

Though Your Sins be as Scarlet

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Sudden Death

Work began as usual that morning at the Liberty Homes Manufacturing Plant. A dozen mobile homes were under construction down the long assembly line. Starting with the floor, the homes would move down the track from one station to the next, walls being added on here, wiring and plumbing there, the roof, then siding, etc., until the finished product rolled out the doors at the end of the line.

I was busy wiring the walls as quickly as they were nailed in place, often having to wait for the carpenters to complete their work. One of the carpenters, Jack, a young man in his mid to late twenties, had only been on the job for a couple of months. From his appearance, it was obvious that he was not enjoying the rich experience of a follower of Christ. His countenance was hard-as though he had led a pretty tough life. Big and burly, language like a sailor, and his sleeveless shirt revealing powerful arms, Jack was not an easy person to get close to.

From time to time, I would try to strike up a conversation with him, hoping to witness to him of the love of Christ. Although he never seemed very interested, I could see that beneath the rough exterior was a different man. Jack really wasn't the hateful person his appearance seemed to testify of him. Like many others, he was the product of a generation of young people that had yielded to the temptations of drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc. More than likely, a few fights and brawls probably also figured into the shaping of the poor fellow's character. Beneath the facade, however, was an insecure, confused, and probably lonely individual.

As sometimes would happen, Jack was called up the line to either repair or finish something. That meant I would have to forget about wiring walls until he returned. Quickly turning my attention to the roof that had just been carried by hoist and nailed down atop the house in the next station, I climbed the scaffold to begin running wires through the rafters and down the walls beneath.

Suddenly the intercom came to life. "Man down in station ten! Man down in station ten! We need help right away!"

Turning to one of the roofers, I said, "Uh, oh. It sounds like someone is hurt!"

"Yea, and by the sound of it, it may be bad. C'mon. Let's go see what happened!" he replied as he holstered his hammer.

Descending the scaffold, we noticed that many were running toward station ten. It was obvious that something more than the ordinary injury had happened. Arriving there we found a man lying limp and lifeless on the concrete floor. Two workers had already begun CPR, attempting to restore life with mouth to mouth resuscitation and chest compressions. Moving to where I could identify the victim, I saw that it was Jack. We learned later that an electrical short had caused the steel scaffold to become charged. While jumping out of the house, he grabbed the scaffold with both hands to swing out and down to the floor. Instead, his hands clamped around the metal as the current ran through his body. He cried out, but before anyone could assess the problem and turn off the power, he was unconscious. When the power cord was unplugged, Jack fell lifeless to the ground.

As the two worked frantically and faithfully with CPR, the crowd began to grow into a large circle of perhaps 60-70 people. The mobile homes were pushed out of the way in both directions allowing for room, not just for onlookers, but for the ambulance squad that was already on its way. There was

absolute silence save for the breathing and counting of the two administering the CPR. Everyone was hoping; perhaps praying that Jack would revive. So far, there was no evidence of life.

Looking to heaven, I prayed for God to spare the young man. Finally, I mustered the courage to break the ranks of the circle, slipping in to kneel at Jack's feet. Laying my hands on his legs, I continued there in prayer, silently pleading for the Lord of life to bring the breath of life back into his body. How long I was there praying, I cannot tell, but I returned to the circle when the ambulance squad arrived, not wanting to get in anyone's way.

The two workers yielded up the task to the medical technicians who proceeded to administer shocks to revive the heart. His body jerked and jolted with each shock, but it was futile. It was obvious that Jack was gone. A sick feeling came over all of us. Dead! And it could have been anyone of us that day. Jack just happened to be the unfortunate one that was carried off to the morgue. It was a grim reminder of how fragile our lives really are. He had no way of knowing that his last day on earth had come. I have no way of knowing why my prayers were not answered. But God has a purpose and a reason for everything. One day we'll understand.

The following morning the plant manager came to me. Placing his hand on my shoulder, he said, "Allen, I need you to come into the office with me."

I couldn't help but wonder what I had done. It was one thing to have my supervisor talk to me, but this was the manager. Had I not been doing my job well enough? I had always tried to be a conscientious employee, doing the best I could. "It must be something else," I thought to myself.

As we walked along, he put his arm around my shoulder and began to brief me. "I understand that you were praying for Jack yesterday. His wife is in my office right now. She heard that one of our men had prayed for him, and she has requested to speak with that man."

"Oh, my!" I replied. "I really don't know what to say to her."

"Well, I know that this will not be an easy thing for you to do. She is really shaken up. I would really appreciate it if you would speak to her, though."

"Sure," I said. "I'll do the best I can."

Entering his office, I was met by the grieving widow. Tears were coursing down her cheeks. Looking up at me from her chair she asked, "Are you the man who prayed for my husband?"

"Yes," I responded. "And I'm sure that others were, too."

"Please . . . I've got to know just one thing. Did he get right with the Lord before he died?" she managed to ask between sobs.

"I'm sorry ma'am. He never regained consciousness as long as I was there. I wish I could tell you differently. We should never underestimate what God is able to do, though, and only He knows what transpired in those last moments. I suppose the lesson for everyone is that we just don't know when our time will come. If we make our lives right with God today, we won't have to worry about what may happen to us. I'm really sorry."

I looked over at the manager. He closed his eyes and nodded understandingly.

"Thank you for praying," she said as I turned to leave.

I walked back to my workstation doubting whether I had fulfilled my duty. Oh, how my heart ached. If only I could have given her some assurance—but how could I? False hope is worthless, if not dangerous. No one should be led to believe that salvation could be deferred until moments before dying. Deathbed

conversions may be genuine in some cases, but are generally superficial. God knows the heart. If life were granted to the dying after such a conversion, would it last? Would there be a genuine change in the life?

The Bible warns us not to delay. There are too many like Jack whose lives are snuffed out unexpectedly. Don't run the risk of putting off until tomorrow what God would have you do right now. You are not guaranteed a tomorrow.

"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." II Corinthians 6:2.

With every rejection of Christ comes a hardening of the heart, making it that much more difficult for the Spirit of God to bring you to repentance. This is why very few are converted in their later years. While the heart is still open to His pleading, surrender yourself into His loving care.

"Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts ..."
" Hebrews 3:7-8.

Let Us Reason Together

In Isaiah 1:18 we read, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Imagine that! God invites us to come and reason with Him. He tells us that no matter how wretched we are, no matter how dreadful our sins may have been, He will make us white and clean. Who would turn down such a proposal? Sadly, the majority does refuse it. There are generally two reasons why people do not take up this wonderful offer of cleansing. One is because they are not willing to give up sin. Everyone is familiar with the verse in John 3:16,

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Two verses later, however, we read this sad commentary: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. "

If only the sinner could realize the joy of serving the Lord. If only they knew how Jesus is able to change a man's desires. All He asks is that we be willing. The presence of Jesus in the life can bring unspeakable peace and happiness. He can turn you away from sin and replace it with something far better. The Apostle Peter said it this way,

"Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Acts 3:26.

The second reason people often shun this marvelous offer of cleansing is because they do not feel worthy. They somehow feel that their sins are just too many and too awful for God to pardon and forgive. The good news for you, if you are in this class, is that you are just who He is looking for. You are the very one He wants to reason with. "Though your sins be as scarlet ... " In other words, if they are worthy of death (and all sins are), then God wants to help you .. If your sins are of the worst kind, God



wants to reason with you. He is inviting you to come for cleansing-make you whiter than snow. From the least sinner to the greatest sinner, the invitation is extended.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ... For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 3:23, 6:23.

Some have the mistaken notion that this is just some mere transaction that takes place in God's great record book. They imagine that Jesus applies some sort of white out over their sins or a cloak to cover their iniquity.. While it is true that full pardon is recorded in the books of heaven, this act of cleansing is much more. It is experiential. A change takes place in the life. A new power takes over the soul. Victory over sin is granted to every converted sinner. The new life is infused with an inner strength that rises up to shut off the evil tendencies. That inner strength is Jesus Christ. His Holy Spirit works a transformation of the character that becomes manifest to every observer. The Bible says that you are a new creature.

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

Worthy Is the Lamb

It was a cool fall evening as Helkiah took up one of his family's little lambs in his arms. This cute, woolly little creature, affectionately called "Fluff" by the children, never even squirmed as the head of the house began his trek across the nearly three-quarter mile expanse of sand. Although Helkiah was not alone on that desert stretch between the tents of his tribe and the Sanctuary, he paid little attention to the dozens of others who were making the same pilgrimage. His mind was troubled ... confused ... wondering.

The sand was still warm from the sunbath it received all afternoon, and felt good in comparison to the chilly air that was settling in on the countryside. On the horizon the sun was painting a red-orange sky behind the mountain peaks. Halfway to the Sanctuary, Helkiah stopped and lowered Fluff down to the ground. He knew they were far enough away that the little lamb would not be tempted by the children to run and play as he had so often done with them. The family pet would now stay by the man's side as they continued the long hike to the Tabernacle.

Helkiah observed the beauty of the lamb as his short legs scurried along to keep pace. Not a blemish was to be seen in the little creature. This is why he was chosen over the poor family's other two lambs, for the law required a perfect lamb be offered. Yes, offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the family of Helkiah. Peace had to be made with God, and only a blood atonement would suffice.

As he approached the gate of the Tabernacle, he bent over and wrapped an arm around Fluff, holding him momentarily still as another father entered the courtyard ahead of him bearing his family offering. A few short moments passed and it was Helkiah's turn to enter the courtyard. His heart began to ache as he spied the crimson fluid around the altar. Fire was consuming the flesh of previous sacrifices. In a brief few minutes his own sacrifice would be sizzling in the flames. "Why did a God of love require such a gruesome ordeal?" he asked himself as he glanced down at his little woolly friend. "Was this the only way to find peace with God?"

Approaching the priest, Helkiah spotted the long, sharp knife in his right hand. He had been here before, a number of times, and was well acquainted with the service. Kneeling down, he confessed his sins along with those of his family, while placing his hands on the head of the lamb. The precious little pet did not move or make a sound. Looking up at the priest, he extended his right hand to receive the dagger. Haltingly, trembling almost uncontrollably, Helkiah pressed the razor edged blade to the throat of the helpless victim. It was he, not the priest, who must shed the innocent blood of the lamb.

One quick gaze into the evening sky, as if he wondered for a moment whether God-somewhere up there in the heavens—was even watching, and then he tensed his muscles for the life ending slice across the neck. It was over. The blood began to flow as the priest went into action, catching every drop and gathering up the sacrifice to complete the work of atonement.

The priest then disappeared into the Sanctuary with the blood to sprinkle it in the Holy Place. Returning shortly, the priest poured the blood upon the ground at the base of the altar.

Now Helkiah must cut away all the fat from the lamb.

"And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat of the lamb is taken away from the sacrifice of the peace offerings; and the priest shall burn them upon the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: and the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him." Leviticus 4:35.

Helkiah turned, passed out through the gate, and once more began to walk across the broad expanse of desert sand that separated him from his family. Soon he would be reunited with them, fully aware that he would spend the next hour or more comforting the children and explaining why such a sacrifice was necessary. It was the law. God required it. "But, why daddy?" was sure to be the response. Why? That was a good question—one that Helkiah himself was not really sure about. He was well acquainted with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and how their sin had brought about their expulsion from the garden. He knew that death first took place as a result of that sin. The skin of that first sacrifice became the robes for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness. Still the question plagued Helkiah as to why God required this seemingly unending train of sacrifices, day after day.

Suddenly, as if a voice had spoken from somewhere around or above him, the Word of the Lord interrupted his thoughts.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." Deuteronomy 12:16.

He had heard Moses and Aaron make this declaration on a number of occasions. This time, however, the words "*I have given it to you upon the altar,*" stopped him dead in his tracks. Spinning around, he gazed back at the sanctuary. He saw, in the twilight, the smoke from the altar rising up over the fence that surrounded the courtyard and tabernacle. It was illumined by the flames beneath it. Billowing out and ascending up, the smoke arose until it almost covered the heavens.

"Could it be?" he wondered. "Could it be that these animal sacrifices were just a type, a symbol, a shadow of the real sacrifice? Had—or would God offer Himself...His own blood for us?"

An overwhelming flood of emotions broke upon him. There was a sudden strange mixture of remorse and joy, unworthiness and exultation. Revelations began sweeping across his mind. "That's why the lamb had to be without a blemish or defect. That's why it was an innocent victim. "Yes! Yes!" he exclaimed. "What a wonderful God of love!"

Then the realization struck. "I am the slayer. My sins required the life of God."

Falling to his knees, he stretched out his arms toward heaven. With tears glistening in the distant firelight, he broke out in praise and adoration. "Worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is the true Lamb. Thank you God. Thank you God."

Just then he spotted the priest, no longer in his priest garments, carrying the ashes from the altar away from the sanctuary. Helkiah remembered that the law required the ashes to be taken to a clean spot.

Yet another revelation broke upon his now enlightened mind. The fat that was cut away represented the sin that God wanted cut away from his people's lives. The ashes represented a final end of sin and sinners when this world would melt with fervent heat, leaving a clean earth.

"But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away." Psalm 37:20.

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts." Malachi 4: 1-3.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." II Peter 3: 11-13.

The Mission of Jesus

Of course, Helkiah is a fictional character, but he represents millions of people who have come to the startling revelation that God gave Himself for our sins in the person of Jesus Christ.

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." II Corinthians 5: 19.

His mission was, and is, to save sinners. While we are to sorrow over our sins and desire to be free of them, we need not despair regardless how enormous and ugly they may be.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" I Timothy 1: 15.

Like Helkiah, many also come face to face with the reality that they put the Son of God to death by their own sins. It matters not how many sins a person commits, nor how terrible an act they were. The result of a single sin is equal to that of a lifetime of sin. *"For the wages of sin is death."* Romans 6:23. Jesus took those wages upon Himself. He voluntarily, out of unfathomable love, left His glorious place in Heaven to come and offer Himself for our sins.

What Is Sin?

Some years ago, a young couple came to our home. As we talked together in our living room, the conversation soon turned to religion. The young man proudly stated, "I was saved just a couple of months ago."

"That's wonderful!" I responded. "And what were you saved from?" I asked, hoping to see how much he understood about God's plan of salvation.

He thought for a moment or two as a strange look developed on his face. "Well . . . I'm not really sure . . . I'm just saved."

Unfortunately, there are many today who might fit well into that young man's shoes. They have never come to grips with the reality of sin. Sin is a little word that our modern society tries to avoid. Most people today do not know what sin is. Oh yes, they know that it is something bad ... something that God

doesn't like. They are generally conscious of the fact that certain horrible acts, and some not so horrible, are classified as sin; but they really cannot define it. Since it is the Bible that teaches us what sin is, we should look for the Bible definition of it. I John 3:4 tells us that,

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

Transgression simply means violation, infringement, or breach.

Now we are getting nearer to an understanding of what sin is. Let's look a little closer. It is the violation of the law. What law? God's law, obviously. But what law is that? The Bible interprets itself. In Romans 7:7 we read:

"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

That law, of course, is one of the Ten Commandments. These are God's great absolutes that lay out before us God's wonderful moral code for life. The first four commandments reveal our duty in relation to God, while the last six teach our responsibility toward our fellow man. As the Holy Spirit sheds light upon those basic commands, we begin to see them in a broader manner. Jesus taught this in His famous "Sermon on the Mount." There He declared that to be angry with a person without cause was like killing. To look upon a woman with lust was to commit adultery in the heart. In other words, Jesus was placing a spiritual magnifying glass over the commandments. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this when he said,

"The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable." Isaiah 42:21.

Every sin that a man (or woman) may commit can be traced back to a violation of one or more of the Ten Commandments. As a chain with just one broken link results in a broken chain, so too, one broken commandment results in a broken law. One Bible writer said it this way:

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." James 2:10,11.

God's Law Internalized

The Ten Commandments are often referred to as "a transcript of God's character." Since "*God is love*" (I John 4:8) and "*love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Romans 13:10), then we can see that the commandments express the character of God. It is Christ's desire that we each reflect the character and the glory of God. In Old Testament times, God wrote the Ten Commandments in stone with His own finger, and gave them to Moses to take to the people. He also spoke them to the entire nation. Unfortunately, the law was unable to do anything for the people except provide a guide and point out their shortcomings. This resulted in condemnation. What God really longed for was to see the law internalized. In order to do this, He had to get the law off of the cold, hard tables of stone, and into the warm, fleshy tables of our hearts.

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." Hebrews 10:16.

How does Jesus propose to do that? This is part of the great mystery of the plan of salvation. In fact, the Apostle Paul refers to it as a "mystery" sixteen times in the New Testament. Here is just one example:

"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**" Colossians 1:25-27.

That is truly amazing—a wonderful mystery. The way Jesus writes the law in our hearts and minds is to come and dwell in us. The question of utmost importance to us, then, is how to get Jesus to come into our lives and abide in us. The answer is found repeatedly through the Bible. Let us consider a couple of passages.

In Ephesians 3:15 Paul says, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Faith is belief. This is not merely a mental ascent, but accepting the sure promises of God and claiming them as your own. Faith also requires corresponding, appropriate action, or it is not genuine faith. For example, Noah believed God and built the ark. Abraham believed God and prepared to offer his only son, Isaac (a foreshadowing of God offering His only begotten Son, Jesus). Moses believed God and returned to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel. The repentant sinner, as he comes to Christ for salvation, must believe to the point that the appropriate corresponding action follows. We will now consider what that encompasses.

Steps to Christ

The following is not to be considered a secret formula that one must follow to find salvation, but rather a brief overview of the necessary steps we each must take to be saved. Consider this a helpful guide rather than the one and only prescribed method to follow. God works upon individuals according to the various conditions and circumstances, but the following points are those that the Bible teaches that all who hope to be saved will eventually realize.

Confession: There must be a confession that Jesus is Lord and that He rose from the dead.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Romans 10:9.

Secondly, he (or she) must acknowledge and confess that he is a sinner and that by breaking anyone or all of the 10 Commandments, the sentence of death is written against him; for it is written,

"The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die." "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "For the wages of sin is death." Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 3:23, 6:23

Repentance: This involves a turning away from sin. If you are willing, Christ will supply the power as you set that will in motion.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Proverbs 28:13. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Acts 3:19. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Philippians 2:13.

Invitation: He must invite Christ to come into his heart and be Lord of his life. Jesus does not force Himself upon us, but draws us with love.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Revelation 3:20.

When a person dies to self and surrenders his life to Jesus Christ, inviting Him into his life, not as a temporary guest, but as absolute and eternal Lord of his life, he becomes a new creature. Jesus referred to this as being "born again." A new life begins in the soul.

Baptism: He must be baptized.

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. " "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts 2:38, 22:16.

Baptism is a symbol of burial and washing, the word itself meaning immersion.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Romans 6:3-5.

Study: He must learn from the Holy Scriptures. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy,

"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." II Timothy 3:15-17, 2:15.

Knowledge of God: He must develop his relationship with God and Christ.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3.

This is no mere casual acquaintance, but an intimate knowledge.

Obedience: Follow the Lord and obey Him.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey,' whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Luke 9:23, Romans 6:16, John 14:15, I John 2:3-4.

Justification

The word justification simply means "the state of being just or right, free from guilt." This is not something we are able to do, for we have all sinned and are subject to death. We are all condemned until we make the surrender to Christ. Once the surrender is made, Jesus justifies us—He declares us righteous. Our sins are forgiven and we stand in a new position of righteousness.

The prophet Jeremiah under inspiration asked,

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jeremiah 13:23.

Obviously, an Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor can a leopard change his spots. It is just as impossible for us to remove the stain of sin from our lives and to henceforth live righteously. It requires a supernatural work, but we are in bondage to the natural limitations of fallen humanity.

The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in Romans 7:18-24,

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh.) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Have you ever felt that way? You know what is right, but the performance of the right is so difficult. Temptations seem to have an overmastering pull on you at times. Once in a while you may pull up your bootstraps, grit your teeth, and walk away from evil. Remember though, just one sin—one failure—and you are under condemnation and ready for the fire. Paul called this fallen flesh nature "the body of this death."

To better grasp the significance of this phrase we must go back in time to Rome in Paul's day. A man who was found guilty of murder was sentenced to carry the corpse of the one he had slain upon his back. Arm to arm, back to back, the two were strapped together until the decaying flesh would destroy the guilty party. Can you imagine the stench, the contempt, and the pain that the convicted murderer had to endure? This is how we should look upon our old sinful nature. When we see it that way, we too will cry out, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" How can we free ourselves from the sentence of death and the stench of sin? The answer comes in Paul's next words. "*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Jesus is the only way of escape.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Romans 5:1, 2.

The law is holy, just, good and perfect. (Psalm 19:7, Romans 7:12) As mentioned earlier, it is a transcript of God's character. The law reveals to us the high standard of righteousness. There is something the law cannot do, however. It is powerless to make us righteous.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:3,4.

The law is like a mirror, which reveals the dirt on your face, but cannot remove the dirt. You must turn to another source for the cleansing, such as soap and water. Once the law reveals our sin, we must look to the blood of Christ for cleansing.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.**" I John 1:7.

Sanctification

Once we are justified, then the process of sanctification begins. While justification is a work of a moment, sanctification is the work of a lifetime. This is the step by step process of growth and revelation, overcoming sin, evil habits, and character defects as the Spirit of God reveals them. Sanctification actually means, purification." A newly converted person has a new heart, but lacks the complete understanding and the development of character that only comes with time and experience as he studies the Bible and prayerfully follows after the revealed will of God.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." I John 3:2,3.

Of course, it is not possible to purify ourselves apart from Christ. Without Him we can do nothing. (John 15:5) It is our responsibility, however, to cooperate with Christ in this process of sanctification. As we continue to surrender our will to Him, He works in us to perform His will.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Philippians 2:13.

This working of God in us is capable of more than we could ever dream.

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus." Ephesians 3:20, 21.

As long as we cooperate with Christ in sanctification, we retain our justification.

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity,' but toward thee, goodness, **if thou continue in his goodness:** otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: **If ye continue in the faith** grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven." "For we are made partakers of Christ, **if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.**" "**For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth,** there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Colossians 1:21-23, Romans 11:22, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 10:26.

There are many today who believe that once a person is saved it is impossible to lose their salvation. Such must have large erasers to take away all the "ifs" and conditions given in the Bible. The letters to the churches in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, contain one common condition of final salvation--overcoming. We are to continue in the faith of Jesus, overcoming sin through His power. "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*" I John 5:4. Therein lies our assurance of salvation. We must simply live up to the light we have, trusting in Christ to perform His work and will in us. This is the key to security-total surrender.

Law and Grace

We have seen that the law is powerless to save anyone. Sadly, some well-meaning people are still trying to be justified by the law. Somehow they believe that by keeping the law well enough they will earn enough merit to go to heaven. The Apostle Paul made it clear that that would never work.

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 2:21, 16.

Yet another error is made when we go to the extreme of saying that the law is now void since we are under grace. Paul met this misconception head on.

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Romans 3:31.

You see, law and grace are not opposed to one another. Grace is a combination of unmerited favor and the enabling power to keep God's commandments. Those who are under grace are forgiven and pardoned, no longer under condemnation. They are also redeemed from the power of sin.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Romans 6:14-16.

Let us illustrate this by using a modern day analogy. Suppose you are stopped by a policeman for driving 65 mph in a 45 zone. You are now under the law. You are condemned by the law of the land as a transgressor. The law cannot save you from condemnation, for it is written in the law books that you cannot exceed the speed limit. The penalty is written as well—a \$100 fine and suspension of your license. As you stand before the judge, you know you are guilty. He then, to your great joy, pardons you and lets you go free, allowing you to continue driving. The penalty is cancelled. Now you are under grace. Does that mean you are free to go out and exceed the speed limit again, because you are under grace? Of course not. In fact, out of gratitude you should become a more law abiding citizen. This is just what we read in Romans 6:1-2 where Paul writes,

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

We spoke earlier of God's law being internalized. *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."* Hebrews 10: 16. What this really involves is a change of character. You find yourself desiring to do right out of appreciation and love. The commandments take on a new meaning in your life. Rather than being a strict code of prohibitions, they become promises. Rather than saying you cannot, they will begin to say you will not. You will not steal, kill, commit adultery, take God's name in vain, break the seventh day Sabbath, dishonor your parents, etc. Why? Because Christ is dwelling in your heart and transforming your very character.

Isn't that beautiful! Do you know why Jesus is able to do that? The secret is found in the fact that He lived an absolutely sinless life. You see, the law was written in His heart and mind, even though He came to this world *"in the likeness of sinful flesh."* Romans 8:3.

"A Body Hast Thou Prepared Me"

Let us go back to the subject of the "mystery of the gospel." We noted that part of the mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27. The sinless Christ coming to tabernacle in our sinful flesh is certainly a mystery. The amazing thing is, however, that it was in the likeness of our sinful flesh that He lived in this world for 33-1/2 years. In Hebrews 10:5-7 we read,

"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, **but a body hast thou prepared me:** In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said. I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me.) to do thy will, O God."

In other words, God had no pleasure in the sacrifices and offerings that were multiplied on the altar. The blood of bulls, goats and lambs could not take away sin. Only the blood of Christ could atone for sin. The Old Testament sacrifices were a part of the ceremonial law which was nailed to the cross, as type met its anti-type.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Colossians 2:14.

Of course, Jesus was the anti-type—the real substance that cast the shadow. That meant that Jesus had to come in the flesh in order to die for us. Before His death, however, He had to overcome sin in the flesh. Only by being tempted in all points as we are tempted, yet never yielding to the temptations, could He condemn sin in the flesh. The writer of Hebrews made that clear.

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15.

In order to identify with humanity He took upon Himself our flesh—sinful flesh.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same,' that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels,' but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behaved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:14-18. **That is the body that was prepared for Him.**

Now let us look at the passage from which the writer of Hebrews was quoting in 10:7 when he said,

"Lo, I come ... " It is found in Psalm 40:7-8. "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." **Jesus had the law in His heart. So when He abides in you, He brings the law into your heart and mind. Glory!**

Perfect obedience then becomes attainable as we yield ourselves entirely to Him. Let us make our confession just what Paul confessed:

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

Just as Jesus overcame sin in the flesh nearly 2,000 years ago, He wants to overcome sin in your flesh. Though you live in the flesh, you do not have to be subject to its sinful propensities. You can walk after the Spirit, enjoying victory with each step. Oh yes, you may fail from time to time if you do not keep close to Christ by prayer and Bible study. There are also occasions when you may sin out of ignorance. Thank the Lord that we have an advocate with God in such cases.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." I John 2:1.

His grace and mercy are extended to us in such times, but His ultimate desire for us is that we fully reflect His character. The closer we draw to our precious Savior, the more we will be like Him.

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." II Corinthians 3: 18.

Jesus Soon Will Come

Jesus promised that He would return one day for His people.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." John 14:2-3.

We do not know the day or hour of His coming, but we can see by the events in the world that it won't be long. You can sense it, can't you? Something major is happening—the fulfillment of Bible prophecy concerning last day events. Consider the increase in natural disasters—flooding, earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, tornadoes, volcanoes, tidal waves, etc. It is as though this poor old planet of ours is ready to burst at the seams.

Then there is the great movement toward a "New World Order." Treaties, international trade agreements, the World Wide Web, U.N. troops stationed around the world for peace keeping purposes, national sovereignty becoming a thing of the past, and our U.S. Constitution being torn apart. These things remind us that the Bible warns of an attempt to unite the world into one system of religion under the control of Antichrist. It is a time when no man may buy or sell unless he has the dreaded "mark of the beast." Perhaps these warnings were once considered to be far off into the future. To the skeptic, they were mere fairy tales. Now we see these things right on the horizon.

Jesus also warned that conditions would be like the days of Noah, the people of the world abounding in iniquity. He also mentioned the days of Lot when Sodom and Gomorrah were wholly given to sin. Such is the condition of our modern world. Homosexuality, unfaithfulness in marriage, fornication, dishonesty, violence, murder, etc., all going practically unchecked.

Do you remember in our story of Helkiah, how he observed the priest, no longer in his priestly attire, carrying the ashes out to a clean place? Do you recall how that represented the final end of sin and a clean earth? The priest represented Jesus, our faithful High Priest and advocate with the Father. Soon His work of intercession will cease for us in the great sanctuary in Heaven. He will then remove His priestly garments and adorn a different attire—the "*garments of vengeance*." Isaiah 59: 17.

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Psalm 50:3, II Thessalonians 1:8.

You need not be among those who are consumed at His appearing. If you will surrender your life to Christ while probation lingers, your reward will be eternal life. God loves you and desires to have fellowship with you throughout all eternity. In fact, He loved you enough to give His only begotten Son to die that horrible, agonizing death on the cross in order to ransom you from the devil's power. You may be among the redeemed who look up and see Jesus coming and proclaim,

"Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Isaiah 25:9.

Don't wait, friend. Procrastination is dangerous. Make Jesus Christ Lord of your life today and experience the joy and fulfillment of serving Him.