

Christianity Clarified Volume 18

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 0 0] What is Christianity really all about? The issue remains very confusing to a large segment of our society.

At times it even extends to many who consider themselves Christian. Here in an ongoing effort to try and dispel some of the confusion is Marv Wiseman with another session of Christianity Clarified.

The Power of Repentance Picture yourself standing at the very threshold and on the verge of having bestowed upon you the most incredibly wonderful gift any human being has ever received.

It is so valuable, it required the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to purchase it for you. And he paid for it in its entirety, leaving nothing for anyone else to pay, including you.

What do you need to do in order to receive this gift so freely made available? Do you see yourself worthy of this? If so, then you cannot have it.

[1 : 0 8] You cannot have it so long as you think yourself worthy of it. It is denied you. But if you repent, if you change your mind and agree with God it is a gift, you are then in a position to receive it.

But as long as you deem yourself fit and worthy of it, you believe it as a payment to which you are entitled, and God will have none of that. Forgiveness Denied Repentance opens the floodgates of heaven for the effusive pouring out of a veritable ocean of God's forgiveness that bathes and cleanses the one repenting, each and every last one of them.

There is scarcely nothing that delights and warms the heart of God more than a human's repentance, because it means we view ourself and our situation as God does.

We come over to His side by our repentance. We scrap our inaccurate representation of ourselves, and we buy into His.

We have changed our mind from what we previously thought to what God says is the truth of the matter. Don't try coming around if you're not willing to do this, because He won't be in.

[2 : 3 0] Yet, His ear is ever inclined to hear the cry of the repentant. We have described repentance as the truly hard part of the gospel. It's a tough thing to do, and nobody likes it.

Admitting we have been wrong and are wrong does a real job on the human ego, especially a male ego, and we speak from experience.

To do so makes us look bad and feel bad, and why do you suppose that is? Because we are bad. Deal with it. And if you do, you'll repent.

And if you don't, you won't. Oh, your badness may not be as bad as lots of other folks, but don't forget, God's standard of what is good and acceptable is His Son, Jesus.

So, how do you measure up to Him? We rest our case. But for you, dear thirsty ones, who should have faced the reality of your true condition, there yet remains only the greatest of pleasantries.

[3 : 39] Having repented and agreeing with God about your unworthiness and true state of lostness before Him, you may as an act of your will freely abandon yourself to Christ, handing yourself over to Him and trusting what He did for you.

Repenting is Hard to Do The Scriptures command us to repent and believe the gospel. When the gospel, which means good news, is proclaimed in whatever setting, it is simply the dispensing of information.

Those hearing the information, whether an individual person or a large crowd, must then decide what they will do about the information they heard.

We would hope they would embrace it for the good news it is. But to do so, they will have to disbelieve whatever they believed before they heard this new information of the gospel.

The changing of their position is what the Bible calls repentance. It is merely discovering something you previously thought was right isn't.

[4 : 59] The new information you receive has convinced you otherwise, and if you are big enough to admit it and correct yourself, that's repentance, and it is a hard thing to do.

In fact, it may be the chief reason people remain unsaved even though they have heard the gospel. The Bible calls this the hardness of heart or unrepentance.

It is a stubbornness that entails eternal consequences. But everyone who has become a Christian had to do it. There is no way one can come to faith in Christ without admitting they have been apart from Christ, which is the wrong place to be.

Merely finding ourselves there makes us wrong and in need of repentance. In reality, we ought to be delighted to discover we have been wrong so we can correct it.

Many are, but others actually resent learning they are wrong, and they may even berate the person who gave them the information contained in the gospel. It isn't unusual for folks to dig their heels in and even become angry before they get saved by repenting and believing the gospel.

[6 : 18] And what does believing the gospel entail? It involves the personalizing of the truth that Christ died for the sins of the world by understanding that includes you personally as an individual.

One makes a conscious, deliberate, and intentional entrustment of oneself to Jesus Christ who stands ready to receive you.

He saw to it that the good news about himself was made available to you so you could receive it, repent, rejoice in it, and have eternal life.

It's the most incredible and desperately needy information the world or any individual could ever hear. God says so in his word. To the Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes, I delivered unto you first of all that which I also receive, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

Did you get that? First of all, of primary importance, what could be more urgent? Nothing. The Simplicity and Difficulty of Repentance In the apostle Paul's famous sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill, he said, God now commands all men everywhere to repent.

[7 : 53] What precisely does that mean? There's certainly no way that men can do it if they don't even understand what it means to repent. Have you ever seen a nerdy little cartoon-like character walking around in public while carrying a sign that says, Repent, the end is near?

Well, that's about the extent to which many connect the word, and it still doesn't tell us what it means. First off, let's think of what it does not mean. It does not mean do penance, be sorrowful, or shed tears.

It doesn't mean make resolutions, or promises, or try to do better about whatever. The word in the original Greek, in which the New Testament was written, is metanoia.

It literally means through the mind, or a change of mind. A change of mind about what? Well, about anything.

In fact, it need not even have anything to do with changing your mind about something religious, although by usage, it is generally found in a religious context.

[9 : 07] Essentially, repentance means that upon discovering you have been wrong about something, anything, you change your mind from the position you previously held to the position you now understand to be right.

that is, you reverse yourself as opposed to where you were before hearing the enlightening information. Actually, we repent all the time about a lot of different things.

Whenever we get an update of information that clarifies something, or that contradicts something, we get the rest of the story, as they say. But it should also be noted that this is a very hard thing to do.

Very hard. In fact, it is the most difficult thing man is called upon to do in connection with one's personal salvation. Why is this? Well, who likes to admit they have been wrong about anything?

In fact, some people hate to admit it so much they never have been wrong about anything in their entire life. We probably all know somebody like that. Of course, I'm being facetious, but you get my point.

[10 : 22] It's a truly tough thing to say, I was wrong about that. You see, it's bruising to the ego, especially if it's a male ego. Yet, it is an essential ingredient to salvation because for anyone to be saved, he must be in a position of being unsaved, and that's the wrong place to be.

To get out of there, one must recognize the wrongness of his position and change his mind from previously thinking he was right to now acknowledging he was wrong. And when he has done that, he has repented.

The basis for changing his mind is that he has received new information called the gospel or good news. And this is why we preach the gospel. It gives people a reason for changing their mind.

Humanity's Greatest Single Need Part 1 The greatest need that every human being has is within the reach of everyone hearing this brief message.

It is the most priceless commodity that has ever been on the stage of human history. For lack of this great necessity, sleepless nights are spent, restless days endured, and agonizing memories haunt feeble attempts to forget.

[11 : 44] Countless numbers have taken their own life, even preferring death rather than continuing with the pain they can no longer endure. What is this missing jewel, this priceless commodity causing so many to welcome death?

It is forgiveness. Forgiveness sets us free from excruciating guilt that consumes from the inside out. It paralyzes and binds us with a seeming Gordian knot, and our feeble fingers feel over the strands of the knot looking for a weakness, a loosening, but it isn't there.

It's tight, very tight, and the pain of unforgiveness goes on and on and on. One who has been here or is here now knows all about this.

A burden of guilt that knows no relief is a wretched kind of torture. Prominent psychiatrist Dr. Carl Menninger, founder of the famous clinic that bore his name, authored a book bearing the title, Whatever Happened to Sin?

Critical question. Critical because our denial and excusing of sin tells guilt it has no basis for being. But guilt isn't buying it.

[13 : 04] Guilt ignores the no-fault claim and simply goes on about its business collaborating with the conscience in producing its output of anxiety and fear.

Fear of discovery, fear of punishment and consequences, fear of embarrassment, or loss, perhaps, of another's love, loss of freedom, of fortune, and the potential list goes on.

Mental health specialists dealing with anxious souls torn apart by these realities every day agree that the population of our mental institutions could be radically reduced if fear and guilt were eliminated.

How can that be done? Well, we know how it can't be done, no matter how skillfully attempted. Not by denial.

Not by drugs. They may numb the unforgiven for a time, but the human psyche will not be fooled. The conscience is a resilient and stubborn thing, always seeking to be diligent in its assigned task, the task of reminding its owner of what he did.

[14 : 19] Guilty, guilty, guilty. Sometimes it whispers and sometimes it screams. Isn't this a truly terrible scenario? And yet, it can all set the stage for the entrance of the only adequate rescue mentioned at the outset of this brief message described as the greatest of all human needs, the need for forgiveness.

It is available from the only one who has it to give, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Greatest Single Human Need, Part 2 It doesn't sound right to identify forgiveness as the greatest need of every human being, and realization of it lies within the grasp of everyone hearing this.

If that were true, why doesn't everyone grasp it? Is it possible while God is the Great Forgiver, the key to obtaining His forgiveness is held by the one needing forgiveness?

It is not merely possible, it is the reality. The unforgiven may find it hard to believe that God is more eager to forgive than we are to be forgiven.

But forgiveness is God's specialty, a part of His job description. It's what the manger, the cross, and the resurrection are all about. God in Christ invaded our world to accomplish these events and make them the earth changers and people changers they were and are.

[15 : 59] The payment made by this sinless Savior balanced the scales of God's justice, enabling Him to dispense forgiveness without compromising His integrity in making forgiveness available for distribution.

But, if it's God's forgiveness and it's His to grant as He will, how can mere man be said to have it within his grasp? It is because man, with the volition God has given him, may trigger the release of God's forgiveness.

And what is this trigger man has at his disposal? It is repentance, and it's the only trigger that there is. All through Scripture, from the people of Nineveh to whom Jonah preached, into the book of Revelation recording the final wrap-up, it is the repentance of man that activates the forgiveness of God.

And it is man's refusal to repent that requires God to withhold forgiveness. The difference between repentance and unrepentance is in the changing or not changing of our mind.

Unrepentance refuses to change the mind. He is one who digs in his heels and denies culpability, shifts blame, makes excuse, will not take responsibility.

[17 : 26] Scripture calls it stiff-necked and hard-hearted, stubborn, etc. You get the picture. The repentant one is courageous enough to face the painful truth of guilt, not blaming others, but stepping up to the plate and saying, I am guilty as charged and I take full responsibility.

Refusal to repent confines us to unreality and God's forgiveness is not released for us to receive. Because God traffics only in reality, not unreality.

He is real and when we get real, we are on the same wavelength and in position to do business. It's the most glorious transaction in the universe. What else can man do that causes angels in the presence of God to rejoice like Luke 15 tells us?

Nothing we know of. The fullness of forgiveness. If there is anything the scriptures make crystal clear, among other things, it is the extent to which the price paid by Jesus Christ for man's sin was full and complete.

This is declared in several ways, some of them very colorfully throughout the scriptures. Already noted was the mere definition of to forgive and it was wonderful.

[18 : 57] Add to that the phrase found in Colossians 2 that even though we were dead in our sins, we have been made alive in Christ and have been forgiven all our trespasses.

The death state from which we came refers to our spiritual and moral death, that is, the lot of all who are separated from God. And yes, just as the truth of our forgiveness is not determined because we feel forgiven, but because God says so, even so, the truth of man's alienation from God is not because man feels alienated or doesn't feel alienated, but because God says he is.

Here in Colossians 2 we are given additional divine assurance that in Christ we are complete and we have been forgiven all trespasses. Again, let us be reminded that the truth and scope of this great forgiveness is inseparably linked to and predicated upon the totality of the redemptive work of Christ.

When the Savior cried out, Tetelestai, it is finished, it really was. Nothing remained to be paid. Jesus paid it all.

Whereas sin had left a crimson flow, he washed it white as snow. Do you realize the enormity of this transaction?

[20 : 32] having forgiven you all trespasses? Does this mean all my past sins? Yes. What about my present sins?

Yes. Are we saying that God has forgiven my past, present, and future sins? Yes. Words mean things.

What do you think is meant by all? Some? Many? Most? How about what it says?

How about all? No, we are not minimizing the seriousness of our sin. What we are doing is acknowledging the incredible fullness of Christ's redemption.

Can you possibly imagine there are some sins for which Christ did not die? Was his work then unfinished? Need he come back and offer something other than himself or himself again to finish what he did not complete?

[21 : 38] Nonsense. But, say you, I find it hard to believe Christ could forgive me for sins I haven't yet committed. But remember, when Christ died for our sins, they were all future, weren't they?

This fullness of redemption that makes us complete in Christ reflects our inviolable position in him. It is a position of perfection. What God has done with our sin. It's a beautiful and comforting expression Isaiah gives us in chapter 38 when he says of God, Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

Yes, it's true, this is Hebrew poetry, and yes, it's an anthropomorphism because God doesn't have a back per se. Human body parts like back and arms not shortened that they cannot save and eyes that run to and fro upon the earth are all ascribed to the Almighty.

If there is to be any communication at all between creator and creature, God needs to reduce himself at least in language to what we can grasp and we can grasp this.

Picture, if you will, God having a back. Isaiah is saying, And here are our sins front and center before God.

[23 : 07] But when repentance and forgiveness are in place, what then does God do with those sins? He gathers them up and throws them over his shoulder.

Now they are behind his back, out of sight. Can we say out of sight, out of mind? Every additional thing God does to separate our sins from us is one more expression of his love and grace, despite our undeservedness.

Besides this, Israel is told in Jeremiah 50 that their sins are sought for and not found. not only is this true for a nation, but as well for the individual.

Now what does that mean? Well, picture, if you will, an angel, perhaps even Satan himself, the fallen angel, looking for evidence with which to charge us.

He plans to bring that evidence front and center and lay it all out. There you will be put on display and all the sins you owned, there they will be, filling several exhibit tables in the courtroom of heaven.

[24 : 19] You're really in for it now. Just look at all this condemning evidence. Exhibit A through, well, how far does heaven's alphabet go?

Wait a minute. Where are they? Satan says, I know this guy and all he had against him and why it was enough to put him away for eternity.

Where is all that evidence? What happened to it? It would have been an open and shut case. But there will be no trial. There is no case.

Case dismissed for lack of evidence. Well, what happened to the evidence? It was sought for, but not found. Cast behind God's back. Oh, yes, one more wonderful, gracious reality, further expressing the scope of Christ's death for our sin and the thoroughness of forgiveness.

It tells us they are buried in the depths of the deepest sea. Actually, being buried in any old sea would be enough, but not for God. He buries them in the deepest sea.

[25 : 26] That is, the deepest part of the deepest sea. God so greatly loves those bought by his Son, he wants to make certain we will never be confronted with what he has forgiven.

As far as East is from the West. It is one more clearly incomprehensible thing we would labor in vain to even begin to calculate.

We speak of the corporate sin burden of all humanity during the several millennia of our existence. What have we at the present? Six, seven billion on Earth?

And how many have gone before numbering in the billions? And how many are there yet to live before the curtain comes down? Multiply those billions times the sins of each, covering every moral infraction, great and small, at least to our measure.

And what have we by way of totaling human sin of all time? We can't even fathom it. But God could, and did. And Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, took all those sins upon himself and died a death all those evils deserved.

[26 : 48] Utterly astounding! He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Think of that.

Our human righteousness, flawed and lacking as it is, gets replaced with the very righteousness that belongs to God. And now, it belongs to us, received as a free gift.

Can we not readily see why this is called good news? What better news has anyone, anywhere, at any time, ever heard? In addition, Psalm 103 tells us, As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Well, just how far is the east from the west? The observation has been made that the distance between north and south can be determined by calculating the space between north and south poles.

Scientific instruments today can probably narrow it to a tenth of a mile, perhaps even closer. But we can't do that with the distance between east and west because we can't fix a starting or ending point.

[28 : 03] We do not have an east and west pole from which to calculate. And that's just the point. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

How far is that? It's incalculable. That's how far. So, what's the picture God is communicating here in Psalm 103.

He has taken our sin out of the way. It's off the record. Gone. Removed a distance from us that is incalculable.

This is not some boomerang forgiveness whereby it comes back around to haunt us. This is a gone-for-good forgiveness that makes those sins irretrievable.

And if they are not that, it places the finality of the work of Christ in great jeopardy. Perish the thought. Gone. Gone. Gone.

[29 : 07] All my sins are gone. So far has the east is from the west. So far has he removed our transgressions from us. God reads the human heart.

It's a difficult concept to explain and perhaps it cannot at all be fully explained. It has to do with God knowing and reading the heart of an individual. What is meant is that God knows the thoughts, intents, and true motivation of each of us.

He knows what's there and he is incapable of wrong conclusions. God not only reads us, he always reads us correctly. The point to be made here is that if a sincere trust in the Savior is in one's own heart or spirit, God knows that and accepts it.

The text says in Romans 10 that if we believe in our heart that God has raised him from the dead, we shall be saved. And the heart as referred to in the Bible does not mean the blood pump in our chest, but rather the very core of our being, as we might use the word in speaking about the heart of the matter.

Many scholars equate the biblical use of the heart with the mind, the seat of our thinking, processing, and decision-making. It is the mental action center. It's where every decision is made before it's ever expressed verbally and outwardly.

[30 : 36] Here is the place where we believe in Christ or whatever else. And perhaps the core is designated as the heart because it also includes the emotions.

Generally speaking, we tend to think of the mind as governing the intellect and the heart as governing the emotions. But there may well be some crossover here that we do not fully understand, all of which is a part of our being fearfully and wonderfully made.

At any rate, the expression of believing in the heart infers something of depth as opposed to shallowness or superficiality. Something believed in one's heart ought to impact their entire being, which is exactly what Christ does when he enters the human heart or spirit.

He immediately starts by regenerating or making us spiritually alive. And if the belief is truly in the heart, it naturally breaks forth to the surface.

This is the confess with your mouth part of Romans 10. But it isn't some absolute imperative that one must confess with one's mouth verbally and outwardly.

[31 : 55] And it doesn't thus mean that a mute person can't be saved because he cannot confess with his mouth. What the text seems to say is that an outward admission or confession with one's mouth is the most logical and anticipated expression of the belief that took place in the heart.

There is no Christian formula, no open sesame or abracadabra magic words to be uttered that makes one a Christian. It is an internal weighing of the information contained in the gospel followed by a conclusion one reaches based on the evidence considered then followed by a deliberate voluntary entrusting of oneself to the person of Jesus Christ because he died for our sins.

God sees whether this is in place within the heart of each one. If it is, we belong to him. If it isn't, we don't. What's in your heart? The internal cleansing of man.

A common expression we would call an emotional reaction has been noted by several people upon repentance of their sin and coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

And it has been, I felt clean, clean like I have never felt before. I don't understand it, but I just feel like I was given a bath on the inside.

[33 : 25] Well, that's an interesting expression they have described, and I would not doubt them for a moment. But I would add, they were not cleansed internally because they felt they were, but because God said they were.

Not everyone who comes to faith relates this sensation of feeling cleansed internally, but they were whether they felt it or not because God says they were.

Titus 3 reminds us that it was not through works of righteousness that we were saved, but by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

And please don't confuse this with water baptism. This is an internal cleansing and regeneration of the human spirit inside our being where water cannot reach.

We can all, I think, at least most of us, identify with having been involved in some kind of a very dirty, nasty job. So dirty that it left us feeling like we might never be clean again.

[34 : 28] But remember how inexpressibly refreshing you felt upon emerging from the shower? You can actually see your skin again. You just may make it after all. Physically, you were so dirty that if dirt could kill, you'd have been dead by now.

But here you are, cleansed and with a change of clothing, why, you'll even be presentable to the world again. And all thanks and praise to the magical wonders of soap and water.

Okay, lots of soap and water, but voila, here you are. Didn't that feel great? That's just you looking at you. But as good as it is and as good as it feels, it's all external where the soap and water are applied.

But now let's go inside where only God sees. And he sees a human spirit that was laden down with all the things you would and should be ashamed of. Really cruddy stuff.

Evil thoughts, desires, deeds, and assorted unmentionables, moral dirt, really bad stuff. What were you engaged in anyway? And what does the Spirit of God do when you trust the Savior?

[35 : 43] He washes that spirit, cleanses, renews, and regenerates. No wonder some newborn believers say they feel clean. They are, because God says he cleansed them.

And they have the sensation of feeling clean as well. Talk about the best of both worlds. And this vital, life-giving cleansing is all the result of the gracious provision of a loving Savior.

He was not turned off by our sin. He actually took it and put it upon his own shoulders when he died a death we should die because of it.

Fully, freely, forgiven, forever. Hallelujah. What a Savior. The Ease and Difficulty in Connecting with God Because connecting with God is the most significant, eternally enduring transaction anyone could ever make, many think it must be a very complicated process.

But, because it is of such great importance, he wants no one unconnected to himself because it was too complex for people to come to him. God has done the most he could do in providing his son as our substitute so that he could require from us the very least.

[37 : 10] And what is that least? It is simply the volitional placing of our trust and confidence in the son he has given. It is with an act of our will we pronounce ourselves as unworthy rebels, self-willed and self-serving.

Then, for our remedy, we cast ourselves upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. And, yes, some will say, that's too easy. Well, it is easy once we get beyond the hard part that requires us to see ourselves as the sinful beings God declares us to be.

that's the hard part, dealing with our own ego and the illusion that we're not really all that bad. But we are. And God is asking us to trust his assessment of ourselves rather than trust our own.

Self-deception is systemic to humanity and is a major part of the problem. The information contained in the gospel is the most solid truth available on the planet.

It isn't called the gospel or good news for nothing. Man, being the most incurable do-it-yourselfer there ever was, tries to circumvent the simple gospel, which anyone could understand and believe, with something that will recognize human efforts and provide some bragging rights, however small.

[38 : 36] So, man devises all sorts of religious hoops through which men must jump. You have to be baptized, baptized, you have to take communion, you have to join the church, the right church, you have to do penance, you have to go to confession, you have to pray, you have to give money, and on and on and on.

And if you have obediently navigated all those hoops, maybe, just maybe, you will gain God's favor. But there is no assurance. So, try harder, give more, pray more, attend more, and so it goes.

Christ delivered a scathing rebuke to the religious establishment of his day when he told them, they laid burdens on men they themselves could not bear, and they made the word of God of no effect by encumbering it with their traditions.

Jesus was saying the way into the heart of God and connection to him was not difficult or burdensome, but the religious establishment had made it well nigh impossible with all of their paraphernalia and rituals.

Come unto me, said Jesus, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and you will find rest unto your souls. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[39 : 52] A decision of your mind, an act of your will, by trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, will solidly connect you with him, nothing else will, and you can do that even now.

man's pervasive persistent plague. Billy Sunday was the Billy Graham of the 1920s and 1930s, and as an evangelist, he faced the same obstacles and misunderstanding people have about Christianity as Billy Graham faced during his extensive career.

In fact, earlier evangelists from the first century were confronted by the same confused thinking by their contemporaries, and nothing has changed with the content of the gospel or with the essential makeup and thinking of people.

And don't be fooled by the technology factor, because as real as it is, it hasn't changed the gospel or man's perpetual misunderstanding of that gospel. Well, what then is it that is the crux of man's misunderstanding?

What is this pervasive persistent plague? Here it is. It is the mistaken notion that becoming acceptable to God is a works-based activity, peppered with consistency, good intentions, and the image of just being a nice person.

- [41 : 18] Ah, yes, that's the ticket. That will impress God. And then, God being impressed and grateful for your wonderful behavior will reward your efforts by allowing you into heaven.
- And one can't find anything that makes more sense than that to the average person of any generation, including the present. But, please listen to what God actually says about all this in Romans chapter 4 of the Bible.
- But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
- What? That can't be. That's too easy. Just believe in Christ? Ha, anybody can do that. No, that's not true.
- Not just anybody can believe in Christ. In fact, most cannot believe in Christ, and for very good reason. Because you must have a rationale, a motivation in place in order to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or you won't do it.
- [42 : 25] So, what is the motivation that moves one to trust in Christ? Christ, you would have to see him as your only hope. You have to abandon faith in yourself and your hope to gain heaven in that way.
- Some are willing to do that because they don't think all that highly of their good deed accomplishments, but most of us have an ego that makes us think we have a good chance of making it, and that prevents them from believing in Christ.
- they are unwilling to abandon their faith in themselves. But Jesus is the only one qualified to wear the title Savior. Christ will not team up with you so you can provide part of your salvation by your good works, and then he will make up what you may lack.
- No, no, no. He alone saves, or we are lost. God's terms are quite clear. Christ the Savior does the saving.
- He receives the credit. We receive incredible benefits with eternal life. The hymn writer said it so well, Nothing in my hand I bring, only to thy cross I cling.
- [43 : 41] Are you clinging to that cross? Revelation is for rejoicing.
- Revelation is all about what the word itself implies. It means to disclose, to unveil, or open. When used as in biblical revelation, the meaning is connected with what is revealed in and by the Bible.
- Sometimes it's called special revelation as opposed to general revelation, each somewhat defined by those words. General revelation, also called natural revelation, refers to matters God has revealed in a general way to all humanity in all ages.
- Psalms 19 declares, The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. What God has made, he has put on display for all humanity to see.
- Sunshine and rain, night and day, mountains and oceans are all visible items of general revelation, bearing witness to man that someone is behind it all.
- [44 : 48] The sun, moon and stars by day and by night declare, reveal or unveil the very existence, majesty and power of the one who created them all.
- Romans 1 tells us these things are clearly seen, so clearly in fact that man is without excuse for ignoring them. We may think of general revelation as a way God has used to declare himself by putting his creation front and center that man might not miss it.
- Yet, while general revelation has its value, it does not communicate the specific information needed that lies beyond general revelation. And for those specifics, God has given us the Bible in what is called special revelation.

This kind of revelation is not merely specific, but it is information that man could not possibly know were it not revealed in the Bible. While general revelation discloses that there is a God so powerful that he made the world we see, it conveys nothing about the information critical to man's origin, purpose, meaning, or destiny.

Only specific biblical revelation provides answers to these critical issues. And at the very heart of biblical revelation is the greatest of all matters we would not otherwise know about.

[46 : 11] It involves our Lord Jesus Christ and his great redemptive work via his death, burial, and resurrection. In no way could we learn or understand the significance of Bethlehem, Calvary, the empty tomb, and the promise of his return if it were not for the special revelation in our Old and New Testaments.

Revelation, whether general or special, means, were it not for God's gracious disclosures, we would not have the information we do. And all forms of revelation God has given are intended for one outcome.

Revelation is information that requires a response. It is not merely knowing things God has been pleased to reveal, but responding to what God has revealed.

Along with all kinds of divine revelation, the question always looms nearby. So what? Well, our response to God's revelation is positive, leading to accepting Christ, or negative, resulting in our rejection of Christ.

Both positions involve eternal consequences. God Won't Mess Up Your Life He sat there, wringing his hands.

[47 : 33] Ted was a rather good looking young man, probably in his mid-thirties, and as he began pouring out the tale of his woes to the pastor, he freely admitted he really didn't want to be there, but he was desperate.

And when you're desperate and have nowhere else you can go, you might even go to the extreme of talking to a man of the cloth. Maybe he has a connection with God who could make all of his problems go away.

Fidgety and trying to position himself in the easy chair across from the pastor's desk, he continued by admitting that he was not perfect, which for him seemed to be a stunning, almost unexpected admission.

What he was, however, and this he saw quite clearly, was simply a man whom life had dealt a bad hand. He had done his very best to play it, but when fate frowns on you, well, said he, the deck is just stacked against me.

A bunch of bad breaks, one after another, and here you're looking at an unfortunate victim of circumstances. Yes, he was married, but he obviously got the wrong woman, because she's at her lawyers while I'm here with you.

[48 : 43] She's divorcing me and wants full custody of our only child, one year old, little girl. I lost my job a month ago because the boss was jealous of me, and I haven't been able to find a job I want since.

Our credit cards are maxed out, and creditors are hounding me. We're in a house with an overdue mortgage, and one of our two cars has already been repossessed. And my parents aren't willing to help us anymore, and her parents never would help because they opposed our marriage from the start.

None of this stuff is anything I bargained for, Pastor, when I got married. Frankly, I don't think I can take it anymore. Life stinks. So, you tell me, Pastor, where do I go from here?

Does God have any solutions for a hard-luck guy like me? I'm willing to do anything, you know, whatever it takes. The pastor leaned back, preparing to utter his first word in response to the question.

Well, Ted, there's no question you are in a crisis mode, and it may be that God is using this extremity to speak to you about himself. I call these attention-getters, Ted, and I would urge you to consider the claims of Christ.

[49 : 55] He died for our sins, you know. And when we put our trust in him, his forgiveness and salvation becomes ours. It's the beginning of a whole new life. Ted, I see your root problem being a lack of relationship to Christ, and if you address that as job one, you'll have a new ally for dealing with all of life's less important issues.

And I don't mean to say that your problems are not important. They are. But your connection to Christ, or lack thereof, is the most important of all, for you and your wife. Ted, would you like to hear an explanation of the gospel and learn how Christ could make the greatest difference you could ever imagine?

With a pained expression, Ted replied, Well, Pastor, that's not exactly what I had in mind. I couldn't just give myself and everything over to God and wait for who knows how long for him to make all this stuff go away.

Besides, if I did that, that would mess up my whole life. The pastor was speechless. Understandably so. The How and Why of Faith How did the concept of faith originate, and why?

The principle of faith originated by God in order to salvage fallen humanity. In man's corporate rebellion and fallenness, via our first parents, we all became alienated from God and utterly incapable of any work or deed that could restore us to God's favor and acceptance.

[51 : 35] Man's moral impotence could accomplish nothing pleasing to God. Because man could not facilitate his way back to God, he and all his progeny were doomed to remain alienated from their creator.

Man's tainted inability excluded him from a solution. One possibility remained. Would the offended creator be willing to initiate a strategy whereby he could restore fallen man to the place and position of acceptance?

But why should he? And what possible strategy could be derived? Yes, the offended creator was willing to so initiate such a strategy.

But why should he do so? Only because of an amazing love for these rebelling creatures. It was love that stemmed not from rebel creatures being lovable, but from God's own great loving heart.

And what possible strategy could do it? What could restore man to the place of favor and acceptance while allowing God to maintain his character of justice and holiness?

[52 : 50] How could a just God forgive without justice being fully satisfied? Without sully or tarnishing his nature and character? The moral integrity of a holy creator must be maintained.

It's part of what makes God God. The answer is utterly sublime, and it resides only in Judeo-Christianity. None of the religious systems can lay claim to this strategy.

Only in the confines of Judeo-Christianity do you find it. It's called justification by faith. And coupled with the principle, God as much as made out an IOU payable to himself by himself, without man even making a smidgen of contribution to it.

How's that for grace? The marker would be called in 4,000 years later when God the mighty maker died for man the creature's sin. And even before Christ died and picked up the tab for man's sin, justification by faith had been in place all along.

Before Christ came, man's faith was simply deposited in the person and promises of God. Now, after Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, our faith is placed in that Savior who made good on all God promised.

[54 : 18] Since that time, our message calls humankind worldwide to place their faith in a substitutionary Christ and be justified on the basis of faith, Christ being the object or depository of our faith.

Connecting with God through Christ As mind-boggling as it may sound, each and every one of us can establish a personal connection to God, enjoy His forgiveness, bask in His fellowship, and receive His eternal life.

So how is this possible? God has made a way, but it is not as many think. What do we have to do to make a personal connection with anyone else?

Well, we have to go where they are and establish a face-to-face meeting, or at least a link of some kind. We telephone, email, text, or Twitter them, but in some way we make a connection.

But you say, I can't email God or get Him on the phone, not even on a smartphone. Well, that's true. And he who set this whole thing up about connecting man and God knew full well what he was doing.

[55 : 36] So what did he do? He established a working connection far more effective and available than the latest communication gizmo that man can invent. Paul the Apostle refers to this in the 13th of Romans when he asks the rhetorical question, Do we have to bring Christ down from where He is to connect?

No, not at all. He is as near as what is inside you by way of your heart and mind. How near is that? The connection, he said, is made by faith.

But what does that mean? It means we connect with God by exercising our will. We know the connection is valid because God who cannot lie says it is.

And when we merely believe God, we are using our will to believe. That's faith. That's the human response to the word of the gospel. We can and should do it.

It is what is meant in saying the word is very near each one of us. For everyone who has a mind and a will, Christ is just that available, as near to you as yourself.

[56 : 43] How near is that? When one hears the gospel, the good news about Christ dying for our sin, that's information made available. We then internalize that information, process it, evaluate it, consider it.

Is it true or not? If we conclude it is valid, as millions have, we deliberately, willfully, personally believe it and log it as a settled truth, thanking God for this indescribable gift of His Son.

Doing that is an act of faith. It is being justified by faith because you don't see Christ. You can't touch Him physically as the disciples did.

But He is here. He is available. As available as your very breath. And how do we know that? Because God who cannot lie said so. Faith is nothing more than believing what God has said and entrusting oneself to it.

Again, do you not see why the Bible is so very critical as our source of information? Because you cannot respond to what you do not know. This gives rise to the essential proclaiming of the gospel as good news.

[57 : 55] It gives people something from God to respond to. Our faith, trust, reliance, commitment to the message of the gospel is our response.

It is our assessment and answer to what God accomplished through His Son's death, burial, and resurrection. The Bad and Good News of the Gospel There is no question as to the meaning of the word gospel found throughout the New Testament.

It means good news. Usually it is found in the context of telling this good news to others. The Apostle Paul expresses it in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

Christ died sounds like bad news. Anybody dying sounds like bad news. And especially Christ dying. Yet, it was His dying and the reason for His dying that makes the good news good.

In reality, and the way it all plays out is, the good news is good and real, because the bad news is bad and just as real.

[59 : 12] The bad news is connected to our sin and is what prompted the need for the death of Christ. Can we see how these are a complete package?

One is meaningless without the other. We really can't provide a reason for the good news until we see the reality and effect of the bad news first.

And they need to be thought of in that order. First the bad news, then the good news. If we omit the bad news of our sin, we rob the good news of its reason for being.

If we reverse them, it's like taking medicine before you have an illness that would require it. Perhaps in large part, our problem is our reluctance or unwillingness to tell people about sin.

Well, who wants to hear that? Even if we know it to be true in our heart of hearts, we still don't want to tell people that.

[60 : 22] It's mighty uncomfortable. We risk offending them, turning them off, or just making them plain mad. But most people get mad before they get saved.

And what makes them mad is that which offends them. Telling the truth about the bad news cost many of the biblical prophets their life because people in their audience didn't want to hear it.

They still don't. Nothing has changed. They persecuted those they didn't kill. They killed John the Baptist. They killed Christ. They killed Stephen.

All for the same reason. They all told people the truth. And it made them angry. When people couldn't get at the source of the message, which of course was God, they did the next best thing in their minds.

They killed the messenger. Do you see why we are reluctant to give people the bad news? It's not likely to cost us our life, but we may endure criticisms, sneers, angry looks, folks talking about our offensive judgmentalism behind your back.

[61 : 40] So be of good cheer. You're in great company. Get on with it. Bad news and good. And, in that order, A Crisis of Faith Interesting parallels exist between things physical and things spiritual.

And we have likened the gestational and birth process as being among them. Because, from the fertilizing of the ovum, the gestation period, the baby, begins physically and normally will be born in about nine months.

Spiritual seed is also sown in the heart of hearers by exposure to the gospel, and that seed may begin to grow as well. As more information is added, the gestational period moves forward.

The actual birth, spiritually, may be only a short time later when the hearer comes to faith in Christ, or, it may encompass a period of several years, all in spiritual gestation before the hearer actually comes to faith.

Sadly, in some cases it never occurs at all, and the hearer dies unsaved and in rejection of the grace of God. You might call that a spiritual stillborn.

[62 : 58] Of critical concern about all this, however, is the realization that no matter how brief or how lengthy the period of spiritual gestation is, there is no spiritual life imparted until the hearer actually comes to faith in Christ as an act of His will.

When that happens, it is an expression or placement of faith in the person and work of Christ. God responds to our response with an act of His own.

He regenerates or makes new the spirit of the believing person by imputing to Him the very life of Christ, thus making Him a fully regenerated new creation in Christ Jesus.

Some call this being born again, saved, regenerated, forgiven, or receiving the righteousness of God in Christ. But you may think of it as all of the above, plus much more.

But let's be advised, however, that as wonderful as all these incredible gifts are, they are only potential and not actually realized until the point of decision for Christ by the hearer.

[64 : 04] No one is half saved or half unsaved. That's akin to a woman being half pregnant. She is or she isn't, but she is not a little pregnant.

And as with the birth of the baby, there is but a moment of time between its being gestationally in utero and its exiting the womb and beginning to breathe and live. This is the crisis of birth.

The crisis is during transition between dependency in the womb and independency out of it. And spiritually speaking, no one's regeneration and reception of new life in Christ occurs in a protracted manner.

While their spiritual gestation may have been protracted, even over several years, their actual birth and infusion of spiritual life from Christ is a crisis act.

It is a passing from death unto life as stated in John chapter 5. Nobody has almost passed from death unto life and is situated somewhere in between.

[65 : 11] There is no in between. One has trusted in Christ and received forgiveness and life from Him or not. Nothing in this world or in the next will equal the importance of this crisis.

Choose well. Feeling forgiven Part 1 So, what does being a recipient of God's forgiveness involve?

Lots of things, occurring simultaneously without our even realizing it. So, if we don't realize it, how can we know it's true? A very good question.

And don't forget the answer. Here it is. God says so. That's it. God said so. But, what if I don't feel forgiven?

Oh, you'll have days like that. Even Christians may face situations making you feel like anything but forgiven. No matter.

[66 : 17] Because feelings are fickle things. We humans tend to rise and fall based on what's happening to us and around us. Sometimes it's ugly and depressing.

But that's not the gauge of our forgiveness. We need something lots more steady than our fleeting feelings. We need something that won't move. Not subject to prosperity or adversity.

And that's where the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture comes in to enlighten and steady the soul. Nothing the Bible says is true of the believer because you feel it.

It's true because God says so no matter how you feel. Feelings are wonderful things and life is unimaginable without them bringing us from the height of euphoria to the pits of despair.

But God did not give emotions to be the proof of our relationship with Him or the reality of the forgiveness we have received from Him. The realities contained in God's forgiveness begin with the meaning of the word itself.

[67 : 26] To forgive means to release, to dismiss, to excuse, to send away. We have been released from the penalty of sin. Charges placing us under sentence and penalty of death have been dismissed.

Picture the God of Heaven seated before you as you face charges and he says, Case dismissed. If you have repented of your sin and have trusted Jesus Christ, that's precisely what God has done for you, whether you feel like it or not.

That's what forgiveness is. Forgive also means to excuse. What does the judge say to the defendant who was just tried and found not guilty?

He says, The defendant is excused. You are free to go. But wait, weren't we guilty? Yes, we were.

But Christ paid the penalty for our sin and we are freed. To forgive means to send away. Under the Mosaic system, hands were laid on the scapegoat while the priest confessed the sins of Israel.

[68 : 39] Releasing then the scapegoat into the wilderness, it was never to be seen again. That's what God did with our sins. They are sent away, never to be seen again.

And we don't know this because we feel like it's true. We know it because God says it's true. Rejoice in being fully, freely forgiven forever.

Feeling forgiven, part two. While it is true that we are not to gauge or base our forgiveness by God on our feelings, yet, our feelings really are an important part of our being.

So while we do not look at our feeling forgiven as proof we have been forgiven, feeling the forgiveness is not a bad thing. Certainly not. It's a good thing.

It's merely a matter of not making our feelings do certain things they were not designed to do. So, what were feelings designed to do?

[69 : 46] Why do we even have feelings and emotions? We have them as a byproduct or consequence of something that is objectively true. Feelings are intended to be the cart that follows the horse.

They are subjective, not objective. What does that mean? It means feelings are personal, emotional experiences we have in our human spirit.

Your feelings are highly individualistic and belong exclusively to you as the subject. Thus, we call them subjective. But, what are our feelings based upon?

What causes us to feel the things we feel? That's because of what has occurred that is objective. If something is objectively true, it doesn't matter how you feel about it as a subject.

It's true anyway. And how you feel about it does not change the truth of it. So, our subjective personal feelings must be based upon what the objective reality is and not the other way around.

[70 : 57] In other words, what is true is that which is. Truth corresponds to reality, not to our preferences, wishes, or desires.

It is what it is, and I cannot change it by how I feel about it. My feelings must be brought into alignment with what is real and actual.

Contrary to what some New Agers teach, we do not and cannot create our own reality. reality. Oh, of course, there are times when we would like to, especially when what is real and objectively true is painful and distressing.

Nonetheless, what is real is real, and trying to convince ourselves it isn't is futile. It is a denial of reality, which can become very unhealthy.

What is real, what is objectively true, is that God has so loved you that he yielded up his only begotten son to die in your place, pay the penalty we all owed for our sin, and asks us to believe in him and trust him, because it is real, true, objectively true and factual.

[72 : 11] If and when we embrace that as objective truth and do so with our will and intellect, we have personally and subjectively committed ourselves to an objective reality. This, then, can produce the feelings of forgiveness that logically follow.

Our basis for feeling forgiven is rooted in the fact of its being objectively true, because God in his words says it is. We rejoice with a subjective feeling built on an objective reality.

You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman. A preview of upcoming volume 19.

Christianity Clarified, as the name suggests, is devoted to an ongoing explanation and elaboration of what is actually involved in embracing the Christian faith.

While it is true there is a blessed simplicity in appropriating the gospel in becoming a Christian, there is likewise an amazing profundity and depth to what appears as a simple childlike faith.

[73 : 31] Christianity Clarified seeks to delve into both, carefully noting the many misunderstandings that many non-Christians may have that actually prevent them from embracing the Christian faith.

At the same time, for those already a Christian, nothing so greatly confirms them in their faith more than an adequate appreciation of it. The greater our grasp of Christianity and the more clarification we have of our faith, the greater our gratitude grows.

Thus, gratitude to God for what we have in Christ then becomes our principal motivating factor for loving Him and serving Him more effectively and joyfully.

In sum, this is our rationale for producing Christianity Clarified on behalf of those already committed to Christ and presently enjoying His salvation.

For those not yet committed, our prayer is that Christianity Clarified may be used to eliminate some misunderstandings they may have about biblical Christianity and with those misunderstandings addressed, pave their way for embracing this one to whom to know a right is eternal life.

[74 : 51] Ideas from listeners as to how this may be done more effectively would be much appreciated as well as any suggestions as to how the project of Christianity Clarified can be made available to more who might welcome it and benefit from it.

So, our upcoming volume 19 of Christianity Clarified will continue pursuing this goal. For any interested, correspondence may be addressed to Grace Bible Church, 1500 Group Road, and that's spelled G-R-O-O-P, 1500 Group Road, Springfield, Ohio, 45504, or you may email us at Grace Bible Church, at GraceBible Springfield dot com, and that's Grace Bible Church at GraceBible SPFLD dot com.

Grace Bible Church at GraceBible SPFLD dot com. This is Pastor Marv Wiseman thanking you for being a listener to Christianity Clarified.

Sit at Tab Cloud tables