

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

For thousands of years mankind has heard preachers wailing away from the pulpits, on street corners, and in tent revivals preaching, “Repent and flee the Wrath to come.” Today's preachers convey that very same message through mass evangelism via the radio, television and over the internet. However, most cannot agree on what true repentance is, and what to repent of. This article will open your eyes to understand the TRUTH of what the Bible teaches about the life long process of conversion and true repentance.

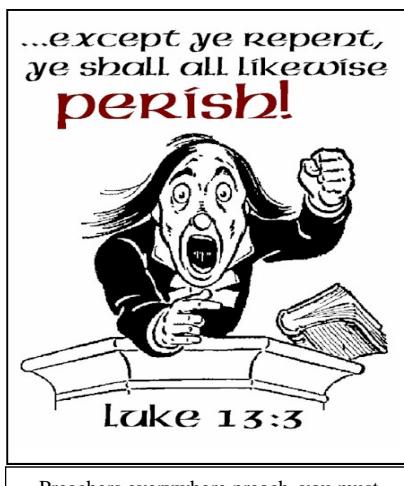
Perhaps one of the most confusing questions facing us is “What does it mean to repent?” The Bible is full of warnings to repent. Matthew 18:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-12 illustrate that the *only* way into the Kingdom of God is through repentance. But nothing in the Bible specifies *how* to repent, or describes what it feels like. So how do you go about “repenting,” and when are you finished?

Numerous scriptures in the Bible indicate that repentance means turning away from sin, and from your own ways of thinking and behaving, and embracing the True, Living God. The dictionary defines repentance as “*sorrow or contrition over past actions or attitudes*, so much so that you determine to change for the better.” But determining to change for the better does not negate one of the most common themes in the Word of God; that depending on *your own* righteousness and self-discipline to be “perfect” with God does not lead to salvation.

Perhaps the best way to describe repentance is to call it *a process of change, in which you first accept and then learn the way of life that God intended for us to live.* It begins with “godly sorrow” (II Cor 7:10) that comes from a choice: to admit that you are human like everyone else, and have made mistakes and sinned. Jesus Christ said he did not come to call the righteous, but *sinners to repentance* (Matt 9:13, Mark 2:17). He said this knowing that those who will not acknowledge their own sins feel they have no need of God; they consider themselves “righteous” without believing God’s Word. But those who do recognize their weakness and faults are able to acknowledge that they have sinned against their own Creator.

They know they need forgiveness, and mercy, and continued help from God.

Further, we must recognize that our own sins have earned us the death penalty according to Spiritual Law, because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Blaming someone else’s sins for the death of Jesus Christ (most people are quick to blame the Jews) is *not* the same as admitting that *your* sins brought about His death just as surely as the sins of every other human being who ever lived. Lastly, you choose to believe the Word of God, even if at first you are able to do this only in a very small and limited way. The foundation of that belief is the fact that the blood of Jesus Christ was shed in payment for the sins of all mankind, so that we could be reconciled to God and given life – when we repent.



Preachers everywhere preach, you must repent! But none can agree as to what to repent of, or what true repentance is.

Satan into prison (Rev 20:1-3), to abolish human government (Rev 11:15, Rev 20:4), and set up the everlasting Kingdom of God (2 Pet 1:10-11).

Repentance is a Process

Once you accept that Jesus Christ and His Father have authority over you, your life will be marked by a continual series of choices. Each time you become aware of something in your heart, mind or behavior that is contrary to God's way, you are expected to *choose* good over evil, following the example that Jesus Christ set for us (Isa. 7:14-15). The process is different for everyone, since we all come from varied backgrounds and have had many diverse experiences in life. Also, we each have our own unique personality and world-view, which means we each have a unique relationship with our Heavenly Father, and our own weaknesses to overcome.

The process of repentance can begin in a number of different ways. Some people come to realize that organized religion has not taught them the *whole truth* about the *real God*, and feel a strong desire to find and know Him. Some people reach a point where they simply don't know how to continue in life, or have fallen down so far it seems there is no way up again. Some people realize they're lost, trying to fit into a world that makes no sense. Others, in various ways and times, understood they had witnessed something miraculous, and set their hearts to seek the Creator God who gives life and heals.

No matter how the process begins, there is one thing in common for everyone: for the first time in his life, that human being will begin to perceive God as both REAL and PERSONAL. It is an amazing transformation, as dramatic as opening the eyes of the blind – although it may or may not happen so quickly. What makes it all possible is the Holy Spirit of God, a tiny bit of which is given to you when you repent. It will grow and flourish, as long as you nurture and protect it the way you would protect a child growing inside you.

Another common aspect of the process is the ability to see, a little bit at a time, one's own faults and shortcomings. All the wrong ideas and attitudes stuck in our minds since our childhood; all the many ways in which we've harmed others or ourselves with words or hatred, bad habits or actual violence, will slowly come to light. Layer by layer, we begin to see ourselves the way we really *are*, rather than the way we always thought we were. In the inspired words of God through Paul, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23). Why is it that we all sin? Why do we all, to some degree or another, live our lives contrary to the way that God intended us to live? Why do we bring so much pain, confusion, and destruction not only to ourselves, but also to others?

The fact is we were born into a world where everything we know and are expected to do already existed, but *the ways of our Creator God are neither valued nor taught*. For instance, today's Christians believe "everyone knows" that Sunday is the day for religious worship, while Muslims "know" the real day for worship

is Friday, yet in India everyone "knows" that mice are sacred. Religious belief systems; the means by which we earn a living; the way our society is organized; and even the attitudes we have to adopt in order to succeed, were all imposed on us by the rules of our world. Although those rules may vary somewhat from one region or country to another, by and large the whole world has been moving in the same direction since our earliest ancestors walked the earth. That direction, if the cycles of history are any indication, is toward an ever greater hostility between the various races and religions, and ever more efficient ways of destroying human life.

In the book of Genesis we read that Satan, in his first attempt to defeat God's plan, tempted Eve to eat fruit from the tree of "knowledge of good and evil." Eve then ate the fruit, and gave some to her husband Adam to do the same. God had earlier warned Adam that "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Gen 2:16-17)

Satan's Great Deception



Satan's deception was accomplished using a half-truth. He knew Adam and Eve wouldn't die *right away*; rather, they would lose *their potential for eternal life* by falling away from God. Satan told Eve "You shall not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:4-5) In fact, Adam and Eve did *not* physically die after eating the fruit, so although what Satan said was technically correct, *in principle* it was utterly untrue. Thus we see that the half-truth is both the oldest form of deception, and the most effective. Satan uses the same method to deceive people all over the world today, by teaching them to follow religious systems and religious leaders rather than our Father in heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Adam's sin set in motion several destructive actions. *First* was a separation between man and His Creator, for "You are not a God who is pleased with wrongdoing; you allow no evil in your presence." (Ps 5:4).

Second, by "knowing evil," *all of mankind* entered a sinful or rebellious state. Thrust outside the umbrella of God's authority and guidance, we were left to figure things out according to human reasoning and human

nature. Without the spiritual protection that comes from doing things God's way, we have been subject to constant influence from Satan, who is called the "prince" or "god of this world" (John 14:30, 2 Cor 4:4). Not only are *all present world systems ruled by Satan* (Luke 4:5-8), but *all of mankind* is under Satan's influence – because the systems of our world also shape our attitudes, thoughts and beliefs (Rev 12:9). But we see that God didn't leave us to flounder on our own; He provided us His written word, the Bible, for an account of mankind's history and guidance for our lives. The Bible reveals that the opportunity for repentance will eventually apply to all of mankind, including those who lived and died in generations past, but each in his order and according to God's plan (I Cor 15:20-28).

Man's First Sin

Third, God put Adam and Eve out of the Garden, blocking the way so they couldn't return. He also cursed the earth so mankind would have to work hard to grow food. "Then the LORD God said, 'Now that man has become like one of us and has knowledge of what is good and what is bad. He **must not be allowed to take fruit from the tree that gives life, eat it, and live forever.**' So the LORD God sent him out of the Garden of Eden and made him cultivate the soil from which he had been formed. Then at the east side of the garden he put living creatures and a flaming sword which turned in all directions. This was to keep anyone from coming near the tree that gives life." (Gen 3:22-24, Today's English Version; emphasis added.)

Fourth, as we see from Gen 3:22 above, once the sentence of death was exacted, our physical life ends. Mankind does **not** go on to Heaven or anyplace else when he dies, although the Bible *does* teach of a resurrection *in the future*. The plain fact of our mortality is repeated throughout God's Word. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and *thus death spread to all men, because*

all sinned" (Rom 5:12; emphasis added.)

The death sentence was not limited to human beings, but affected the entire world. Until then, there were no deadly viruses or poisonous insects, nor were animals killing one another – instead, they all ate plants (Gen 1:30). There was no destruction, no decay, and no suffering. But from the time of mankind's fall the earth has been cursed. The soil has become depleted, the waters void of minerals and laden with pollutants, and disease has become more prevalent among animals and humans alike. Not only did animals begin killing other animals before the flood of Noah's time, when "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." (Gen 6:12)

Ironically, the world could have been a very different place than what we now experience – peaceful, healthy, clean, without war or disease, and plenty of food for everyone. It was human sin that separated us from God, and only by repenting can we be reconciled to Him. Those who ultimately refuse to repent will be destroyed in a lake of fire, during a future time called the Great White Throne Judgment (II Thes 1:6-10, Rev 20:11-15).



Artist rendition of Man's first sin, eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden



Man being cast out of the Garden

Does The Bible teach of an Eternity in Hell?

But why does "religion" teach that people go to hell when they die, if they don't submit to the teachings of the Catholic Church, or Islam, or some other major religion? Remember that Satan controls the religions of this world, and is still using half-truths to deceive mankind. Satan wants to scare people into believing in false religion, in order to lure them away from their Creator God. Satan's demons have been interact-

ing with humans for thousands of years, teaching them doctrines and “mysteries” that are nowhere found in God’s Word.

Jude 13 states: “They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.” This passage from the book of Jude is describing the ultimate fate of Satan and those angels – now demons – that followed Satan in rebelling against God. As spirit beings, they have eternal life. The fate of a rebellious being with eternal life is *eternal imprisonment*, far from the presence of God, in the black darkness of space – perhaps in a black hole.

God, in His mercy, made mankind with a finite, physical life – so we could *be given* eternal life upon repentance. Those who stubbornly rebel despite every chance at repentance will be destroyed, completely and forever, in the day of judgment. This is a far more merciful end for them than to spend eternity suffering in a hell fire, as is commonly taught by man-made religion.

Between our physical death and our future resurrection is a state of deep unconsciousness, which the Bible refers to as “sleep” (Dan 12:2, I Thes 4:14, Ps 13:3). There is no awareness during this state, neither of sensation nor the passage of time. As Solomon said, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for *there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*” (Eccl 9:10, NKJV)

Many people still have a hard time understanding how “repentance” could apply to them. Consider the effect that Adam and Eve’s original sin had on today’s world. We already understand that Satan rules this world, and causes us to think and act in ways that are contrary to God. Since Jesus Christ said that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning” and is “the father of lies” (John 8:44), one can conclude that following Satan’s influence leads to deceit, harm, or destruction in one form or another.

Well, what do we see around us on this earth? We see hatred, which leads to murder, or slander, or war, or physical violence to people and property. We see envy, which leads to competition and *more* envy, and causes some people to feel they are somehow “worth less” than others. We see anger and rage, which not only destroy our own bodies from within, but also lead us to hurt others in countless ways. We see vanity, which leads to a desire for the envy of others, or to the idea that one person/group is somehow “superior” or “more deserving” than another. We also see lust and greed, which causes mankind to steal or even kill to get the things they desire. The fruits of these spirits doesn’t care how much harm is done to other people or to the environment in the self

serving name of *the “god of profit.”* We see children and animals and old people injured, abused, or ignored through hardness of heart and ignorance. We see man-made religion growing ever richer and more powerful, even to the point of controlling world governments and destroying millions of human beings, while billions go without adequate food and water. THIS is the result of Satan’s influence, and THIS is what God wants us to reject.

What is Sin?

The first sin committed by human beings was that of **not believing God, or questioning His Word.** Disbelieving led Eve to disobey, and disobedience or rebellion against God is sin. Although much “human reasoning” through the centuries has attempted to define sin, God’s written Word gives us a very clear definition:

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, **sin is lawlessness**” (I John 3:4). The Ten Commandments are called the **Law of God**, and deliberately breaking or ignoring them is referred to in the Bible as “lawlessness,” “sin,” or “iniquity.” (Mat 7:12-23.)

The only “change” Jesus Christ made to the Law of God was to magnify it, increasing the scope of the Law from purely physical to spiritual. An example of this would be murder. Magnifying the concept of “murder” to a spiritual level means that even hating someone, or being

angry at them without a cause, is the same *in principle* as murdering that person (Matt 5:21-22.)

Note what Moses said in Deu 5:22, after he finished reciting the Law of God to the people of Israel: “These words the Lord spoke unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: *and He added no more.*” Those who would add to the Word of God by teaching their own definition of “sin” are in danger of suffering the plagues prophesied in the book of Revelation (Rev 22:18). Those who take anything away from God’s written Word will also have their names removed from the Book of Life, and will never take part in the Kingdom of God (Rev 22:18).

One of the many changes a person would notice in the process of repentance is a growing *desire* to submit to God’s authority, to learn the Ten Commandments and other aspects of God’s Law, in order to follow the way of life described by the Apostles. It might simply begin with a feeling of sorrow or disgust at one’s own actions, and the acknowledgement that this behavior has caused a lot of harm. But gradually one realizes that if one decides not to follow the ways of this world, then there must necessarily be another way to follow instead. In studying the Law of God, it is easy to see that it merely provides a framework for good living, *teaching us how to love God first, and then how to love other people.* Best of



For centuries man has been told unless he repents he will spend eternity in hell with Satan and his demons. Is that what the Bible teaches?

all, it teaches us a way of life that leads to real joy and hope for an otherwise terribly bleak future.

Yet some so-called “Christian” priests, being deceived by Satan and full of rebellion against God, have taught for centuries that God’s Law was different for “spiritual Israel” (Christians) than for the physical nation of Israel rescued from Egypt. They teach the last six Commandments, but have changed the first four. By denying the God of Israel, *which “god” do they really worship?* Certainly not Jesus Christ, because He **is** Jehovah, the God of Israel! This false teaching (most notably by the Catholic religion) has sparked hatred and violence against Jews since the days of the Roman Emperor Constantine, when “Judaizing” was first declared to be against the teachings of the ruling religious institution.

Other “religious” teachers insist that obeying God or putting His Word above man-made tradition is wrong, claiming that the New Covenant promises forgiveness through God’s grace *without obedience on our part*. Some go so far as to say that, because we are unable to keep God’s Law perfectly anyway, there’s no need even to try – that our sins only give God more chances to show His love by forgiving us. In the First Century A.D. this same doctrine was taught by a group known as the Nicolaitans, who taught that the more people sinned, the more God’s grace could abound. One reads in Rev 2:6 that Jesus Christ “hates” such doctrine.

These religious teachers couldn’t be further from the truth! A covenant is an agreement between two parties – like a contract. God’s part in the New Covenant, established by Jesus Christ before His death on Passover, is agreeing to wipe out our entire past record. All sins, all mistakes, all the ways we’ve hurt ourselves and others through our ignorance before the time of our repentance, will be erased – and it is indeed a free gift of His grace. Additionally, He agrees to plant His Holy Spirit within us through the laying-on of hands after baptism; His Holy Spirit is our “down payment” on eternal life (Acts 8:14-17; Eph 1:13-14). Remember, though, that baptism is only the outward symbol of our repentance – what really matters is a true change of heart, and without that, baptism itself means nothing.

However, *our part* in the New Covenant is agreeing to *accept* God’s way of living and thinking, to learn and grow in His ways, and to continually go to Him in prayer for guidance, help in overcoming, and forgiveness for the things we have yet to overcome. God wants us to change to become like Him, and is patiently waiting to help us! We need to turn to Him as little children, eager to learn the things He wants to teach us (Mat 18:3-6).

Imagine that your own child was stubborn and getting himself into deeper and deeper trouble. Maybe you had asked him to stay away from certain kids involved with gangs, and he refused to do so. You tried every kind of correction you



The world’s conception of hell is eternal punishment with Satan and his demons. The above is an artist conception of a demon guarding the gates of hell

could think of, and he would not obey you – but you still loved him, right? Then one day your child came home from school instead of running around with his gang buddies. Maybe his attitude still needed improvement, but at least he was starting to listen to you. Would you be angry with him for *trying* to do what you wanted? If he had finally made the effort to do as you instructed him to, would you punish him for being less than perfect? Of course not, and neither would God treat us that way.

The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 illustrates how gladly God welcomes us back when we turn away from our old ways and look for Him. Our Father in Heaven not only removes our troubles when we repent, He also encourages us and rewards us so that we will continue to learn and do even better. God **loves** us and wants to heal us, not hurt us.

Man’s Way is Opposed to God’s Law

So many people have been confused or even angered at the idea of obeying God. But the whole point of obedience is merely to learn and grow spiritually – to be willing to accept God’s way of doing things, learning the way of love and compassion – and to reject the ways of this world, which are based on glorifying the self, lust, greed, vanity, hatred and envy.

Practically everything we’ve learned from our early childhood on has been against the ways of God. We were taught to lie and to fib, to tell people things we don’t really mean. We were taught to cheat when we thought we could get away with it, whether on

our taxes or a test or in jacking up the price of a car or other goods for sale. We were taught to be aggressive; to always put ourselves first and “get” everything that we “deserve” in life. We were taught that competition is everything, that people only “matter” if they follow the latest trends (clothing, jewelry, cars and homes), or if they have a title after their name and plenty of money. We were taught to judge other people by our own standards rather than looking for strong character, or being compassionate and forgiving. We were taught to be fakes and phonies, to go to church on Sunday with all the other “nice” people, then turn around and do exactly the opposite of what Jesus Christ taught us by His example.

We could not help what we were taught as children, and we could not help being caught up in this world as long as we didn’t know better...but we *do* have the power *now* to choose whether to continue or to change.

The reason that repentance is the one-and-only ticket into God’s Kingdom is because the way of thinking and behaving outlined by the Law is **the way that everyone in God’s Kingdom will be living!** There will be no exceptions – *either a person accepts God’s Way, or they will not be given eternal life and brought into the Kingdom of God* (II Thes 1:6-10).

THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS PRIMARILY WRITTEN IN HEBREW & ARAMAIC

Translation for the words for repent and repentance are often obscured in translation into English

Strong's Concordance gives us the meanings of these words translated into English from Hebrew in the original King James Version Bible. All of the words in the O.T. translated into English meaning to repent or repentance come from only three Hebrew words with just two primary root words..

Strong's # 5162 nacham (pronounced—naw-kham) A prim root; to sigh, i.e. breathe strongly-by implication, to be sorry, to express pity or to be sorrowful

Nacham means “to repent, comfort.” (1) Nacham is translated “to repent” 41 times and “to comfort” 57 times in the Old Testament (1a) To repent means to make a strong turning to a new course of action.

The emphasis is on turning to a positive course of action. It also places emphases on the new course as a new positive course of action.

Comfort is derived from “*com*” (with) and “*forth*” (Strength). Hence, when one repents, he exerts strength to change , to re-grasp the situation, and exert effort for the situation to take a different course of purpose and action.

Strong's # 7725 shuwb (pronounced—shoob) A prime root; to turn back (hence, away)

This word is more often translated into turning or going back, or to transverse a path once taken

Shuwb means “to return or go back, bring back.” The basic meaning of the verb is movement back to the point of departure (unless there is evidence to the contrary). In the first occurrence of this verb God told Adam that he and Eve would “eat bread, till you **return** to the ground.”

The process called conversion, or turning to God is in reality a re-turning back again to Him from whom sin has separated us, but whose we are led by virtue of creation, preservation and redemption. For example, “**turning from**”, pursuing evil, (I Kings 8:35)

That is why repentance is so important, because the process of changing human nature and human behaviors into the kind of thoughts, actions and behaviors that mimic those of God can **only** be done through Jesus Christ, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit living within us. The Law of Moses, with its many requirements, was not able to do it, because even perfect obedience to the Law of Moses could not guarantee a perfect heart and attitude. No “mother church” or religion can do it for us; no human priest or man-made organization or man-made rules can take the place of a one-on-one relationship with the true God, and a heart that is willing to submit to His authority. This is why Jesus Christ said: “I am **the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to the Father except **through Me**.” (John 14:6)

Many people have been deceived by Satan into thinking that following their own desires for religious belief, power, material wealth and superficial values is not only the will of God, but that it glorifies Him as well. But God tells us something entirely different. “This is what the LORD says: ‘Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things, and so they came

into being?’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the one I esteem: *he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word.*’” (Is 66:1-2, New International Version; emphasis added.)

God doesn’t need our wealth, or position, or titles – including religious titles – to be glorified, although these things are highly valued by most human beings. “Now remember what you were, My brothers, when God called you. From the human point of view few of you were wise or powerful or of high social standing. *God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. He chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. This means that no one can boast in God’s presence.* But God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus, and God has made Christ to be our wisdom. By Him we are put right with God; we become God’s holy people and are set free. So then, as the scripture says, ‘Whoever wants to boast must boast of what the Lord has done.’” (I Cor 1:26-31, TEV; emphasis added.)

THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS PRIMARILY WRITTEN IN GREEK

Translation for the words for repent and repentance are often obscured in translation into English

Strong's Concordance gives us the meanings of these words translated into English from Greek in the original King James Version Bible. All of the words translated into the N.T. English meaning to repent or repentance come from only four Greek words with several primary root

The words primarily used in the Greek come from: **Strong's # 3840 metanoeo** (pronounced-met-an-o-eh-o); and **Strong's # 3341 metanoia** (pronounced-met-an-oy-ah).

Both of these Greeks words come from a composite of two primary words. (#'s 3326, and 3539)

Metanoeo means to think differently or afterward, i.e. to reconsider or to repent. It is used 43x's in the N.T., all of which are translated to repent.

Metanoia used as a noun means "afterthought, change of mind, repentance". It is used 24x's in the N.T. all of which are translated repentance.

Note: In the O.T., "repentance" with reference to sin is not so prominent as that change of mind or pur-

pose, out of pity for those who have been affected by one's action, or in whom the results of the action have not fulfilled expectations, a "repentance" attributed both to God and to man.

In the N.T. the subject chiefly has reference to "repentance" from sin, and this change of mind involves both a turning from sin, and a turning to God. The parable of the Prodigal son is an outstanding illustration of this.

Christ began His ministry with a call to "repentance," Matt. 4:17. The call came not as in the O.T., to a nation, but to the individual.

The transformation of repentance to the individual is part of the conversion process by the believer that it is God, through Jesus Christ that cleanses us.

What does that mean – "He chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful"? Why would God choose "weak" people to reveal His truth to, instead of those who make a grand display of their "religion," or the highly educated, or powerful world leaders? Why would God choose people with addictions, or rough edges, or those who had been locked inside emotional or other prisons, to bring to repentance? The answer is because *when we repent, God forgives us and begins to heal us*. That is His will for us – to make us whole. This world has done us a lot of damage, and taught us very little about love and compassion. When our eyes are opened and we begin to see just how bruised or angry or rebellious or deceived we were all those years, it just seems that much more incredible that God would be so kind and merciful to help and heal us.

There are two Biblical principles at work here. The first is that God is able to show His power through our weaknesses, by helping us overcome those things we could not overcome by ourselves. The apostle Paul quoted God as saying: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor 12:9).

The second principle is that God knows our loyalty to Him will be stronger if our debts to Him were great. In speaking

about a woman – a sinner – who ministered to Him in the home of a religious leader, while the religious leader had failed to provide even basic courtesy, Jesus said, "I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. *But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love.*" Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." (Luke 7:47-48, TEV; emphasis added.) By this principle, one who is forgiven for much will also love God that much more.

No matter how much or how little one knows the Bible, it is one's *attitude from what you have learned toward God* that really matters. But let's go back to the concept of "self-righteousness," or trying to "be good" through your own efforts. The entire book of Hebrews is a persuasive testament to the fact that Jesus, as the Word of God in the flesh, was indeed the Messiah or Savior of all mankind.

"...but we do see Jesus - who for awhile was a little lower than the angels - crowned now by God with glory and honor because He suffered death for us. Yes, because of God's great kindness, Jesus tasted death for everyone in all the world. (Heb. 2:9)

And it was right and proper that God, who made every-

thing for His own glory, should allow Jesus to suffer, for in doing this He was bringing vast multitudes of God's people to glory; for His suffering made Jesus a perfect Leader, one fit to bring them into their salvation.

We who have been made holy by Jesus, now have the same Father He has. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers. For He says in the book of Psalms, 'I will talk to my brothers about God my Father, and together we will sing His praises.' At another time he said, 'I will put My trust in God along with my brothers.' And at still another time, 'See, here am I and the children God gave Me.'

Since we, God's children, are human beings - made of flesh and blood - He became flesh and blood too by being born in human form; for only as a human being could He die and in dying *break the power of the devil who had the power of death. Only in that way could He deliver those who through fear of death have been living all their lives as slaves to constant dread.*

We all know He did not come as an angel but as a human being - yes, a Jew. And it was necessary for Jesus to be like us, his brothers, so that *He could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God, a Priest who would be both merciful to us and faithful to God in dealing with the sins of the people. For since He Himself has now been through suffering and temptation, He knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted, and He is wonderfully able to help us.*" (Heb 2:9-18, TLB; emphasis added.)

Hebrews also goes into great detail to explain that the old method of redemption to God, through the Law of Moses with its punishment for sin, was replaced by obedience to God's Law through faith in His Son, and the power of God's Holy Spirit living within a repentant human. That's because no human being could be "perfect," or keep the whole Law, with all its complexities, perfectly. The need for human priests was done away with, as Jesus Christ Himself became our High Priest, seated at the right hand of His Father. It is only through the intercession of our High Priest, and our faith in **His** power over Satan and sin, that we ourselves can truly overcome sin and be redeemed to our Heavenly Father.

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, *He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.*" (Heb 5:7-10, NIV; emphasis added.)

"The matter becomes even plainer; a different priest has appeared, who is like Melchizedek. He was made a priest, *not by human rules and regulations*, but through the power of a life which has no end. For the scripture says, 'You will be a priest **forever**, in the priestly order of Melchizedek.' *The old*

rule, then, is set aside, because it was weak and useless. For the Law of Moses could not make anything perfect. And now a better hope has been provided through which we come near to God.

In addition, there is also God's vow. There was no such vow when the others were made priests. But Jesus became a priest by means of a vow when God said to Him, 'The Lord has made a solemn promise and will not take it back: "You will be a priest forever."

This difference, then, also makes Jesus the guarantee of a better covenant.

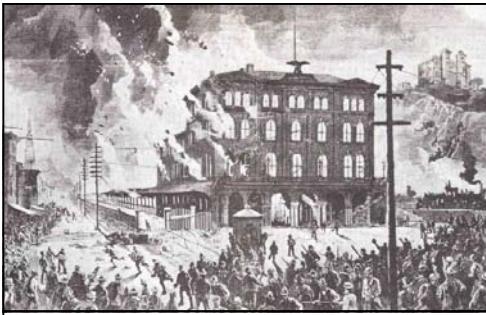
There is another difference: there were many of those other priests, because they died and could not continue their work. **But Jesus lives on forever, and His work as priest does not pass on to someone else. And so He is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through Him, because He lives forever to plead with God for them.**"

Jesus, then, is the High Priest that meets our needs. He is holy; He has no fault or sin in Him; He has been set apart from sinners and raised above the heavens. He is not like other high priests; He does not need to offer sacrifices every day for His own sins first and then for the sins of the people. He offered one sacrifice, once and for all, when He offered Himself. The Law of Moses appoints *men who are imperfect* to be high priests; *but God's promise made with the vow, which came later than the Law, appoints the Son, who has been made perfect forever.*" (Heb 7:15-28, TEV; emphasis added.)

It is powerfully moving to begin to understand the depth of God's love for us. Through the perfect life of His Son – through Jesus' obedience to His Father even to the point of His own death – mankind has the means of bridging the gap between us and God that had existed since Adam and Eve first doubted God's Word. By overcoming the temptations of Satan, Jesus Christ made it possible for us to do the same. Notice the importance of the word "obedience." It is only by submitting our own will to our Heavenly Father and accepting **His** will that we can be forgiven and made whole. This CANNOT be done through any human "priest" or organized "religion," but ONLY through a direct relationship with God. Our faith in Jesus Christ gives us the will to try, and God's Holy Spirit living within us gives us the ability to overcome. That is all we need. Notice how often Jesus assured people that their *faith* had made them whole (Mark 5:34, Mark 10:52, Luke 8:50).

It is this process of being healed and made perfect, once we choose to follow the true, living Creator God rather than "religion," that we call repentance. The Apostle Paul referred to it as a "race," and urged:

"Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap



Conception drawing of and artist of man fleeing the wrath of God that is to come upon all mankind.

themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us.

Focus on Jesus Our High Priest

Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross (Greek “stauros”, or upright pole) because of the joy He knew would be His afterwards; and now He sits in the place of honor by the throne of God.

If you want to keep from becoming faint-hearted and weary, think about His patience as sinful men did such terrible things to Him. After all, you have never yet struggled against sin and temptation until you sweat great drops of blood.” (Heb 12:1-4, The Living Bible; emphasis added.)

Paul wrote that each of us has our own particular “race” to run. That might be easier to understand if you think of repentance as a road intersecting our lives. Each of us begins at a different place on the road, depending upon when and where we were born, the morals and customs of the world around us, the level of nurturing and growth we’ve experienced through our lives, and the mistakes we’ve made along the way. We all have imperfections to overcome, but some people might seem to have more than others. It would be easy to condemn someone who has less material wealth than you, or someone who has not yet overcome an old habit, as one who hasn’t repented. But can you really know that? Can any of us know how far another person has already traveled on his particular road? Who is to say that the “less perfect” person hasn’t already put miles behind him, while the more esteemed or “proper” person has practically stood still from the moment he began his journey, having been given a head start by learning good behavior in his childhood?

In the end, it is not so much your current place on the road that counts, but how far you’ve come from your start point in terms of growth, and how much of yourself you’ve put into the journey. The main thing to remember is that only one person can get you across the finish line, and that’s you. As Paul wrote:

“In a race everyone runs, but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win. To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup, but we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I’m not just shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside.” I Cor 9:24-27, TLB)

But what exactly should we be changing *into* as we go through this process? How can we measure our progress? In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul gave some important instructions on how to live our lives. Notice also that he did *not* say we should just “go to church” and then continue gossiping, cheating and lying like we used to. Paul taught us to be truthful, not to indulge our human nature.

“Instead, we will lovingly follow **the truth** at all times – speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly – and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the Head of his

body, the Church. Under His direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Let me say this, then, speaking for the Lord: Live no longer as the unsaved do, for they are blinded and confused. Their closed hearts are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of

God because they have shut their minds against Him, and they cannot understand His ways. They don’t care anymore about right and wrong and have given themselves over to impure ways. They stop at nothing, being driven by their evil minds and reckless lusts.

But that isn’t the way Christ taught you! If you have really heard His voice and learned from Him the truths concerning Himself, then *throw off your old evil nature* – the old you that was a partner in your evil ways – rotten through and through, full of lust and sham.

Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better. Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature.

Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves. If you are angry, don’t sin by nursing your grudge. Don’t let the sun go down with you still angry -- get over it quickly; for when you are angry, you give a mighty foothold to the devil.

If anyone is stealing he must stop it and begin using those hands of his for honest work so he can give to others in need. Don’t use bad language. Say only what is good and helpful to those you are talking to, and what will give them a blessing.

Don’t cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live. Remember, it is what marks you to be present on that day when salvation from sin will be complete.

Stop being mean, bad-tempered, and angry. Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your lives. Instead, *be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ.*

Follow God’s example in everything you do just as a much-loved child imitates his father. Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave Himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, for Christ’s love for you was like sweet perfume to

Him.

Let there be no sex sin, impurity or greed among you. Let no one be able to accuse you of any such things. Dirty stories, foul talk, and coarse jokes – these are not for you. Instead, remind each other of God's goodness, and be thankful.

You can be sure of this: The Kingdom of Christ and of God will never belong to anyone who is impure or greedy, for a greedy person is really an idol worshiper – he loves and worships the good things of this life more than God. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible wrath of God is upon all those who do them. Don't even associate with such people. For though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! Because of this light within you, you should do only what is good and right and true.

Learn as you go along what pleases the Lord.” (Eph 4:15-5:10, TLB; emphasis added.)

The end goal of all this disciplined behavior, or *obedience to God's Word and His Law*, is the godly character we will need to be a part of God's soon-coming Kingdom. It is summed up in Galatians 5:22 - 6:10.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one

should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, *without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.*

Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (NIV; emphasis added.)

Paul listed the fruits of the Spirit in the reverse order from which we usually acquire them. Most of us have to *start* with faith or self-discipline – often by turning away from one of our greatest and most offensive weaknesses – and then work our way up through the rest. But we find, if we *really* desire to grow spiritually, that God will lead us through the experiences we need in order to do so. We may not always like the things we go through, but God knows exactly what we need in order to change in ways that please Him.

The apostle Peter wrote, in his letter to “those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:”

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, *make every effort to add to your faith*

Would it surprise you to know that God Himself Repented? Because this sounds so strange, many people instinctively consider this blasphemy. This is because the TRUTH about repentance has never been fully understood.

Most uses of the term of repentance in the O.T. are connected with God's Repentance.

“...it repented the Lord that He has made man.” (Gen 6:6)
“...for it repented the Lord of their groaning..” (Judges 2:18)
“...the Lord had repented that He had made Saul king ... “
(I Sam. 15:35) (There are many more like these in the Bible)

There are two passages that seemingly indicate that, in addition to repenting, God commits evil acts. Unfortunately, the translators have failed to convey the true meaning of these passages. Only by understanding the true meaning of the words, “Repentance” and “Evil” can we fully understand what the Bible is telling us.

The first passage: “and the Lord “repented” of the “evil” which

He had pronounced...” (Jer. 26:19)

The second passage found in Ex.32:14 “And the Lord “repented” of the “evil” which He thought to do unto His people.”

Both passages convey the same expression of thought. Earlier we covered the word ‘repent’. Meaning to turn from what you are planning on doing. The word evil comes from the Hebrew word “ra”. (pronounced-rah). It refers to that which connotes evil, something bad, , misfortune, or in the case of God bringing upon man justice or reward for his actions.

Used together, the words “repentance” and “evil” mean that in response to the just and unjust actions of men, God decides to alter His original plan to reward or punish people accordingly (e.g. see the story of Jonah & the Assyrians). ”

goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Therefore, my brothers, *be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.* For *if you do these things,* you will never fall, and *you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (II Peter 1:3-11, NIV; emphasis added.)

Among the names of God is the great "I AM," or "I AM THAT I AM." This may seem confusing, until you think about what it means. God is what He is because He chooses to be. *God chooses to be exactly the way He is.* He didn't "accidentally" become filled with love and patience instead of greed and hatred, but He chose to be that way. In a much smaller way, He is placing the same responsibility – or rather, opportunity – on us through our process of repentance. Each time we realize that something in our life or some aspect of our behavior is against God's way, we are faced with a choice. We need to reject that thing, and choose to go God's way – and then go to Him in prayer for help.

We don't always feel ready or able to make that choice, so we stall for time, hoping things will just work themselves out. But this can sometimes lead to greater problems, and isn't worth the extra worry and stress it causes us. Or we may struggle with the problem on our own for a while. The best way, and the way in which we grow most quickly, is to take the matter to God in prayer *as soon as you realize* there is a conflict between what you

are doing and what you should be doing. Make the choice. Talk to your Heavenly Father about it, and tell Him not only that you are sorry, but that you simply *don't want to be that way anymore.*

It is amazing how easily God can remove thoughts and behaviors from your mind and heart, once you have *made the choice* to reject them – even if they were something you struggled with for years. This applies not only to "big" problems like addictions or physically breaking the Commandments, but also to "smaller" things like your feelings or your state of mind, or attitudes and behaviors you were taught as a child. You will find that once you have corrected your big problems, there will be an almost endless supply of little ones. The only way to cross the finish line is to keep on running the race!

Just remember that we didn't make mistakes in life because we wanted to, but because we had not yet learned the right way to do things. If our Father in Heaven is willing to forgive us for those mistakes, we need to forgive ourselves as well, and look forward. It is only by admitting our shortcomings – facing them squarely, naming them, and then forgiving ourselves – that we can exercise real compassion for others. Without real compassion, we are only *pretending* to love. And what is love, except the act of extending ourselves for the sake of spiritual growth and learning? How can we love others and desire spiritual growth for them, unless we also love and want the same for ourselves?

Having defined what it means to repent, we can see that we never actually stop. Only our physical death (with its future resurrection), or the change of our body from physical to spirit when Jesus Christ returns, will give us rest from our works. For this process of repentance – our efforts to *work* toward perfection – are the "works" by which we will each earn our own reward when Christ returns. As the overseer of the first Christians, in Jerusalem, said in the earliest years of the Church – before the Church became corrupted with doctrine from outside

The Ten Commandments

Ex 20:1-17 "And God spoke all these words saying,"

I. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."

II "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children

for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

III. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

IV. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.

On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

V. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

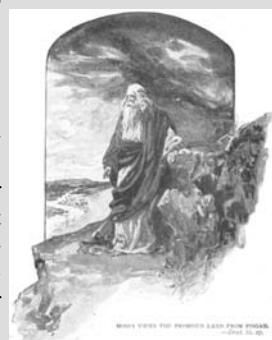
VI. "You shall not murder."

VII. "You shall not commit adultery."

VIII. "You shall not steal."

IX. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

X. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Ex 20:1-17, NIV)



the Bible:

“So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead. But someone will say, ‘One person has faith, another has actions.’ My answer is, ‘Show me how anyone can have faith *without* actions. I will show you my faith *by* my actions.’ Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe—and tremble with fear. You fool! Do you want to be shown that faith without actions is useless? How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Can’t you see? *His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions.* And the scripture came true that said, ‘Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.’ And so Abraham was called God’s friend. *You see, then, that it is by his actions that a person is put right with God, and not by his faith alone.*” (James 2:17-24, TEV; emphasis added)

God’s Word clearly tells us that salvation is a free gift from God: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 6:23). Thus, believing the gospel of Jesus Christ – about His having overcome Satan for our sakes, and qualifying to return to this earth as King of Kings over God’s government – is the key to our own eternal life. But along with the gift of eternal life for faithful believers, there will be “rewards” when Christ returns, and those rewards are based on our own individual “works,” whether obedient or disobedient.

“And He said to me, ‘Do not keep the prophetic words of this book a secret, because the time is near when all this will happen. Whoever is evil must go on doing evil, and whoever is filthy must go on being filthy; whoever is good must go on doing good, and whoever is holy must go on being holy.’

‘Listen!’ says Jesus. ‘I am coming soon! *I will bring my rewards with Me, to give to each one according to what he has done.* I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’

Happy are those who wash their robes clean and so have the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life and to go through the gates into the city. But outside the city are the perverts and those who practice magic, the immoral and the murderers, those who worship idols and those who are liars both in words and deeds.

‘I, Jesus, have sent My angel to announce these things to you in the churches. I am descended from the family of David; I am the bright morning star.’

The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’

Everyone who hears this must also say, ‘Come!’

Come, whoever is thirsty; accept the water of life as a gift, whoever wants it.” (Rev 22:10-17, TEV; emphasis added.) But what about someone who repents near the end of his life? What if someone were to hear this gospel and turn to God with his whole heart, knowing he would die the very next day? Should he worry about what his “reward” will be?

It should be clearly understood that repentance is not a contest. We are not competing with one another, but merely **learning a way of living that will be the way of life in God’s Kingdom**. Whatever time God allows us now, to learn and practice that way of life, are for His glory and will serve His purposes. But remember that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom

6:23) Believing the truth about Jesus Christ – accepting Him as the soon-coming King of God’s government on earth, and believing God’s promise of eternal life if you put His will above yours – will assure your place in that Kingdom, forever. Our loving Father in Heaven wants *everyone* to accept His way of life, so that *everyone* may be given eternal life! There is no reason to worry if you don’t have enough time to become “perfect” before you die...Jesus Christ will take care of that when He converts you into a spirit being upon His return to Earth.

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” (II Peter 3:8-9, NIV; emphasis added.)

Having received God’s grace, or free gift of salvation, let your *faith* show through your works. Run your own race steadily and with patience, pausing only to help, teach, and encourage others along the way. Obedience to our Father in Heaven is what enabled Jesus Christ to live a perfect life – let that *obedience* to God be your goal, and *faith in Christ* your strength in overcoming Satan and his snares. For these three – grace, faith and obedience – are all required for true repentance.

God called Abraham “good” or “righteous” for believing Him. He also called Abraham His “friend.” When speaking to His disciples, or followers, Jesus said: “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,* just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.* No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.” (John 15:9-17, NKJV; emphasis added)

It doesn’t matter where you have been, how lost you were, or how awful the things you may have done. Your Father in Heaven sent His Son to heal us and lead us back to our God, saying “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*” (Luke 5:31-32, NIV, emphasis added.)

If you strive to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), you have nothing to fear, but can rejoice in knowing that you are considered a “friend” of God, and will one day live in His Kingdom, as His spirit-born child, forever.



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