten the problem:

– We can get rid of "original sin" simply by a priest splashing water in baptism.
– We don't have to think about sin any more because Jesus Christ has taken it all away.

– We don't deserve hell-fire forever, just a limited time in purgatory.
– Unbelievers are just annihilated after death.
– God will save everybody in the end.

And so on. Anything and everything except acknowledging how vile and deserving of hell-fire forever we really are.

Church leaders throughout history thought it far more important to be able to formulate fine descriptions of God in human language. So, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity is regarded as far, far more important than any doctrine about sin. So important in fact, that people were cast out of the church as heretics if they didn't believe it.

The only two well-known names in "church history" who understood this truth about human nature were Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century, and John Calvin of Geneva in the sixteenth. There were others, but any who really saw the truth about human nature are nearly all unknown to us. Simply because the "great" theologians of history didn't ***want*** to think about how bad they really are.

How can we trust the church, if it doesn't even ***want*** to believe the most important things about life, such as the true depth of depravity of the human soul?

Churches instead have developed for themselves whole new systems, with whole new vocabularies, which not only have absolutely nothing to do with Scripture, but are very confusing to anyone from outside. Here are some random words from various different traditions:

Eucharist
Scapular
Trinity
Archimandrite
Holy Orders
Evangelical
Antidisestablishmentarianism
Hypostatic Union
Lent
Iconostasis
Vespers

Do we know what any of these words mean? Anyone who has not been born and brought up in an environment where words such as these are regularly used, cannot possibly know what is going on. The churches are essentially speaking a foreign language to outsiders. But those entrenched in such organisations are quite happy there, knowing the vocabulary, and going along with it all.

So much of what passes as Christianity today is nothing like what Jesus Christ came to give the world. It is what men have developed over the centuries as to what they ***want*** Christianity to be like.

And many people born and brought up in one of these churches, would never go anywhere else, assuming without thinking that "their" church, the one to which their family belongs, must be the one true church, and that simply by being associated with it, they must be true Christians. But it doesn't make sense to think like that. We should think through everything we are taught and compare it with Scripture, before embracing it, not blindly follow anything or anybody.

None of this is ***real*** Christianity. Jesus Christ came to give us something altogether different. And the only way we can find out what Jesus was really like and what He taught, is not to listen to men who have never met or experienced Him, but to read our Bibles. The Bible only. No extra misinformation about Him, just the Bible.

This dreadful situation in the churches can be reduced down to the one major problem of not having a correct understanding of human nature. Nobody wanting to see the depth of their own sin. We exalt ourselves far too highly. We don't see our desperate need of Jesus Christ, but rather, we worship men. We think the "church fathers" and great "saints" of the past were so holy. We think our church leaders are such godly men. We follow our minister, priest, pastor, or whatever we call him, because, after all, he's been to theology college and we haven't. He must know what's right. But he doesn't. All theology colleges have an agenda, and only teach what their associated church believes. We should rather listen to Jesus Christ as He speaks to each of us through the Scriptures.

Look in people's faces. And our own in a mirror. What do we see? So proud. So smug. So arrogant. People's faces say to us: "I've got all the

right answers, listen to me." Cocky. Confident. That's what we're all like by nature. We think we're God's gift to the world. Then we look at photographs of church leaders on the back of their best-selling books or see their faces in their YouTube videos, and they all look so smug too. No humility on any of their faces. For a start, a truly humble person would never want a photograph or video to be taken of them at all. They would rather want to hide away from people.

"But we're made in the image of God," we may say. Yes, but we've fallen from that position. We've lost it. We're only evil continually now. We are vile. We always will be vile. We can never be anything else. But we can be saved from our sins if we embrace Jesus Christ. Then, when we die, we will be given new bodies which will be sinless. That's the blessed hope of the Christian.

We need to pray to Jesus Christ. speak to Him. Ask His forgiveness for our many sins. Daily. And, if we are genuine, He will respond. We don't need to go to church to receive His forgiveness. "Church" is, in fact, irrelevant. It teaches all sorts of irrelevant nonsense. However, once we have become a Christian, it is always good to meet with other real Christians, who will be mainly found scattered in one or other of the churches. So it's not wrong to go to church, it's good to meet these people. Rather we should never put our whole hope and trust in a church, any church, and especially in those who run them. We must put our trust only ever in Jesus Christ alone.

What is Truth?

Sin

We all have a major problem. We are selfish. Self-centred. Living for me, me, me, my pleasures, my desires. As if I was the centre of the universe. Not just that, but we are so proud, thinking we are so much better than others. How arrogant! In fact, if the real truth be known, we are vile, stinking cesspits of iniquity deserving of eternal conscious torment in hell-fire forever.

Nobody is going to ever admit that, or even see themselves as being anything like that. By nature, we are far too proud to accept such a description of ourselves. Indeed, our modern world keeps on telling us that we must never think like that. We must have a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and self-esteem. Otherwise, so they tell us, we will end up with some kind of mental problem.

But that's not true. Rather, it is those who at first agree with the world's assessment of themselves, and who then later realise that it is all wrong, who are more likely to end up with a mental problem, because they were originally taught a lie by their educators, people who they once trusted, only to find that they have been deceived.

The sooner we accept the truth about ourselves, the sooner we can get the help we need.

But we're not going to get help from men. They are too full of themselves, thinking how wonderful they are. They are the ones peddling this modern psychology in the first place. We need help from a far higher source, namely God. This is where the Bible comes in.

The Bible is the only book which acknowledges the truth about human nature:

Genesis 6:5
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21
….the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth….

Job 40:4
Behold, I am vile….

Job 42:6
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Psalm 5:9
For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

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For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

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Romans 3:10-18 (quoting from various Psalms)
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Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Salvation

And the Bible also tells us that there is an answer. God has provided a way out of this mess. That's the most wonderful thing in the world. There is no need to despair! How do we avail ourselves of this way out? The way is very simple. Ask God.

Matthew 7:7,8
Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

We don't need to do anything. As if we could impress God! We just need to simply ask. But we must be absolutely genuine in our seeking of Him, and ***want*** with all our heart to be changed:

Jeremiah 29:13
And ***ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart****.*

Hebrews 11:6
But ***without faith it is impossible to please him****: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that* ***he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him****.*

When we do ask God for help in all sincerity, He will change us from the inside. This is what all of us most desperately need:

John 3:3
Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, ***Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God****.*

2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore ***if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature****: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

We then have that most precious of things — a real relationship with the One True Living God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, who created us and upholds all things in His providence. We can communicate directly with Him. Tell Him everything. And the most wonderful thing is that God keeps and looks after His people. What a privilege! The world knows nothing of this. We should never take such a privilege lightly, but always take Him deadly seriously.

Sanctification

Once we have been changed by God, we grow in this new faith:

2 Peter 3:18
But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

But what is this growth exactly? Many Christians think that, with the Lord's help, they are slowly getting better and better all the time. But this is a great mistake. And this has created much wrong thinking throughout church history.

Even so, we have still most definitely changed. We are far, far better people after having been changed by God than before. All thanks to the Lord at work within us. But we, in and of ourselves, never actually get better and better. Christians look for a far greater hope. A new body which cannot sin. But this is promised to us after we die, not here in this world, but in the next:

1 John 3:2
Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

As long as we have these bodies, we are still the same vile sinners as ever we were:

Romans 7:25
So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

So, if we're not getting better and better, how do we become different? In many ways:

— We began to learn more about God, and more about ourselves.

— We now want to live for God, not for ourselves any more.

— We are kept from the grosser sins that we used to have no qualms about, thanks to God giving us a far more sensitive conscience.

— We now love the law of God, no longer hate it and want to keep it, although we still fall so far short of this in ourselves.

— We now hate our own selfishness. Another incentive not to pander to it.

— We now grow in grace and knowledge

— We become more and more set apart from the world and it's ways:

John 17:17
Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

All of these changes should engender humility and stop us ever boasting again about ourselves, because, all the time these things are happening to us, underneath everything, we're still no better than anyone else:

Romans 3:27
Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

It is very easy to see selfishness in others. We see plenty of it in others every day, even without the need of an experience of God changing our heart. But it's only after God has really changed us from the inside that we begin to see it in ourselves. This is what we essentially have to deal with in this life. Ourselves. We can't change others. We can't even change ourselves. But if God is living within us, we can now hate our selfish nature and want to be changed by God from within, even though we all too often still fail by letting self get in the way.

This is the real, authentic, true Christian life. It is exactly how the apostle Paul describes it as he said about himself:

Romans 7:14-26
I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

This is not a description of a person before God changed him, because there was no battle going on at all in his soul, then. Neither can we say it was something else not relevant to the Christian today, such as Paul, a Jew, telling us of his experience in relation to the Jewish law. No. It's a description of the true Christian whom God has truly changed, with the spiritual battle against the flesh continually going on within him until he dies.

The more we realise the truth about the depth of our sinful nature, the more we realise our desperate need of a Saviour. A Saviour who doesn't just lightly forgive sin and then forget about it. So many religions have that idea. A forgiveness of sin that is so easy. Sin is far, far more serious than that. It needs atoning for. We need One to die in our place, as the only way to placate the wrath of God. That is exactly what Jesus Christ came into the world to do. And not only that, but He comes into the hearts of His people and changes them permanently from the inside. Not that we become better, but rather we see more and more the truth about ourselves, and more and more our need of Him if we are to do any good at all:

Matthew 1:21
And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

2 Corinthians 5:21
For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 2:20
I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

This is the fundamental message of Christianity.

So, to conclude: True Christianity is all about three simple truths regarding ourselves:

(1.) — We are all born with selfish natures. We live for self. We are self-centred. We cannot get out of this condition by ourselves. We have no desire to. If this is not dealt with, we will get what we deserve, which is eternal conscious torment in body and soul in hell-fire forever.

(2.) — To know God for ourselves, and to escape the wrath to come, we must be "born again" by the Spirit of God. This is an internal experience which could only possibly come from God. We can't whip it up for ourselves. All we can do is cry to God for mercy, and He chooses whom He chooses:

Romans 9:15,16
For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then ***it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy***.

(3.) — Once we have been "born again" in this way, we are fundamentally changed from the inside. God comes to dwell within us. We are saved to eternal life. We grow in grace and knowledge. We become more and more set apart from the world as we learn more and more of the truth, which only the Lord can reveal to us through His Word.

The Truth and the "Church"

When people think of Christianity, they think of a "church" or "churches" that they know of, and base all their opinions about Christianity on that. And this is perfectly natural. We automatically assume that "church" is "Christianity" and that "Christianity" is "church." But this is not necessarily true.

Firstly, we see so many different "churches" around us, all proclaiming to be the one true "church," the one true expression of Christianity. They may accept other "churches" as valid, but not as the ***true*** "church," the "church" as they think it ought to be. And all these "churches" differ from one another quite markedly. They can't all represent Christianity. The best we can say about them is that each may hold ***some*** truth about Christianity, and that some will have more truth than others.

But how can we discern what Christianity is really all about, if every "church" is a mixture of this kind? How can we differentiate between the real truths of Christianity and the man-made teachings that have crept into all of these "churches"?

Well, the first thing we can do is to not just blindly believe any "church" without thinking. So many people just decide to follow the "church" they are most familiar with, usually the one their family "belongs" to. But a blind faith like that is not helpful at all. Your "church" will be wrong in many aspects.

None of us are going to get very far if we blindly trust in a "church" to tell us what is right, because every "church," indeed every person, is going to have something wrong in what they believe somewhere. Nobody, and therefore no "church," is perfect.

Secondly, God has shown us exactly what the truth is, by giving us the Scriptures. So here we have our God-given answer. Scripture alone shews us all the truth we need to know. But every "church" would immediately respond by saying that they are the one true "church" because they are the only "church" that interprets the Scriptures

correctly. Yet they all interpret the Scriptures differently. So we are no further on in our quest for the truth.

We need to discern what differences there are between each individual body that calls itself a "church," and what the Scriptures actually teach. Then we can be able to tell how much truth each of the "churches" around us actually has. Which will invariably be a lot less than each "church" actually claims.

Just to confuse matters, some "churches" have more books in what they call their "Scriptures" than others. So at least some "churches" are going to be wrong on this issue alone. Here, we will only quote from the Protestant canon of Scripture, because, out of all of them, this has the least number of books (66), all of which are agreed upon by all of the other "churches." So nobody can complain.

The Truth

Authentic, real Christianity, as taught in the Bible, is as follows:

— All men are born totally depraved in sin. We are all vile. We are all selfish and self-centred by nature. Stop pretending it's any other way:

Genesis 6:5
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Ecclesiastes 7:20
For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Jeremiah 17:9
The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Mark 7:21-23
For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

— True Christianity is all about salvation from this wretched condition:

Psalm 85:4
Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

Isaiah 45:22
Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Romans 1:16
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

1 Thessalonians 5:9
For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ

Titus 2:11-14
For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

— This salvation is available freely from God for the asking, but we must be genuine with Him, asking Him in prayer to change us. And He will:

Proverbs 8:17
I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

Jeremiah 29:13
And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7-8
Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

— This change is a real, complete change in the heart, only possible by God's working in us. We can't work it up from within ourselves. We are powerless to change ourselves in any way:

Psalm 80:3
Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Lamentations 5:21
Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

John 10:26-27
But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me

— Once this happens, we become completely different. Before the change, we loved sin and self. After the change, we now hate sin and self:

Job 40:4, 42:6
Behold, I am vile…. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Romans 8:6
For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Psalm 119:97
O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

— Knowing doctrine is not necessary for this change to occur. Knowledge of doctrine is only of use after we have been changed, in order for us to be able to perform the good works God has prepared

for us to do. Doctrine is not there as just another interesting subject to study. Neither is it there for us to try to win arguments:

Ephesians 2:8-10
For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Colossians 1:9-10
For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God

Titus 3:8-9
This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

The most important point in the whole of Christianity is this heart change. We ***must***, as individuals, be changed from the natural self-centred condition we are born into. We ***must*** be *"born again"* into a new God-given life:

John 3:3
Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, ***Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God****.*

John 3:7
Marvel not that I said unto thee, ***Ye must be born again****.*

In other words, we must be made "*new creatures*" in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a ***new creature****: old things are passed away; behold,* ***all things are become new****.*

Galatians 6:15
*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creature**.*

No "church" teaches this truth about being "born again" properly.

Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and similar "churches" would tell us that a person is "born again" simply by undergoing water baptism, a ceremony using water, officiated by a priest, and usually done on infants. But this does not involve any heart change whatsoever. So Baptists and Evangelicals dismiss that as being mere superstition.

Baptists and Evangelicals, on the other hand, would tell us that being "born again" is our having had a "conversion" experience in our hearts. But a feeling in our hearts is not necessarily a genuine change. So Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox dismiss this whole idea as simply being emotionalism.

Both of these are wrong ideas about the meaning of the phrase "born again".

Being "born again" is having a heart ***genuinely*** changed by God. Without this genuine, God-given change, we are all destined for hell fire, which is where every one of us deserves to go if left to our vile, sinful, self-centred nature that we are born with. In our natural state, we cannot possibly be a "Christian," whether we have been baptised in water by a priest or had an emotional experience or not. We ***must*** truly be "born again" by the Spirit of God and really and completely changed from within.

And once we have been truly "born again" in this way, the Holy Spirit will come to dwell within us as individuals, guiding us to the correct Scriptures and helping us to interpret them correctly, so we may understand the truth.

In our natural state, we love sin and love ourselves. With a genuinely changed heart, we now hate sin but still do it. Therefore we must hate ourselves:

Romans 7:22-25
For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

In our natural state, we either hate or are at least ambivalent towards Christ. With a genuinely changed heart, we now love Christ more than our own family, and indeed more than our own selves:

Luke 14:26
If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

This is authentic, real Christianity.

But it's not in any of the "churches."

The "Church"

Let us contrast these truths with what the "churches" around us teach.

All "churches," whether they be Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant or any other, exist separately for only one reason: their own glory.

All would say they believe Scripture (although what they define as "Scripture" may differ). And indeed, wherever the truths of the true Scriptures are preached and advanced in any of them, God can and does use it. But all "churches" have also developed so many wrong extra man-made doctrines, which have taken them over. Where these are preached and advanced in the "church," God will not work through them at all.

Christ warned us about following the doctrines of men:

Isaiah 29:13
Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men

Matthew 15:9
But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Mark 7:7
Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Colossians 2:20-22
Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Titus 1:14
Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

Such man-made doctrines hide the Scriptural truth from many people.

Many people think they are a "Christian" because they believe one or more of these man-made doctrines. But they are not, because none of them have been truly "born again" in the heart.

Many people think they are a "Christian" simply because they believe the orthodox Creeds. But the devils believe all the orthodox Creeds:

James 2:19
Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Many people born and brought up in a "church" think that theirs is the one true "church" no matter what, and they will never leave or go anywhere else, thinking every aspect of its teaching is correct. But it's not.

And even many who have truly been "born again" in the heart, can be taken in by such man-made doctrines from the "church" they attend, and they can be carried along with these false doctrines for many years. So the teachings of a "church" can be very confusing for many true believers.

All "churches" have something wrong with them somewhere. If we blindly follow a "church" or believe one "church" has everything right, no matter how big that "church" is, then we are a cult worshipper, worshipping the great god "church" rather than Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.

Now let's come to a few particular examples of wrong, unbiblical, man-made beliefs in some of the "churches" we have around us:

Eastern Orthodox "Churches":
— They deny the original sinful nature of man. They've got the problem with the human condition totally wrong to start with, so they can never have the correct solution. Which means that they don't believe that Christianity is "salvation" from anything.
— They believe we can all naturally become "gods" (Theosis).
— They believe that everybody is going to heaven thanks to Christ "harrowing" hell.
— Infants are given the bread and wine in the communion service.
— They believe marriage is eternal, and continues after death.
— They believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary.
— They don't believe that the Bible is the "Word of God." Rather, Christ is.
— They believe that the priests have the awesome power to change the bread and the wine into the actual body and blood of Christ.
— They believe that priests also have the awesome power to forgive sins on behalf of God Himself.

Roman Catholicism:
— They believe in "baptismal regeneration": That is, they believe, correctly, that we are all born in sin, but they then go on to believe that this "original sin" is taken away simply by a priest splashing water on someone (usually as an infant). This is spoken of as being "born

again." The Holy Spirit is subsequently regarded as then being "in" the person baptised. But there's no heart change. cf. Simon Magus in Acts 8:13-24.

— They believe in "Purgatory": That is, they believe that, at death, unbaptised people go straight to hell; *some* baptised members of the "church" who are particularly "holy" go straight to heaven; and all the rest of the baptised members of the "church" (i.e. most of them) go to a place called "Purgatory," a place of punishment where they need to go to have their sins burned off. All of these baptised individuals will eventually be saved in the end. The "church" sells "indulgences," paid for by the people (keeping them poor), which are declarations that can help to shorten this period of torment for either themselves or their dead relatives.

— They believe in the immaculate conception and perpetual virginity of Mary.

— They believe Mary gave us the rosary, a superstitious form of reciting prayers.

— They believe that the priests have the awesome power to change the bread and the wine into the actual body and blood of Christ.

— They believe that the members of the "church" have the duty to confess their sins to a priest, and that the priests have the awesome power to forgive sins on behalf of God Himself. [Consequently, this leads to the ridiculous conclusion that, if a priest has been consecrated wrongly or in error, all "power" he supposedly had to do these things never existed in him. So people treated by such men would have to go through the rituals, e.g. take confession, get married etc. etc., all over again, because the first time was not valid].

— They believe in salvation by faith and works.

— They believe that suffering, in and of itself, is a virtue, a "good work".

— They believe that the pope of Rome is the "vicar of Christ," and is infallible in his official teachings.

Protestantism

Evangelical:

— Being "born again" is often thought of purely as an emotional experience. In reality this may or may not be a genuine heart change.

— Their religion is too relaxed. The things of God are not taken anywhere near as seriously as they should be. There is too much frivolity, laughing and joking in their "churches."
— They have a very, very light view of sin. "If Christ has saved me from my sins, I don't need to think about sin any more."
— Many Protestant "churches" have overbearing, charismatic preachers in charge exalting themselves.
— Many people in Protestant "churches" are convinced that they are interpreting the Bible correctly, yet all differ from one another. This results in thousands of tinpot little denominations going it alone.
— They aggressively evangelise. Many of these "churches" only exist to get others in to their cosy little denomination. There is little or no teaching in their "churches." They make people feel guilty if they are not going out and evangelising, "winning souls" for Christ.
— There is often no humility.
— They believe in progressive sanctification. Some Protestant "churches" believe that we can actually become perfect in this life. Most of them, though, rightly distance themselves from such an idea, but still believe that every day in every way Christians are getting better and better. But we're not. We grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), but not in being more and more Christlike. We want to be, but we aren't.

Other Protestant:
— There are many other types of Protestant "church" which would not believe Scriptures at all. They believe all kinds of worldly liberal views imaginable. There is no difference from the world in any of these.

"Churches" Are Not Necessary

Salvation is God changing hearts in individuals.

Truly "born again" Christians would very much like to be in contact with each other. After all, these are our fellow believers. So most true Christians go to "churches" for that purpose. And that's fine, as long as we don't think everybody who professes to be a Christian in the

"church" is one in reality. Any "church" will always be a mixture of sheep and goats, wheat and tares.

Other than of use for Christian fellowship in this way, "churches" are not absolutely necessary at all.

We read of "churches" around the world being persecuted. All that tends to mean is that they, as institutions, are forbidden to do certain things (such as meeting) by various governments throughout the world.

But the world will always be against Christians. Even in a "safe," so-called "free" country, we may be able to freely set up organisations which we can call "churches," but there are still always going to be restrictions, wherever we live. For example:
— there are always fire and building regulations.
— We can't just build and set up a "church" anywhere. We need planning consent.
— We can't forbid homosexuals from holding office.
— Christians can't set up radio or television channels without a licence.

Wherever we live, the "church" will be "persecuted" in some way or other.

But we praise the Lord that true religion is inward, based on the changed hearts of individuals. "Churches" may be persecuted and disappear, but nobody can touch our inner selves:

Matthew 10:28
And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

We don't need "churches" other than as places to meet other Christians.

Separatism

What a mess the Protestant church is in. There are thousands and thousands of different expressions of "church," all independent of one other, everywhere. In fact, anyone can set one up for themselves, just the way they want "church" to be. Where is God in all this? Where is Jesus Christ? Why should anyone want to come to my tinpot little expression of "church" rather than going to someone else's? Well, I can give you all the theological reasons why my church is right and all the others are wrong, and I might be absolutely correct on all of it. But what's the point? Where's the unity? Why can't Christians just love one another?

Have we ever tried moving from one of these "churches" to another? As soon as we leave, we never get contacted by anyone from the previous "church" any more. It's as though they think themselves to be the best, and we are the weaker Christians, leaving for somewhere nowhere near as good. And in cities, there are so many of these "churches" to choose from. If we get fed up attending anywhere, we can just go somewhere else instead.

But the question is: should anybody ever separate and form their own "church" down the road?

In practice, not many of us are going to be in the forefront of doing that. However, if the "church" we are in just happens to be in the process of splitting, we may have to make a decision at some point, which makes things difficult. We will be forced to pick a "side" to be on, whether we want to or not.

This whole concept is wretched in the extreme. Should splits ever occur?
— As two strong personalities argue in the church?
— As a judicial decision is made by the powers that be in the church?
— On practical issues, e.g. Sabbath transport, women ministers?
— On theological issues, e.g. the nature of Christ, the Trinity?

We can split and split and split to try to produce a perfect "church," but it's never going to happen. So, what's the answer?

From Moses' day to Christ's, there was only one visible church, the Tabernacle, then later the Temple set up in Jerusalem. If people ever did split from this, such as the Samaritans, we hear very little more about them in Scripture. Those who "split" became an irrelevance:

Acts 5:35-39
Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men [the Apostles]. *For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you,* R*efrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.*

However, there was one notable occasion recorded in Scripture, when the ten tribes of Israel split *en masse* from the Temple worship in Jerusalem. This was a huge church "split," mirroring the national situation at the time. Jeroboam, the self-proclaimed new king of Israel, set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel and told his citizens to worship there instead of travelling to Jerusalem:

1 Kings 12:26-29
And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto R*ehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to* R*ehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Beth–el, and the other put he in Dan.*

This "split" was not unlike the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century. The "split" went along national lines. In the Reformation, if the leader of a country became Protestant, the whole land had to follow. If the leader remained Roman Catholic, the whole land had to be too. So, if you disagreed with the side the leaders of

your country came down on, the only way out was to either put up with the ensuing persecution, or leave.

And that is what happened to the ten tribes of Israel. In this "split," it was rather obvious which was the true church and which wasn't. Jeroboam had set up idols. The true worship was still in the Temple in Jerusalem. Consequently, all those in the kingdom of Israel who were true to the Lord left, and headed to Judah:

2 Chronicles 11:13-16
And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him [Rehoboam of Judah] *out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers.*

In major national "splits" of this nature, completely out of the control of the churches themselves, this is what we may have to do. Put up with persecution, or move. This is not a "split" taking place in a "church" and the aggrieved faction setting up another "church" just down the road, like the sort of thing we have today. Nothing of the kind. This is all done at a national level, where the man in the pew has no choice in the matter. He suddenly sees the authority in his national church has changed, and so he has to either go along with it or move out of the country altogether.

In Christ's day, the religious leaders, as usual, were dreadful people. They wanted to put Christ to death, because he interfered with their exalted status in the nation:

John 11:47-48,53
Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation…. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

This was the attitude of the visible church of Christ's day. If we had been there at the time, we could never have agreed with it in any way. It was Christ-hating. They got their very own prophesied Messiah put to death. Surely, knowing all this, shouldn't we not separate from such an institution? Surely, it can no longer be the true "church," can it? Well, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea were true believers in the ruling body of the church, and they didn't start a new movement. They had to be disciples of Jesus secretly, and did what they could. They at least gave Christ a decent burial:

John 19:38-40
And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

But, can a church ever become so bad that it becomes a "*synagogue of Satan*," forcing us to consequently have no choice but to leave? The phrase "*synagogue of Satan*" occurs twice in Scripture:

Revelation 2:9
I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are ***the synagogue of Satan****.*

Revelation 3:9
Behold, I will make them of ***the synagogue of Satan****, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.*

Neither occurrence of this phrase refers to a "church" at all, but to a faction within the church, specifically those who "*say they are Jews and are not.*" In other words, hypocrites. We are told to beware of them. There is no call here to "split" the church, even over the existence of such people in it. We are to leave their judgment to God.

Hypocrites were also Christ's greatest enemies in the church:

Mark 7:6
He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

Matthew 23:13-15,23,25,27,29
[13] But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.
[14] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
[15] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.
[23] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.
[25] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.
[27] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.
[29] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

We should all be wary of hypocrites, no matter what "church" we are in.

Another thing we are told about the leaders of the visible church in Christ's day, was that they "*devour widows' houses*." How evil is that. But Christ commended a poor widow who cast into their treasury all her living:

Mark 12:38-44
And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the

synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which ***devour widows' houses****, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but* ***she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living****.*

Luke 20:6,46-47, 21:1-4
But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which ***devour widows' houses****, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation. And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the* ***offerings of God****: but* ***she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had****.*

This woman sacrificially gave all she had to these charlatans. Was she simply ignorant of the fact that they were using the money she gave to devour her house in return? Or did she specifically cast her money into the visible church of the day, because the alternative would be promoting division if she gave her money to a separate "church" elsewhere?

We are told that she "cast" her money there. The Greek word is "*ballo*," the usual word for "throw," not "give," which is "*didomi*." I can't help thinking she was very upset at the direction the church leaders were taking, but still recognised the Temple in Jerusalem as the true house of God, and so committed the money into God's hands to be dealt with. Christ indeed here called it the "*offerings of God*."

Christ Himself worshipped in the Temple, and never called for anyone to "split" from it. Not even for the seemingly noble aim of forming a "purer church."

Yet, at the same time, Christ had very little to commend the Temple leadership as it was. He told them:

Matthew 23:33
How can ye escape the damnation of hell."

He acknowledged the wickedness of the church leaders, but still told people to obey them, without behaving like them:

Matthew 23:1-3
Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Is this Christ supporting an "apostolic succession" type of arrangement here, whereby, generation after generation, one set of leaders pass all their church authority on to another in direct, continuous succession? No. Exactly the opposite in fact. Christ was in the process of abolishing such an arrangement. The Jews had had an "apostolic succession" type of leadership for centuries, from Moses' day all the way up until Christ came. And we have a full record in the Old Testament of how bad it all turned out to be. And now that the very Messiah they had been waiting for had finally come, the ultimate action of the church leaders – in their positions by "apostolic succession" from Moses no less – was to have Him put to death. That's the sort of thing "apostolic succession" practised in a church inevitably leads to. Unbelievers get into the highest leadership positions in the church and pursue their own agendas, not Christ's.

Christ gave His judgment on the whole idea of men exalting themselves in the "church." This situation was not going to continue for much longer:

He said that in God's good timing, their house was going to be left to them desolate:

Matthew 23:37-39
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left

unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Luke 13:34,35
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

He said that the physical Temple would be destroyed for ever, and He will raise it up again in three days, this time spiritually:

John 2:18-21
Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.

He also said that the hour is coming when the Father will no longer be worshipped at Jerusalem, or in any other specific place:

John 4:19-24
The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

The fact is that there has only ever been one true church, and it is invisible, we can't see it. It is, and always was, made up of all those who are born again of the Spirit of God in their hearts. They know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in Him alone for their salvation. Old Testament believers looked forward to His coming without knowing His name, we look back. This one true church is

scattered throughout the world, some in national churches, some in separatist churches, some not in churches at all. The one thing they all have in common is that they all love the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah!

Any concept of a visible "church" in the Bible is clearly shown to be an edifice impossible to deal with.

In the Old Testament, God gave the Israelites details of exactly how He should be worshipped externally. So they were without excuse to not do it properly. And, as we have already seen, they were terrible examples of keeping to God's arrangement. In fact, if God had chosen any other nation, they would have been just as bad.

In the New Testament, God has given us detailed instructions as to how to set up Christian churches externally too. So we also have no excuse to not do it properly. But at the same time, God has also given us many warnings about the fact that false teachers are inevitably going to come in and completely ruin everything:

Acts 20:29,30
For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

1 Timothy 4:1-3
Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

2 Timothy 3:1-7
This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away

with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Jude 1:4
For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's good to go to a church, because that's where we are most likely to meet fellow believers. But getting involved with church politics, deciding whether we should split or not, or deciding whether we should go to this "church" or that one, is not really the issue. The bottom line is that, as long as we support any tinpot little "church" of no real consequence, we are supporting separatism.

William Perkins, an Anglican minister of the 16th Century, defending his national church, said this:

From William Perkins' *Exposition on the Creed*:
"*Christ saith, He preacheth in their synagogues and temple (John 18:20), which at that time were places full of disorder; insomuch as He called the temple a den of thieves (Matt. 21:13); and the scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the doctrine of the law (Matt. 15:3) transgressing the commandments of God by their own traditions; and they taught justification by the works of the law, as Paul saith (Rom. 10:3), They being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and going about to establish their own righteousness, which is by works, had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. Besides all this, they were loose and wicked men in their lives and conversations; and therefore Christ commanded the people that they should observe and do whatsoever the scribes and Pharisees bid them, sitting in Moses' chair (Matt. 23:2,3); but after their works they must not do; because they say and do not. Now although these corruptions and deformities were in the Jewish church, yet our Saviour Christ made no separation from it, but came and preached both in their temple and synagogues, where these seducers and false teachers were. And hence we gather that the practice of all those men in our church which separate themselves from all assemblies for the wants thereof, holding that our church is no church; that the grace which is wrought by the preaching of the Word among us is nothing else but a Satanic illusion; that sacraments are no sacraments; I say that their practice is condemned by our Saviour Christ's conversing among the Jews. For if Christ should have followed their opinion, He ought to have fled from*

amongst the Jews, and not so much as once to have come into the temple or taught in their synagogues; but contrariwise He joined Himself with them; and therefore we cannot in good conscience disjoin ourselves from the church of England."

Whatever "church" we attend, we will only ever meet a fraction of the total number of truly born-again Christians in our area. Maybe there are some good Christian believers living down our street, but we never meet them because they go to another "church."

And, if we don't go to any of these separatist "churches," but simply go to our national church instead, we are also unlikely to meet many of our fellow truly born-again Christians, because the vast majority of them have left and joined separatist "churches" in a desperate attempt to find real Christian fellowship, and/or get better Bible teaching.

If all the true Christians stayed in the national church and never "split," it would be a wonderful place to be! All the true Christians would be in one place! It may not be quite how they like it. There'd be plenty of differences of opinion. And there would be plenty of unbelievers mixed in there as well, indeed some who even deny the resurrection:

Mark 12:18
Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection….

Acts 23:8
For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit….

But it would at least be a lot better then the situation we now have, where the unbelievers have completely taken over the national church because the true Christians have almost all left.

So, whatever we do, we can't win. It's a good job that our home is in heaven:

Colossians 3:1-3
If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

There is a lot to disagree with in the national church. Many unscriptural practices are found. The list is almost endless. Evil people have inserted themselves into the highest positions in the church. Wickedness abounds. And to cap it all, most of the true believers have left. But is it any worse than the church in Christ's day???

The City of our Solemnities

Isaiah 33:20
Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken.

The biggest problem a Christian can ever have is their church. Of course, there is no such thing as a perfect church, simply because churches are made of people. But today we have a big dilemma to deal with.

On the one hand we have churches which take the worship of God deadly seriously. And that's a good thing, we certainly should take the worship of God deadly seriously. We are worshipping a holy God, and the things of God are the most serious things we can ever deal with in life. But such churches tend to be those that emphasise tradition over and above the truths of the Bible.

On the other hand, we have churches which may have fairly good Biblical teaching, but they so emphasise "fellowship" with one another, that it is at the expense of no real seriousness in the worship of God. Yes, we should have good, genuine Christian "fellowship" with all our fellow believers in Christ whenever we can find it. But, such friendly "fellowship" should not be carried over into the worship of God, who should not be treated simply as our "best pal," but treated deadly seriously. After all, He is our Father in heaven.

The churches with the most serious worship tend to be the traditionalist ones, such as all under the umbrella of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and "high" Anglicanism. They are ritualistic, which we may or may not like, but at least they have seriousness about their worship. A few years ago, I visited Notre Dame cathedral in Paris and a service was going on. There were plenty of visitors walking around, with about twenty actual participants seated in the service. The priest was speaking in French, so I couldn't understand what was being said, but the thing that really stood out for me was the seriousness of the whole occasion. Deadly seriousness is

missing from most churches today. And this is what is desperately required.

We love the solemnity of Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic church services. Even though their teaching is altogether wrong.

But, you may say, every Protestant church has something wrong with their teaching too. And that's true. There is no church on earth with perfect teaching. We all should know that.

But there is one doctrine that is so fundamental to the Christian faith that, without it, everything else taught by a church will always be wrong.

The traditionalist churches would argue that it is whether we believe in the Trinity or not that counts, or whether we believe in the two natures in one Person of Christ or not that counts. And they would throw people out of their communion if anyone disagreed with the church on these things. I believe both these doctrines, but these issues are not the point. They are not essential to faith.

The one fundamental doctrine essential for a church, is that it needs to have a correct understanding of human nature. With a wrong understanding of this to begin with, then every other doctrine the church produces will be based on a lie about ourselves. Any church that teaches such a lie will be propagating an altogether different religion which has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. Try telling that to your nearest Orthodox or Roman Catholic priest!

The correct understanding of human nature is that we are all born in sin:

Genesis 6:5
And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Psalm 58:3
The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

Jeremiah 17:9
The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Matthew 15:19
For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies

Eastern Orthodoxy, of whatever form, does not believe that we are born sinners. They believe that we are born "neutral." They may believe that we eventually, inevitably sin after we are conceived, but they argue that we are not guilty of Adam's sin, and therefore, in their mind, we are not actually conceived in sin and sinners by nature at all. But we are:

Psalm 51:5
Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

So, whatever else Eastern Orthodox churches believe and teach, it is not going to help anybody because they have not understood the problem of human nature correctly. Whatever else they teach may or may not be correct, but it never solves the problem.

So, what about Roman Catholicism? Well, they do have the correct view of human nature. Thanks to Augustine, they believe in the doctrine of "Original Sin." We are all born in sins and trespasses. Which is correct. This is promising. They have a good start, so they are worth looking into.

However, they believe in a hierarchy of priests, separate from the riff-riff in the pews, who have magic powers. They really believe that when a priest splashes water on a baby (or anyone else for that matter), they are imparting the Holy Spirit on that child at that moment in time, and "Original Sin" is thus dealt with. The child is now regenerate. It is no longer sinful by nature. It becomes "neutral." I really don't understand that. All babies have tantrums, baptised or otherwise. They are still sinful and in need of a Saviour. They have not become good or neutral, or been changed in their hearts in any way.

Roman Catholics also believe that these priests have the magic power to turn the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper into the very body and

blood of Jesus Christ. I'm sorry, but I honestly cannot believe in any class of men having magic powers to do anything. That's straight out of a fantasy novel. We may as well believe in Star Wars. So Roman Catholics do technically have the correct view of human nature to begin with, but they think they have in their hands the magic ability to solve the problem easily. Which is nonsense.

So that leaves Protestantism as the one true religion in the world. And that is correct. Protestants do believe that we are all born in sin and that we need a Saviour. This is because we can't save ourselves.

Subsequently it is from amongst these churches that we must find our place, a place where where we should be able to worship God "*in spirit and in truth,*" serving God "*acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*"

John 4:23
But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

Hebrews 12:28
….*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*

A true understanding of human nature particularly affects our understanding of salvation. Because we are all born in sin, we therefore cannot save ourselves, so we need a work of God in our hearts to do it for us:

John 3:3
Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Galatians 6:15
For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Romans 8:7-10
Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

How do we receive this work of God in our hearts? Simply by asking Him, but it has to be genuine. We have to genuinely come to an end of ourselves and genuinely cry out to Him:

Jeremiah 29:13
And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7,8
Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

This is the true religion. So every church that does not have a correct understanding of human nature will not believe in the necessity of this new birth either.

It is possible to be in a church that teaches something other than the truth and still be saved to eternal life. It is God changing the heart that counts, not what we are taught. But if we are in a church that doesn't teach the truth about human nature, then everything else we are taught in that church is never going to be of any help to us, because it will not deal with our true human condition.

I need to clarify that Protestant churches are the only ones who ***in theory*** teach this fundamental truth, because in practice, we find that most of them don't actually do so. Most of them simply don't want to believe that we are born in sin, so they change everything to suit their own purposes. So even if we are in a Protestant church, we can find plenty of false teaching based on a false understanding of human nature and consequently a false understanding of salvation.

So, what are we to do? The answer I tentatively give is to join that branch of Protestantism known as "Evangelical." "Evangelical" is usually used to mean those who teach the Bible, which would, in theory, include this correct understanding of human nature. But even here we still have a large spectrum of churches to choose from, some with better teaching than others. Nevertheless, in general, "Evangelical" churches would have the far better teaching than anywhere else, because it would be based on Scripture and not on any wrong, albeit ancient, church tradition.

Because this new birth is absolutely necessary for salvation, then "Evangelical"churches who truly believe this will also be very missionary minded. They must evangelise the world. They must tell everyone they need to be saved from their sins and come to Jesus Christ for salvation. Hence evangelism tends to be a big thing in such churches.

But there is still a problem with nearly all of these "Evangelical" churches, and that is the original problem I mentioned at the beginning, of not taking the things of God seriously enough. This is the dilemma we have today. They may have good teaching, but the worship is not as serious as it ought to be.

The services are mostly modern music. The preacher is often "chatty." God is spoken to, or about, as though He were just another member of the fellowship to chat with. I remember a few years ago, the mainstream churches in Wales had a nickname for the "Evangelicals." They were called "*Pobl y paned*," which loosely translated means "people of the tea break," because they were always having "fellowship teas."

Now, we really need to get to know, as real, genuine Christian friends, our fellow believers in Christ. We need Christian "fellowship." But in "Evangelical" churches, this becomes the main item on the agenda, at the expense of seriousness in worship. "Christian fellowship" and evangelism become the two fundamental reasons for the church's existence, rather than any serious worship, or even teaching, about the things of God.

We evangelise to bring people into the church. Then we immediately teach these newcomers how they in turn should be evangelising to bring more people into the church, so our "fellowship teas" can grow ever bigger. From the outside, all the church appears to be is an ever increasing social club (except that it doesn't increase because other people, for whatever reason, leave). We should rather be evangelising to bring people into the church so that they can get to know the Lord better for themselves, through serious worship and good Bible teaching. The fundamental purpose of the church should be that we all:

2 Peter 3:18
….grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Sadly, in many "Evangelical" churches, although the "service" may last an hour or so, the "fellowship" afterwards often lasts longer than the service. This really should not be. If this is happening in our church, alarm bells should start ringing in our minds. We go to church to worship God, not have a natter. There is plenty of time for a good natter the rest of the week.

A lot of people don't actually like huge social groups such as "fellowship teas" anyway, and they tend to sneak off before any "fellowship tea" starts. Sadly, the "Evangelical" churches seem to have nothing much to help such people. They simply cannot understand anyone who doesn't like social occasions, and think such people can't possibly be a proper Christian.

The ideal church ought to have good "fellowship" (although endless "fellowship teas" might not be the best way to go about this), but it ought also, more importantly, to have a time of serious worship.

Nehemiah gives us a good template for serious worship:

Nehemiah 9:1-3
Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month ***the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them****. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and* ***stood and***

***confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers**. And **they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God**.*

We have here a few optional, voluntary things before the service starts:
– Fasting beforehand (probably from the night before)
– Wearing sackcloth

And then the service itself:
– Standing (at least for confession of sins and the reading)
– Bible reading for a fourth part of the day
– Confessing and worshipping for another fourth of the day.
In other words, the whole service takes half a day, (e.g. a Sunday morning)

Nehemiah 12:46
*For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and **songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God**.*

We have here:
– Songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God.

Nehemiah 8:8
So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

We have here:
– Preaching from the Scriptures alone.

On top of these principles drawn from Nehemiah, we have one extra New Testament principle: The Lord's Supper. The Bible strongly suggests that New Testament believers had a weekly meeting on the first day of the week, the climax of which was the believers partaking in the Lord's Supper:

Acts 20:7
*And **upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread**, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*

1 Corinthians 11:20
When *ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.* [i.e. they weren't doing it properly as they should have been].

What is wrong with this template for worship? Traditionalist and liberal churches need to get their theology right by coming to the Bible and embracing the truth, especially the truth about human nature. That's where they go fundamentally wrong. On the other hand, "Evangelical" churches need to learn from the traditionalist churches with regards, not their theology (God forbid!), but their ***solemnity***. This is what is missing in today's church. Good Bible teaching ***and*** solemnity. Now, where can we find that?

Life

Genesis 3:19
….dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

James 4:14
….For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

As we grow, we learn things and live in the light of what we learn. This knowledge changes over time as we learn new things and reject old things we used to believe when we were younger but don't any more. As we grow old, we start to forget things, until we grow so old we can't even do things any more and eventually die. That's life.

Furthermore, we are all born in sin. We live for the sole purpose of living for and pleasing self. We only ever show kindness to other people if it suits us. Usually we want companionship, so, what appears to be kindness to others is really, underneath everything, serving ourselves, because we want friends, we want their influence, help, money or we have some other such like purpose. We don't genuinely want them for who they are in themselves at all. And others will have exactly the same idea when they befriend us. We spend our entire lives living like this, only seeing our fellow humans for what we can get out of them for ourselves.

As we grow old and become more and more useless to others, we lose most of our friends, because we no longer serve their purposes. And we treat others in exactly the same way if they no longer serve our purposes. This is how we spend our lives.

What a useless existence.

But, there is a God to whom we shall all give an account.

Naturally, most people don't want to give an account to anyone else for their selfish behaviour. So, they find it very convenient that God is invisible to our natural senses, because they think that means they can

quite happily not believe in his very existence and carry on the way they are.

Others, realising the pointlessness of living for themselves, embrace a man-made religion, an invented belief system that incorporates a supernatural world other than this one, maybe with a god or gods in control. And, the crazy thing is that they actually believe that they can please such deities by doing a few tasks themselves or behaving a certain way.

But we can never please the true God.

We are stuck in these self-centred bodies, only ever living for self. How can we ever live for God, if we can't even begin to live for anybody else?

If we want to know the truth about ourselves, then this is it.

We all, as individuals, need a Saviour to save us from this mess that we're in, because we can't get out of it ourselves.

So, let's now talk about church.

We become a Christian. We start going to church. And we find ourselves ending up following a very similar pattern in church circles to how we were in the world.

We begin knowing nothing about God at all. We grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As we grow in this new spiritual knowledge, we learn things and live in the light of what we learn. As in the world, this knowledge in us changes over time as we learn new things and reject old things we used to believe when we were younger but don't any more. And as we grow old, we start to forget things, until we grow so old we can't even do things in the church any more. And we eventually die.

So, we find that church life follows a very similar pattern to worldly life. But there is something else. As we grow in spiritual knowledge, we slowly learn that, no matter which church we are in, church, just like

the world, is never as good as we expect it to be. No church follows Christ as He presents Himself in Scripture. So, we either have to put up with the imperfections we have got in the church we find ourselves in, or move churches. But even if we do move, it only results in our attending another imperfect institution with other difficulties. Eventually, as we grow old, we can't get to all of the church services any more anyway. And we find that, after all, well, actually we don't really mind that. As we mature in the faith, we grow out of "church" altogether. We have the Bible alone for our comfort and strength. Then when we can't even see to read or hear the Bible any longer, we simply rely on Jesus Christ Himself in our hearts. Until the time comes when He calls us home. And that is the true, spiritual, Christian life.

Hebrews 13:5
…*he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

Colossians 1:27
….*Christ in you, the hope of glory*

The Next Life

When we die, we will all be shocked. Those who don't believe there is life after death at all, will be shocked just by finding out that there is. But even if we do believe there is a life after our time here on this earth, the next life will be altogether different from this one. It will be something we did not and could not have ever expected or imagined:

Isaiah 64:4
For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.

Firstly, after we die, all our desires, aspirations, supposed achievements, plans and ideas that we had in this world will disappear altogether. "We" will still exist, but everything we have lived for, and hoped for here, will be gone, and we will be left with nothing. It will be like having our legs kicked from under us:

Genesis 3:19
In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Ecclesiastes 1:14
I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

James 4:14
Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Matthew 6:19-21
Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Christians will be very thankful that they have been saved from their sinful natures, and will enter glory by being given new sinless bodies, to be with Christ for ever:

1 John 3:2
Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

But, having got into glory by the sheer grace of God alone, they will still be just as shocked as anyone else.

The next world will be altogether different. Heaven is not going to be anything like this world down here. It is not going to be a place of meeting all our loved ones again and chatting with them for ever over endless fellowship teas. That's not heaven. It will be nothing like "church" here. Christ will be all the glory. We will no longer have the desire to fellowship with men any more, but only with Him.

But, what exactly will we be doing in heaven? Down here we have lots to do. We need to provide for ourselves. We need to care for our ailing bodies. All around us we are overwhelmed with so many, many needs and opportunities to help others. There are always problems to deal with here. But in heaven nobody will have any problems at all:

Revelation 21:4
And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

This is good. It would be such a welcome relief from the trials of this world. And we will be forever thankful. But if, in heaven, we won't need to provide for ourselves, or have ailing bodies to deal with, and nobody will need our help any more, what shall we actually, physically be doing there? We will be worshipping God and His Christ for evermore. But, apart from that, we can't really imagine what other work there would be to do.

In this world, we have things we can see to deal with. In heaven, we will have (as yet unspecified) true riches. This place is a testing ground for the next:

Luke 16:10-12
He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

On occasions, men, in this life, have come into contact with aspects of the next life.

Often they have not recognised it, because it has been deliberately hidden from them:

Hebrews 13:2
Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Judges 13:21,22
But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

Luke 24:15-16,31
And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him…. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

In fact, Jesus came to this earth in humility. Most people did not recognise who He truly was. We read of only one occasion when He revealed Himself for who He really was a little bit more, to some of His closest disciples:

Matthew 17:1,2
And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

Some people in this world have actually seen things in the next life that it is not lawful to reveal here. It would be too much for us to comprehend:

Daniel 12:4
But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4
I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Revelation 10:4
And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Some people in this world have encountered glorious beings from the next life, knowing they were such. Every one of them had to fall on their face as dead:

Genesis 17:3
And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

Joshua 5:14
And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

Matthew 28:2-4
And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

Revelation 1:17
And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last

One thing is for sure. If we ever come into contact with anything from the next life, there will be no strength remaining in us:

Isaiah 6:5
Then said I, Woe is me! for ***I am undone****; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.*

Daniel 10:8
Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and ***there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength****.*

Daniel 10:15-17
And when he had spoken such words unto me, ***I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb****. And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision* ***my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me****.*

Isaiah 14:9-10
Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, ***Art thou also become weak as we?*** *art thou become like unto us?*

We certainly won't be defending ourselves in any way:

Matthew 22:12
And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? ***And he was speechless.***

Luke 1:22
And when he came out, ***he could not speak unto them****: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for* ***he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.***

Acts 9:7
And the men which journeyed with him stood ***speechless****, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

And that is going to be the situation when we die. Our strength will be gone. We will enter the next world powerless and without strength:

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

I'm a sinner. Everything I have done in this life has been pointless, except what the Lord did through me after changing my heart. Other than that, I, personally, deserve eternal, conscious torment in body and soul in hell fire forever. That is where every one of us deserves to go, whether we recognise that or not:

Romans 7:23-25
But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

If God sent every one of us to hell fire forever, He would have done nothing wrong:

Matthew 25:41
Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels

When we reach the next life, the first thing we will see is the utter depth of depravity of the sinful nature that we had on this earth. And we'll see it so clearly for the first time. We can see some of it now, as the Lord reveals it to us. But even the best of Christians, in this world, are still far too full of self to see much of it here. That's why we will all be so shocked and surprised when we get to heaven. Even a lot of what we thought was our "Christian" life here will be seen to have been in error and pointless. And a lot of our beliefs too, which we sincerely held here, things that we imbibed from our church (and not from God), will be clearly seen to have been terribly wrong too.

Those who were not Christians in this world, and who go to hell fire, will also see the depth of depravity of their sin too. But they won't be sinning for evermore down there. They will be desperately wanting to sin, wanting to continue the selfish lives they lived on earth, but they won't be able to. That's the hell of it.

Those who get to heaven will know it is not what they have done that has got them there, it is all of the Lord. These are the ones to whom, while they were still in this world, the Lord at least began to show them how much of a vile nothingness they really were. But that would only ever be a beginning. When we get to heaven, we'll see ourselves truly for what we really are. And that will be the biggest shock of all.

In the next world, in whichever place we end up, we will be nothing and God will be everything. We need to stop pretending it will be any other way.

Isaiah 2:22
Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

Heaven

Christianity is all about being saved from our sins. Most Christians would agree with this, but the sad thing is that such a subject is taken so lightly. Many don't think it means all that much. Yes, there is a Saviour who has died in the place of all His people as an atonement for sin. All who put their trust in that Saviour, Jesus Christ, will not have to pay the price for their own sins, because Christ paid it all for them Himself. Hallelujah! We believe all that, now let's get on with our church activities.

But sin is not just a light thing, easily removed from our lives by thinking of Jesus. Salvation from our sinful nature is the most precious thing any of us could ever possibly possess. But many don't see that, simply because they don't see the depth of their own sins for themselves, and therefore they don't see much of a need of salvation. Even the best of Christians are almost totally blind to the true vileness of their own souls while they are in these sinful bodies. The fact is that we are wretched, vile creatures. We really are. Selfish, self-centred. All of us. That's the honest truth. We should be humbled to the dust about all this, but we're nothing of the kind. We're too full of ourselves to even begin to see the depth of depravity in our own hearts.

I can scream and scream and scream to try to convince people of how vile we all are, but nobody is going to listen. Nobody wants to listen. Everyone will close their ears and think of me as having some kind of mental illness. "Oh, cheer up!" they would say. But:

Acts 26:25
….*I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

My point in mentioning our sinful nature is as an introduction to understanding what life is going to be like after death. When we get to the next world, we'll all have one enormous shock. At the moment, in this world, we all think far too much of ourselves. Unbelievers certainly do, and think of themselves as some great thing, boasting of

their achievements. Believers will at least have acknowledged to some degree that they're sinners, and will have come to Christ for salvation, but they'll still have far too high a view of themselves really.

Upon death, as we enter the next world, every one of us will suddenly become aware of what we're truly like by nature. That's the shock. We'll see our vile, wretched, sinful nature for what it really is. Death will be a wake up call to everybody who's ever lived.

When most Christians think of the next life after death, they think that it is going to be fairly similar to life now but without the bad bits. So, we'll see all our friends again and have a good time with them. We'll be chatting to the apostle Paul over a coffee and asking him all those questions we had from our reading about him that we've always wanted to ask. We'll only be forever sad about those who didn't make it and went to hell instead.

Hang on a minute. That is nothing like what heaven is going to be like.

First of all, I don't really want to see people I knew in the past again. I'd be so embarrassed by what I did in my lifetime. And they would probably feel the same way about what they did.

Genesis 47:9
….*few and evil have the days of the years of my life been*….

The Bible actually gives us very little detail about what the next world is going to be like. And that is for a purpose. Because even if we knew, we wouldn't understand it, or rather, more to the point, we wouldn't be able to deal with it.

The apostle Paul was once caught up to the third heaven. But he didn't describe anything of what he saw to us. He just said that the words he heard there were "unspeakable," and it is not lawful for anyone to utter them here:

2 Corinthians 12:2-4
I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

So, as long as we are in these bodies, we are deliberately **not** told what it will be like. Because heavenly things will be so completely different from the way things are down here.

In fact, we're told that our life down here is like a seed compared to the full grown plant that we will be in heaven:

1 Corinthians 15:35-38
But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

How can a seed know what the full grown plant is going to be like? It can't.
"You will be green." "What's green?"
"You will be full of sap." "What's sap?"
"You'll see growth." "What's growth? I'm just a dead and dry seed."

It will be altogether different in heaven. We are sown a natural body, but raised a spiritual body:

1 Corinthians 15:42-45
So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: ***It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body****. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

Here, we are in corruption, dishonour and weakness. There we will be in incorruption, glory and power. That's all we know about the difference.

Everyone, when they die, will see the reality of their sin before a holy God. That means that when we die we will see the utter depravity of our very being for ourselves, in full.

Unbelievers, who never repented of their sin while they were on this earth, will have this view continually before their faces for evermore, and will never be able to atone for it, or get rid of it from their consciences in any way. They will always be reminded of the sins they committed while they were on earth. And, in the next life, they won't be able to carry on with their sins any more. God can't possibly have invented a place where people will be sinning for evermore. That would not be hell. They'd all be enjoying themselves. No. They sin for a short time on this earth, but in hell, they will no longer be able to sin. Consequently, they will be forever hating every minute of their existence. That's hell.

Believers, who repented of their sin and trusted in Christ for their salvation whilst on earth, will still be utterly shocked at finding out what they're really like underneath everything. It will be far worse than they ever imagined. But this will make them even more thankful to the Lord for His grace and mercy in saving them from hell fire, which is exactly what their sins deserve.

And, in heaven, they also won't be able to sin any more, and they will be loving it. That's heaven. We'll be like Christ:

1 John 3:2
Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, ***we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is****.*

We'll be freed from our sinful condition by nature, and we'll be so happy. We'll never want to exalt ourselves any more. Any remaining self-worth we thought we had while on earth, will be taken away from

us. All self-centredness will be gone. We will be totally and finally free from self-esteem and humbled to the dust for evermore. Hallelujah!

But we'll always be aware of what we were on earth. We'll always be able to see the depth of the sin we had on earth, which we were too proud to see for ourselves while we were there. But we'll be freed from it.

Otherwise, what's the point of our time on earth at all, if we're going to forget all about it? Surely, we'll always be aware of what we have been saved from. We only need to see the nail prints in Christ's resurrection body to remind us of that:

John 20:25-27
The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And it is also true that, those in heaven will not be sad about people being in hell. Everyone, both in heaven and in hell, will understand that hell is just deserts for sin. We should all be there by rights, but by God's grace, some aren't, and have been saved to eternal life. Christians will escape the wrath to come. How dare we think that when we get to heaven we'll be sad about anything. It's a place of complete bliss. Here, on this earth, even in our best moments, some times are always going to be sadder than others. But that cannot be in heaven. There, everything is wonderful all the time.

What Will Heaven Be Like?

But what will heaven be like? What will we be doing there? We know so very little. We'll be praising God continually for ever. There must also be some kind of work for us to do. But I can't imagine what that could possibly be.

– We won't need the Bible. We'll be walking by sight, not by faith any more. So those who were Bible teachers on earth will become redundant. They'll also be fully aware of all that they got wrong about spiritual things while they were on the earth, and be so utterly ashamed about the wrong things they taught others.

– We won't be living for self any more, just living for God. So selfish ambitions will no longer exist. So, will we be continually learning anything?

– We can justly fill our lives here on earth with many things to help others. There are plenty of people who need help down here. But in heaven, nobody will be in need, so there will be nobody to help:

Revelation 7:17
For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and ***God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes***.

Revelation 21:3-5
And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and ***God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*** *And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

– And, if there's no time, how can there be movement?

Revelation 10:6,7
And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be ***time no longer****: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*

– And we know that the world to come will be put in subjection to us:

Hebrews 2:5
For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

Contact with Heavenly Things on Earth

Moses

Exodus 3:6
Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And ***Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God****.*

Exodus 33:18-23
And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. [19] And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. [20] And he said, ***Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live****. [21] And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: [22] And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: [23] And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.*

Fallen men cannot see God and live. But in glorified, sinless bodies they will be able to:

Revelation 22:3,4
And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: [4] ***And they shall see his face****; and his name shall be in their foreheads.*

Christ's Parables

Before God, we will be speechless, and only deserving of torment for our sins:

Matthew 22:12,13
And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? ***And he was speechless****. [13] Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Before God, in the next world, we won't even be able to cry directly to Him for mercy any more, like we can on this earth:

Luke 16:23,24
And in hell he lift up his eyes, ***being in torments****, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. [24] And he cried and said,* ***Father Abraham, have mercy on me****, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for* ***I am tormented in this flame****.*

Not being able to call on God any more, we can try to call on men such as Abraham, but they won't be able to help. All we deserve is torment for our sins, and that's what we'll get if we don't repent here on earth, now.

Daniel

When Daniel saw an angel, there was no strength left in him:

Daniel 10:5-6,8-11,15-19
Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: [6] His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude…. [8] Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and ***there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength****. [9] Yet heard I the voice of his words: and* ***when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground****. [10] And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. [11] And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And* ***when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling…. [15] And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set***

***my face toward the ground, and I became dumb**. [16] And, behold, **one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. [17] For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me**. [18] Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, [19] And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And **when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened**, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me.*

John

Revelation 1:17
*And **when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead**. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last*

John had been with Christ for the whole of His ministry on earth.
He saw Him in a glorified state at His transfiguration.
He saw Him in His resurrection body.
Now, here, he falls at His feet as dead.

When heavenly beings want to communicate with men, they condescend to us:
They often appear as other men.
They often instil fear.
They often cause men lose all their strength.
They sometimes cause men to fall down as dead.

In reality, sinful men can never approach heavenly beings, or indeed heavenly things at all, without losing all their strength and falling down as dead, only recovering if the heavenly being condescends to allow them to be lifted up.

Visions of Heaven

In the Bible there are a handful of people who had visions of heaven, but these are actually all of the throne room itself. Surely, heaven will be far larger than this:

Isaiah 6:1-3
In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. [2] Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. [3] And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

Ezekiel 1
Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. [2] In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, [3] The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him. [4] And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. [5] Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. [6] And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. [7] And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. [8] And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. [9] Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. [10] As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. [11] Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. [12] And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. [13] As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. [14] And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. [15] Now as I beheld

the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. [16] The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. [17] When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. [18] As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. [19] And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. [20] Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. [21] When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. [22] And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. [23] And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. [24] And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings. [25] And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings. [26] And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. [27] And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. [28] As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

Ezekiel 10

Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. [2] And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cheruh, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. [3] Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. [4] Then the glory of

the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD'S glory. [5] And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh. [6] And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels. [7] And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out. [8] And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings. [9] And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. [10] And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. [11] When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. [12] And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. [13] As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. [14] And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. [15] And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. [16] And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. [17] When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them. [18] Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. [19] And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD'S house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. [20] This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims. [21] Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. [22] And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.

Daniel 7:9,10

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. [10] A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

Revelation 4

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. [2] And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. [3] And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. [4] And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. [5] And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. [6] And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. [7] And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. [8] And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. [9] And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, [10] The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, [11] Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.