

Christianity Clarified Volume 19

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[0 : 00] 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 Uniqueness of Christianity The grace of God has been described as contrary to human logic and reason. And so it is.

Let's just be ever so grateful that it isn't contrary to divine logic and reason. Because we humans are locked in to the merit system.

Every human religion operates on the merit system and imposes demands the faithful must meet to be accepted and remain in good standing. But really now, is that so far afield?

[1 : 01] Isn't that really the way the world works? Do good and be rewarded? Do bad and be punished? That's only right, isn't it? It sure is.

Then, why does Christianity claim to circumvent that principle? Good question. And the answers are multiple. Number one, with Christianity, salvation is not a reward for good behavior.

Salvation is a free gift, neither earned nor deserved. Romans 3 tells us, The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Likewise, Ephesians 2, That salvation is by grace through faith a gift of God, and not of works, so that no one can boast.

And, two, How can we who have done wrong receive this free gift we do not deserve instead of receiving the justice we do deserve?

[2 : 02] It's all because someone else paid the price, the debt we owed. Instead of the penalty for our sin being visited upon us, it was visited upon a substitute who was willing to bear it in our place.

This is the very essence of what makes Christianity what it is. Christianity is Christ, dead, buried, and resurrected, all on behalf of a fallen humanity.

Christ was sent, came, and died in our place, paying a debt he did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay. And why should he do that?

I can't think of any logical human reason why he should. But we are ever so thankful that in the great divine logic of a loving Heavenly Father, he could and did.

The substitutionary death of Christ, he who knew no sin, was made to be sin in our place. This is the very heartbeat of the Christian faith.

[3 : 14] Salvation by grace through faith makes Christianity utterly unique from all other faiths throughout the world. Other systems claiming to connect with God make that connection dependent upon certain acts of compliance provided by its adherents.

Christianity alone makes the connection dependent upon God and what he accomplished through the sacrifice of his Son. The only compliance he requires is our faith in that substitute he provided.

It's a gift, a completely unearned, undeserved, gracious gift provided by a loving Heavenly Father and His Son. The Audacity of Exclusivity, Part 1 Out of all the faiths and religions in the world, How can anyone have the audacity to say there is only one way to God?

This is a major sticking point among non-Christians. Left to man, he would probably devise as many different approaches to God as there are people, because we do like our options.

Many would have you believe that any way you think is right to approach God is just fine. And back to that idea of the audacity of exclusivity, or the nerve, the gall, if you will.

[4 : 45] Does not that smack of a bigotry or narrowness on the part of any Christian who says Christ is the only way to God? Well, it isn't our idea.

It never was. Christians don't determine these requirements. We only try to follow them, even if imperfectly and at times inconsistently.

The exclusivity of Jesus Christ for salvation is insisted upon by His Father, who has a very vested interest in the whole matter.

You see, it was the Father who sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. That's the Savior, not a Savior.

God did not so love the world that He gave His only Son so we could ignore Him and replace Him with the Savior of our choosing. Had there been other ways of approaching God apart from Christ, Jesus could have just stayed in heaven.

[5 : 47] A similar vein is touched upon by the Apostle Paul when he addressed those who believed their observances of the law of Moses would stand them in good stead with God. And Paul thundered, If righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died in vain.

Do we get that? If Christ is not exclusively the way to God, He's redundant, unnecessary, just extra-religious baggage.

There needn't have been a Bethlehem, a Calvary, or an empty tomb. And? His suffering, deprivation, and agony? All non-essentials.

The age-old philosophy that sounds so good and so reasonable and so logical and certainly benevolent goes like this. There is a mountain. The mountain has a peak.

Climb the mountain from any side or trail you wish. They all lead to the top. In other words, all religions or no religion at all, they end at the same place, the top.

[6 : 55] So, just pick the way that seems best to you and although it is very different from the way another chooses, voila! We all arrive at the top and that's all that matters.

Well, as logical as that sounds and appeals to our human reasoning, it is fatally flawed. Proverbs 16 says, there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.

Do you know anyone else who is entitled to wear the name Savior? And for good reason? The Audacity of Exclusivity, Part 2 Evangelical Christianity has recently experienced a round of criticism and scorn it could have scarcely imagined just a generation ago.

Leading the list that some have drawn up in their disdain of Christianity is its claim of exclusivity. We are even told it is very unchristianly to insist that this faith called Christian is the only way to God.

How dare we, say they, claim something for the Christian faith that not even God claimed? Oh, but He did. In fact, the idea of Christianity's exclusivity is God's alone.

[8 : 26] And why not? It was God who provided the person of His own Son in His sacrificial death for the purpose of reconciling a lost world to Himself.

And it was that Son who was willing to be given that so clearly revealed Himself to be the way to God, the truth of God, and the very life from God, and this to the exclusion of all others.

Peter the Apostle reiterated the same when he emphatically informed the Jewish religious establishment in Acts chapter 4 concerning the one they were instrumental in His being crucified, saying about Christ, Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

Those who indignantly brand Christians as narrow, bigoted, or lacking in compassion for those of other faiths because we affirm what God has plainly stated, are simply speaking from gross ignorance.

In addition, these should examine the claims of other faiths and their followers. They may be surprised to learn that nearly all of them claim the same kind of exclusivity for their beliefs.

[9 : 49] Ask any Muslim, Hindu, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, or any other number of lesser religious groups whether they believe God can be connected with outside of their particular group.

They, and so many more like them, all claim an exclusivity of their own. The issue is not whether any faith, including Christianity, is exclusive in its claims.

The issue is whether or not it's true. If it isn't true, then we have no business saying it is. But if it is true, we cannot help but proclaim it confidently and passionately.

In fact, may God help us if we don't. We are in serious dereliction of our duty as redeemed sinners. No Christian worthy of the name could even imagine proclaiming Jesus Christ as one possible source for obtaining salvation, but of course other options just as viable are open to you as well.

No, no. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Paul, in 1 Timothy 2, adds his sentiments to those of Christ and Peter.

[11 : 16] Salvation is intensely personal. The last thing we would want to do is to cause anyone to doubt their salvation. Because knowing of a certainty that your faith is solidly placed in Jesus Christ and that you are as sure of heaven as if you were already there is the next greatest thing to salvation itself.

Security is surely a key ingredient to one's spiritual growth and maturity. Besides, God wants you to know where you stand with him and not be torn and thrown about with fear and doubt.

2 Peter 1 enjoins us to make our calling and election sure, to examine ourselves and see whether we are in the faith. And why are we to do that?

Because it's possible to be born into a Christian family, know and understand the Christian ways, standards, and lingo, fit right in just like we belong, except we don't.

And often, those who don't don't know they don't. They talk the talk and walk the walk, attend the same church, sing the same hymns, yet there is no real life of Christ within them, and they themselves may not even be aware of it.

[12 : 34] If one were to ask them when they came to faith in Christ, their answer would likely be, oh, I've always been a Christian. They don't think there ever was a time that they were not a Christian.

But that's like saying, oh, I've always existed. No, you haven't always existed. And no, you haven't always been a Christian.

Christianity is not received by osmosis from a Christian family into which we were born. Coming to faith in Jesus Christ is an intensely personal decision that can only be made by the individual act of one's will.

It isn't something handed down by parents or older siblings, like one inherits their older brother's blue jeans. While it's a wonderful and highly desirable privilege to have been born and reared in a Christian family, that is not a substitute for one's own personal decision for Christ.

Children are not somehow spiritually blanketed over by their parents' faith. Someone has said, God has many children, but no grandchildren. Children, every generation must personalize their faith by their own decision.

[13 : 50] And why is this? It's because each individual is endowed by God with a human volition. As a free moral agent, each person stands or falls before our Maker on our own, independent of others.

Parents and others may lovingly encourage and influence our coming to Christ, but they cannot come for us, and they cannot believe for us. That is strictly between each individual and God.

History has recorded multitudes of people who regarded themselves as Christians only to discover later in life that faith was, in fact, non-existent. All should apply this diagnostic question.

If you should die today and stand before your Maker, what would you answer him if he were to ask you, Why should I let you come into my heaven? A thousand wrong answers could be given.

Only one is right. Do you know it? Salvation is not outsourced, part one.

[14 : 57] There is no doubt about it. Things that claim to be Christian are numerous, and they stretch from one end of the spectrum to the other, all the while steadily insisting that they, and sometimes they alone, represent the truth.

So, how in the world is a serious inquirer supposed to know? Good question. And serious inquirers certainly have my sincere sympathy.

Because one can easily understand why a serious searcher may throw up his hands in frustration at the whole notion of trying to sort it out. Their frustration might even lead them to one of two extremes, that of equalizing anything and everything that claims to be Christian, despite their numerous differences from each other, or simply chucking the whole lot as they're all being so much stuff and nonsense.

And they may then conclude, I don't know what or who is right, and they all claim to be. So, I'll just ignore all of them and take my chances by following my own ideas and my own gut instinct.

Lots of people have come to this, and one can easily see how they did. In fact, their taking it upon themselves and facing the issue as one individual is actually to be commended because they are on the right track.

[16 : 21] And this is because they see their standing before God as a personal issue, which it is, and not an institutional issue, which it is not.

And why is this? It's because the Creator God has endowed humans, created in His image and likeness with an incredibly important component called volition.

Human volition is the power to make choices, the decision-making facility we all possess. And it's not only an ability, but a responsibility.

We are accountable for the decisions we make, and we see this played out in everyday living. It is a personal accountability, not an institutional accountability.

Romans 14 tells us that each of us will give account to God for ourself. And for anyone who supposes they can delegate the church or another institution to fend for them, answer for them, or somehow shelter them because they are a member of such and such, it is a tragic mistake.

[17 : 35] And it is true. There are multitudes who derive a false sense of security because of the religious institution to which they belong. And it is equally true that some institutions make claims that encourage this while fostering a deep sense of dependency among their adherents.

Religious institutions, particularly those that are truly Christian, do have a legitimate place and function, but it is clearly not to supplant the God-given responsibility we have to Him with the volition He gave us.

Your eternal destiny is far too valuable to entrust to any religious institution no matter how sincere one may be in doing so.

It's a personal thing. Salvation is not outsourced.

Part 2 It is a serious matter to be a human being made in the image and likeness of God. In fact, some sense the seriousness of it so profoundly, they prefer to hand the responsibility that goes with it off to someone else.

[18 : 49] And who might that be? Or perhaps an individual like a pastor, priest, rabbi, or another religious guru. Or an institution that dispenses sacraments and rituals considered essential to one's salvation.

And there are always individuals and institutions willing to accept that trust and responsibility, considering themselves servants of God for doing so. In the process, there is enormous and unwise dependency established.

And there is also a measure of relief and security that the individual realizes in the feeling they have entrusted their eternal well-being to a God-ordained expert or professional.

After all, these are far better custodians of the faith of the faithful than are the faithful themselves, or so the reasoning goes. Maybe, maybe you've even heard the analogy, if you have a plumbing or electrical problem in your home, save yourself a lot of grief, call a plumber or an electrician.

If you try to do it yourself, you'll only mess it up and you may even get hurt in the process. Just bite the bullet, reach for your wallet, shell out a few bucks and get the job done right. Well, in the main, we would not argue with that logic and we can speak from experience.

[20 : 09] Yet, to apply that analogy to humans and use it for outsourcing the care and responsibility for our own spiritual well-being is hardly justifiable.

Spiritual leaders and religious institutions do the faithful a great service in education and inspiration, or at least they certainly should. Yet, however well-intentioned they may be, however impeccable their credentials, however trusted they are, they are no substitute for the individual person making his own connection with the Almighty.

This is because it is to each of us God has imputed volition and personal accountability. Spiritual leaders will give account to God for how they cared for those entrusted to them, and that too is a solemn obligation.

Yet, they are to be expounders and proclaimers of the truth, not entrusted with the role of mediator between the individual and God himself. 1 Timothy makes it clear there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

One cannot avoid personal responsibility for their own relationship to God through Christ by attempting to delegate it to another, whether a pastor, priest, or institution.

[21 : 37] Personal responsibility is important because each of us is accountable to God. 2 Corinthians 5 says, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Each of us will give an account of himself. Instantaneous sainthood It isn't likely that the average Christian would be willing to introduce himself to anyone by referring to himself as Saint Robert or Saint William.

Saint? Who are you kidding? Saints are, well, holy, perfect, sinless. No.

No, they aren't. It is a huge area in need of clarification. It isn't merely a misunderstanding in the world at large.

It's also a misunderstanding among Christians. The term saint is used in nearly every New Testament book and sometimes refers to people whose behavior is far less than what it should be.

[22 : 59] The term saint is applied biblically to anyone who is in union with Jesus Christ and has been saved by God's grace. Saint means separated one.

Separated from what? Separated by whom? Separated or set apart from the world. While yet living in the world, the saint has been separated by God and he has also deliberately separated himself from the world's philosophy, the world's way of seeing and doing things, to the way God sees and does things.

A saint is one who has or should have swapped the world's standards and values for God's standards and values. They are radically different, you know.

Some Christians attempt to live with one foot in the old unregenerated life and the other foot in the new regenerated life. Be warned, however, that while such an attitude may be the manifestation of a new but slowly developing Christian, it could also be due to actual regeneration never having taken place.

Saints are not produced by good behavior, but by the good grace of our God in regeneration. It is, after all, impossible to truly live by Christian standards if one is, in fact, not really saved.

[24 : 33] Any professing Christian who prefers the lifestyle of an unbeliever should seriously rethink his conversion experience to see whether he is truly in the faith.

While it is true, the new believer's lifestyle often contains residual attitudes and actions, from his old, unconverted life, there is no excuse for the older believer not to have matured beyond that.

After all, we are reminded in 2 Corinthians 5 that if one is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away.

Behold, all things have become new. Those whom Christ saves, he saves to the uttermost, holy and complete. salvation is not dispensed on an installment plan.

It's based on a plan paid in full. Why? Because Jesus paid it all. That's why. Our Volition and Accountability Part 1 There is universal recognition that each of us has the ability to exercise our will in the making of decisions.

[25 : 58] This is the normal, everyday use of human volition. And it is this volition that not only determines the course of action we take in any given situation, it is also that same capacity of volition that makes us accountable for the consequences coming from those choices we make.

As children, we are accountable to parents or teachers, as employees to our employer, or the marine recruit to his drill instructor, and so on.

In each case, decisions we make and actions we take invariably produce consequences, good and bad. God endowed us with this power of choice as free moral agents.

As such, we are able to distinguish between right and wrong, or good and evil. While there are areas of gray upon which not all would agree, most issues with moral implications are understood by most people in most situations.

And because we are not only morally wired, we are also free to choose between doing the right thing or the wrong thing. All of us have, at times, gone both ways as we move through life making one moral decision after another.

[27 : 24] In each case, that which prompts us to make the decisions we do always stems from the information available to us and our perception, or even our misperception of that information.

So, based upon our possessing and processing that information, we decide to do this or that. We call it making up our mind, or getting our mental ducks in a row.

Good, accurate information becomes supercritical. And a God who endowed us with these capacities also places great importance upon information.

information. This is why he has provided us with the most vital information ever. He knows we need it to make the right decision using the volition he gave us.

The information is called of first importance in 1 Corinthians 15. It explains who Jesus Christ is, who sent him, and why, what it was he accomplished, and why it is of such eternal importance to you and me.

[28 : 35] Upon processing this good news information called the gospel, we use our volition to respond to it positively or negatively. In either case, the inevitable consequences will follow, resulting from our choice of eternal life or eternal death.

We can see the responsibility of choosing is upon us all. Choose well. The inevitable consequences will surely follow whatever choice we make.

Consequences not subject to change, but eternally irreversible. Again, choose well. Our Volition and Accountability, Part 2 Coercive religion is a curse.

It's found worldwide in all kinds of settings. It's the mistaken notion that one has the obligation to force others into adopting a certain belief or faith, even if contrary to their wishes.

It's done, of course, under the assumption that you are doing them a great service, for which they will eventually thank you. But it is all a dangerous and erroneous assumption.

[29 : 53] What one places one's faith in must be done freely, without coercion, intimidation, or threats. Christians are not charged by God to make Christians out of anybody.

What we are charged with is the responsibility and privilege of lovingly communicating to them the same good news that prompted us to put our faith in Christ. And upon their hearing that good news, they then have the right to reject it or embrace it as an exercise of their will.

Most, in fact, do reject it upon their first hearing, and many continue to reject it even after repeated hearings, to their own peril. But it is their prerogative to do so.

While we as concerned Christians regret their rejection, it is still their decision, and we should acknowledge that without attempting to manipulate or intimidate.

While it is vitally important they make that decision, it is also important they do it because they want to, of their own free will. It must be a decision by oneself for oneself in order to be an intelligent, volitional decision.

[31 : 05] Why is this so vital? It is because the commitment one makes to God must be sincere. And while it is true that merely being sincere doesn't save anybody, being insincere won't save anybody either.

Only an obedience that is a willing obedience is worth anything. Only a love that is voluntary is worth anything. It is an awesome thing to realize God has not only given us a volition, the power of will to make choices, he also respects that volition he has given us by not forcing us to make personal decisions we really don't want to make.

Were he to do so, the autonomy of each of us would be merely illusory. But our power to choose as a free moral agent is real. And it is this very reality that provides the basis for our being accountable for the choices we make.

We didn't have to make them. We chose to make them, whatever they might have been. And there is no more significant choice one can make with more significant consequences than that which determines one's eternal destiny.

While not coercive, it surely should be viewed as compelling to consider that Christ freely and of his volition gave himself for us when he died in our place.

[32 : 30] How could there be a greater positive motivation for us to give ourselves to him with thankful and loving devotion? Think of it this way. Jesus Christ exercised his volition in dying so we could exercise ours by trusting in him.

By Grace Through Faith Part 1 An important clarification for Christians to understand and appreciate is the working and place of grace and faith involved in the salvation of the human soul or spirit.

How do these work? And are we splitting hairs in trying to distinguish them? Not at all. And their distinction is important simply because Scripture clearly distinguishes between them.

Perhaps a familiar passage will help explain their respective roles. Ephesians 2 tells us, It is by grace, through faith, that we are saved.

Prepositions mean things. And while we are warned about hanging too much doctrine on the thread of a preposition, there is something of general value to be gleaned.

[33 : 51] When the apostle says it is by grace, we may conclude that it was grace, God's grace, that was the motivating factor, the basis or platform.

The divine rationale, if you will, that prompted God to do as he did in making man's reconciliation to himself to be on the basis of grace.

This means, of course, that the deep desire behind God's motivation to redeem man lay in the benevolent nature of himself rather than in any deserts or attractiveness of man.

God moved in a fashion utterly undeserved by man. The impetus was in God, not in man. All that was in man was the need, the unworthiness and inability.

Along with God's grace being the motivating factor, we can see joined to that grace measures of love, pity, compassion, etc. It would certainly seem that these and no doubt much more all come under the rubric of God's grace on the basis for action and initiative on his part.

[35 : 08] Strangely enough, instead of fallen man being overjoyed and grateful for this grace, his natural tendency and his fallenness is to reject it.

This rejection stems from his spiritual and moral blindness that causes his warped reasoning. It's his faulty logic that wants to insist he can make himself acceptable to God by his own efforts.

He, thus repudiating the grace of God in favor of his own imagined goodness and worthiness. But God makes it ever so clear, not only here in Ephesians 2, but in numerous other places as well.

Grace, God's grace, is the base of it all. Miss that or deny that and you forfeit everything forever. This grace is what makes the good news good.

It's what even makes the good news possible. First John tells us, The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. It was he who made God's grace available to us in satisfying the justice of God by his sacrificial death for the sins of the world.

- [36 : 22] Christ opened the floodgates of God's grace, making it the very coin of the realm in approaching God. Christianity Clarified, Volume 19, Track 11, By Grace Through Faith, Part 2 So, once God's grace is driving the Almighty to do as he did, how then did he utilize or implement this grace so as to get it to man, his desired recipient?

We are told it is through faith, by grace through faith. Through suggests conveyance or by way of.

Faith lies within the personhood of every being. Even those with no spiritual interest have faith, even if only in themselves. It is simply trust, reliance, or confidence in that so-called non-faith position.

That is his faith. Upon hearing the gospel that Christ died for our sins and that we are doomed and helpless apart from him, we then decide what to do about that information.

We can reject it, and most do when initially hearing it. We can mull it over and begin thinking about it. Or we can take the faith, the belief, the capacity to trust or rely upon another and deliberately, as an act of our will, put our faith in Jesus Christ for our personal salvation.

- [38 : 01] Thus, we respond to the grace of God through our faith or belief. Grace is the commodity God provides, and our faith is the response to that commodity of God's provision.

It is by or on the basis of grace through the instrumentality or pipeline of faith. And as faith by itself means virtually nothing, because everybody has faith, faith that is meaningful must have an object.

And if it is a biblical faith, it is not faith in faith that saves anyone. It is faith in Jesus Christ. That is saving faith predicated upon the platform of God's amazing grace, by grace, through faith.

Thus saith the Scripture. Let us think of this as a partnership affair. God and man acting together in concert. Now, God does not need to partner with man, but He does so because He chooses to do so.

In this divine human arrangement, it is God who is clearly the originator, the initiator. He initiated His salvation through His Son, who died to provide it for us.

- [39 : 20] This initiation is then declared to man in a message or information called the gospel or the good news. When and where this gospel is announced, it is done so it might receive a response from those in its hearing.

Whether one person or a large crowd. The response, if positive, is a willing placing of one's faith, trust, confidence in the person of Jesus Christ.

This response is called the obedience of faith or a positive response that embraces the grace of God in Christ. This makes our salvation by grace through faith.

Have you made it yours? Grace is limited and unlimited.

One is hard-pressed to think of something more counterintuitive than this. It really doesn't compute in the human psyche because it simply contradicts our reason and logic.

- [40 : 27] It conflicts with our very system of morality, punishment, and reward. In fact, upon our initial hearing of it, we are likely to reject it out of hand as being too good to be true.

Oh, sure, we've heard the term and even used it, loosely so, without actually realizing exactly what it means. We know it in a general sort of way, but most of us never knew it as the very critical apparatus that enables man to connect with God.

Whatever are we talking about? We speak of the most incredible aspect of the Christian faith, that which is radically exclusive to Christianity, that with which no religion or belief system, large or small, has anything to do with.

So, come on, what is this thing? This thing is the incomparable, inexhaustible, indispensable grace of God. This thing called grace is a principal attribute of God that allows mankind access to himself, and it provides the only such access.

God's grace is that benevolence, that kindness, that condescension, that compassion that allows him, the Creator, to literally spend himself upon utterly undeserving subjects as fallen, rebellious humanity.

[41 : 46] Grace, to be worthy of its name, cannot find nor relate to deserving recipients. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace.

But, has grace no limitations? Yes, and no. What do we mean? Just this. Grace is limited in that it can be extended only to those acknowledging their need of it.

That's what we mean when we say grace is limited. But when we say it is unlimited, we mean that once an individual acknowledges his undeserving need of grace, there is no limit to the amount of grace God is willing to bestow.

It's an amazing concept, but one that the Bible joyfully proclaims throughout. No human being can be so vile or so sinful that he is beyond the reach of the grace of God.

It's appropriately called amazing grace, and it is exclusive to biblical Christianity. Every other belief or religion has obligatory requirements of its followers, hoops through which they must jump.

[43 : 04] Christ says, forget the hoops, they are all man-made and lead to death. Put your trust and confidence in me, and I will make you who are otherwise unacceptable, acceptable, loved, and received.

But you cannot come to me unless you are coming for grace. If you are coming for grace, you know you are unworthy and that's why you need my grace. An acknowledged unworthiness, a confessed undeservedness, makes one a candidate for God's grace.

Grace is a free gift, not cheap, but free. Salvation is a process and a crisis.

Christianity has several aspects about it that are misunderstood. That's the purpose for Christianity Clarified. One of the most common misunderstandings is how becoming a Christian actually takes place, especially within the time frame it takes place.

It does seem impossible that a bona fide conversion could take place in an instant of time. Yet, this is the only way it can occur. While the process leading to one's salvation could take even years, and realization that conversion has taken place may not immediately be recognized or understood or understood by the convert himself, nonetheless, the actual event of spiritual transformation is not gradual, but immediate.

[44 : 48] One either is or is not a Christian, is or is not a true believer in Christ, is or is not passed from spiritual death to spiritual life, is or is not bound for heaven.

No one is half in and half out. No one is mostly forgiven, but not quite, and no one is halfway spiritually alive and halfway spiritually dead, halfway accepted by God and halfway rejected.

One crisis we face during an average lifetime involves preparation or consideration as to whether we take the plunge of marriage.

Yet, actually taking it comes down to an act of crisis. The question of, will you take this woman to be your lawful?

And transformation from single to married occurs as quickly as one says, I will, followed with, I now pronounce you husband and wife.

[46 : 01] How long did that take? Never mind the possible months of preparation and consideration leading up to those mere seconds of time, marriage did not occur until those words were uttered.

After a nine-month gestation period, when mother carried you within mere seconds upon exiting her body, you began to live independently.

Perhaps one reason many think becoming a Christian involves a lengthy process is because it is a very important transition and there is a great deal to learn about Christianity.

But thankfully, entering the fold of Christianity requires very little knowledge. We must know our sin separates us from a holy God who does not grade on a curve, and we must know that while this holy God maintains a standard we cannot meet, His Son Jesus Christ met it for us based on incredible love and grace for wayward sinners.

Deliberately committing oneself to this reality as revealed throughout the Bible transforms us into a child of God whose sins are forgiven. Amen. Why do some people respond to the gospel of Christ with minimum exposure to the salvation message while others, even after repeated exposure, perhaps over several years, never do believe?

[47 : 45] Everyone's experience with hearing the gospel results in believing it or rejecting it, and few believe it upon their first hearing for several reasons. Because in hearing the gospel, a mental process begins wherein the hearer is evaluating the information and deciding what to do about it.

Usually, repeated hearings are required, with each one providing more information to be processed. Repeated hearings may soften the heart of one person, while another may even become more resistant to the message, rather than less resistant.

Repeated hearings coupled with other events taking place in the life of the hearer may also increase or decrease their interest in the message. This entire process may take place over a period of weeks, months, or even years.

One might think of it as a spiritual gestation period. The gestation of a physical baby from conception to birth is about nine months. The birth of a spiritual baby may involve a gestation of mere hours or several years.

Events occurring during this gestation may be negative or positive experiences that bring the person nearer to a decision or move them further from it.

[49 : 09] Often, these experiences come in the form of a crisis that impacts one's life, again, negatively or positively. We need to remember that until the actual decision is made to repent of one's sin and commit to Christ, no birth has occurred, no spiritual regeneration, and no new life is begun.

No matter how exposed one has been to hearing the gospel, the gestational mode continues. And if the hearer dies physically, without coming to faith, one could almost equate their physical death as a spiritual death still born.

Such is a great tragedy with eternal consequences. Advancing in age often contributes to the difficulty with which one can come to faith.

This is because that old adage about people becoming set in their ways has a real element of truth to it. Because the older we become, the more mental and emotional baggage we develop, and the harder it is for us to repent and admit how wrong we have been for so long a time.

Stubbornness and the protection of our ego are very real, and sometimes so powerful we allow them to rule against our own best interests. This also helps explain the relative ease it is, comparatively speaking, for a child or younger person to come to faith, because in addition to having a more tender heart, they lack that baggage and ego that may be the spiritual undoing of so many older hearers of the gospel.

[50 : 55] Please think on these things. Partially dead versus fully alive.

How can anyone be dead and alive at the same time? Impossible, say you. It has to be one or the other. Well, it would seem so, wouldn't it?

But it isn't. It isn't because all humans are comprised of multiple components. One of your components can be living while the other is dead.

We are capable of physical life and physical death, spiritual life and spiritual death. Christ refers to this when he raised Lazarus from the dead in John chapter 11.

He said, He who lives and believes in me shall never die. What? Was he serious? Didn't Peter, James and John and the other apostles believe in Jesus?

[51 : 56] Yes. And didn't they die? Well, yes. And no. Now, how can that be? Either they died or they didn't. Well, that was 2,000 years ago and we don't see them around.

That's true. But remember the multiple components of personhood mentioned earlier? Peter, James and John, plus all the other believers, are as much alive as Christ is right now.

Of course, if the physicalist or naturalist is right, they are all dead and dead through and through. because to those who deny the existence of the spiritual, physical life and physical death are all there is.

If that's true, then these did die nearly 2,000 years ago and they remained dead, fully dead, and Christ with them. But if Christ was right, he knew whereof he spoke.

And while the physical component of Christ and the others, that is, their bodies, died, their spirit was and remains very much alive, and Christ's body physically alive as well.

[53 : 06] No, they were not alive with us, but alive with God, and that is what Christ meant. So, while one may be physically dead, yet spiritually alive, as those believing in Christ, so too one may be physically alive and spiritually dead.

These number in the billions. And they are all around us. Most of whom are utterly clueless about the component of their personhood that's dead, namely, their spirit component.

This is precisely what Paul the Apostle was addressing when he wrote the Ephesians in chapter 2 and said, And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

Oh, they were very much alive physically, walking and talking and eating and drinking. They were physically alive to one another. But spiritually dead in their separation from God.

The time came when these Ephesians heard the gospel preached by Paul about Christ dying for the sins of the world. They repented of their sin, placed their faith in Christ, and were regenerated or made alive toward God in their human spirit.

[54 : 15] These people, prior to their salvation, were partially dead and only partially alive. And they didn't even know it until they heard and believed the gospel. Then they became fully alive.

So can you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be fully alive. Misunderstanding the Ten Commandments One of the most humorous and yet serious things one can ever hear from another person is his claim to live by the Ten Commandments.

And they are serious about that. Invariably, they are at a great loss to name even half of them, yet they claim to live by them. And this is humorous, is it not?

But it's also serious, because they are placing themselves in a perilous position. How so? Well, James 2 in the New Testament tells us that he who would keep the whole law and yet offend in one point is guilty of all.

The Ten Commandments can be likened to a ten-linked chain. If one is broken, the whole is ruined. So ask the person who says they live by the Ten Commandments, have you ever told a lie?

[55 : 35] Ever? Well? Have you ever taken anything not belonging to you? Anything? Ever? Well? Have you ever really hated anyone so much you could wish them ill or worse, even dead?

Well, there was this boss, there was this neighbor, there was that... So if you've ever lied about anything, you have violated the Ninth Commandment.

If you've ever taken anything not belonging to you, you violated the Eighth Commandment. And if you've ever hated anyone in your heart, Jesus said it was as murder in your heart.

So for one who claims to live by the Ten Commandments, he has just admitted that he is a thief, a liar, and a murderer. Would you care to reconsider your motto of living by the Ten Commandments?

People do not intentionally lie when they claim to live by the Ten Commandments, they just don't understand what's involved. The fact is, all of us, all of us have broken some of the commandments, and most of us multiple times, and some have the dubious distinction of having fractured the whole slate more than Moses when he dashed them on the ground.

[56 : 50] The reason we do is very key to understand, and the misunderstanding of this key is epidemic. Here is that key so vital to understanding our relationship to the Ten Commandments.

Here it is. We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. The difference is huge and key. Our problem is from our very birth.

We are simply born wrong. This created the need to be born again, like Christ said when talking to Nicodemus in John 3. Human sinfulness is systemic to the human condition, and proof of this is realized in our eventual physical death.

It is appointed unto man once to die, after this the judgment, says Hebrews 9. Why must we die? Because of sin. Yes, it's ugly, unpleasant.

Oh, some of us are cleaner sinners, and others dirtier sinners, but sinners all. Don't deny it. Don't fight it. Admit it, because it's true. God said so.

[57 : 56] And because we are all sinners, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Who said that? The man God used to write one-third of the New Testament.

Paul the Apostle. Quality versus Quantity Everybody is able to grasp the concept of relative righteousness.

It's what we traffic in here among us humans. Simply put, it means we are better than some people, and not as good as some people. Kind of somewhere in the comfortable average.

Or, we like to think, maybe a little bit above average. But, it's a relativity we can understand. We can't tell for sure where we place in the whole mix of humanity, but we'd like to think we would fare okay.

Now, where would you categorize God and His righteousness? Well, now, say you, that's a different matter. God isn't part of the relative thing, because He's God.

[59 : 08] Perfect in His righteousness. It's part of His job description, isn't it? Well, we agree it is. But now we have people with relative righteousness among themselves and a God of absolute righteousness within Himself, and the two seem to be incompatible.

One might even use the term infinite to describe the difference between man's relative righteousness and God's absolute righteousness. So, what standard of righteousness will God require when He judges man?

And where would a man have to place among his fellow humans to make the grade? How would he know what to shoot for? How would he know how close he is to making it?

How many people does he have to overtake to get where he needs to be so his relative righteousness will be sufficient? There's no way to answer those questions, and for good reason.

The answers are non-existent. So, don't worry about trying to figure it out. That gives some relief, but it also means relative righteousness is off the table.

[60 : 17] It's immeasurable and indefinable, leaving only one kind of righteousness, and that's God's, which is not relative, but absolute. If you're grateful God doesn't require absolute perfect righteousness, we have good news and bad news.

The bad news is, this absolute righteousness is the only kind that can satisfy a holy God. He only traffics in perfection. But, you protest, how can that be?

It isn't fair for God to require what man cannot provide, and then condemn Him for not having it. Well, that would be true, were it not for the good news.

The good news, otherwise known as the gospel, reveals that Jesus Christ has in Himself the perfect righteousness His Father requires, and He will give His very own righteousness to you as a free undeserved gift if you will acknowledge your lack of acceptable righteousness and place your faith in Christ.

What He did on that cross to make His righteousness available will be placed to your account. This is called justification by faith. It was God's plan all along. The righteousness God requires is qualitative, not quantitative.

[61 : 36] Not how much righteousness you have, but what kind. What will God do with those who possess the righteousness of Christ? They are as acceptable to Him as His very own dear Son.

The danger of peer pressure Part of the human experience we have all faced is the reality of dealing with peer pressure, going along to get along.

It isn't always a negative thing, especially if the peers are engaged in the right things and going in the right direction. We have an innate desire to belong and be like others.

And while it might be intensified during those difficult teen years, peer pressure can be a reality from 2 to 92. Many has been the time when a very mature adult, perhaps even in their 30s or 40s, responds to a gospel message by trusting in the finished work of Christ.

And this is amazing to those who knew them and always considered them to be a Christian. Their story unfolds something like this. I attended a youth meeting when I was a freshman teen with a lot of other kids from my school.

[62 : 55] The speaker was a pretty cool guy who told funny stories and I really enjoyed it. And then at the end, he said that everyone who wanted to be a Christian should come down front.

Well, I wasn't really too interested because I thought that meant I would have to be some kind of a Holy Joe and I just couldn't do that. But they kept singing this song and some of my friends went down front.

It still didn't appeal to me to do anything, so I just stood there with most of the other kids. And then, and I couldn't believe my eyes, the team captain and quarterback of our all-state football team went down front too.

He was about the coolest guy in the whole school. Well, that really got everyone's attention, including mine. So I went down with several others.

The speaker asked us to repeat a prayer after him and we did. I don't remember much about the prayer, but afterwards, he told us that we were all Christians now and we should go home and live a new life and pray every day and go to church.

[64 : 02] He read something out of the Bible and asked if we believed it and we all nodded yes because, after all, it came from the Bible and who wouldn't believe that?

I never did understand what he was talking about, but if this guy said we were now Christians, I guess we were. I'm sure he knew a lot more about it than any of us.

Besides, if the coolest kids in school went for this, that was good enough for me. And now, here I am realizing years later why there was no real change in my life or in my values.

I never did actually come to faith in Christ at all. I was merely told that I had believed. Now I see the connection between Christ dying in my place and me.

Now, and with a lot more understanding, I have received Christ and this time, I know something really happened that didn't happen back there as a teen. Similar versions of this man's story have been expressed.

[65 : 09] Peer pressure can often lead one astray. The only legitimate pressure for trusting in Christ should come from within our own spirit, pressuring us to come to Christ because it's the right thing to do, not merely because someone else has done so.

You need to do it for yourself. Why confusion surrounds Christianity Even though Christianity has been around two thousand years, there remains massive misunderstanding and confusion about it.

And it's this perpetual confusion that has given birth to Christianity clarified. So, from whence cometh all this confusion and massive misunderstanding?

Well, it comes from three principal sources. First, Christianity is a thinking faith. Man, in his moral fallenness, has an intellect that is fallen also.

Hence, we think with a warped intellect that virtually guarantees wrong conclusions, especially in areas of morality. A fallen intellect enables us to look at a simple concept like the gospel of the grace of God and totally reject it for its simplicity.

[66 : 26] It just doesn't measure up to our standards of sophistication. We deserve something more suitable to our intellect. We much prefer to contrive something more complex and worthy of our intellectual abilities.

That's the first obstacle. Secondly, there is the unsolicited assistance from the adversary, Satan himself. The Apostle Paul reminds us in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4, that, If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Thirdly, worldwide confusion as to what constitutes Christianity is contributed to by professing Christians themselves. Dr. E. Stanley Jones, an American missionary to India, was conversing with Mahatma Gandhi in the 1940s.

They had become friends and could speak frankly to each other. Dr. Jones asked the great Indian leader, And, When will Gandhi become a Christian?

Gandhi, of course, was a devout Hindu. He replied to Dr. Jones, Gandhi will become a Christian when Christians become Christians.

[67 : 51] Ouch! But he nailed it, did he not? Christians, acting contrary to their professed faith, are a source of great confusion, a detraction to the gospel, even detrimental.

God's greatest earthly asset is the believer who lives Christianly, and his greatest liability is the professed Christian who does not walk Christianly.

man's corrupted powers of logic, plus negative influence from the God of this age, plus professing Christians who play the hypocrite, all mightily contribute to the worldwide confusion surrounding Christianity.

With all these formidable foes, how then can anyone obtain the truth necessary to become a Christian? only because the gospel is the very power of God through faith unto salvation for everyone who believes.

There it is. Nothing short of the power of God is able to penetrate those formidable three barriers of confusion and misunderstanding, and we are so grateful that it does.

[69 : 08] Resources from Being in Christ Every individual person who truly comes to faith in Jesus Christ becomes, at that point of decision, the possessor of an incomparable array of benefits and resources designed to equip him for victoriously living out that new life.

But if one does not know that, the resources are not utilized. This is the position of many Christians, and as a result, their maturity in Christ is sadly impaired.

They suffer from a stunted spiritual growth and usually don't even know it. Imagine a million dollars being deposited to your checking account, but no one ever told you.

That's a poor analogy because the idea of having incomparable spiritual assets in your private account as a believer and not knowing that is really far more serious.

Knowing what you need to know and knowing that you know it provides a level of confidence and enjoyment that no one in all the world, apart from the believer in Christ, is entitled to have.

[70 : 16] How can we say that? Simply because of the authority behind the one who provides it, none other than God himself. We're told that we are given exceeding great and precious promises in Peter's second letter, but if we are unaware of them, how can they help us?

Paul in Ephesians 4 tells us the reason for pastors and teachers and other gifted people in the body of Christ. They are for the maturing of the saints, that is, they are to be change agents for those who are Christians.

The most critical thing one needs to do after being born is to grow, to thrive, and mature. As the intake of nourishment is critical for the physically newborn baby, so is the intake of spiritual nourishment critical for the new believer in Christ.

Without, this newborn is consigned to immaturity, a lack of confidence and assurance, and an inability to truly enjoy one's life and position in Christ.

One might even go so far as to say the provision made for all believers in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is, in reality, being squandered. Think of that.

[71 : 32] This is serious stuff, folks. Squandered? Wasted? How so? Well, think of the well-known parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15.

He had considerable resources given to him by his father when he left home and struck out on his own, but he squandered those resources on things of no real value and fell into poverty.

And when his grinding poverty served a wake-up call, he came to his senses and realized what he had done. He repented of his foolishness and got back where he belonged in the favor of his father.

We all tend to have some prodigality in us. For believers, the dissatisfaction and lack of joy stemming from our squandering of the father's resources can be the wake-up call for all of us.

It's a very serious thing to be a human being made in the image and likeness of our creator. It's even more serious to be one who benefits eternally from the provision Christ made for us when he died in our place and then squander that provision.

[72 : 39] Let it not be said of us. You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman. Preview of Upcoming Volume 20 In an ongoing effort to explain in detail precisely what is involved in the clarifying of Christianity, our next Volume 20 will continue with additional content that we trust will deepen and enrich our understanding of precisely what we as believers possess in the salvation God has provided.

As noted earlier, our motivation in doing so is to increase our index of gratitude and thanksgiving to God for this unspeakable gift. If we succeed, the love we have for God and His Word will only increase and abound.

And this will lead us into a more intelligent service for Him and a greater love one for another. Such will be the inevitable consequence of a Christianity that is adequately clarified.

Of course, we have no illusions of giving our Christianity an exhaustive or thorough treatment because such is not even possible for us mere mortals when investigating the provisions of deity.

We can only hope to increase our understanding to the point of making us stand in awe at who our God truly is and how worthy He is of our unqualified trust and devotion.

[74 : 27] So, if you are as eager to learn as I am, you are sincerely invited to explore the upcoming revealing content that will comprise our next disc on Volume 20.

The previous 19 volumes, which many now listening already have in their possession, remain available. If you have any missing volumes you wish to obtain, you need only advise us and they will be sent to you free of charge, postpaid, no strings attached.

And by the way, recipients of Christianity Clarified will never receive letters from us appealing for contributions. Funds to underwrite this project of Christianity Clarified as well as the accompanying project of Marriage on the Rock have been generously provided by the Barbara Wiseman Memorial Fund.

This memorial was generously provided by the Congregation of Grace Bible Church and you may contact us by writing Grace Bible Church 1500 Group Road that's spelled G-R-O-O-P Grace Bible Church 1500 Group Road Springfield, Ohio 45504 Online, orders or questions can be addressed to www.gracebiblespringfield.com By telephone, you may call area code 937-322-3113 during regular morning business hours Eastern Standard Time.

This is Pastor Marv Wiseman thanking you for listening and providing for me this outlet to be of service to you and to our Lord.

[76 : 29] God bless you. Organisation and which is the standard part the