

# THE GLORY OF OUR SALVATION

**Dr Willie Marais**

## THE GLORY OF OUR SALVATION

Publisher: Deon Roelofse  
Postnet Suite 132  
Private Bag x504  
Sinoville, 0129  
E-mail: deon@eeds.co.za  
Tel: 012-548-6639

First Print: August 2010  
ISBN NR: 978-1-920290-33-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover design: Jaco Strydom

The Tulip flowers on the cover signifies the Glory of our Salvation. The acronym TULIP can be used to present the main doctrinal points of the Glory of our Salvation:

**T**otal Depravity  
**U**nconditional Election  
**L**imited Atonement  
**I**rresistible Grace  
**P**erseverance of the Saints

Editing: Deon & Sonja Roelofse

Printing and binding:  
Groep 7 Printers and Publishers BK  
epos@groep7.co.za

## STATEMENT

Everyone who reads this book will come to know four things:

1. He will know if he has already been saved (cf. John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:12-13).
2. He will know that he has only himself to blame if he goes lost for all eternity (cf. Acts 18:6).
3. He will know that if he comes to the Lord (cf. Matt. 11:28) he will be saved (John 6:37; Acts 16:31).
4. He will know that both the sovereignty of God (Rom. 9:16) and the responsibility of man (cf. Heb. 2:3; Rev. 22:17; John 6:37) are taught as realities in the Scriptures (cf. Phil. 2:12-13), and to fully understand these two truths in perfect harmony with each other is too complex for us: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the things of the Law" (Deut.29:29).

# THE GLORY OF OUR SALVATION

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	5
Recommendation .....	6
Preface .....	8
1. Anybody who will inherit the kingdom of God needs to be saved first.....	18
2. The time of our Salvation .....	25
3. The Lord keeps knocking .....	35
4. The ability to hear .....	42
5. How do we open our hearts ?.....	44
6. How will I know that I have been saved ?.....	46
7. We ought to confess Him before men.....	54
8. We may be building our hope on false foundations.....	57
9. We cannot save ourselves .....	63
10. The meaning of repentance .....	66
11. We are not all saved in the same way .....	74
12. The necessity of repentance .....	79
13. We have to make a choice .....	94
14. Become a worker in the Lord's "Vineyard" .....	102
15. The most important Commandment .....	119
Curriculum Vitae .....	123

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I want to thank my wife, Maryna, for who she is, and for what she meant to me during the more than fifty years together. Pastor Mike Shields of the Loma Community Church, who has taken the time to read the concept manuscript, offer useful advice, and for his kind recommendation. My daughter, Rentia, for correcting my use of the English language. Joan Deussen and Deon and Sonja Roelofse for their help with my computer.

## RECOMMENDATION

Dr. Willie Marais is a man of God. He is a man whose love for his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, compels him to do what he can do so that others may be given an opportunity to be included in Christ's glorious salvation. The thing that Dr. Marais can do is write from his heart. That is what he has done in writing "The Glory of Our Salvation".

Reading this book took my thoughts back to when I was about eleven years old. A wonderful pastor cared enough for me to press me about my relationship with God. As a result I acknowledged my sinfulness and my need of the Saviour and received Christ Jesus into my life. Dr. Marais' words point to that same wonderful relationship with God.

Sometimes we treat salvation like a ticket for a bus ride or a plane ride. Once we are on board we discard the ticket. The glorious salvation Dr. Marais teaches about is not a simple ticket to heaven. Dr. Marais leads one into the Sacred Scriptures to appreciate the precious value of salvation by giving due honour to the Lord Jesus for His Person and His death on the cross. He shows us that when we come to Christ we are given a new life, a forgiven life, and a growing relationship with the true and living God. His words challenged me to stop and exam my journey of growth in Christ; I was able to rejoice and yet be reminded of my daily need of repentance and renewed commitment.

Dr. Marais' writing also reminded me of my Bible College days. I remember being thrilled with learning Gods Word. One course was called: "The

Doctrine of Soteriology", or the study of salvation. The Glory of Salvation is a refresher course on the doctrine of Soteriology. I believe that anyone who reads and absorbs this book will come away with a good solid understanding of the wisdom of God in the salvation provided through faith in Jesus Christ. I believe that anyone who heeds to admonitions of Dr. Marais' book will experience genuine inner peace as well as a wonderful sense of pleasure in their Christian life.

Sincerely Submitted,

Mike L. Shields  
(Loma Community Church, Colorado, USA)

## PREFACE

As a minister of religion, it is my calling and privilege to devote myself steadfastly to prayer and the ministry of the Word (cf. Acts 6:4). It is my duty to proclaim from the pulpit and from house to house (cf. Acts 20:20) the whole purpose, plan and counsel of God (cf. Acts 20:27); explaining the way of Salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30); urging people to turn in repentance [that is due] to God and to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ [that is due to Him] (cf. Acts 20:21).

I was often approached with questions like these: What must I do to be saved? Is it possible for anyone to know for certain that he or she is saved? How can one be sure of one's salvation? What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that can never be forgiven? This book is an effort to provide answers to these questions from the Bible (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). I made use of the Bible for it is the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13) which is able to instruct and give us the understanding and wisdom to receive the salvation which comes through faith in (trust in, adhere to, rely on) Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15).

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. I quote and refer to the Amplified Bible (expanded edition) for it is true to the Hebrew and Greek languages. It is written simply and is easy to understand. To clarify the reading of the text of the Amplified Bible it contains additional phrases of meaning parenthesized and bracketed clarifying words or comments.

I made abundant use of quotations from the Bible for four reasons: First, I want to make it

convenient to the readers to bring the Bible to them. Secondly, it will help the readers to keep them throughout to the same translation of the Bible. Thirdly, it lets the Bible speak directly to the readers. Fourthly, it lets the readers see that it is not only the opinion of the writer, but is what the Bible truly teaches.

And this is the message we must bring to the whole world. Paul writes: "Even as [in His love] He chose us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (consecrated and set aside for Him) and blameless in His sight, even above reproach before Him in love. For He [God] foreordained us (destined us, planned in love for us) to be adopted (revealed) as His own children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the purpose of His will" [because it pleased Him and was His kind intent] (Eph. 1:4-5). "But all things are from God, Who through Jesus Christ reconciled us to Himself [received us into favour, brought us into harmony with Himself] and gave us the ministry of reconciliation [that by word and deed we might aim to bring others into harmony with Him] ... So we are Christ's ambassadors, God making His appeal as it were through us. We [as Christ's personal representatives] beg you for His sake to lay (take) hold of the divine favour [now offered you] and be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18,20).

Salvation means deliverance from eternal death, for he who "believes and trusts in and clings to and relies on Him ... has already passed over out of death into life" (John 5:24). Salvation also means to be freed from the guilt, the penalty and the bondage of sin, "Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ

(the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old (previous moral and spiritual condition) has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Man's nature became totally corrupt at the fall of man in the garden of Eden. In regeneration, God implants the new life in the dead heart. Thus man's nature is reborn. The Scripture speaks of a new creature, another birth, being changed and renewed. But this change is not completed at once. Therefore Paul writes: "Strip yourselves of your former nature [put off and discard your old unrenewed self] which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; and be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude]. And put on the new nature (the regenerated self) created in God's image, [Godlike] in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

And he also writes, saying: "O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am! Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles of] this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). And he immediately answers himself, saying: "O thank God! [He will] through Jesus Christ (the Anointed One) our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25). "But it is from Him [from God] that you have your life in Christ Jesus. Whom God made our Wisdom from God [revealed to us a knowledge of the divine plan of salvation previously hidden, manifesting itself as] our Righteousness [thus making us upright and putting us in right standing with God], and our Consecration [making us pure and holy], and our Redemption" [providing our ransom from eternal penalty for sin] (1 Cor. 1:30). "For those whom He foreknew [of whom He

was aware and loved beforehand], He also destined from the beginning [foreordained them] to be molded into the image of His Son [and shared inward His likeness] that He might become the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom He thus foreordained, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified (acquitted, made righteous, putting them into right standing with Himself). And those whom He justified, He also glorified" [raising them to a heavenly dignity and condition or state of being] (Rom. 8:29-30).

Because all men are condemned by God in Adam (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:6; Rom 5:12) we must be justified by God so that He can regenerate us. And God justified us, because the righteous and just requirement of the law has been fully met. And it is done through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, "Who was betrayed and put to death because of our misdeeds and was raised to secure our justification" (our acquittal), [making our account balance and absolving us from all guilt before God] (Rom. 4:25). "Sending His own Son in the guise of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh [subdued, overcame, deprived of its power over all who accept that sacrifice] [Lev. 7:37]. So that the righteous and just requirement of the law might be fully met in us who live and move not in the ways of the flesh but in the ways of the Spirit" [our lives governed not by the standards and according to the dictates of the flesh, but controlled by the Holy Spirit] (Rom. 8:3-4).

We may ask the question: "What happened with people who lived before Jesus Christ died on the cross and was raised to secure our (their) justification (cf.

Rom. 4:25); before the righteous and just requirements of the law have been met?" (cf. Rom. 8:3-4). The answer is simply that they were saved when they believed in Christ the Messiah Who was to come (cf. Heb. 11:26), just as we believe in Him Who already came (John 3:16). When Isaiah wrote about Christ the Messiah Who was to come (Isaiah 53:1-12; cf. Luke 22:37; John 12:37-41; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pet. 2:24-25), he wrote as if it had already happened, saying, "Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened (past tense) not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). The time when Jesus came, is not decisive, but only the fact that He should come, and that He came and was put to death because of our (their) misdeeds and was raised to secure our (their) justification (our and their acquittal), [making our (their) account balance and absolving us (them) from all guilt before God] (cf. Rom. 4:25).

The work of God's grace runs through six successive stages: First, our election, and foreordination. Second, our justification. Third, our regeneration. Fourth, our conversion. Fifth, our sanctification. Sixth, our glorification. The divine act of the new life principle is wrought in man at different ages. When? No one can tell. "The wind blows (breathes) where it wills; and though you hear its sound, yet you neither know where it comes from nor where it is going. So is it with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In John the Baptist it occurred in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). How? No one knows. "And He (Jesus) said, the kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed upon the ground. And then continues sleeping and rising night and day while the seed sprouts and grows and increases - he

knows not how" (Mark 4:26-27). This new life results in faith and conversion (cf. John 1:12-13). Conversion flows into sanctification (cf. 2 Cor. 3:17-18). And glorification completes the work of divine grace (1 Cor. 15:28).

John wrote: "Beloved, we are [even here and] now God's children; it is not yet disclosed (made clear) what we shall be [hereafter], but we know that when He comes and is manifested, we shall [as God's children] resemble and be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He [really] is" (1 John 3:2). Meanwhile our salvation takes place in a process of time. It is written: "Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ (the Messiah), advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity" (Heb. 6:1), "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty" (emancipation from bondage, freedom) [Isa. 61:1-2] (2 Cor. 3:17). "And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendour and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [who is] the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). "However, when everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will subject Himself to [the Father] Who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all" [be everything to everyone, supreme, the indwelling and controlling factor of life] (1 Cor. 15:28). This is God's ultimate goal with our salvation. We may call this happening the glory of our salvation.

It is of great importance to understand the message of the Bible for it was written: "While anyone

is hearing the Word of the Kingdom and does not grasp and comprehend it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the roadside ... As for that was sown on good soil is he who hears the Word and grasps and comprehends it: he indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundred times as much as was sown, in another sixty times as much, and in another thirty" (Matt. 13:19,23). When Philip heard an Ethiopian reading the book of the prophet Isaiah he asked him: "Do you really understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). And he said: "How is it possible for me to do so unless someone explains it to me and guides me" [in the right way]? (Acts 8:31).

The Bible is clear: "The words and promises of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in an earthen furnace, purified seven times over" (Ps. 12:6; 19:8). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, saying: "For we write you nothing else but simply what you can read and understand" [there is no double meaning to what I say] (2 Cor. 1:13). And yet Peter writes: "There are some things in those [epistles of Paul] that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist and misconstrue to their own utter destruction, just as [they distort and misinterpret] the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16).

For this and other reasons it is necessary that the Bible must be interpreted correctly for the Scripture says: "The entrance and unfolding of Your words give light: their unfolding gives understanding (discernment and comprehension) to the simple" (Ps. 119:130). When the Levites read from the Book of the Law of God "they distinctly, faithfully amplifying and giving the sense so that [the people] understood the

reading" (Neh. 8:7-8). When Jesus was accompanying two disciples who were going to a village called Emmaus He opened and explained to them the sense of the Scriptures, "He went on explaining and interpreting to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning and referring to Himself ... He [thoroughly] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27,45).

This is the passage of Scripture that the Ethiopian was reading: "Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter. And as a lamb before its shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth. In His humiliation He was taken away by distressing and oppressive judgment and justice was denied to Him [caused to cease]. Who can describe or relate in full the wickedness of His contemporaries (generation)? For His life is taken from the earth and a bloody death inflicted upon Him" [Isa. 53:7-8] (Acts 8:32-33). And the eunuch said to Philip: "I beg of you, tell me about whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" (Acts 8:34). "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this portion of Scripture he announced to him the glad tidings (Gospel) of Jesus and about Him" (Acts 8:35). Paul writes to Timothy saying: "Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). And to the Galatians he wrote, saying: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to and different from which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (*anathema*, devoted to destruction, doomed to eternal punishment)! (Gal. 1:8), "Now am I trying to

win the favour of men, or of God? Do I seek to please men? If I were still seeking popularity with men, I should not be a bond servant of Christ" (the Messiah) (Gal 1:10). Yes, it is necessary that we should interpret the Word without ulterior motives.

Scripture says: "No one seeks out God" (Rom. 3:11). David said: "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any who understood, dealt wisely, and sought after God, inquiring for and of Him and requiring Him [of vital necessity]. They are all gone aside ..." (Ps. 14:2-3). Yes, we all are like Adam and Eve. We are hiding ourselves from the presence of God (cf. Gen. 3:8). We are afraid of God. But He is still looking for us. We read: "But the Lord called to Adam and said to him: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). Jesus said: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10). This is the good news.

The Scripture says: "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who possesses the Son has that life; he who does not possess the Son of God does not have that life" (1 John 5:11-12). But how do we become part of Him and what he offers? Come let us see.

Giving and possessing are not the same. Possessing assumes receiving. It is to them who received the Son that God gave the authority to become children of God (John 1:12). It is not because they received Him, but when they received Him, because the giving as well as the receiving is part and parcel of the grace of God. Jesus said: "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me attracts

and draws him and gives him the desire to come to Me" (John 6:44).

## **1. ANYBODY WHO WILL INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD NEEDS TO BE SAVED FIRST**

It is written: "We were then by nature children of God's wrath and heirs of [His] indignation, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:3). Thus all of mankind is on their way to a lost eternity, unless God intervenes and saves them from eternal death. Jesus said: "I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). We are born first, and then we are born again. Our new birth takes place in our own lifetime.

Paul writes: "Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold the fresh and new has come! For our sake He made Christ [virtually] to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in and through Him we might become [endued with, viewed as being in, and examples of] the righteousness of God" [what we ought to be, approved and acceptable and in right standing with Him, by His goodness] (2 Cor. 5:17-21). We must first be ingrafted in Christ to be a new creation.

On Table Mountain in Cape Town I met a lovely young man. We started talking spontaneously. From our conversation it quickly became clear to me that he was deeply religious. He read his Bible and prayed every day. He visited the house of the Lord twice on a Sunday. He was a churchwarden and chairman of the

youth organization of his congregation. He was truly an active and useful member of his Church.

I liked him at once and wanted to know when he had become converted and accepted Jesus Christ as his Redeemer. He reacted immediately, declaring that he had never converted himself, nor had he ever accepted Jesus Christ as his Redeemer, because he had been a child of God since birth.

I had some trouble convincing him that you cannot enter the kingdom of God unless you had first been born again. What is born from humanity, is man; what is born from Spirit, is spirit (John 3:5-6). Jesus said: "It is the Spirit Who gives life [He is the Life giver]; the flesh conveys no benefit whatever" [there is no profit in it] (John 6:63). Of those that have accepted Jesus Christ, those who believe in Him, it is said that they have been born from God (cf. John 1:12-13). Faith and conversion are thus the inevitable results of us being born again.

At his request I then helped him to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour (John 1:12) and Lord (Col. 2:6-7). Long after that I received a letter from him in which he testified as follows: "Before our encounter I was a servant of the Lord, but now I am his child."

His testimony is proof that we should not assume that all good and religious people have already been saved. It is not religion that saves us, but the Lord of religion. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a system of rules and regulations, but it depends on His Person. He said Himself: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by (through) Me" (John 14:6). He is the Way; there is

no other way, no other truth, no other life (Compare 2 Cor. 11:3-6).

It is not His example that helps us saving ourselves. No, it is He Himself Who redeemed us by His own blood (Rev. 5:9). Yes, everyone who wants to go to heaven needs first to be saved, "Since all have sinned and are falling short of the honour and glory which God bestows and receives" (Rom. 3:23). The Scripture says: "For you say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown (grew) wealthy. And I am in need of nothing, and you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked (Hos.12:8). Therefore I counsel you to purchase from Me gold refined and tested by fire, that you may be [truly] wealthy, and white clothes to clothe you to keep the shame of your nudity from being seen, and salve to put on your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I [clearly and tenderly] love, I tell (of) their faults and convict and convince and reprove and chasten. (I discipline and instruct them.) So be enthusiastic and in earnest and burning with zeal and repent (changing your mind and attitude) [Prov. 23:12]. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me. He who overcomes (is victorious), I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne as, I Myself overcame (was victorious) and sat down beside My Father on His throne. He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the assemblies (churches)" (Rev. 3:17-22).

It is of great importance to note what is written in Revelation 3:22, "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the

assemblies (churches)". This instruction is found in all seven of the letters contained in the book of Revelation (Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22); letters addressed to seven different assemblies (Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14). Note the plural for the word: 'assemblies', which means that all seven letters were to be read out to all seven of the assemblies. Some issues were highlighted for certain assemblies, but the instructions in the seven letters universally applied to all seven assemblies and thus find application to all assemblies everywhere today until the return of Jesus. What is written in this letter, is therefore also valid for each and everyone who hears or reads this message. We are dealing here with an eternal Gospel (Rev. 14:6) that never withers, but stands forever (Isa. 40:8); words that will never pass away (Matt. 24:35).

The letter is addressed to all who can hear and should listen (Rev. 3:22), that is all who have reached an age when conscious decisions have become possible. This applies to those who know the difference between their left and right hands; all who are capable of accepting responsibility and can be held accountable.

Each and everyone who will be saved must have come to a specific, conscious and deliberate moment of choice in favour of Christ Jesus. Our new life leads to a decision. We may call it a commitment. The covenant between God and His faithful is unilateral in its origin and mutual in its effect. Our salvation does not happen in addition to the covenant; it happens in terms of the covenant. Jesus, for example, said about Zacchaeus: "Today is [Messianic and spiritual] salvation come to [all the members of]

this house, since Zacchaeus too is a [real spiritual] son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9).

Those of us who believe strongly in the grace of God, are running the risk of overlooking our own responsibility. We must understand that the pleas of the Spirit for our salvation and our response to it (compare Rev. 22:17) are both part of the grace of God. Grace does not exclude our responsibility, but rather includes it. On the one hand God granted man the strongest means of resistance. Jesus told a parable of a father with two sons. When the younger of them, asked the Father to give him the part of the property that falls to him, the Father divided the estate between them. And he let the younger one gather all that he had and journey to a distant country (cf. Luke 15:11-13). On the other hand He overcomes that resistance by His redeeming grace. When the younger son lost everything he had and nobody helped him to satisfy his hunger, he came to his senses, saying: "How many servants of my father have enough food, and [even food] to spare, but I am perishing (dying) here of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight" (Luke 15:17-18). So he got up and came to his [own] father who received him with pity and tenderness (Luke 15:20-24). Jeremiah said: "O Lord, You have persuaded and deceived me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I am and You have prevailed" (Jer. 20:7).

Jeremiah 20:7 shows that the grace of God works irresistibly. But we must reject the idea that in the work of God's grace man is an unwilling stock or block; not because it attributes something to man, but because it represents God as denying His own work

and ordinance and treats man mechanically. Our will is always moved by inner conviction. It is "God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire] both to will and to work for His good pleasure and delight" (Phil. 2:13). To try and explain how the sovereign grace of God (cf. Rom 9:11-18) and the responsibility of man (cf. Rev. 22:17) works together is too complex for us (cf. Deut. 29:29). It belongs to the mysteries hid from our view. (cf. Deut 29:29). According to the Scripture we must confess both realities, because the Scripture teaches both, but we must leave this seeming irreconcilable difficulty unexplained because every attempt to do so will only result in human folly.

Paul writes: "For who can resist and withstand His will?" (Rom 9:19). Jesus said: "O Jerusalem. Jerusalem, murdering the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your Children together as a mother fowl gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused!" (Matt. 23:37). The Bible calls the Word of God: "The good news (Gospel) of God's grace" (Acts 20:24) and "the Word of His grace [to the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favour]" (Acts 20:32). But Isaiah asks: "Who has believed (trusted in, relied upon, and clung to) our message?" (Isa. 53:1). In Acts 18:5-6 we read: "Paul was completely engrossed with preaching, earnestly arguing and testifying to the Jews that Jesus [is] the Christ. But since they kept opposing and abusing and reviling him, he shook out his clothing [against them] and said to them. Your blood is on your [own] heads! I am innocent [of it]" And in Acts 19:8-9: "And he (Paul) went into the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, persuading and arguing and pleading about the

kingdom of God. But when some became more and more stubborn (hardened and unbelieving), discrediting and reviling and speaking evil of the Way [of the Lord] before the congregation, he separated himself from them”.

The obedience of faith, the yielding to the will of God, is wholly the result of the gracious work of God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18), but disobedience and rejection of Christ is wholly the work of man himself. In this way, Felix by his own guilt thrusts the Word away and prevent his conversion (Acts 24:25), and Agrippa withdrew and left salvation behind him (Acts 26:25-30). And Jesus gives the reason when He said about Jerusalem: “Would you had known personally, even at least in this your day, the things that make for peace (for freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as the result of sin and on your peace – your security, safety, prosperity, and happiness – depends)! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:42).

## 2. THE TIME OF OUR SALVATION

It is written: "For He says, in the time of favour (of an assured welcome) I have listened to and heeded your call, and I have helped you on the day of deliverance (the day of salvation). Behold, now is truly the time for a gracious welcome and acceptance [of you from God]; behold, now is the day of salvation!" [Isa. 49:8] (2 Cor. 6:2). God's time for our salvation is always now. At this very moment He is standing at the door of your heart, knocking. If you open your heart now, He will come in now.

You may think that one cannot come to salvation in such a short time. This was the problem that King Agrippa had. He said to Paul: "You think it a small task to make a Christian of me" [just offhand to induce me with little ado and persuasion, at very short notice]. And Paul replied: "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today, might become such as I am, except these chains" (Acts 26:28-29).

The salvation of the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14 is evidence that one can be saved in a very short time. He went up to the temple to pray. He stood at a distance, kept striking his breast, saying: "O God, be favourable (be gracious, be merciful) to me, the specially wicked sinner that I am!" (Luke 8:13). And then he went home. And Jesus said of him, "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified" (forgiven and made upright and in right standing with God) (Luke 18:14). Where was he saved? In the temple. When was he saved? When he prayed. He was saved in a very short time.

The Bible warns us that we might be dead by tomorrow: "Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city and spend a year there and carry on our business and make money. Yet you do not know [the least thing] about what may happen tomorrow. What is the nature of your life? You are really but a wisp of vapor (a puff of smoke, a mist) that is visible for a little while and then disappears [into thin air]. You ought instead to say: If the Lord is willing, we shall live and we shall do this or that [thing]. But as it is, you boast [falsely] in your presumption and your self-conceit. All such boasting is wrong. So any person who knows what is right to do but does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:13-17).

I remember one evening when a deacon and I were parish visiting. We had barely arrived at the home of the van der Berg's when Mr. van der Berg asked: "How can one be sure of one's salvation?" I explained the way of Salvation to him and his wife. They understood and decided to come to the Lord that same evening. When the deacon and I left, I urged them again to come to repentance before they go to bed, adding that the next day might be too late.

Early the next morning the deacon called me and said: "Come quickly, Mr. van der Berg has died!" On the way to the van der Berg home, I reproached myself thinking: "Why did I leave the van der Berg home the previous evening without making sure that they had come to repentance? What if they did not do what I told them?"

When I arrived at the van der Berg home, I did not even bother to greet Mrs. van der Berg, but

immediately asked: "Did you do what you had undertaken to do last night?" When she answered affirmatively, I asked her to tell me what happened.

She told me that they had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, immediately after our departure. Mr. van der Berg then left the house to make some adjustments to his car, but returned after a short while, complaining of a headache. She sent him to fetch a glass of water while she was looking for the pain pills. When he failed to return from the kitchen, she went to investigate and found him there, lying on his back. When the doctor arrived, he determined that a blood clot had caused Mr. van der Berg's death almost instantly. He died barely twenty minutes after accepting Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

It was my privilege, at the funeral, to assure his family and friends that he had been saved in time. But what would I have told them, if the van der Berg's had decided to postpone their conversion until later that evening? Where would he have spent eternity?

It is possible that the Lord would have saved him in any event, for God had on occasion accepted the willingness to do, in the place of the actual deed. So we read, for example, that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice (Heb. 11:17-18), although we know that Isaac was never actually offered (cf. Gen. 22:12). In this case, God accepted the willingness of Abraham as if he had done the deed. It was, in all likelihood, because Abraham had submitted himself wholeheartedly to the will of God. But how would we have known if Mr. van der Berg had decided with his whole heart to accept the Lord as his Saviour? Only God would have known the answer to that question. God

alone knows the hearts of men (1 Kings 8:39). We could only have hoped that he had been saved; nothing more.

It would be unwise to wait until later to come to repentance. Death sometimes comes unexpectedly and suddenly (cf. Luke 13:4). We cannot afford to gamble with our time to be saved when it comes to our eternal destination.

And if we miss our opportunities to repent when God presents them to us, we might later find that our interest in an eternal life has waned. That we learn from Ecclesiastes 12:1 "Remember [earnestly] also your Creator [that you are not your own, but his property now] in the days of your youth, before the evil days come or the years draw near when you will say, I have no enjoyment in them", yes, even the desire for the Kingdom of God may be gone.

Remember, the reprimands and blessings of God, announced in Scripture, were always given on a conditional basis. Scripture says: "At one time I will suddenly speak concerning a nation or kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it; And when [the people of] that nation concerning which I have spoken turn from their evil, I will relent and reverse My decision concerning the evil that I thought to do to them. At another time I will suddenly speak concerning a nation or kingdom, that I will build up and plant it; and if they do evil in My sight, obeying not My voice, then I will regret My decision concerning the good which I said I would benefit them" (Jer. 18:7-10).

Please do not despise the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads us to repentance (compare Rom. 2:4). It is written: "For He will render to every man according to his works [justly, as his deeds deserve] (Ps. 62:12). To those who by patient persistence in well doing [springing from piety] seek [unseen but sure] glory and honour and [the eternal blessedness of] immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and self-willed and disobedient to the Truth but responsive to wickedness, there will be indignation and wrath" (Rom. 2:6-8).

God has given us eternal life, and that life has its source in his Son (1 John 5:11). But please note: a gift does not belong to us because it was given to us, but because it was accepted by us. There is a vast difference between giving and receiving. Jesus said: "But whoever takes a drink of the water that I will give him shall never, no never, be thirsty any more, But the water that I will give him shall become a spring of water welling up (flowing, bubbling) [continually] within him unto (into, for) eternal life" (John 4:14). The promise of eternal life is given to those who drink the water of life. Scripture says: "Whoever [earnestly] desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate and drink the water of life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17).

To appropriate (make it one's own) the water of life, does not mean that God requires an appropriation as if we contribute in part to our salvation. It is true that God gave the authority to become children of Him to those who did receive and welcome Him, to those who believe in (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) His name (John 1:12; cf. Isa. 56:5), but *touto estin to*

*ergon tou theou ina pisteuyte* this is the work of God that you believe (John 6:29) in His name (John 1:12). God saves us not without faith, but also not because of faith. According to the Greek words of the text we are saved *dia pisteos* by means of faith (Eph. 2:8), not *dia pistin* on the ground of faith. Faith is the work of God (cf. John 6:29); the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). In the same way we must say that God saves us not without repentance, but also not because of our repentance, for God *dounai metanoian* gives repentance to us (cf. Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Jesus said: "However, apart from Me [cut off from the vital union with Me] you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The Scriptures refer almost one hundred and forty times to conversion as an act of man: "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have love, pity, and mercy for him, and to our God, for He will multiply to him His abundant pardon" (Isa. 55:7). But it is the Lord Who brings us back, that we may be restored (Jer. 31:18).

We must never forget that the giving as well as the receiving of our salvation are both included in the grace of God. Jesus said: "No one is able to come to Me, unless the Father Who sent Me attracts and draws him and gives him the desire to come to Me" (John 6:44). God takes the initiative and we follow. God destined us to eternal life, so that we can believe (cf. Acts 13:48). God adopted us as His sons and daughters (Eph. 1:5; 2 Cor. 6:8-9). "Thus we received the Spirit of adoption. And by Him we cry, Abba, Father!" (cf. Rom. 8:15). The Lord restores us, so that we can return to Him (Jer. 31:18). He opens our hearts, so that we can respond to Him (cf. Acts 16:14).

Jesus Christ came to us, that we could receive Him as our Saviour (John 1:12) and Lord (Col. 2:6). He knocks so that we can let Him enter (Rev. 3:20). Grace gets us involved and evokes a response from us.

From the above it is clear that the grace of God is active in us before the moment of our conversion. Paul was converted in Damascus (Act 9:1,10-18; 22:11-16), but he writes to the Galatians, saying: "But when He, Who had chosen and set me apart [even] before I was born ..." (Gal. 1:25). And Jeremiah writes, saying: "The Lord appeared from of old to me [Israel], saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you and continued My faithfulness to you" [Deut. 7:8] (Jer. 31:3). How could God have left a sinner to himself for years, to save him in the midst of his life? Scripture says: "But God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) died for us ... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, it is much more [certain], now that we are reconciled, that we shall be saved (daily delivered from sin's dominion) through His [resurrection] life" (Rom. 5:8,10).

Scripture says: "And those whom He thus foreordained, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified (acquitted, made righteous, putting them into right standing with Himself). And those He justified, He also glorified" [raising them to a heavenly dignity and condition or state of being]. (Rom. 8:30). Our election is God's starting point of our salvation (cf. Rom. 8:30). It is from God that we have our life in Christ Jesus Whom God made our wisdom and righteousness, and only then our Consecration

and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). It is God Who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). God does indeed declare the ungodly just before he believes; that he may indeed believe and not after he believes. And at the same time the Scripture declares that we are justified by faith: "But now the righteousness of God has been revealed independently and altogether apart from the law, although actually it is attested by the Law and the Prophets. Namely, the righteousness of God that comes by believing with personal trust and confident reliance on Jesus Christ (the Messiah). [And it is meant] for all who believe. For there is no distinction" (Rom. 3:21-22). Our justification was secured the moment when Jesus was raised from the dead (Rom. 4:25). "All are justified and made upright and in right standing with God, freely and graciously by His grace through the redemption that is [provided] in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). And it is also written of the ungodly: "his faith is credited to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). And also, "For we hold that a man is justified by faith ..." (Rom. 3:28). And, "Therefore, since we are justified through faith ..." (Rom. 5:1). This double manner of speaking in the Bible we have to accept without trying to solve the difficulty. It belongs to the secret things of God, and it is written: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

It is revealed to us that the opportunity to repent and have our sins forgiven is God's gift to us (Acts 5:31). And we receive a gift at the moment when we accept it. This is an indisputable fact. And we accept it by saying that we accept it. I repeat, we accept it by saying that we accept it.

It is, therefore, obvious that we can know without any doubt that we find our salvation at that very moment when we accept the reconciliation that God has worked for us through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). It is at that very moment that we cross over from death to life (John 5:24). Immediately after Zacchaeus had climbed down from the sycamore tree, and gladly received Jesus into his home and into his heart (Luke 19:5-6), Jesus said: "Today is [Messianic and spiritual] salvation come to [all the members of] this household" (Luke 19:9). The salvation of Zacchaeus came at that very moment. And similarly each one of us is saved the very moment when we open our hearts to Him. And we know it because He said so in Revelation 3:20 "If (when) anyone ... opens the door, I will come in to him ..." He is the faithful and true Witness (Rev. 3:14). He cannot lie (Tit. 1:20).

We are not born with Jesus in our hearts. Ephesians 3:17 teach that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith. Jesus stands outside and knocks. In Revelation 3:20 we read: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if (when) anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me." The word "if" is an indication of time, not of a precondition. It means that Jesus promises to come in at the very moment when anyone opens his or her heart for Him to enter. And when we open our hearts, He comes in. This is the time of our salvation.

God saves us not because we opened our hearts but when we opened it. He saves us in our own lifetime not as a new decision He makes, but we believed because we were destined (appointed and

ordained) to eternal life (cf. Acts 13:48) “which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” [eternal ages ago] (2 Tim 1:9). Our faith in our time confirms the decision God made before the world began. Thus Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, saying: “[O] brethren beloved by God, we recognize and know that He has selected (chosen) you” (1 Thess. 1:4) because: “you turned to God from [your] idols to serve a God that is alive and true and genuine” (1 Thess. 1:9).

Where there are regeneration, faith, repentance, sanctification and glorifying, there is election as the deepest source of it all. It does not mean that your salvation is your discovery that you were already saved, because God has decided before the world was created to save you (cf. Eph. 1:3-4). No, the Bible teaches that the Son of God came to save sinners who are lost (cf. Luke 19:10). The time of our salvation is always now (cf. 2 Cor. 6:2). It is the very moment when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour (cf. Luke 1:9; John 1:12-13) and Lord (Col. 2:6). For this reason the Scripture admonishes us to ratify (validate) our election by our acceptance of Jesus Christ: “Because of this, brethren, be all the more solicitous and eager to make sure (to ratify, to strengthen, to make steadfast) your calling and election; for if you do this, you will never stumble or fall” (2 Pet. 1:10).

Though God elected us before the foundation of the world (cf. Eph. 1:4), it is also true that, for us, our righteousness begins to exist only when we believe in Christ (Phil. 3:9).

### 3. THE LORD KEEPS KNOCKING

The Greek word in Revelation 3:20 which is translated with “stand”, quite literally means that the Lord remains standing and knocking. He never ceases to knock.

If you are ten years old, and you have not yet opened your heart to the Lord, it means that He has been standing at the door of your heart, knocking, for ten years, or for twenty or for fifty, as the case may be.

We might be tempted to believe that the Lord would not knock forever. There are some parts of Scripture that seem to suggest that the Lord might depart from us at some point in time. In Hosea 4:17, for example, we read: “Ephraim is joined [fast] to idols, [so] let him alone” [to take the consequences]. It does seem as though the Lord has abandoned him. But a little further we read: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I surrender you and cast you off, O Israel! How can I make you as Admah or how can I treat you as Zeboiim! [Both destroyed with Sodom] My heart recoils within Me; My compassions are kindled together” [Deut. 29:23] (Hos. 11:8).

I know that you might say now: “If that is the case, I am not coming to repentance now. I will wait until the very last moment. Just before I die, I will open my heart to the Lord so that He can enter”. That is a possibility. Even if you should waste your life, the Lord will not reject you during your last living moments. He did not reject the criminal on the cross, and He will not do it to you. The criminal made a mess of his life. Even whilst on the cross, he joined the other criminal in heaping insults on Jesus (Matt.

27:44). But when he was stricken with remorse, he rebuked his fellow criminal and said to Jesus: "Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingly glory!" (Luke 23:42). And Jesus immediately responded, by saying: "Truly I tell you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). It was a deathbed conversion.

Therefore, if you do not open your heart for the Lord today, He will still be knocking tomorrow and the next day. You may open your heart to Him some other day, for He will not stop knocking.

The fact that the Lord Jesus never ceases to knock, confirms the urgency with which He is knocking. Nobody knows better than Him what a terrible place hell is to be for spending your eternity in. Jesus warns us, saying: "And if your hand puts a stumbling block before you and causes you to sin, cut it off! It is more profitable and wholesome for you to go into life [that is really worthwhile] maimed, than with two hands to go to hell (*Gehenna*), into the fire that cannot be put out. And if your foot is a cause of stumbling and sin to you, cut it off! It is more profitable and wholesome for you to enter into life [that is really worthwhile] crippled than, having two feet, to be cast into hell (*Gehenna*). And if your eye causes you to stumble and sin, pluck it out! It is more profitable and wholesome for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell (*Gehenna*). Where their worm [which preys on the inhabitants and is symbol of the wounds inflicted on the man himself by his sins] does not die, and the fire is not put out" [Isa. 66:24] (Mark 9:43-48).

Scripture says: "Then another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a mighty voice, Whoever pays homage to the beast and his statue and permits the [beasts'] stamp (mark, inscription) to be put on his forehead or on his hand, he too shall [have to] drink of the wine of God's indignation and wrath, poured undiluted into the cup of His anger; and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb [Gen. 19:24]. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever, and they have no respite (no pause, no intermission, no rest, no peace) day or night - these who pay homage to the beast and his image and forever receives the stamp of his name upon him" [Isa. 34:10] (Rev. 14:9-11). What a terrible place to be in forever and ever!

The urgency of the Lord's message is also reflected in the seriousness displayed by His messengers. The fact that a great number of Jews and Gentiles came to repentance at Iconium was ascribed to the vigorous and effective preaching of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:1). Paul said, for example, that he seriously warned both Jews and Greeks to turn to God and to believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21). And to the church in Corinth, he writes: "We [as Christ's personal representatives] beg you for His sake to lay hold of the divine favour [now offered you] and be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). If we should know of people who are asleep in a burning building, we will keep knocking with great urgency until they wake up and flee the building.

How does the Lord knock? We read in Revelation 3:20 that we should hear His voice. He knocks by speaking to us. Does He do it, as in the

case of Paul, directly from heaven in our own language? (Compare Acts 26:14). He can if He wants to. But it is certainly not the rule. The Lord says to those who preach the Gospel: "He who hears and heeds you [my disciples] hears and heeds Me" (Luke 10:16). The voice of the Lord (Rev. 3:20) manifests itself in the voice of the preacher. This means that the voice of the preacher is the voice of the Lord. When we hear the voice of the preacher, we hear the voice of the Lord. I repeat, when we hear the voice of the preacher we hear the voice of the Lord. Don't say that you never heard the voice of the Lord, when you already heard the voice of a preacher.

Jesus said: "Come to Me. All you who labour and are heavy laden and overburden, and I will cause you to rest" (Matt. 11:28; cf. Isa. 55:1-3). Every one of us who read these words now, hear Him calling us, now. And the Word of God command us now, saying: "And let him who is listening say, Come" (Rev. 22:17). We must say now: Come, Lord Jesus! We may open our hearts to the Lord, now (cf. Heb. 3:7-8), and He will come in (Rev. 3:20), now. Paul writes: "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2; cf. Isa. 49:8). Won't you please do it! Paul writes: "We [as Christ's personal representatives] beg you for His sake to lay hold of the divine favour [now offered you] and be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Please do it now, for it is written: "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).

Peter writes as follows: "You have been regenerated (born again), not from a mortal origin (seed, sperm), but from one that is immortal by the ever living and lasting Word of God. And this is the good news which was preached to you" [Isa. 40:6-9] (1

Pet. 1:23,25). God works the new birth through the preaching of the Gospel. Paul said of the Corinthians, "For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the glad tidings (the Gospel)" (1 Cor. 4:15). And to the Romans he writes: "So faith comes by hearing [what is told], and what is heard comes by the preaching [of the message that came from the lips] of Christ" (the Messiah Himself) (Rom. 10:17).

And the message we hear, is found for example in 1 Peter 2:21-25 "He personally bore our sins in His [own] body on the tree [as on an altar and offered Himself on it], that we might die (cease to exist) to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). This means Jesus Christ died for our sins in order to pay our debts to God. It is written: "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has made to light on Him the guilt and iniquity of us all" [1 Pet. 2:24-25; John 12:37-41] (Acts 8: 32-35).

How can we understand this? Imagine yourself to be your left hand and the Lord Jesus to be your right hand. Take a book and let it be your sins. Place the book on your left hand, on yourself so to speak. This is how we stand before God. Our iniquities and our sins have become like a wall, separating us from God (Isa. 59:2). Now, place the book on your right hand, on Christ, so to speak. This is what God did on Golgotha with our sins. He laid them on Christ Jesus. And so He carried the blame in our place. This we must understand and this we must accept (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20). Scripture says: "... be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:20). The Scripture won't command us to be reconciled to God, if it is not necessary for us to do so.

It reminds me of a pair of identical twins, John and Peter Williams, who lived in London England. John was a God-fearing man but Peter served the world. One day Peter killed a man on the street and was caught red-handed by the police. He managed, however, to escape into the crowd of people, and fled to the house of his brother John. John took Peter's clothes, put them on and waited for the police. They arrested John. In the trial that followed John was found guilty, and sentenced to die. His last wish was for a sealed envelope to be handed to his brother one day after his death.

Peter, who was under the influence of alcohol most of the time, was unaware of what had happened to John. And so, the day after John's death he received the letter. This is what John had written: "I died with your clothes on, and in your place. You continue to live my life in my clothes and in my place". When faced with the sobering fact of what he has done to his brother, Peter hurried to the police and confessed everything.

There was a new trial. The verdict of the judge was as follows: "The court acknowledges that the wrong person has been hanged for this crime. The murderer is currently before the court. But he is acquitted, because somebody else had already paid with his life for this murder".

This is what happened to all of us. We all deserved eternal death (cf. Eph. 2:3), but Somebody had already paid on the cross of Golgotha for our sins. We must accept this. And we accept it by saying that we accept it; by declaring that we believe that Christ had died in our place; yes, that He was put to death

because of our misdeeds, and was raised in order that we may be justified (Rom. 4:25). But have we done that yet? Have we already made that statement? What prevents you from doing it now? Accept it now. The absolution that you accept is yours. Accept Jesus' atoning sacrifice (1 John 2:1-2; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17-21), and it will be yours. And if you have done that, you will have eternal life (Rom. 6:23). He who has the Son of God, has eternal life (1 John 5:11-12).

But how do we receive the Son of God? Scripture teaches that God has given His Son to us (John 3:16). And what do we do to receive a gift that was given to us. We do not work for it, pay for it, beg, try to earn it or make promises in order to get it. No, we merely accept it. If somebody gives you a watch, you accept it with your hand. We can, however, not accept Jesus like that. To accept Jesus, means to accept Him for what He is; the One who died in our place for our sins and was raised from the dead to put us right with God (Rom. 4:25); the One Who is our Lord and God (cf. John 20:28). It means to open the door of you heart for Him that He may come in and feast with you (Rev. 3:20). The door of our hearts has a handle only on the inside. We have to open our hearts to Him. Remember, we open our hearts by saying: "Lord Jesus, come into my hart" (cf. Eph. 3:17). But it is God Who enables us to do so (John 6:44).

## 4. THE ABILITY TO HEAR

Scripture says: "If anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice ..." (Rev. 3:20). This means that we must be able to hear. It is possible that we are hearing without listening. Isaiah and Jesus are saying that some are hearing without understanding, seeing without perceiving (Isa. 6:9; Matt. 13:14-15).

I shall not forget how, one day at a gospel rally, I invited people to stay behind so that I could explain the way of salvation to them. Among the group, which stayed behind, I recognized the face of someone of the confirmation class of mine to whom I had shown the way of salvation six months earlier. I assumed that she stayed behind out of interest or perhaps with a friend. Great was my surprise when, after the gathering, she thanked me with tears of gratitude for having led her to find her Saviour at that occasion. Six months earlier she had heard the Word without understanding. To hear, therefore, means to understand.

How will we know for certain that we had truly heard the Word? When Philip heard an eunuch (Ethiopian) reading the book of the prophet Isaiah, he asked him: "Do you really understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30), And he said: "How is it possible for me to do so unless someone explains it to me and guides me [in the right way]?" It is clear from this that the eunuch did not understand what he was reading.

Now this was the passage of Scripture that he was reading: "Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so He opens not His mouth" (Acts 8:32; cf. Isa. 53:7).

And the eunuch said to Philip: "I beg of you, tell me about whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" (Acts 8:34). And we read, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this portion of Scripture he announced to him the glad tidings (Gospel) of Jesus, and about Him" (Acts 8:35). It means that Isaiah 53 is speaking about Jesus Christ (cf. John 12:37-41; Luke 22:37). And when the eunuch understood the Word of God correctly, Philip led him to accept Christ Jesus as his Saviour (cf. Acts 8:36-38). It is of great importance for the preacher to rightly interpret the Scriptures. Paul writes to Timothy, saying: "Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

But it is of even great importance that the other person must hear what you are talking about; he must understand. If anyone is hearing the Word of the kingdom and does not grasp and comprehend it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart, but he who hears the Word and grasps and comprehends it, he indeed bears fruit (cf. Matt. 13:19,23). To hear means to understand.

## 5. HOW DO WE OPEN OUR HEARTS ?

It is written: "Do two walk together except they make an appointment and have agreed" (Amos 3:3). It is like a man who declares his love to his girlfriend and proposes to her. She hears it with her ears, thinks it over with her mind, decides with her heart and responds consciously by answering: "yes", with her mouth. The Lord does it in exactly the same way. In the Bible the Lord says: "My son (daughter) give Me your heart" (Prov. 23:26). We read it with our eyes in His Word, or hear it with our ears, consider it with our minds, decide with our hearts and respond consciously with our mouths, saying: "Yes, Lord, I give my heart to You".

We read: "The [Holy] Spirit and the bride (the church, the true Christians) say, come! And let him who is listening say, come! And let everyone come who is thirsty ... and whoever [earnestly] desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17). How do you do it? You say it: "Lord, I come to you and take the water of life."

In Revelation 3:20 we read: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if (when) anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me". "These are the words of the Amen, the trusty and faithful and true Witness, the Origin and Beginning and Author of God's creation" [Isa. 55:4; Prov. 8:22] (Rev. 3:14). The Lord knocks on our heart's door by means of His Word. He says it in His Word. We read it with our eyes, or hear it with our ears, and we answer in exactly the same way.

In 1954 I visited a mission station in Africa. I had to approach the chief of the tribe first to ask for permission to address his people. While I was talking to him, I noticed three huts that had obviously just been completed. Around the huts there was a clay wall with one opening allowing access to the huts. When the chief saw my interest in the huts, he said: "It is my new home. Do you want to look at it?"

While we were walking in the direction of the huts, he suddenly stopped and said: "Let me just knock first, so that they can open up for us". I was quite surprised and I thought, we are still about ten meters away, his arm is not long enough to knock. The wall is made of clay, not wood, they won't hear any knocking. In any event, there is no door in the opening. How do you open up that which is already open?

He stood there and spoke, saying: "The chief and the pastor are here. May we come in?". And the response came: "The chief and the pastor may come in". The chief then turned to me and said: "They opened up for us, we may go inside". The chief was knocking by means of the spoken word and entrance was obtained in precisely the same way. At that moment I was thinking of Revelation 3:20 and understood it so much better, where the Lord knocks by means of his Word to open up to Him, and we respond to His Word in precisely the same way. God speaks and we answer. We say: "Come in, Lord".

## 6. HOW WILL I KNOW THAT I HAVE BEEN SAVED ?

Paul writes to the Corinthians, saying: "Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it [not Christ]. Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever increasing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you - unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Everything boils down to the question whether you are showing the proper fruits of your faith. Saving faith means to believe (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) Jesus and to accept Him as your Saviour (John 1:12) and Lord (Col. 2:6). It means to open your heart for Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:20).

How will I know for certain that Jesus really came into my heart? He says it in His Word. He says: "If (when) anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door I will come in" (Rev. 3:20). And He is the true Witness (Rev. 3:14). He cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). "He Who promised is reliable (sure) and faithful to His word" (Heb. 10:23).

When a father says to his child he has ten cents in his fist, what does he have in his fist? Ten cents, of course. How does the child know it? Does he see it? No, but he knows it is there, because his dad said so. He believes that his father will not lie to him. If we want to make sure of the date, we look on a calendar.

How much more can we trust God! Scripture says: "If we accept [as we do] the testimony of men [if

we are willing to take human authority], the testimony of God is greater (of stronger authority), for this is the testimony of God, even the witness which He has borne regarding His Son" (1 John 5:9). God's Word is the truth (John 17:17). We can trust God. I know therefore that the Lord is dwelling in my heart, because He has promised to come into my heart if (when) I invite Him in (Rev. 3:20).

I also know that He has entered because He is celebrating with me. When the prodigal son (Luke 15) returned to the house of his father, his father said to his bond servants: "Bring quickly the best robe (the festive robe of honour) and put it on him; and give him a ring for his hand and sandals for his feet [Gen. 41:42; Zech. 3:4]. And bring out that [wheat]-fatted calf and kill it; and let us revel and feast and be happy and make merry. And this because his son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! And they began to revel and feast and make merry" (Luke 15:22-24). I can therefore say that I know that He entered because I feel it. Scripture says: "[After all] the kingdom of God is not a matter of [getting the] food and drink [one likes], but instead it is righteousness (that state which makes a person acceptable to God) and [heart] peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). And peace and joy has to do with our feelings. The Lord let us feel that we are saved.

How does it happen that people who came to repentance, who give their hearts to the Lord Jesus and accept His forgiveness, say that they feel nothing? The answer to that question may simply be this, that we might deal with persons who do not truly believe what God has promised. If we believe that all our sins have been forgiven, that our relationship with God is

in order, that He has given to us eternal life and saved us from eternal hell, we ought to be profoundly happy, or we may feel it is too good to be true.

The Scripture says: "He who possesses the Son has (already) that life" (1 John 5:12). And also: "I write this unto you ... that you may know [with settled and absolute knowledge] that you [already] have life, yes, eternal life" (1 John 5:13). You know it because it is written.

If you were to receive a letter from an attorney informing you that you have inherited a fortune, you will be very happy, unless you do not believe the contents of the letter.

Do not be discouraged because you do not feel that you are saved. Our assurance rest also on what we experience: "We know that we have passed over out of death into life by the fact that we love the brethren" (our fellow Christians) (1 John 3:14). This means that if we love a person because he is a Christian, it is clear proof that we ourselves are already born again. And we may say that we know it because the Holy Scripture says that we know it. It is also written: "Little children, let us not love [merely] in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth (in practice and in sincerity). By this we shall come to know (perceive, recognize, and understand) that we are in the Truth, and can reassure (quiet, conciliate, and pacify) our hearts in His presence, whenever our hearts in [tormenting] self-accusation make us feel guilty and condemn us [For we are in God's hands]. For He is above and greater than our consciences (our hearts), and He knows (perceives and understands)

everything" [nothing is hidden from Him] (1 John 3:18-20).

Our assurance rests on what we do, rather than on what we feel. If our hearts condemn us, let us resist the devil [stand firm against him] (James 4:7), by telling him that you are sure of your salvation because you had come to Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:28), who promised, saying: "All whom my Father gives (entrusts) to Me will come to Me (trust in, adhere to, and rely on Me); and the one who comes to Me I will most certainly not cast out" [I will never; no never, reject one of them who comes to Me] (John 6:37).

Jesus also made a promise; He said: "Therefore, everyone who acknowledges Me before men and confesses Me [out of the state of oneness with Me], I will also acknowledge him before My Father Who is in heaven and confess [that I am abiding in] him" (Matt. 10:32). And how do we confess Him before men? It is, for example, written of Jesus: "Who was betrayed and put to death because of our misdeeds and was raised to secure our justification" (our acquittal), [making our account balance and absolving us from all guilt before God] (Rom. 4:25). Now, if you admit before men that you believe that Jesus was put to death because of your misdeeds and was raised to secure your right standing before God, then you did confess Him before men, and that assures your salvation.

Once on a parish visit, a family in my church wished to know whether one could be certain of one's salvation. I made references to the Bible such as 2 Corinthians 5:1 "For we know that if (when) the tent which is our earthly home is destroyed (dissolved), we have from God a building, a house not made with

hands, eternal in the heavens". The Bible says: we know it. And thus we know it, because it is written in the Book. At their request, I explained to them the way of salvation. When I was satisfied that they understood what I was talking about, I asked my elder to conclude our visit with prayer. He, however, objected to this arrangement and said that I could not conclude the visit on that note. He explained that if I were in the insurance business I would have died of hunger. He said that one should never explain to somebody the advantages of a certain policy, persuaded the person to take out that policy, and then leave without making sure that the person had signed that policy. Then he said to me: "Doctor, you have just convinced these people of the urgent need of a policy that will ensure their heavenly home for them, and now you want to leave before they have accepted that policy". And so that evening we stayed a little longer and our hosts accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Together we prayed aloud, with them following my lead.

Now, I ask you, the reader, won't you, at this very moment, do what so many others have already done? Won't you come to the Lord in prayer, and accept Christ Jesus as your Saviour (John 1:12) and Lord (Col. 2:6). I implore you, please do it now (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20; 2 Cor. 6:2).

I accept the possibility that some of you have previously accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, but won't you dedicate yourself once again to the Lord? There is no fixed recipe or formula for repentance. What is important to know is that you have come to the Lord (cf. Matt. 11:28), and accepted the fact that He did not reject you (cf. John 6:37).

We are on our way to our eternal destination. We had better make double sure that our relationship with God is in order (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5). Rather accept the reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20) anew, and accept it here and now (2 Cor. 6:2). Make today the date that you can remember.

We know that conversion in its saving sense occurs but once in a man's life, and this act needs never be repeated. Jesus said of those who follow Him: "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never lose it or perish throughout the ages. [To all eternity they shall never by any means be destroyed] And no one is able to snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

But still, according to Scripture, it is not wrong to accept Christ Jesus more than once. The tense of the Greek verb in Romans 13:14 means that one must repeatedly clothe oneself with Christ Jesus. It is clear that Paul repeatedly put himself at the mercy of God (cf. Phil. 3:12-18). Come to repentance again and make doubly sure! (cf. Luke 9:23). A converted person may for a time continue in ungodly practices, but gradually his eyes are opened for these evils, and then he repents and forsakes the one after the other. To them it is written: "Repent and turn from your transgressions ..." (Ezek. 18:30).

I know that the prayer that I am going to ask you to pray is not really appropriate for someone who has already accepted the Lord as his Saviour. It is a prayer for someone who is accepting the Lord for the first time. And yet I am going to ask you to pray the prayer just as I have written it. For you it will be a

renewed dedication, while for others it will be a first dedication. The Scripture speaks of "a repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10), but also of a steadily cleansing from what is ignoble and unclean (cf. 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 22:14).

Here is the prayer: "Lord, I acknowledge that I am a lost sinner. I acknowledge that I can't save myself. Only You can save me. Please forgive me all my sins and help me to get rid of them. I open my heart to You. Please come in, Lord Jesus. I accept You as my personal Saviour and Lord. I believe that You have died in my place, and that You have paid all my debts to God. I believe You have been raised from the dead to put me in a right standing with God. I accept the reconciliation that You have worked for me through Your death and resurrection. I believe You have heard my prayer, because You have promised to do so. I believe that I am now shielded by God's power. Help me to tell others that I have accepted You as my Saviour and Lord. Help me to live my life and do my work in honour of Your Holy Name. Amen".

Yes, if you have prayed this prayer, you can know now that your relationship with God is healthy, when you have accepted Christ Jesus as your Saviour (John 1:12) and Lord (Col. 2:6-7). It is your proof that God has brought you back to life, you who were dead in your transgressions and your sins (cf. Eph. 2:1-5).

Scripture says: "And this is the confidence (the assurance, the privilege of boldness) which we have in Him: [we are sure] that if we ask anything (make any request) according to His will (in agreement with His own plan), He listens to and hears us" (1 John 5:14).

And we know that it is His will for us to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

One day a child asked me: "How will I know that I really have accepted Jesus as my Saviour?" Then I asked his father: "Sir, how do you know that you have married the mother of this child of yours?" The father answered me, saying: "I was there when it happened". Then I said to the child: "Exactly so, you know that you really have accepted Jesus as your Saviour because you were there when it happened".

## 7. WE OUGHT TO CONFESS HIM BEFORE MEN

Scripture says: "Because if you acknowledge and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and in your heart believe (adhere to, trust in, and rely on the truth) that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart a person believes (adheres to, trusts in and relies on Christ) and so is justified (declared righteous, acceptable to God), and with the mouth he confesses (declares openly and speaks out freely his faith) and confirms [his] salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10). A newly born baby will cry or else he or she is still being born. A newly born again person will confess or else it is a sign that he or she is not born again.

We read in Psalm 66:16: "Come and hear, all you who reverently and worshipfully fear God, and I will declare what He has done for me" (Ps. 66:16). Jesus said to Legion: "Go home to your own [family and relatives and friends] and bring back word to them of how much the Lord has done for you, and [how He has] had sympathy for you and mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). The Scripture commands us, saying: "Through Him therefore, let us constantly and at all times offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that thankfully acknowledge and confess and glorify His name" [Lev. 7:12; Isa. 57:19; Hos. 14:2] (Heb. 13:15).

Peter writes: "But in your hearts set Christ apart as holy [and acknowledge Him] as Lord. Always be ready to give a logical defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, but do it

courteously and respectfully" [Isa. 8:12-13] (1 Pet. 3:15). The Christian hope is not "may it be", but a joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation. [cf. Ps. 42:5] "Abraham hoped in faith that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been promised" (Rom. 4:18). Hope means therefore to be: "Fully satisfied and assured that God was (is) able and mighty to keep His word and to do what He had promised" (Rom. 4:21). "For in this hope we were saved ... we wait for it with patience and composure" (cf. Rom. 8:24-25).

Share your experience with others. Tell others what the Lord has done for you. Tell them that you have accepted Him as your Saviour (John 1:12) and Lord (Col. 2:6). But if you find it difficult to tell others that you have found the Lord as your Saviour, or if you feel that you are not ready yet to do so, please start to share the good news with at least one close friend who will rejoice with you in your newly found joy. But please do it as soon as possible. The longer you wait the more difficult it will become to break the news at all.

Perhaps you are afraid of the consequences of your testimony. Some of your friends may laugh at you, others will forsake you, or even your family may turn against you. The letter to the Hebrews states as follows: "But be ever mindful of the days gone by in which, after you were first spiritually enlightened, you endured a great and painful struggle. Sometimes being yourselves a gazing stock, publicly exposed to insults and abuse and distress, and sometimes claiming fellowship and making common cause with others who were so treated. For you did sympathize and suffer along with those who were imprisoned, and

you bore cheerfully the plundering of your belongings and the confiscation of your property, in the knowledge and consciousness that you yourselves had a better and lasting possession" (Heb. 10:32-34).

But please remember that Jesus Himself said: "If any person wills to come after Me, let him deny himself [disown himself, forget, lose sight of himself and his own interest, refuse and give up himself] and take up his cross daily and follow Me" [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform, wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also] (Luke 9:23). And don't forget: "I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me" [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self sufficient in Christ's sufficiency] (Phil. 4:13). Do not be concerned if you tremble at first. As you grow spiritually you will find it much easier to talk about your experiences in Christ.

## 8. WE MAY BE BUILDING OUR HOPE ON FALSE FOUNDATIONS

The Scripture warns: "Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands [who feels sure that he has a steadfast mind and is standing firm], take heed lest he fall" [into sin] (1 Cor. 10:12). Therefore we can understand why Paul wrote to the Corinthians, saying: "Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Christ]. Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever increasing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you - unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?" (2 Cor. 13:5).

Some people believe that good works will guarantee their salvation, but the Scripture clearly teaches that nobody is justified through observance of the law: "Yet we know that a man is justified or reckoned righteous and in right standing with God not by works of the law, but [only] through faith and [absolute] reliance on and adherence to and trust in Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). [Therefore] even we [ourselves] have believed on Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law [for we cannot be justified by any observance of the rituals of the law given by Moses], because by keeping legal rituals and by works no human being can ever be justified" (declared righteous and put in right standing with God) [Ps. 143:2] (Gal. 2:16).

Jesus said: "Even so on your part, when you have done everything that was assigned and commanded you, say: we are unworthy servants [possessing no merit, for we have not gone beyond our obligation]; we have [merely] done what was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). And Paul writes: "For we hold that a man is justified and made upright by faith independent of and distinctly apart from good deeds" (works of the law) [The observance of the law has nothing to do with justification] (Rom. 3:28). "For if justification (righteousness, acquittal from guilt) comes through [observing the ritual of] the law, Christ (the Messiah) died groundlessly and to no purpose and in vain" [His death was then wholly superfluous] (Gal. 2:21). No, good works cannot save anybody.

We are saved to do good works, that have been prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10), but we are not saved because of our good works (compare Luke 17:10). We are saved by God's grace through faith, not because of our faith. Our faith is not a good work, but it stands just in opposite of a good work. Paul declares emphatically that in our salvation it depends on him who does not work, but believe: "But to one who, not working [by the law], trusts (believe fully) in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness" [the standing acceptable to God] (Rom. 4:5). Our salvation does not come as a result of good works, it is the gift of God: "For it is by grace (God's unmerited favour) that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation) through [your] faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [of your own doing, it came not through your striving], but it is the gift of God; not because of works [not the fulfillment of the law's demands], lest any man should boast" [It is

not the result of what anyone can possibly do, so no one can pride himself in it or take glory to himself] (Eph. 2:8-9). It does not mean that one has been saved because he believed plus he had done good works, but it means that he is doing good works, because he has already been saved (cf. 1 John 3:18-19).

But what implies saving faith? A teacher showed his golden watch to his class, saying: "I will give this watch to anyone of you who will come and fetch it". No one moved. Then he said to Peter: "Peter, come and fetch this watch and it is yours". "Oh no sir", Peter replied. "Doesn't anyone of you want this watch?". Then one learner said: "Yes sir, I want it". "Now then come and fetch it". The learner stood up and approached the teacher who gave him his watch. Then Peter said: "Does this watch now really belong to him?". "Yes", answered the teacher. "Well if I knew that you really meant what you have said I would have come and fetch it". Now tell me, how many children in the class believed the teacher? Only one. The one that came and fetched the watch. So, to believe in what God said in His Word means to come and fetch Jesus, because God gave His Son to us so that everyone who believes in Him will accept Him as his Saviour (John 1:12), and will be saved (John 3:16). Therefore, to believe in God means to accept His Son Whom He has given us (1 John 5:11).

There is a huge difference between faith in general and saving faith. Saving faith is not mere knowledge or assent, but also confidence. It is something we do. We can for example believe in marriage without being married. The demons believe that God is one, and they shudder (James 2:19). They are not saved. It is only historical faith. Saving faith is

obedience (cf. John 3:36). Saving faith means “to believe in (trust in, adhere to, and rely on) God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15), who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:24); to accept Jesus as Saviour (cf. John 1:12); to come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost (Rev. 22:17).

A good life is no guarantee that we have been saved. We read of Cornelius: “A devout man who venerated God and treated Him with reverential obedience, as did his household; and he gave much alms to the people and prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2). And yet he was not saved. Of him Peter testified: “And he related to us how he had seen the angel in his house which stood and said to him: send men to Joppa and bring Simon who is surnamed Peter; he will give and explain to you a message by means of which you and all your household [as well] will be saved” [from eternal death] (Acts 11:13-14). And we know how this man came to be saved. Cornelius, a person who had led an exemplary life, still had to be saved. A good life is evidently no guarantee that we have been saved.

We might think that we have been saved because of our church membership. Paul writes to those who belong to the church of God in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), but unequivocally declares to them: “Awake [from your drunken stupor and return] to sober sense, and your right minds, and sin no more. For some of you have no knowledge of God [you are utterly and willfully and disgracefully ignorant, and continued to be so, lacking the sense of God’s presence and all true knowledge of Him] I say this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:34). Membership of a church is no guarantee that we have been saved.

Many people think that answered prayers are proof of their salvation. In Psalm 106:15 we read that the Lord answered the prayers of the Israelites: "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with the great majority of them, for they were overthrown and strewn down along [the ground] in the wilderness" [Num. 14:29-30] (1 Cor. 10:5). The Lord answered the prayers of the demons in Legion by permitting them to go into the hogs (Mark 5:12-13), and yet we know that hell has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). No, answered prayers do not guarantee that we have been saved.

How often do people build their salvation on the fact that God has helped them? "If it weren't for the Lord, where would I be?", I hear them say. But the fact that God has helped us is also no proof of our salvation. The Lord, for example, helped Saul to find his father's lost donkeys. The Lord helped him to become king of Israel. He helped him to defeat the enemies of Israel, but how did the king die? He died as one whom the Lord had abandoned. The fact that the Lord has helped us is therefore no guarantee that we have been saved. No, the message of the Bible is different.

Job asks the question: "Who can bring a clean thing out of the unclean? No one!" [Isa. 1:18; 1 John 1:8] (Job 14:4). David said: "Behold, I was brought forth in [a state of] iniquity; my mother was sinful who conceived me" [and I too am sinful] [John 3:6; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:3] (Ps. 51:5). Jesus said: "What is born of [from] flesh is flesh [of the physical is physical]; and what is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Paul teaches: "Since all have sinned and are falling short of

the honour and glory which God bestows and receives" (Rom. 3:23). And also: "Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man, and death as result of sin, so death spread to all men, [no one being able to stop it or to escape its power] because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12). And also: "And all who depend on the law [who are seeking to be justified by obedience to the law of rituals] are under a curse and doomed to disappointment and destruction, for it is written in the Scriptures: cursed (accursed, devoted to destruction, doomed to eternal punishment) be everyone who does not continue to abide (live and remain) by all the precepts and commands written in the Book of the law and practice them" [Deut. 27:-26] (Gal. 3:10). And John writes: "If we say (claim) we have not sinned, we contradict His Word and make Him out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us" [the divine message of the Gospel is not in our hearts] (1 John 1:10). All people are under the curse because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). It is for this reason that Christ became a curse to redeem us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). These references are sufficient to make us understand that all people need to be saved.

The grace of God includes our responsibility. Jesus said: "However, apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Scripture says: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). All things include our responsibility.

## 9. WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES

Scripture teaches that we are unable to save ourselves. Jeremiah writes: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard his spots? Then also can you do good who are accustomed and taught, even trained to do evil" (Jer. 13:23).

Jesus said: "I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). We are born first, and then we are born again. Our new birth takes place in our own lifetime.

Jesus also said: "It is the Spirit Who gives life [He is the Life-giver]; the flesh conveys no benefit whatever" [there is no profit in it] (John 6:63). Paul teaches that the Lord has brought us back to life, we who have been dead in our transgressions and our sins (Eph. 2:1-5). A dead person is not capable of doing anything unless he is first brought back to life. We are, therefore, unable to save ourselves.

It is God Who saves us (2 Tim. 1:8-9). Paul writes: "Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold the fresh and new has come! But all things are from God" (2 Cor. 5:17-18). Yes, God does everything.

But even though God does everything, He does not do it alone. And naturally He does not do it in partnership with us. It is not God along with us, Who works our salvation. No, He does it all, but He does it

in and through us. We become involved. It is the Lord Who opened the heart of Lydia. But it does not end there. He opened her heart so that she could respond to Paul's message. She responded by believing (Acts 16:14-15).

The Lord saves us through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). It is our faith that God takes into account in order to put us right with Himself: "But to one who, not working [by the law], trusts (believes fully) in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness" (the standing acceptable to God) (Rom. 4:5). Faith is the vehicle through which we accept Christ Jesus (John 1:12).

Because of our sins Christ was handed over to death, and He was raised to life in order to restore our relationship with God (Rom. 4:25). It is through our faith that we receive and make this experience our own (Rom. 5:1). Faith is thus a prerequisite for salvation: "And he who believes in (has faith in, clings to, relies on) the Son has (now possesses) eternal life, But he who disbelieves (is unbelieving toward, refuses to trust in, disregards, is not subject to) the Son will never see (experience) life, but (instead) the wrath of God abides on him" [God's displeasure remains on him: His indignation hangs over him continually] [Hab. 2:4] (John 3:36). We must believe, for he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16). We are not saved without faith, but not because of our faith. We are saved by means of our faith (*dia pisteos*), but not on the ground (*dia pistin*) of our faith. We must not forget that God Himself works that faith in us (John 6:29); it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

It is the Lord Who knocks at the door, and it is up to us to open the door for Him so He can enter and feast with us (Rev. 3:20). By believing we open our hearts so that He can dwell in us (Eph. 3:17). We do it because He knocks.

## 10. THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

Repentance means to come to your senses (Compare Luke 15:17), and to turn from your sins, "Say to them, as I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).

Scripture says: "For the real function of the law is to make men recognize and be conscious of sin" [not mere perception, but an acquaintance with sin which works toward repentance, faith, and holy character] (Rom. 3:20). "What then do we conclude? Is the law identical with sin? Certainly not! Nevertheless, if it had not be for the law, I should not recognized sin or have known its meaning. [For instance] I would not have known about covetousness [would have no consciousness of sin or guilt] if the law had not [repeatedly] said: you shall not covet and have an evil desire" [for one thing and another] [Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21] (Rom. 7:7). "Everyone who commits (practices) sin is guilty of lawlessness; for [that is what] sin is, lawlessness" (the breaking, violation of God's law by transgression or neglect - being unrestraint and unregulated by His commands and His will) (1 John 3:4).

Sin is thus disobedience to the will and commands of God. To turn from our sins, means therefore: to return to God. And to return to God means to turn away from sin (cf. Luke 15:13-21). Paul said to King Agrippa that he "made known openly first of all to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout the whole land of Judea, and also among

the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do the works and live lives consistent with and worthy of their repentance" (Acts 26:20).

We have to confess all our sins to God. David said: "I acknowledge my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord [continually unfolding the past until all is told] - then You [instantly] forgave me the guilt and iniquity of my sin, Selah" [please pause, and calmly think of it!] (Ps. 32:5). You also have to: "Confess (mutual) to one another therefore your faults" (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins) (James 5:16). This does not mean that we have to tell the whole world our sins, or to first confess to a specific person what we have done wrong. We have only one Mediator, "for there [is only] one God, and [only] one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

If we know that we have done anything wrong, we must rectify it in as far as it is possible (cf. Rom. 12:18), as it is necessary (Rom. 13:8), and as it is in accordance with love (Rom. 14:15; 15:14). When I was a boy I shot a bird that was protected by law. After my conversion it bothered me. To quiet my conscience I went to a police station and reported it. The officer asked me if anybody saw me. I said: No. Then he asked me if anybody has accused me. When I answered no, he said to me: You may go. There is no law if there is no accuser. Scripture says: "For without the law sin is dead" [the sense of it is inactive and a lifeless thing] (Rom. 7:8).

Repentance means to turn to God and to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul testified: "But

constantly and earnestly I bore testimony both to Jews and Greeks, urging them to turn in repentance [that is due] to God and to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" [that is due to Him] (Acts 20:21). It means God does not save us without, but with faith and repentance.

To prove your repentance by your deeds (Matt. 3:8), includes the putting right of the wrongs of the past. Zacchaeus said, after he opened his house and his heart to Jesus (Luke 19:5-6): "See Lord, the half of my goods I [now] give [by way of restoration] to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I [now] restore four times as much" [Exod. 22:1; Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:6-7] (Luke 19:8). There are certain things that we must rectify. The Bible says: "Keep out of debt and owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8). That means, quite simply: pay your debts, honour your contracts. And if you cannot honour your word, then sort the matter out with your creditor. Also in Romans 12:18 we learn: "If possible, as far as it depends on you, have peace with everyone". We won't be able to live in peace with everyone, but we must at least try. We must do everything in love (1 Cor. 16:14). Love does no harm to your neighbor (Rom. 13:10).

Restitution has to do with our witness and with our sanctification and our spiritual growth: "But at that previous time, when you had not come to be acquainted with and understand and know the true God, you [Gentiles] were in bondage to gods who by their very nature could not be gods at all" [gods that really did not exist] (Gal. 4:8). "But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were [so] far away, through (by, in) the blood of Christ have been brought near" (Eph. 2:13).

Paul writes: "For we also were once thoughtless and senseless, obstinate and disobedient, deluded and misled; [we too were once] slaves to all sorts of cravings and pleasures, wasting our days in malice and jealousy and envy, hateful (hated, detestable) and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour to men [as man] appeared, He saved us, not because of any righteousness that we had done, but because of His own pity and mercy, by [the] cleansing [bath] of the new birth (regeneration) and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:3-5). "Therefore we stripped ourselves of our former nature [put off and discard our old unrenewed self] which characterized our previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; and constantly renewed in the spirit of our mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude]. And put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, [Godlike] in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

Paul writes: "Now the doings (practices) of the flesh are clear (obvious): They are immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies), envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like" (Gal. 5:19-21). And also: "For if you live according to [the dictates of] the flesh, you will surely die. But if through the power of the [Holy] Spirit you are [habitually] putting to death (making extinct, deadening) the [evil] deeds prompted by the body, you shall [really and genuinely] live forever" (Rom. 8:13). This is durative; a deed that ever continues.

But in Galatians 5:24 Paul writes: "And those who belong to Christ Jesus (the Messiah) have crucified (one past act) the flesh (the godless human nature) with its passions and appetites and desires". It is something that does not continue, it is done and over. It seems as if Paul contradicts himself, because the flesh still troubles us. But in the next verse Paul qualifies his statement, saying: "If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" [If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by The Spirit] (Gal. 5:25). It means that because in conversion we accepted the crucified Christ, we in Him also have crucified our flesh. In conversion we have taken (past tense) a decisive stand against the practices of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:24). Through our union with Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) we made a definite break with the evil of the past. Therefore we have to put (present tense) to death the practices of the flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13). We must therefore be what we are. We must become in practice what we are in principle.

In this respect it is necessary to note that the sufferings of the present time (this present life) is part and parcel of us as believers (cf. Acts 14:22). Job (cf. Job 10:1-10; 42:5) and Asaph (cf. Ps. 73:13-17) at first did not understand this, but the psalmist says: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now Your word do I keep [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying it] ... It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:67,71). Paul writes: "And to keep me from being puffed up and too much elated by the exceeding greatness (pre-eminence) of these revelations, there was given me a

thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack and buffet and harass me, to keep me from being excessively exalted" [Job 2:6] (2 Cor. 12:7).

There is still another blessing in our afflictions. Paul writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of sympathy (pity and mercy) and the God [Who is the Source] of every comfort (consolation and encouragement), Who comforts (console and encourage) us in every trouble (calamity and affliction), so that we may also be able to comfort (console and encourage) those who are in any kind of trouble or distress, with the comfort (consolation and encouragement) with which ourselves are comforted (consoled and encouraged) by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). We have to use our suffering for the benefit of others.

Suffering for Christ (cf. Acts 9:16) or suffering with Christ (cf. Rom. 8:17) includes every kind of affliction (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17-5:5; Col. 1:24; Heb. 10:32-34; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). The suffering is to prepare us for the glory that is about to be revealed to us and in us and for us and conferred on us (cf. Rom. 8:16-17). It is written: "For our light, momentary affliction (this slight distress of the passing hour) is ever more and more abundantly preparing and producing and achieving for us an everlasting weight of glory" [beyond all measure, excessively surpassing all comparisons and all calculations, a vast and transcendent glory and blessedness never to cease!] (2 Cor. 4:17). Peter writes: "So, since Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than to fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with

[intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God], so that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills" (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

Our sanctification is a process. The Holy Spirit must be allowed (cf. Gal. 5:25) to direct our progress, step by step toward the goal of perfect consecration to the Lord: "Now all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendour and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The words: "from one degree of glory to another" point to a process. Our sanctification is not wrought in one instant, but it comes as a steady development (cf. Eph. 4:15). We "grow in grace" (2 Pet 3:18). Scripture says: "Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ (the Messiah), advancing steadily toward completion and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity" (Heb. 6:1).

Yes, the extent to which restitution between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and our fellow man has been made, is a measure of the extent to which our religion has become a living reality. And this renewing of our spiritual life will continue until: "everything is subjected to Him (the Son), then the Son Himself will also subject Him to [the Father] Who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all" [be everything to everyone, supreme, the

indwelling and controlling fact of life] (1 Cor. 15:28). This is God's utmost goal with all of His children. We may call this happening the glory of our salvation.

## 11. WE ARE NOT ALL SAVED IN THE SAME WAY

Salvation does not come to us all in the same manner. The conversion of Paul differs radically from that of Timothy.

Paul's repentance came in dramatic fashion. He initially persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9). He was a blasphemer and a violent man (1 Cor. 1:13). But while he was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem, God intervened powerfully in his life (Acts. 9:1-9). Three days later Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, helped Paul to come to repentance (Acts. 9:10-19; 22:16). His was a dramatic conversion. Paul knew exactly when, where and how it happened.

And how different was the conversion of Timothy. He grew up in the house of a god-fearing mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). He had from his childhood a knowledge of and been acquainted with the sacred writings (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15). But Paul called him: "my true son in faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). It means that Timothy has become a born again child of the Lord through the ministry of Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15).

The life of Timothy thereafter did not differ perceptibly from his life before his repentance. And yet there was a difference. Christ was now occupying his heart (cf. Eph. 3:17). From the moment of his conversion his life was united with Christ, rooted and built up in Him (Col. 2:6-7).

Timothy therefore came to Christ very quietly. And yet he and Paul knew that it happened, where, when and how it happened. Paul said Timothy is: “my true son in faith” (1 Tim. 1:2).

Scripture tells us of a jailer who was saved instantly upon hearing for the first time the message of what is needed to do in order to be saved (Acts 16:30-34). In the case of Paul it took him three days to come to a final commitment to the Lord (Acts. 9:1-18; 22:16).

In the case of the jailer no requirements were stated, except to believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts. 16:31). But to the rich young man, for example, Jesus said: “You lack one thing; go and sell all you have and give [the money] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come [and] accompany Me” [walking the same road that I walk] (Mark 10:21).

It seems as if the Lord had different ways of dealing with different people. To the one salvation was given quite unexpectedly (cf. Luke 19:5-9), but to others Jesus said: “Strive to enter by the narrow door [force yourself through it], for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24).

On close examination, we discover that the summons of Jesus to some people to strive to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24), does not contradict the seemingly unconditional salvation He offered the jailer for example (Acts 16:31). On the contrary the effort to enter through the narrow door, is rather the natural outcome of the true repentance, which is given by the Lord (Acts. 5:31; 26:20). It produces fruit in keeping with repentance (cf. Luke

3:8). This truth is fully proven by the conduct of Zacchaeus who was willing to rectify the wrongs in his past immediately after he received Jesus into his house and into his heart (Luke 19:5,8). The deeds of Zacchaeus, thus, illustrated and underlined the genuineness of his conversion. Paul writes: "I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward" (Phil. 3:14). After his conversion, Paul was still striving to be ready to enter through the narrow door.

Jesus tells us of a narrow gate we find at the beginning of a narrow road that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). But the narrow door He spoke of (Luke 13:24), we find at the end of that narrow road (Luke 13:13-30). It is the door that gives entrance to the wedding banquet of the Lord (cf. Matt. 25:1-12). And all of us, who entered the narrow road, are on our way to that narrow door. Some people, however, will be turned away (Matt. 25:8-12; Luke 13:24-30). It is those people who had not a wedding garment (Matt. 22:11-13), those who had not put on Christ Jesus (Rom. 13:14). May God have mercy on us to be ready to go in with Him to the wedding banquet (cf. Matt. 25:10).

But all of us that had put on Christ Jesus (Rom. 13:14), who had accepted Jesus as our personal Saviour, may keep in mind what Paul wrote to the Philippians: "And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bring to full completion in you. It is right and appropriate for me to have this confidence

and feel this way about you all, because you have me in your heart and I hold you in my heart as partakers and sharers, one and all with me, of (God's unmerited favour and spiritual blessing). [This is true] both when I am shut up in prison and when I am out in the defense and confirmation of the good news" (the Gospel) (Phil. 1:6-7). God never quits in the middle (cf. Rom. 11:29; Phil. 1:6-7).

However, it often happens that children of the covenant are unable to remember the date associated with their (first) repentance to salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). They may even doubt if it really happened. My advice to them is: do it again, just to make doubly sure. Rather accept the reconciliation to God through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20) anew, and do it here and now (2 Cor. 6:2). The Greek verb in Romans 13:14 has the meaning that one must clothe oneself repeatedly with Christ Jesus. Pray and say: "Lord, I believe that You have been put to death, because of my misdeeds, and was raised from the dead so that You can put me in a right standing with God (cf. Rom. 4:25). I accept it for myself. Amen". Make today the date that you can remember.

We must never forget that Jesus told a parable of a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. And when the king came in to view the guests he looked intently at a man who had no wedding garment. Then the king said to the attendants: "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him into darkness outside; there will be weeping and grinding of teeth" (cf. Matt. 22:1-13). We must make beforehand double sure that we have a wedding garment. The wedding garment is nobody else than Jesus Christ. We read in Romans 13:14, "But clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ" (the

Messiah). Accept Him right now as your Saviour. We cannot afford to gamble when it comes to our eternal destiny.

## 12. THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE

Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Peter writes: "The Lord does not delay and is not tardy or slow about what He promises, according to some people's conception of slowness, but He is longsuffering (extraordinary patient) toward you, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). It is thus the Lord's will that all should repent. Paul wrote: "For this is the will of God, that you should be consecrated" (separated and set apart for pure and holy living) (1 Thess. 4:3). To do the will of the Father means to repent and to live a holy life. The Scripture admonishes the church of Laodicea to: "be earnest and repent" [changing your mind and attitude] [Prov. 3:12] (Rev. 3:19). Scripture says to us: "Whoever [earnestly] desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17), and warns us: "And if anyone cancels or take away from the statement of the book of this prophecy [these predictions relating to Christ's kingdom and its speedy triumph, together with the consolations and admonitions or warnings pertaining to them], God will cancel and take away from him his share in the city of holiness (purity and hallowedness), which are described and promised in this book" (Rev. 22:19). The necessity of repentance is thus clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus began to preach, saying: "Repent (change your mind for the better, heartily amend your ways, with abhorrence of your past sins), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). The message of the

Holy Scriptures is: repent or die (Ezek. 33:11). Even within the church the call to repentance must be heard (Rev. 2:5,16,21; 3:3,19). Those teachers, who tell the people that it is not necessary to come to repentance, are like those teachers of whom Jesus said: "Woe to you ... (who) shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces; for you neither enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who are about to go in to do so" (Matt. 23:13). May God take away the veil before their minds and their hearts, so they can see (cf. 2 Cor. 3:16). Paul constantly and earnestly bore testimony both to Jews and Greeks, urging them to turn in repentance [that is due] to God (cf. Acts 20:21).

The same must be said to those teachers who tell the people that it is not enough only to accept Jesus as their Saviour, for there are still other things you must do first in order to be saved. It is written we "drink the water of Life without cost" (Rev. 22:17). The Scripture says about Jesus: "You were slain (sacrificed) and with your blood You purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and nation" [Ps. 33:3] (Rev. 5:9). It is not his blood plus something else. His blood alone is sufficient to save us. In Proverbs 30:5-6 we read: "Every word of God is tried and purified; He is a shield to those who trust and take refuge in Him [Ps. 18:30; 84:11; 115:9-11] Add not to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar".

Indeed, everything that was written long ago in the Scriptures was meant to teach us (Rom. 15:4).

Some people do not realize that it is imperative to be saved: "For you say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown wealthy, and I am in need of nothing; and

you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" [Hos. 12:8] (Rev. 3:17). It is people who do not know that it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh conveys no benefit (cf. John 6:63). It is like a man who sits in a boat without paddles in a river, and is moving by the stream of the river in the direction of a dangerous waterfall. Suddenly he realizes that he cannot save himself; he is in need of somebody to save him. Someone sees it and fastens a stump at the end of a rope and throws the stump to the boat. Now, what must the person in the boat do to be saved? He must grab the stump and cling to it. Then that person on the side of the river will pull him out of the river. But what must he do to fall off the waterfall to his death? The answer is: nothing. He only has to ignore the stump.

This is a description of our situation. We are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), on our way to a lost eternity. And we cannot save ourselves (cf. Jer. 13:23). But by the grace of God the rope of salvation is thrown within our reach (cf. Rom. 10:6-8). The Holy Scripture says: "The (Holy) Spirit and the bride (the church, the true Christians) say, Come! And let him who is listening say, Come! And let everyone come who is thirsty ... and whoever [earnestly] desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17). Now what must we do to be saved? We have to grab this rope of salvation and cling to it. But what must we do to get lost? The answer is: nothing - only think that we need not to be saved. Yes, we only have to ignore that opportunity given to us by God to be saved. Heaven forbid! Scripture says: "It is a fearful (formidable and terrible) thing to incur the divine

penalties and be cast into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

We have to believe, because it is written: "... he who does not believe [who does not adhere to and trust in and rely on the Gospel and Him Whom it sets forth] will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). We read: "For indeed we have had the glad tidings [Gospel of God] proclaimed to us as truly as they [the Israelites of old did when the good news of deliverance from bondage came to them]; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because it was not mixed with faith (with the leaning of the entire personality of God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness) by those who heard it; neither were they united in faith with the ones (Joshua and Caleb) who heard did believe" (Heb. 4:2). We have to note that the message they heard did not benefit them, because it was not mixed with faith. The blame is put on them.

It is clear, the message is valid but it was not effective: "because it was not mixed with faith" (Heb. 4:2). Paul writes: "However, it is not as though God's Word has failed [coming to nothing]. For it is not everybody who is a descendant of Jacob (Israel) who belongs to [the true] Israel" (Rom. 9:6). We read: "For if the message given through angels [the Law spoken by them to Moses] was authentic and proved sure, and every violation and disobedience received an appropriate (just and adequate) penalty. How shall we escape [appropriate retribution] if we neglect to pay attention to such a great salvation [as is now offered to us, letting it drift past us forever]? For it was declared at first by the Lord [Himself], and it was confirmed to us and proved to be real and genuine by

those who personally heard [Him speak]" (Heb. 2:2-3). We shall not escape if we neglect to pay attention to such a great salvation. The message is: "if we neglect to pay attention".

Our salvation is an open invitation to all: "Wait and listen, everyone who is thirsty! Come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Yes, come, buy [priceless, spiritual] wine and milk without money and without price" [simply for the self surrender that accepts the blessing] [Rev. 21:6; 22:17] (Isa. 55:1). But Jesus said: "For many are called (invited and summoned), but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14).

We may ask the same question: "Is there then injustice on God's part?". Elihu said: "Truly God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert justice" (Job 34:12). Let us start by saying: God owes nobody anything. Adam represents all of us: "And the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and guard and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and blessing and calamity you shall not eat, for in the day when you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:15-17). When Adam disobeyed the command of God, he sinned. And we all sinned within him for we all were in his loins (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). It is written: "Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man, and death as a result of sin, so death spread to all men [no one being able to stop it or to escape its power] because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12). And Scripture declares: "We were then by nature children of God's wrath and heirs of His indignation, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:3).

Therefore, God owes nobody anything. It is His sovereign right to choose some of us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] "in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy [consecrated and set apart for Him] and blameless in His sight, even above reproach, before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4), and to leave others in the state wherein they, in the loins of Adam (cf. Heb. 7:9-10), brought themselves. Indeed, is He not permitted to do what He chooses with what is His? (cf. Matt. 20:15).

It is true that Jesus said: "All whom the Father gives (entrusts) to Me will come to Me ..." (John 6:37). And: "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me attracts and draws him and gives him the desire to come to me" (John 6:44). And also: "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted him [unless he is enabled to do so] by the Father" (John 6:65).

But we may not let this fact rob us of the confidence to: "come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17), for Jesus Himself made an open invitation to every one, saying: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy-laden and overburdened, and I will give you rest" [I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls] (Matt. 11:28). And He also said: "... and the one who comes to Me I will most certainly not cast out" [I will never, no never, reject one of them who comes to Me] (John 6:37).

I know what you may say now: "But, if God decided before the foundation of the world that He will leave me in the state of sin wherein I, in the loins of Adam, had brought myself, is He not committed to

that decision He has made?”. It is true that God binds Himself to the Holy Scriptures. When a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested Him, Peter drew his sword, and striking the body servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear, Jesus said to him: “Put your sword back into its place ... Do you suppose that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will immediately provide Me with more than twelve legions [more than 80,000] of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must come about this way?” (Matt. 26:52-54). Jesus Himself said: “The Scripture cannot be set aside or cancelled or broken or annulled” (John 10:35).

It is true that God does not change (cf. James 1:17): “For God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable [He never withdraws them when once they are given, and He does not change His mind about those to whom He gives grace or to whom He sends His call] (Rom. 11:29). But as far as His reprimands are concerned, God is not a captive of His own decisions. God for example decided to destroy Nineveh within 40 days (Jonah 3:4). But when God saw that Nineveh turned from their evil ways, He revoked His [sentence of] evil that He had said that He would do to them and he did not do it [for He was comforted and eased concerning them] (Jonah 3:10; cf. Jer. 18:7-8). The Word of God says: “Return, O faithless sons, [says the Lord, and] I will heal your faithlessness” (Jer. 3:22). We may have the same attitude as the king of Nineveh who said: “Who can tell, God may turn and revoke His sentence against us [when we have met his terms], and turn away from His fierce anger so that we perish not” (Jonah 3:9).

It is written: "At one time I will suddenly speak concerning a nation or kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it. And if [the people of] that nation concerning of which I have spoken turn from their evil, I will relent and reverse My decision concerning the evil that I thought to do to them" (Jer. 18:7-8). On the other hand it is written: "At another time I will suddenly speak concerning a nation or kingdom, that I will build up and plant it; And if they do evil in My sight, obeying not My voice, then I will regret and reverse My decision concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it" (Jer. 18:9-10). In this sense we must understand the word of Jesus, saying: "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:13). At the same time we must confess our believe in the perseverance of the saints (John 10:28-29; 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6-7; etc.).

Therefore, it is possible that God can change His mind about people of whom He originally decided to leave them in the state wherein they put themselves in the loins of Adam, for it is written: "And He [that same Jesus Himself] is the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours alone but also for [the sins of] the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The expression "the whole world" includes all men who ever lived or will live. The Lord bought even those who went to hell, because they "subtly and stealthily introduce heretical doctrines (destructive heresies), even denying and disowning the Master Who bought them" (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1). But "the whole world" does not include all persons individually, just as the expression "the whole counsel" (cf. Mark 15:1) did not include every member of that counsel (cf. Luke 23:50-51).

Every rule has its exceptions (cf. Matt. 15:21-28). There are two such exceptions mentioned in the Scriptures. First, it is written: "If anyone sees his brother [believer] committing a sin that does not [lead to] death (the extinguishing of life) he will pray and [God] will give him life [yes, He will grant life to all whose sin is not one leading to death]. There is a sin [that leads] to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin which does not [involve] death" [that may be repented of and forgiven] (1 John 5:16-17).

The words "his brother" refers to a fellow Christian (cf. Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). This text speaks of "sin" not "a sin". It speaks of a state, not a specific act. The Scripture speaks of death in three distinct ways: (i) The physical death (cf. 2 Kings 13:14). (ii) The spiritual death (cf. Eph. 2:1). (iii) The eternal death, the second death (Rev. 20:6). John writes, saying: "If anyone sees his brother committing (a) sin that does not lead to death" (1 John 5:16). Paul also writes of "sin which leads to death" (Rom. 6:16). But neither he nor John specifies whether they mean physical, spiritual or everlasting death. But John writes that one can see when someone is committing sin that does not lead to death (1 John 5:16). It means one can see when sin leads to death. And the only death one can see is the physical death. One can see when somebody dies. John thus writes here about the physical death. John writes: "There is (a) sin that [leads to] death. I do not say that one should pray for that" (1 John 5:16).

As long as a person is still alive we may not stop praying for that person. Samuel writes: "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should

sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you ..." (1 Sam. 12:23). But when a person dies that person's destiny is sealed. Then our prayers cannot change their destiny. "If a tree falls ... in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie" (Eccl. 11:3).

When a certain rich man in Hades said to Abraham: "Have pity and mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame" (Luke 15:24), Abraham said: "Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who want to pass from this [place] to you may not be able, and no one may pass from there to us" (Luke 15:24,26). There is no second chance after death to get saved.

Secondly, it is written: "For if we go on deliberately and willingly sinning after once acquiring the knowledge of the Truth, there is no longer any sacrifice left to atone for [our] sins" [no further offering to which to look forward] (Heb. 10:26). In such a state one can blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: "But whosoever speaks abusively against or maliciously misrepresents the Holy Spirit can never get forgiveness, but is guilty of and is in the grasp of an everlasting trespass" (Mark 3:29). The word "never" means: "neither in this world and age or in the world and age to come" (Matt. 12:32). One may blaspheme and get forgiveness, when one can say, as Paul did, when he writes: "I obtained mercy because I had acted (blasphemed - cf. 1 Tim 1:12) out of ignorance in unbelief" (1 Tim 1:13). But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven because this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is done because a person deliberately and willingly, after once acquiring the knowledge of the Truth (cf. Heb. 10:26), that is

revealed to him by the Holy Spirit of Truth (1 John 5:7), that Jesus is Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3), has "persisted in saying that He (Jesus Christ) has an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:30). Such a person cannot become saved. But no child of God could ever and can never commit this sin, for a person who committed this sin can never be forgiven (cf. Mark 3:28-29), and to the children of God (cf. Jude v.1) it is written: "Now to Him Who is able to keep you without stumbling or slipping or falling, and to present [you] unblemished (blameless and faultless) before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy and exultation" [with unspeakable, ecstatic delight] (Jude v. 24).

To conclude: It is true that few are chosen (cf. Matt. 22:14), and that those who are chosen will come to faith (cf. Acts 13:48), and will be saved for ever: "For God's gifts and His calling are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). If God chose some it means that He left the others in the position they were. We may call this action of God a rejection of the others. We can't blame God for doing this, because He owes nobody anything, and He may do whatever He wants with His own (cf. Matt. 20:15). It is true that: "as many as were ordained to eternal life (and only those) believed" (Acts. 13:48). But at the same time it is also true that God made the door for salvation wide open, for: "He who did not withhold or spare [even] His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also with Him freely and graciously give us all [other] things?" (Rom. 8:32). We know that all God's reprimands and decisions are given conditionally (cf. Jer. 18:7-8; Jonah 3:4-10).

It will be sinful man to blame if anyone does not become saved: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest to them; for God hath

showed it to them ... so they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). And John writes: "There it was - the true Light [was then] coming into the world [the genuine, perfect, steadfast Light] that illumines every person [Isa. 49:6] (John 1:9), and the people have loved the darkness more than the Light, for their works (deeds) were evil" [Isa. 5:20] (John 3:19). Jesus said of Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a mother fowl gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused" (Matt. 23:37). And also: "And still you are not willing [but refuse] to come to Me, so that you might have life" (John 5:40).

It is true that Paul writes: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated (held in relative disregard in comparison with My feeling for Jacob) [Mal. 1:2,3]. What shall we conclude then? Is there injustice upon God's part? Certainly not! For he says to Moses: I have mercy on whom I will have mercy and will have compassion (pity) on whom I will have compassion [Exod. 33:19]. So then [God's gift] is not a question of human will and human effort, but of God's mercy. [It depends not on one's own willingness nor on his strenuous exertion as in running a race, but on God's having mercy on him]" (Rom. 9:13-16). This Word means that our salvation depends solely on the goodwill of God.

To Timothy Paul wrote: "First of all, I admonish and urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be offered on behalf of all men ... For such (praying) is good and right, and [it is] pleasing and acceptable to God our Saviour, Who wishes all men to be saved and [increasingly] to perceive and recognize and discern and know precisely and

correctly the divine Truth. For there [is only] one, and [only] one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Tim. 2:1,3-6).

Paul earnestly urged the Jews and the Greeks to turn in repentance to God and to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and said: "Therefore I testify and protest to you on this [our parting] day that I am clean and innocent and not responsible for the blood of any of you" (Acts 20:26). He said to them: "Your blood be upon your own heads" (Acts 18:6). In other words: You have only yourself to blame if you do not come to salvation. This Word means that it is our own responsibility to get saved.

We read: "Because I have called you and you refused ... I also will laugh at your calamity" (Prov. 1:25,26). And because Jerusalem refused to be gathered under the wings of Christ, her house is forsaken and desolate (cf. Matt. 23:37-38). Scripture asks: "How shall we escape [appropriate retribution] if we neglect and refuse to pay attention to such a great salvation [as is now offered to us, letting it drift past forever]?". This means that all of us are obliged to come to repentance, for God is: "not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

It is written: "Accordingly as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). And Peter wrote: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if you do these things you will never fall; For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:10-11). We have to accept it: Our Lord's call to sinners is thus in close agreement with what was ordained before the foundation of the world, (cf. Eph. 1:4) and "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17). The Scripture says: "So then, [God's gift] it not a question of human will and human effort, but of God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). But also: "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The Scripture teaches both our election and our own willingness or responsibility as realities.

The Scripture stated in several places that salvation is the responsibility of every one. For example: Matthew 4:17: "Repent (change your mind for the better, heartily amend your ways, with abhorrence of your past sins), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Matthew 24:13: "But he who endures to the end will be saved". Acts 18:6: "Your blood be upon your own hands". Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape if we neglect and refuse to pay attention to such a great salvation?" [as is now offered to us, letting it drift past forever].

But it is too complex for us to try and bring harmony between the sovereignty of God (cf. Rom. 9:16-18) and the responsibility of man (cf. Rev. 2:17).

The best we can do, is to listen to what is written in Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all of the words of this law". The solution is: Do what the Bible commands us to do; it is: "Lay hold of the divine favour [now offered you] and be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20), and leave the rest in the hands of God. This is what the Scripture

commands us to do: "Work out your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling ... for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you both to will and to work" (Phil. 2:12-13). Trust God! (Ps. 25:2). For it is written: "Faithful is he Who is calling you [to Himself] and utterly trustworthy, and He will also do it [fulfill His call by hallowing and keeping you]" (1 Thess. 5:24).

### 13. WE HAVE TO MAKE A CHOICE

All people are incurably religious. There is no person on earth that does not belong to a Religion. The non-Christian religions, as a rule, contain a system of rules and regulations. If you do this and that, then you are in a right standing with God. Everything depends on what you do. It is in its essence self saving Religions.

We may not say that all Religions are in essence the same, and that anyone of them is capable to bring us in a right standing with God. The Christian Religion differs from them all. The Christian Religion depends on a Person. Jesus Himself said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father but by (through) Me" (John 14:6). We have to make a choice between the Christian Religion and all the others, for Jesus said: "But whoever denies and disowns Me before men, I also will deny and disown him before My Father Who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33). And also: "He who is not with Me [siding and believing with Me] is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me [engage in My interest], scatters" (Luke 11:23). We have to make a choice for or against Christ Jesus. We cannot afford to ignore the choice. Peter testified about Jesus, saying: "And there is salvation in and through no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by and in which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

When Peter said to Jesus: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), Jesus replied: "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because My Father in heaven has revealed this to you"

(Matt. 16:17). But how will we know for certain that Jesus Christ is really what He said about Himself? Jesus said for instance two things about Himself: He said beforehand that He would be killed, but on the third day He would be raised from the dead (cf. Matt. 16:21). And it happened precisely as He said it would. Paul writes, saying: "I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scripture said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scripture said" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Thus, we know that Jesus spoke the truth. He was a true Witness; not a liar.

Jesus was raised from the dead with His own body. When Jesus appeared to His Eleven [apostles] gathered together, and those who were with them (Luke 24:33,36), He took His stand among them, but His disciples were so startled and terrified that they thought they saw a spirit (Luke 24:37). And He said to them: "Why are you disturbed and troubled, and why do such doubts and questionings arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself! Feel and handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and blood, as you see that I have" (Luke 24:37-39). And He ate a piece of broiled fish before them (Luke 24:42-43). Then later He showed Himself to more than five hundred brethren at one time, of whom the majority was still alive when Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:6). Yes, He Himself was raised from the dead as He beforehand announced.

The fact that Jesus really died on the cross, is proven by the fact that when Peter and John came to the tomb, John writes about them, saying: "Until then ... they still hadn't understand the Scriptures that

Jesus must rise from the dead" (John 20:9). It means that John testified that Jesus was dead. And Jesus Himself said to John: "I died, but see I live forever ..." (Rev. 1:18).

Jesus also said about Himself that He is the Messiah (cf. John 4:25-26), and that He is the Son of God (cf. John 10:35). These statements we cannot verify, but the Scripture asks rightly: "Does a spring of water bubble out both fresh water and bitter water? ... No, you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring" (James 3:1-12). Thus, if what Jesus beforehand had said about his resurrection on the third day, is true, as it indeed is, than it stands for reason that what He had said about Himself, that He is the Messiah and the Son of God, is also true.

The Christian Religion is the only Religion that tells us that we cannot save ourselves, that say: "For we hold that a man is justified and made upright by faith independent of and distinctly apart from good deeds" (works of the law) [The observing of the law has nothing to do with justification] (Rom. 3:28). Thus, if the Christian Religion is right about the fact that we cannot save ourselves, and all the other Religions state that we can save ourselves, we have to make a choice between the Christian Religion and all the other Religions.

It pleases God to let his Church become visible through gifts given to His people (Eph. 4:8): "And His gifts were [varied; He Himself appointed and gave men to us] some to be apostles (special messengers), some prophets (inspired preachers and expounders), some evangelists (preachers of the Gospel, traveling missionaries), some pastors (shepherds of His flock)

and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). These different offices developed into three offices, namely pastors, elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-2; 3:8; Acts. 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1). Paul wrote to all the saints (God's consecrated people) in Christ Jesus: "who are at Philippi, with the bishops (overseers) and deacons" (assistants) (Phil. 1:1). He did not mention the other offices, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11.

These gifts (offices) belong to God's people, but the people belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God (1 Cor. 3:21-23). "His (God's) intention was the perfecting and the full equipment of the saints (His consecrated people), [that they should do] the word of ministering toward building up Christ's body (the church)" (Eph. 4:12). Yes, all of these people are Christ's body, and each of them is a part of it (1 Cor. 12:27). And if we are Christ's body we: "are many parts of one body, and we all belong to its other" (Rom. 12:5).

Paul writes: "But the Jerusalem above (the Messianic kingdom of Christ) is free, and she is our mother" (Gal.4:26). With "our mother" Paul includes himself as well as the Galatians who are born again, who are not children of the slave woman [the natural] but of the free [the supernatural] (Gal. 4:31), those who belong to God. The church is mother of the people of God. He speaks of the Christian Church.

The Christian Church is not the mother of the world. Those who are part of the world, do not belong to God. Jesus said: "I am praying for them (who belong to You). I am not praying (requesting) for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they belong to You" [not the world] (John 17:9). This does

not mean that the church must be hostile toward the world, because the church lives in and from the world. It is written that God loves the world (it means the people of the world), but God hates the sins of the world. Therefore we read: "Do not love or cherish the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh [craving for sensual gratification] and the lust of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the pride of life [assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things] - these do not come from the Father but are from the world [itself]. And the world passes away and disappears, and with it the forbidden cravings (the passionate desires, the lust) of it; but he who does the will of God and carries out His purposes in his life abides (remains) forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

God sent the believers into the world, and He said to them: "The harvest indeed is abundant [there is much ripe grain], but the farmhands of the harvest are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest. Go your way; behold I send you out like lambs into the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:2-3).

Of the Church in the Old Testament we read of one lamp stand (Zech. 4:2). There was only one church in the Old Testament. The people that became members of the church in the Old Testament were circumcised and became one nation with the Jewish people (cf. Gen. 34:14-23).

In the New Testament things work different. We read of seven lamp stands (Rev. 1:12). The church in the New Testament is divided in different churches,

mainly because of the different languages and cultures, but also because of the differences in the doctrines of the various churches. It stands for reason that no single church wholly owns the truth. We may therefore speak of pure and less pure churches.

It is God's sovereign plan that His people, and that every believer therefore should belong to one of these churches (cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 4:8,11-12), if its teaching is in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. It is written: "[Direct such people] to the teaching and to the testimony! If their teachings are not in accord with this word (the Word of the Lord), it is surely because there is no dawn and no morning to them" (Isa. 8:20). Paul writes: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to and different from that which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (*anathema*, devoted to destruction doomed to eternal punishment)! (Gal. 1:8). And also: "For I want you to know, brethren, that the Gospel which was proclaimed and made known by me is not a man's gospel [a human invention, according to or patterned after any human standard]. For indeed I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but [it came to me] through a [direct] revelation [given] by Jesus Christ (the Messiah)" (Gal. 1:11-12). He declares that his Gospel and that of the apostles are the same message: "So, whether then it was I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed" [what you adhered to, trusted in, and relied on] (1 Cor. 15:11). And of the Old Testament he said: "I worship (served) the God of our fathers, still persuaded of the truth of and believing in and placing full confidence in everything laid down in the Law [of Moses] or written in the prophets" (Acts 24:14). In the Old Testament we

read: "The sum of Your word is truth [the total of the full meaning of all Your precepts], and every one of Your righteous decrees endures forever" (Ps. 119:160). And also: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). According to its internal evidence the Bible must be our touchstone (cf. Isa. 8:20; Heb. 4:12) for what is right or wrong.

There are differences between the doctrines of the various churches. But the Bible says that everyone must be fully convinced in his own mind: "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike (sacred). Let everyone be fully convinced (satisfied) in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).

There can even be differences of opinion within any local church (congregation) about the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, but the Holy Scriptures must have in each case the final say. It is written: "[Direct such people] to the teaching and to the testimony! If their teachings are not in accord with this word, it is surely because there is no dawn and no morning for them" (Isa. 8:20). It is the whole Bible that must be taken into account. We have to compare the Bible with the Bible. And the objective for us must be to be of the same mind (cf. Phil. 2:2). And if it is not yet attained, there must be the attitude of Paul toward those who have a different attitude of mind: "So let those [of us] who are spiritually mature and full grown have this mind and hold these convictions; and if in any respect you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you. Only let us hold true to what we have already attained and walk and order our lives by that" (Phil. 3:15-16). Every standpoint must continuously be tested by the Word of God: "For the

Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12; cf. Gal. 1:8).

Paul called the church in Corinth: "the church (assembly) of God" (1 Cor. 1:2). Of the members of the church of the New Testament we read that they were [collectively] Christ's body and [individually] they were members of it, each part severally and distinct [each with his own place and function] (1 Cor. 12:27). And it is expected that all the members should work together: "And let us consider and give attentive, continuous care and watching over one another, studying how we may stir up (stimulate and incite) to love and helpful deeds and noble activities. Not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together [as believers], as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning, urging, and encouraging) one another" (Heb. 10:24-25).

## 14. BECOME A WORKER IN THE LORD'S "VINEYARD"

We must remember what Jesus said: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me [cut off from the vital union with Me] you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Scripture speaks of Christ our righteousness, our consecration and our redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ Jesus performs the work from the beginning to the end. He obtained for us the gift of sanctification. But the Scripture speaks also of: "the sanctifying work of the [Holy] Spirit" (2 Thess. 2:13). The Holy Spirit is the Worker, yet whatever He imparts to us He takes from Christ. It means that while our sanctification comes from Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), Christ carries on our sanctification through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9, 13; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

In John 7:39 we read: "For the [Holy] Spirit had been not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (raised to honour). Jesus said: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby), that He may remain with you forever. The Spirit of Truth, Whom the world cannot receive (welcome, take to its heart), because it does not see Him or know or recognize Him, for He lives with you [constantly] and will be in you" (John 14:16-17). "However, I am telling you nothing but the truth when I say it is profitable (good, expedient, advantageous) for you that I go away. Because if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you [into close fellowship with you]; but if I go away, I will send

Him to you" [to be in close fellowship with you] (John 16:7).

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not there under the Old Covenant, for David prayed, saying: "Take not Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). And yet there is a difference. Under the Old Covenant the Holy Spirit comes from without. We read: "... and the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul and they also prophesied" (1 Sam. 19:20). But under the New Covenant the Holy Spirit dwells within the believers (cf. 2 Tim. 1:14) and works upon them from within: "for He lives with you [constantly] and will be in you" (John 14:17).

Jesus said: "But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency, and might) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (the transition from the Old to the New), and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is said: "you shall be", and not: "you must be." To be His witnesses will be the spontaneous outflow of being filled by the Holy Spirit.

All born again persons have already received the Holy Spirit: "But if anyone does not possess the [Holy] Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" [does not belong to Christ, is not a child of God] [Rom. 8:14] (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer (2 Tim. 1:14), but believers are sometimes repeatedly filled by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 4:31; 13:52). Born again Christians need again and again to be filled by the Holy Spirit (compare Acts 2:4 with Acts 4:8, 18-20, and Acts 9:17 with Acts 13:9-11, and 1 Cor. 12:13 with Eph. 5:18).

Paul writes: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled and stimulated with the (Holy) Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). We become filled by the Holy Spirit, not with Him. The Greek word *en* is used instrumentally. The Holy Spirit is not something like water. We cannot have more and more of Him. He is a Person; He can speak (cf. John 16:13,15). One can lie to the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:3). But the Holy Spirit can have more and more of us. We must let the Holy Spirit control our whole life: "If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" [if by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by the Spirit] (Gal. 5:25).

Jesus said: "So then, any of you who does not forsake (renounce, surrender claim to, give up, and say goodbye to) all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33). We must surrender ourselves totally, voluntary and unconditionally to the Lord. According to Scripture we must yield our bodily members [and faculties] once for all as servants to righteousness (right being and doing) [which leads] to sanctification (Rom. 6:19). We have to do it because The Holy Spirit sometimes meets serious opposition from us or even in us (Acts 7:51). But the Holy Spirit overcomes this resistance with infinite pity as we stir up the gift of God that is in us (2 Tim. 1:6-7,14).

When the flame of God's gift was burning low in Timothy Paul admonishes him, saying: "That is why I would remind you to stir up (rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning) the [gracious] gift of God, [the inner fire] that is in you ..." (2 Tim. 1:6). He need not seek something new or something extra. Paul writes in this verse of the: "gift of God that is in

you". In the case of Timothy the reviving came from inside. The Holy Spirit already dwells in him (cf. 2 Tim. 1:14).

Paul says: "Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men" (Acts 24:16). "But offer and yield yourselves to God" (Rom. 6:13). "But if through the power of the [Holy] Spirit you are [habitually] putting to death (making extinct, deadening) the [evil] deeds prompted by the body ..." (Rom. 8:13). "Making a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1). And pray to God (James 4:2) that He might fill you by His Spirit, and He will answer your prayer, because: "if our conscience (our hearts) do not accuse us [if they do not make us feel guilty and condemn us] we have confidence (complete assurance and boldness) before God, and we receive from Him whatever we ask, because we [watchfully] obey His orders [observe His suggestions and injunctions, follow His plan for us] and [habitually] practice what is pleasing to Him" (1 John 3:21-22).

Believe (cf. Gal. 3:14) that He has answered your prayer (Mark 11:24), because you prayed in accordance to His will (1 John 5:14; cf. Eph. 5:18). And remember: "we walk by faith ... not by sight or appearance" (2 Cor. 5:7). And you will experience in some or another way that you are really filled by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 4:8,18-20; 4:31; 6:3,10; 13:52; 14:1).

If we are filled by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:18-19) we cannot remain silent, even when we have been forbidden to speak in His name (cf. Acts 4:8,18-20). Even under difficult circumstances (cf. Acts 4:21,29), we will speak the Word of God with freedom and boldness and courage (cf. Acts 4:31). And when it is necessary, with wisdom (Acts 6:3-10), and with joy (Acts 13:52), and with the blessing of the Lord (Acts 14:1).

The Lord sent us into the world (cf. John 17:18) and He prays for us and also for those who will ever come to believe in (trust in, cling to, and rely on Christ) through our word and teaching (cf. John 17:20).

We must try to reach each and every one: "to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth" (Acts 1:8), with the message of salvation. We are under a moral obligation to do it. Paul writes: "Both to Greeks and to barbarians (to the cultured and to the uncultured), both the wise and the foolish, I have an obligation to discharge and a duty to perform and a debt to pay" (Rom. 1:14). The Lord said: "If I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, and you do not give him warning or speak to warn the wicked to turn from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered yourself. Again, if the righteous man turns from his righteousness (right doing and right standing with God) and some gift or providence which I lay before him he perverts into an occasion to sin and he commits iniquity, he shall die;

because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood will I require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he is warned; also you have delivered yourself from guilt" (Ezek. 3:18-21).

We can be witnesses for Christ Jesus at any place. Jesus talked with a woman at Jacob's well (John 4:6-27). Paul, we read: "Reason and argued in the synagogue with the Jews and those who worshiped there, and in the marketplace [where assemblies are held] day after day with any who chanced to be there" (Acts 17:17).

We can be witnesses at any time. Scripture says: "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hands, for you know not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether both alike will be good" (Eccl. 11:6). Paul writes: "Herald and preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency [stand by, be at hand and ready], whether the opportunity seems to be favourable or unfavourable. [Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it is welcome or unwelcome, you as preacher of the Word are to show people in that way their lives are wrong], and convince them, rebuking and correcting, warning and urging and encouraging them, being unflinching and inexhaustible in patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

We can be witnesses on any day. Jesus talked with a woman at the well of Jacob in the middle of the week. He was on His way to Samaria (John 4:4).

Become a fisher of men. Jesus said: "Come after Me [as disciples - letting Me be your Guide], follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). He said to Peter: "Have no fear; from now on you will be catching men!" (Luke 5:10). Paul said to the elders of Ephesus: "I did not shrink from telling you anything that was for your benefit" (Acts 20:20). He brought to them the indicative (an actual fact is stated) of the Gospel. He explained to them the way of salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17-19), but also the imperative (expressing a command) of the Gospel; the call to repentance (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). He said to them: "But constantly and earnestly I bore testimony both to Jews and Greeks, urging them to turn in repentance [that is due] to God and to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ [that is due to Him]" (Acts 20:21). He said: "For I never shrank or kept back or fell short from declaring to you the whole purpose and plan and counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). And only because of that he could say to them: "Therefore I testify and protest to you on this [our parting] day that I am clean and innocent and not responsible for the blood of any of you" (Acts 20:26). It means that he said to them, that because he brought to them the whole counsel of God (not only the indicative but also the imperative of the Gospel), it is thus not his fault if anyone of them suffers eternal death. And this applies to each and every one of us. We have to tell the whole world the whole purpose and plan and counsel of God to save them from eternal death.

We will seriously err, if we only proclaim conversion in its passive aspect, as an act of God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25), and lack the courage to tell people that it is their duty to convert themselves (cf. Acts 20:21).

May I ask you who read this book a question: Where will you open your eyes if you have to die right now? The Word of God says: "My son (daughter) give Me your heart" (Prov. 23:26). Please do it right now! Paul wrote, saying: "We [as Christ's personal representatives] beg you for His sake to lay hold of the divine favour [now offered you] and be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). Pray now and say to Him: Lord Jesus Christ, I give my heart to You, right now.

Do it right away. It is written: "Behold, now is truly the time for a gracious welcome and acceptance (of you from God); behold, now is the day of salvation!" [Isa. 49:8] (2 Cor 6:2). Immediately after Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well that He is the Messiah (John 4:25-26), we read: "Then the woman left her water jar and went away to town. And she began telling the people: Come, see a Man Who has told me everything that I ever did! Can this be [is not this] the Christ?" [Must not this be the Messiah, the Anointed One?] (John 4:28). Jesus said: "Do you not say, it is still four months until harvest time comes? Look! I tell you, raise your eyes and observe the fields and see how they are already white for harvesting" (John 4:35).

He who does this, undertakes an important task. James writes: "[My] brethren, if anyone among you strays from the Truth and falls into error and another [person] brings him back [to God]. Let the [latter] one be sure that whoever turns a sinner from his evil course will save [that one's] soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" [procure the pardon of the many sins committed by the convert] (James 5:19-20).

The reason why the Word of the Lord sped on rapidly during the first centuries after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1-4), is described by someone as: "Each one won one". We read in Acts 8:1, "And Saul was [not only] consenting to [Stephen's] death [he was pleased and entirely approving]. On that day a great and severe persecution broke out against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (special messengers) ... Now those who were scattered abroad went [through the land from place to place] preaching the glad tidings, the Word" [the doctrine concerning the attainment through Christ of salvation in the kingdom of God] (Acts 8:4). "Thus the Word of the Lord [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God] grew and spread and intensified, prevailing mightily" (Acts 19:20).

The proclaiming of the Gospel is not a privilege for the preachers only, but is an assignment to every believer: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, [God's] own purchased, special people, that you may set forth the wonderful deeds and display the virtues and perfections of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" [Exod. 19:5-6] (1 Pet. 2:9).

He who does this, will bring great joy: "Even so, I tell you there is joy among and in the presence of the angels of God over one [especially] wicked person who repents" (changes his mind for the better, heartily amending his ways with abhorrence of his past sins) (Luke 15:10).

He who does this will receive an immense reward: "And the teachers and those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness (to uprightness and right standing with God) [shall give forth light] like the stars forever and ever" [Matt. 13:43] (Dan. 12:3). Jesus said: "Behold, I am coming soon. And I shall bring wages and rewards with Me, to repay and render to each one just what his own actions and his own work merit" [Isa. 40:-10; Jer. 17:10] (Rev. 22:12).

Every child of God must understand that the Lord has created us to dedicate our lives to the good works we have been destined to do (Eph. 2:10). "Let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint" (Gal. 6:9). "Do not forget or neglect to do kindness and good, to be generous and distribute to the needy [of the church as embodiment and proof of fellowship], for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:16). We must use the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit, in the service of others (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Worship regularly in church: "Planted in the house of the Lord, they shall flourish in the courts of our God" (Ps. 92:13). Scripture says: "Not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together [as believers], as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning, urging, and encouraging) one another, and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

Become acquainted with the contents of: "the sacred Writings, which are able to instruct you and

give you the understanding for salvation which comes through faith in Christ Jesus" [through the leaning of the entire human personality on God in Christ Jesus in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom and goodness] (2 Tim. 3:15). Peter writes: "Like newborn babies you should crave (thirst for, earnestly desire) the pure (unadulterated) spiritual milk, that by it you may be nurtured and grow unto (completed) salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2). Jesus said: "You are cleansed and pruned already, because of the word which I have given you" [the teachings I have discussed with you] (John 15:3), and He prayed: "Sanctify them [purify, consecrate, separate them for Yourself, make them holy] by Truth. Your Word is Truth" (John 17:17).

Yes, the explanation of His teachings gives light and brings wisdom to the ignorant (Ps. 110:130). The Word of God keeps us from falling, prevents that we be overcome by evil (Ps. 119:133). It is the perfect law of God that brings freedom (James 1:25; 2:12). The Scripture, for example, commands us: "You shall not steal" [Prov. 11:1; 16:8; 21:6; 22:16; Jer. 17:11] (Exod. 20:15). If we do not steal, then we are free. But he who steals comes under the bondage of sin. He who "commits and practice sin is the slave of sin ... So if the Son liberates you [makes you free men], then you are really and unquestionably free" (John 8:34,36).

You will do well to pay close attention to the Holy Scriptures as to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Pet. 1:19), for the prophets of the most ancient times (cf. Luke 1:70) and the teachers of the divine will and purpose (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-13) were under the control of the Holy Spirit. Peter writes: "[Yet] first [you must] understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is [a matter] of any personal or private or special

interpretation (loosening, solving)" (2 Pet. 1:20). Most translators and commentators interpret verse 20 as warning against the misuse of Scripture through faulty interpretation. The critical word is *epiluseos* and the basic idea in classical Greek is to "release from" or "loose" or "untie". But when the related verb is *ginetai*, the meaning shades off into the idea of origination. And if origination is the subject of verse 20, then verse 21 becomes a conclusion of the argument in verse 20: "For no prophecy ever originated because some man willed it [to do so - it never came by human impulse], but men spoke from God who were borne along (moved and impelled) by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Greek word *gar* (for) in verse 21 points to the origin of the prophetic word in verse 20.

Scripture commands us to pray for one another (James 5:16). The work of the Holy Spirit in the prayers of intercession belongs to the domain of grace. Even when we don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit helps our infirmities and prays from our hearts to God on our behalf: "So too the [Holy] Spirit comes to our aid and bears us up in our weakness; for we do not know what prayer to offer nor how to offer it worthily as we ought, but the Spirit Himself to meet our supplication and pleads in our behalf with unspeakable yearnings and groanings too deep for utterance" (Rom. 8:26). Scripture says: "Is anyone among you afflicted (ill treated, suffering evil)? He should pray ... Is anyone among you sick? He should call in the church elders (the spiritual guides). And they should pray over him ... And the prayer [that is] of faith will save him who is sick, and the Lord will restore him; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:13-15). And also: "Be unceasing in

prayer" [praying perseveringly] (1 Thess. 5:17), and: "You do not have, because you do not ask" [1 John 3:15] (James 4:2).

Prayer is so important that Paul writes to Timothy, saying: "First of all, I admonish and urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be offered on behalf of all men" (1 Tim. 2:1). Samuel writes, saying: "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you ..." (1 Sam. 12:23). We may not stop praying for other people. We must never say that someone can't be saved. With God everything is possible (Mark 10:27). Pray on a regular basis. David said: "Evening and morning and at noon will I utter my complaint and moan and sigh, and He will hear my voice" (Ps. 55:17). Daniel: "got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he has done previously" [Ps. 5:7] (Dan. 6:10). These examples are descriptive, not prescriptive. But whatever was written in the Holy Scriptures was written for our instruction (cf. Rom. 15:4).

Find prayer-partners. When Herod the king arrested Peter, and put him in prison (Acts 12:4), we read: "fervent prayer for him was persistently made to God by the church (assembly)" (Acts 12:5). The congregation prayed together. We must find others to join us in the struggle by praying to God (Rom. 15:30) that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly (2 Thess. 3:1), and that many may be saved (cf. Rom. 10:1).

We must help those people who are in the service of God. We must support them and provide for them. John wrote to Gaius, saying: "In fact, I greatly

rejoiced when [some of] the brethren from time to time arrived and spoke [so highly] of the sincerity and fidelity of your life, as indeed you do live in the Truth [the whole Gospel presents] ... So we ourselves ought to support such people [to welcome and provide for them], in order that we may be fellow workers in the Truth (the whole Gospel) and cooperate with its teachers" (3 John v. 3,8).

We have to bear in mind that the Lord is long-suffering (extraordinarily patient) toward us, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). And this repentance is a gift from God: "God exalted Him [Christ Jesus] to His right hand to be Prince and Leader and Saviour and Deliverer and Preserver, in order to grant repentance to Israel and to bestow forgiveness and release from sins" (Acts 5:31).

Scripture says: "Whoever [earnestly] desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17). This is the good news of the sacred Writings, which is able to instruct you and give you understanding, the wisdom to receive the salvation which comes through faith in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15), and this message of the Bible can change the whole world. This is: "... the Word which implanted and rooted [in your hearts] contains the power to save your souls" (James 1:21). Please help reaching each and every one with this message.

We can further the kingdom of God by praying (cf. 2 Thess. 3:1; James 4:2), writing and printing books and tracts that write of the reconciling of men to God. We have to translate it into every language (cf.

Acts 1:8), and distribute it among the people. It would be wonderful if every follower of Christ Jesus becomes a fisher of men (cf. Matt. 4:19). Jesus said: "Already the reaper is getting his wages [he who does the cutting now has his reward], for he is gathering fruit (crop) unto life eternal, so that he who does the planting and he who does the reaping may rejoice together. For in this the saying holds true, One sows and another reaps" (John 4:36-37). I thank God for everyone who is busy in the "vineyard" of the Lord.

The repentance of a sinner may start with a prayer (cf. Luke 18:13). We: "received the Spirit of adoption [the Spirit producing sonship] in [the bliss of] we cry, Abba (Father)! Father! The Spirit Himself [thus] testifies together with our own spirit, [assuring us] that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16). Three times it is written in the Scriptures: "And whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 2:32; Acts. 2:21; Rom. 10:13).

Revival (spiritual awakening) starts with prayer. The return of Israel to the Holy Land started with the prayer of Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 1:2-11). One of Nehemiah's kinsman came from Judah and told Nehemiah: "The remnant there in the province who escaped exile are in great trouble and reproach; the walls of Jerusalem is broken down, and its [fortified] gates are destroyed by fire" (Neh. 1:2-3). When Nehemiah heard this he: "sat down and wept and mourned for days and fasted and prayed [constantly] before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). When the king asked him: "Why do you look sad?" (Neh. 2:2), he was very much afraid and prayed to the God of heaven and told the king the reason. And the king gave him permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:3-9).

Every great revival that came upon the earth started with prayer. The Holy Spirit makes God's children aware of the need for revival and actuates them to pray for it. First a small group begins to pray. Then it grows to a mighty stream of prayers. Prayer for repentance (cf. Luke 18:13), and prayer for revival is a gift of the Holy Spirit: "And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace or unmerited favour and supplication. And they shall look [earnestly] on Me Whom they had pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one who is in bitterness for his firstborn ... All the families that are left, each by himself, and their wives by themselves" [each with an overwhelming individual sorry over having blindly rejected their unrecognized Messiah] (Zech. 12:10,14).

God made the door to heaven wide open. It is written: "The [Holy] Spirit and the bride (the church, the true Christians) say, Come! And let him who is listening say, Come! And let every one come who is thirsty ... And whoever [earnestly] desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost" [Isa. 55:1] (Rev. 22:17). All that is called by the gospel, is called in all seriousness. In all seriousness God promise to all who come to Him: "He will most certainly not cast out [I will never, no never, reject one of them who comes to Me]" (John 6:37). And God our Saviour wishes all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4), "not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul said: "But constantly and earnestly I bore testimony both to Jews and Greeks, urging them to turn in repentance [that is due] to God and to have faith in our Lord

Jesus Christ" [that is due to Him] (Acts 20:21). Yes, it is possible that anyone can become saved because Jesus was: "crowned with glory and honour because of His having suffered death, in order that by the grace (unmerited favour) of God [to us sinners] He might experience death for every individual person" (Heb. 2:9, cf. 2 Cor. 5:15). "And He [that same Jesus Himself] is the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours alone but also for [the sins of] the whole world" (1 John 2:2), even for the false teachers who: "denying and disowning the Master Who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:2); it is those who go to perdition, because: "every violation and disobedience received an appropriate (just and adequate) penalty. How shall we escape [appropriate retribution] if we neglect and refuse to pay attention to such a great salvation [as is now offered to us, letting it drift past us forever]?" (Heb. 2:2-3).

## 15. THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

When one of the Pharisees asked Jesus what is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses, Jesus answered, saying: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (intellect) [Deut. 6:5]. This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment. And a second is like it; You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself [Lev. 19:18]. These two commandments sum up and upon them depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

This is not *eros*, the physical love between a husband and his wife (cf. Gen. 4:1), or *storge*, family love, as the love of a mother for her child (cf. Isa. 49:15), or *philia*, the love between animals, as a fowl for her brood (cf. Matt. 23:37), or between friends, as between David for Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3), but *agape*, the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22); the love of God that has been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is of this love Scripture testifies: "Even if I dole out all that I have [to the poor in providing] food, and if I surrender my body to be burned or in order that I may glory, but have not love (God's love in me), I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). Of faith, hope and love, the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13).

Love is the greatest because: "love meets all the requirements and is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Faith and hope are the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 8:24), and will vanish when we are in heaven (cf. Rom. 8:24), but love remains forever

(1 Cor. 13:8). God loves us with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). His love for us never changes; He will never forget us (cf. Isa. 49:14-15). "Who shall ever separate us from Christ's love? Shall suffering and affliction and tribulation? Or calamity or distress? Or persecution or hunger or destitution or peril or sword?" (Rom. 8:35). Christ forgives us without any reproach (Compare Matt. 27:44 with Luke 23: 42-43). With His blood He purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). Jesus said: "If you [really] love Me, you will keep [obey] My commands" (John 14:15). God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

It is this love that: "endures long and is patient and kind; Love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening]. Love never fails" [never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end] (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

All our efforts to do good works are impossible without the "Soli Deo Gloria." It is written: "So

whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Therefore do always as the Scriptures say: "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord" [Jer. 9:24] (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17). Paul writes, saying: "What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?" (1 Cor. 4:7). We must never rob God of His honour: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. [For all things originate with Him and come from Him; all things live through Him, and all things center in and tend to consummate and to end in Him] To Him be the glory forever! Amen" (so be it) (Rom. 11:36).

Scripture says: "But if one loves God truly [with affectionate reverence, prompt obedience, and grateful recognition of His blessing], he is known by God" [recognized as worthy of His intimacy and love, and is owned by Him] (1 Cor. 8:3). And also: "And this command (charge, order, injunction) we have from Him; that he who loves God shall love his brother [believer] also" (1 John 4:21). "Do nothing from factional motives [through contentiousness, strive, selfishness, or for unworthy ends] or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [thinking more and highly of one another than you do of yourselves]. Let each of you esteem and look upon and be concerned for not [merely] his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment; that you should love one another, just as I loved you, so you too should love one another" (John 13:34).

Jesus on one occasion washed His disciples' feet and said to them: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher (Master), have washed your feet, you ought [it is your duty, you are under obligation, you owe it] to wash one another's feet; For I have given you this as an example, so that you should do [in your turn] what I have done to you" (John 13:14-15). Jesus gave us the golden rule, saying: "So then, whatever you desire that others would do to and for you, even so do also to and for them, for this is (sums up) the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). May God bless you all!

Dr. Willie Marais, January 25, 2007

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### DR. WILLIE MARAIS

Dr. Willie Marais was born in Christiana South Africa on the 5th of May 1929. He graduated in 1949 with a BA (admission) degree from the University of the Free State. In 1953 he was sworn in as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at the Theological Seminary of Stellenbosch University, and as of 3rd April 1954 he was ordained as Pastor of the "Grootte Kerk" congregation in Pretoria. In 1968 he obtained a D.D. (Doctor of Divinity) degree at the University of South Africa.

He served as pastor in seven congregations, namely: Pretoria, Odendaalsrus, Brixton, Olifantshoek, Krugersdorp, Bloemfontein and Pretoria-East.

In 1981 he was appointed Managing Director of Trans World Radio (Republic of South Africa) and on the 1st of August 1983, Minister in Synod service Tenure of office of Evangelism for Northern Transvaal.

Dr. Willie is married to Maryna Otto. They have 3 children and 5 grandchildren.

Dr. Willie has written 56 books and hundreds of articles, brochures, pamphlets and tracts.

He retired on 5 May 1994.