

Christianity Clarified Volume 20

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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.

Freedom follows embracing reality. It's a common perception among many who are not Christians to think that those who are live a very restrictive and deprived kind of lifestyle.

After all, say they, isn't that what Christianity is all about? You can't do this, and you can't do that, and you have to do this, and you have to do that, and if you don't, you lose your good standing as a Christian.

Well, this is a gross misunderstanding of what Christianity is. In fact, it's much the opposite. Biblical Christianity, when entered through the new birth, is the most liberating and exhilarating kind of existence on planet Earth, and it was intended to be so by our liberator, Christ himself.

[1 : 11] Christians are told in Galatians 5 that it is for liberty that Christ set us free, and we are not to allow ourselves to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Galatians is commonly called the letter of Christian liberty, and under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul was reminding them they were formerly in bondage before they came to faith in Christ and experienced true liberty.

Their bondage was their sin that dictated their lifestyle and passions, and there is no taskmaster so confining and so demanding as that of sin.

It inhabits all of humanity and determines the way we treat each other, and even the way we treat ourselves, often contrary to our own best interests. Sin is a very real and powerful slave master, and is responsible for the world being the way it is.

Sin is a very real and powerful slave master, After all, it isn't the right things we do to each other that produce all the misery in life, but the wrong things. These things the Bible calls sin. Of course, we don't want to call them that.

That sounds too judgmental. So, let's call them mistakes, faults, imperfections. After all, we eagerly excuse ourselves with a, Well, I don't claim to be perfect.

[2 : 32] Well, no one who knows you ever thought you were. We need to realize that nothing can be treated without first being diagnosed, and it's as foolish to think we can diagnose our own moral condition as it is to think we can diagnose our own physical disease or mysterious physical pain we are having, because we need an expert diagnostician, and we call him doctor.

Little wonder, isn't it, that Christ is called the great physician? And he has a blanket diagnosis for all the human race. Physical illnesses come in all kinds of diagnoses.

Cancer, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, you name it and somebody has it. But the malady of moral disease is singular, and it's the same for everybody.

It's sin, and we need the honesty and courage to admit it. So if you've ever asked yourself, What's wrong with me? This is it. Can you deal with it?

Christ already has, and he graciously waits for us to come to the same diagnosis he has. Christ died for our sin, the scriptures thunder throughout. And now, he is open-armed and prepared to embrace those who want to be freed from their sin by coming to him and putting their trust in him.

[3 : 52] This, my dear friend, is true freedom. God and evil coexist.

If there really is a God who is all-powerful, why doesn't he do something about the evil and injustice in the world today? This is a problem as old as man, and philosophers and theologians have argued about this not merely for centuries, but for millennia.

The ever-present reality of evil, but not simply the existence of evil, which isn't that hard to understand, but the existence of evil alongside of what is claimed to be the existence of an all-good and all-powerful God.

The conflict is echoed every day on every continent. If God is all-good, he must not be all-powerful, or he would surely end the evil we see all around us.

And if he is all-powerful and could end evil, but chooses not to, how could he be all-good? It is, in fact, this reality, the coexistence of God and evil, that has caused some to do away with half of the problem, namely God.

[5 : 08] All then that's left is evil, and for some, it's a lot easier to believe evil exists than believing God exists, so their answer is atheism. And for these, the problem is solved.

There is evil, but there is no God. Others, incredible though it is, opt to hang on to God, but deny the existence of evil, which they label an illusion, some even denying the existence of matter itself. This is a popular position among the Eastern mystics, that matter simply doesn't exist. It's only an illusion. One has wisely noted, however, that even an Eastern mystic, when crossing a busy street in Calcutta, still looks both ways.

The Bible alone addresses this coexistence problem, while very emphatically acknowledging both good and evil. There is good and there is evil.

There are men and there are angels. God created both in a state of moral neutrality, making them neither good nor bad, but possessing the ability of going in either direction.

[6 : 19] Eventual rebellion and sin of man and angels resulted in altering the world from its original creation, which God had pronounced very good.

This changed everything, and we continue to live with the consequences. And make no mistake about it, the introduction of moral evil has resulted in every negative known to man, including disease, death, and injustice on every hand.

This is referred to as the fall. It has been and continues to be globally devastating. While God could have made man and angels incapable of doing wrong simply by creating them without volition and the power to make moral choices, but automatons?

Robots? Capable of doing no wrong? Capable of doing no right? What kind of existence would that be? Yes, there is a God, and yes, there is evil, and while God cannot be charged with the origin of evil, he accepts responsibility for having created free moral agents with the power to choose.

The Least God Can Do Because God is holiness and righteousness personified, it would appear only logical that he must in every case be just and righteous in all his dealings, whether with men or angels.

[7 : 52] What precisely does justice entail? It is a universal concept and one that seems to have been identified and agreed upon by humanity through the ages.

Simply put, justice is the proper sentence carried out upon the accused. The proper sentence for the guilty is the appropriate punishment. The proper sentence for innocence is acquittal.

When the guilty are punished and the innocent are set free, we say, justice was done. In each case, the accused received what was deserved. We know how difficult it is to render justice in human courts.

The information that would exonerate or incriminate the accused is never full or complete, and the difficult task of the jury is to reach a verdict with only the available evidence to consider.

Many cases would have received a different verdict had all the information been available.

Consequently, some verdicts legally handed down by a well-meaning jury fall far short of justice having been done.

[8 : 59] But this is not a problem with our just judge of the universe. He who knows everything is not even dependent upon exhibits being presented, either for or against the accused.

He need not cross-examine or even question the witness. And God's all-knowing mind fully considers any and all extenuating circumstances, all mitigating factors when He judges each case of each person before Him.

Then, when rendering His verdict, it will be perfect justice and administered. This means one's just desserts will be realized. Justice is receiving the sentence that perfectly fits the offense.

Not one bit more than is deserved, nor one bit less. And while this is very hard for man to achieve in his human law courts, it is the only way God operates, and it reflects His righteous nature.

There will be no appeals, there will be no reprieves, no pardons, no time off for good behavior. Once the judge of heaven and earth pounds his gavel, justice has been done.

[10 : 09] Perfect justice. What was rendered was precisely what was due and deserved fully. This justice is the very least God can dispense.

Every person before God can definitely count on receiving from God exactly what is deserved. God must do this at a minimum. But while He cannot do less, He can do more, much more.

His wonderful grace is available to all who know they deserve God's justice, but they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ who bore God's justice for them.

We can receive the justice we deserve or we can receive the justice through Christ, our substitute. And when we do, God's justice is wondrously transformed into grace, mercy, and peace, all procured for us through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

The Motivation Doubt Provides Have you ever been spiritually and emotionally paralyzed by doubt? It isn't unusual, you know.

[11 : 26] All were aware that some even considered doubt to be a sin in itself. Well, isn't it? No, it isn't. While it may be sinful to wallow in doubt and be unwilling to take the steps to resolve doubt, doubt is not sinful in itself.

It's part of the human condition, and yes, we mean part of the Christian's human condition. Doubt can and should be part and parcel of the maturing process.

Doubt is a sign of thinking, and God certainly places a premium on that because Christianity is a thinking faith. While many Christians may be convinced that God is really upset with them when they doubt, and even feel deep guilt over doubting, be assured it is a normal part of our humanity.

And yes, that includes doubting whether or not God even exists. Surely you can't mean that, say you. Oh, yes, but we do. Doubt can and should be a stepping stone to more maturity.

Maturation, as a Christian, is a lengthy process and contains many ingredients for getting there, only one of which is doubt and resolving doubt.

[12 : 43] When we research our doubts with a view to resolving them, it results in a spiritual victory and more growth. The researching of doubt is nothing more than a pursuit of the truth claims that surround the area of our doubt.

The research of truth can only do you good. Be assured the truth will never hurt you because God is the repository of truth and he is all for you.

While doubt most often assails newer Christians, usually making them doubt the reality of their decision for Christ, or whether they are really forgiven because at times they don't feel forgiven, or whether God is actually there and real in their life because if he is, why would he allow what is happening to me?

And similar such things that stir up doubt. Make no mistake about it, doubt can be paralyzing and even agonizing while en route to finding peace that comes from doubt's resolve.

The reason our doubts can be so emotionally debilitating is because even though we are in doubt about certain things, we usually know and understand enough to know how important the thing is about which we doubt.

[13 : 55] In reality, while doubting is very common and God full well understands our doubts, which are simply due to our lack of knowledge, there is no good justification for continuing in doubt or wallowing in it.

Too many excellent resources are available to those who wish to have their doubts resolved and their faith strengthened. And, may we assure you, there is no more exciting or exhilarating or satisfying experience one can have than is found in the discovery of truth and the committing of oneself to it.

It's enough to make one rise up and call his doubts blessed simply because of what we learned in resolving them. Then, we can doubt our doubts and believe our beliefs.

It's the only way to go. Divine Authority and Its Detractors Is there such a thing as an expression of authority and finality for Christians and their faith?

Indeed, there is. And one such expression is in the tiny epistle of Jude, consisting of only twenty-five verses, and for a small book, it contains a large truth.

[15 : 13] The crux of Jude's content deals with the existence and dangers of apostasy. It's a tendency men have to turn from the simplicity and sufficiency of Christ to anything and everything else.

Jude identified these as those who deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. His picturesque language describes these detractors as clouds without water, trees without fruit, and raging waves of the sea foaming out their own shame.

Nothing has changed from the first century to the present. Except with a greater world's population, we have a greater number of people Jude identifies as apostates. These are they who wreak havoc in the body of Christ.

They depreciate the person and work of Christ while elevating human achievement, and their conclusion is always the same, namely, the rejection of the only true authority for faith and practice in favor of man-made authority.

Jude says such apostates have abandoned that faith once for all delivered to the saints. These chip away at the faith revealed in Scripture until they end up with something radically different.

[16 : 35] Their end product is devoid of an incarnate God, the substitutionary death of Christ, bodily resurrection of Christ, the promise of His return, and the certainty of heaven by grace through faith.

What does it have left to offer? Nothing but skepticism, denial, and a dry, insipid vagueness. Little wonder Jude calls them wells without water and trees without fruit.

The tragedy is that they often get an audience because of their academic credentials. Many naive laymen are impressed and influenced by the pronouncements of these confident-sounding apostates because, after all, they are very learned, possessing advanced degrees from leading institutions.

Doesn't this guarantee they are erudite scholars who certainly know what they're talking about? Doesn't guarantee any such thing. While we do applaud scholarship and believe education to be a valuable and valid pursuit, its possession alone is no guarantee that such an one is deserving of serious consideration.

While educated in man's estimation of education, such apostates have done more to deny and detract from the historic faith mentioned by Jude than anyone else.

[17 : 58] A straightforward garden variety atheist does less damage to the historic faith by denying everything spiritual than the radical apostate who recast biblical truth after their own imagination while heaping doubt and confusion upon sincere, seeking Christian people.

The apostle Jude justly condemns them and their conclusions. Another misunderstanding clarified. There are numerous reasons given as to why people are unwilling to respond to the gospel and place their faith in Christ as their Lord and Savior. Some appear to be valid, at least as regards their sincerity, and others provide excuses rather than valid reasons.

The one we now discuss, however, is very real in the mind of the one who's withholding his trust. His fear is that in knowing his own weakness and faults, he will not be able to live the life he believes is expected were he to become a Christian.

He may succumb to a temptation, thus committing sin, and looking like a grade-A hypocrite as a Christian. His repeated objection is that he would not be able to hold out and maintain the sinless standards Christians hold.

[19 : 24] Excuse me? Sinless standards? Christians maintaining sinless standards? Are we speaking of sinless Christians in our present world?

Because we don't have any of those. This mistaken person who is reluctant to embrace salvation in Christ is laboring under a completely erroneous assumption.

Christian? The idea that once one is a Christian, they live such a holy life they never think anything wrong, say anything wrong, or do anything wrong. That's their definition of a Christian?

Well, it may be that some holier-than-thou professing Christian gave them that idea, but they surely didn't get that from the Bible. While Christians are less justified in having bad behavior than a non-Christian, he is in no way exempt from it.

The simple bumper sticker summed it up with a few words, Christians aren't perfect, only forgiven. In addition, when we do place our faith in Jesus Christ, we are not provided with probation, but with salvation.

[20 : 37] And it is a salvation as entire and eternal as God can make it. We do not lose the ability to sin upon salvation, but we do gain a new capacity to recognize and avoid it.

As hard as it may be to accept it, part of what makes the good news good news is that Christ died for our sins, all of our sins, present and future.

So, the objection to receiving Christ because one is fearful he could not live up to it? Welcome to the club. None of those called Christians do live up to it fully, consistently, or flawlessly.

And any who think they do just identified themselves as self-deceived at the least, or arrogantly proud at the worst.

Both of which, by the way, fall well within the category of, I have sinned. So, if perhaps your reluctance in coming to Christ is your fear of a substandard performance afterwards, well, one more substandard performance will be received by Christ, loved by Christ, and forgiven by Christ.

[21 : 50] It's what he does best. That's why he's called the Savior. Now shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. Man is Material and Immaterial The Bible describes man as dualistic in nature and composition.

In other words, we are a two-part being. We are more than our body. Everything about us is material or non-material, physical or spiritual.

What is not one is the other. Nothing about us is both, and nothing about us is neither. What makes up our physicality is obvious.

We are flesh and blood, and all they comprise internally and externally. So much for the body. But what is the composition of the human spirit?

The part of our intangible being. If this distinction is correct, and our spirit is non-physical, the components of our spirit would be non-physical as well.

[23 : 03] And what might these components be? If the human spirit is the repository of the real person, then the human spirit would consist of things like personality, temperament, intelligence, memory, conscience, imagination, creativity, norms and standards.

The list is not complete. And what these have in common is their non-physicality. No one has ever seen these traits, but no one doubts their existence.

We only see how these are manifested outwardly through the expressions our body gives them by word and action. So, where in our personhood do these things reside?

The Bible puts them in the mind. Mind is a word the Old and New Testaments use repeatedly. It occurs over 100 times throughout Scripture.

And what is the mind? Of necessity to fit the category of non-physical, it too is non-physical, not to be equated with the brain, which is physical, weighing between two and three pounds.

[24 : 16] The conventional wisdom among medical experts is singular as regards the mind and the brain, and they now believe the mind to be non-existent.

Perhaps their inability to dissect and evaluate the mind as they do the brain leads them to disavow its existence altogether. The mind does not lie within the purview of the laboratory, as does the brain.

So, the majority of medics insist the physical brain alone is responsible for all we would ordinarily assign to the mind. In other words, we humans don't have a mind, we only think we do.

We only have a brain, and it, from within itself, originates and generates memory, intelligence, personality, etc. But, what sayeth the Scriptures?

The Bible does not deny the reality of the brain, but simply omits it, placing emphasis upon the mind. Whether to go with the latest scientific pronouncement or with the biblical assessment is not a hard choice to make.

[25 : 24] After all, who has the best track record? Case closed. It's all another example of our being fearfully and wonderfully made, aren't we, though?

The rationale for believing The rationale for believing can be something very complicated.

The basis for believing anything about anything should be because it is true. If something corresponds to reality, we ought to embrace it on that basis alone, because facts are worthy of belief.

Is there any other motivating factor that causes people to believe something? Yes, there is. And this is where believing becomes complicated. While we ought to believe something because we are convinced it is true, we may also believe something simply because somebody else believes it.

That's not really good enough. We ought not tell people they should believe the gospel because we do. They should believe the gospel because it is true, no matter who believes it or doesn't believe it.

[26 : 36] In other words, the gospel of Christ needs to be embraced for itself, not because somebody else embraced it. This is not to ignore or undermine the power and effectiveness of

one's personal testimony, because Paul the Apostle validated this power and the appropriateness of it by relating his own personal testimony multiple times in the book of Acts.

And we all know of people's interest in the gospel being awakened because of the personal story of someone they admire who recounts how they came to faith in Christ. People with a public persona like a star athlete, gifted musician, TV or movie personalities can be riveting attention-getters when they go before the media and tell their story.

U.S. presidents or other government officials who have been open about their spiritual beliefs have caused people to think twice about faith issues simply because so-and-so has declared their pilgrimage of faith.

This is all good, and it is certain that God uses these and their testimony to stimulate honest investigation where one might otherwise never inquire.

Yet, and here is where it can become complicated, because some prominent dignitary has professed faith in Christ, it does not follow that we should because he did.

[27 : 59] What does follow, perhaps, is that because he did and I greatly respect him or my favorite star NFL running back or professional baseball player and I greatly respect him, their testimony can stimulate one to investigate the Christian faith and see what they found so appealing.

That's legitimate, and that's the real value of a personal testimony. But to simply believe because someone else believes smacks of an unintelligent and, for lack of a better term, a piggyback faith. Can you imagine someone being carried into heaven piggyback? Neither can I. Young children are often prematurely encouraged to make a decision for Christ and sometimes want to believe simply because their parents believe.

There can be a powerful urge to do what their parents have done simply to please them, and this can sometimes result in a profession that is not real. Their decision was not based on an understanding of the gospel and an embracing it for themselves.

They embraced it because their parents embraced it. But believing the gospel is an intensely personal thing we must do because we are persuaded it has real merit on its own.

[29 : 21] God Created Time and Space The text says, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. What was before the beginning?

Nothing, according to the text. Note, we did not say no one, but no thing. Even the beginning had to have a beginning.

What was the beginning a beginning of? It would appear to be time, space, and matter, none of which existed prior to Genesis 1.1.

God is presupposed in his existence because he had to be in order to bring everything else into being. While we can express the concept, we surely can't comprehend the concept that before Genesis 1.1 there wasn't anything, only someone.

And that someone Genesis calls God dwelt in a state called Eternity, which is devoid of time, space, and matter.

[30 : 33] These entities God brought into being and started the clock ticking from the time of creation. Scripture refers to God as Spirit.

Spirit is intangible, that is, non-material, and occupies neither time nor space. a concept hard, if not impossible, for us to grasp, despite the fact that we all have a human spirit and are linked to the image and likeness of God.

When God is said to dwell or inhabit eternity, it does not mean merely that he has been around a long time or even a long, long time.

It is because eternity is not time piled on top of time. It isn't time at all, but timeless. Of course, neither does it mean that God is actually rather young or new, because those designations are also oriented to time.

Time is a creaturely reality. Time and space were created in Genesis 1.1 as an accommodation for all animate and inanimate matter.

[31 : 49] Before matter existed, there was no need for either time or space, both of which are disconnected from God. The heavens and the earth were non-existent until Genesis 1.1.

But there had to be something, one might object. Where did God live? But when we say where, we involve space, space, because where needs a place to be.

Yet, God doesn't need a place to be because Spirit does not occupy space. Mind-boggling, isn't it? So, how great is our God?

Well, His greatness is infinite, and none of us can perceive that. What a being, a creator, utterly timeless, spaceless, and infinite who inhabits eternity.

The Controversy Concerning Creationism The battle rages on.

[33 : 05] Touted experts on both sides of the issue are summoned. Lawsuits are filed, accusations are made, judges and juries hand down their rulings, almost always to the filing of appeals.

And all of it is coupled with whether the Bible or prayer should be allowed in public schools. And the beat goes on. Why this protracted controversy that defies resolution?

It's because neither side is willing to acquiesce. Countless hours, money, and energy are thrown into the fray. From time to time, each side suffers defeat in one venue, only to gain an encouraging victory later in another.

Both are unyielding and both insist that their opponent's position is detrimental to all mankind, particularly children in our public schools. Both are well aware of the implications flowing from a final outcome, and they are staggering.

They consist of the choice between humanism and theism. Humanism views man as the measure of all things.

[34 : 20] Theism views God as the measure of all things. Evolutionists adopt humanism.

Creationists adopt theism.

The humanist views man as his own authority, and man sets his own agenda, and he alone has the right to do so. Morality and values are whatever man says they are, all things being relative, culturally conditioned, and environmentally determined.

And this, they insist, should be the only view allowed in the public school. The creationist believes the creator is the measure of all things.

He views the universe as theocentric, not anthropocentric. Convinced that God made all things, then God alone has the right to determine how his creatures carry out their existence.

He has devised an overarching umbrella of moral standards and values to be respected by all mankind. These are reflected in the pages of Holy Scripture and are chiseled in the hearts of humans, a la Romans 2 in the New Testament.

[35 : 38] One cannot find two paths more diverse than these. Man sets the agenda and standards or God does. So again, what exactly is it that is at stake?

Everything that each holds dear. Little wonder then why neither gives in. These diverse positions existed from the first rebellion in Genesis 3, but now they surface as the hot-button issue involving the youth of our nation and what the youth are taught to believe today will be reflected in the leaders of tomorrow.

That is what is at stake. Christians need to understand this and be counted. We can assure you, the other side does. the what, how, and who of being saved.

Have you heard people talk about being saved? What exactly does that mean? Who is it that is saved? And what is it that is saved about them?

There are two ways one may be saved. In Acts 27, the Apostle Paul, in the midst of a great storm on the sea, used the expression, All hope that we should be saved was gone.

[37 : 08] Paul was speaking about physically surviving the storm and saved from drowning at sea. But more often, being saved refers to one's spiritual rescue or deliverance, particularly from sin's penalty and consequences.

In Matthew 1, the angel Gabriel told Mary to name her child Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

1 Corinthians 1 tells us that the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.

And that in the wisdom of God, the world by its wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the seeming foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

This refers not to the physical, but the spiritual. We all have a spiritual component where the real person is, internal and unseen, the soul or spirit, and every human being has one.

[38 : 15] This spirit part of our being is saved when we believe the good news about Jesus Christ. And the essence of that good news is that Christ died for our sins, and because he did, we may believe on him and be saved from our sin.

This was the purpose of Christ coming into the world. This is also the reason he alone is worthy of the title Savior, because Christ alone died for our sins, no one else.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Many assume believing to the saving of the soul simply refers to their belief that there is a God. Well, even Satan believes that. Believing on Christ to the saving of our soul entails a deliberate act of one's will. It is a conscious volitional decision whereby one places their trust, confidence, reliance in the person of Jesus Christ.

And this conscious commitment is our response to the great transaction Christ accomplished on the cross when he said, it is finished. If we believe on Christ in this manner, we are saved.

[39 : 33] And it's very personal, not institutional. All that's required is one Savior who saves and one person who wants to be saved. Can it really be that simple?

And how can believing like that result in the saving of one's soul? Because God said so. He has already done everything that's difficult when he provided his only son.

Now for us to respond to that by embracing Jesus as our substitute is all that he asks. This is why it's called good news. The Diagnostic Question Dr. D. James Kennedy, now in heaven, was the founder and influential pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida.

He recounted the riveting story of how he came to faith in Christ. It was on a Saturday night in the 1950s when he was at work. His work was as a professional to teach dancing to would-be dancers wanting to enhance their social life.

And, of course, the obligatory drinking and partying was part of the job. The following morning, a Sunday, he awakened in a motel room he couldn't even remember booking.

[40 : 52] His head was throbbing with a splitting hangover headache. As he sat on the edge of the bed, he turned on the bedside radio, hoping for some soothing, calming music.

And what blared out? A preacher, no less. Surely the last and the least of anything he wanted to hear. Holding his head with one hand while reaching to change the dial with the other, the unwelcome man of the cloth then blurted out a provocative question just as Kennedy prepared to turn that dial.

And it was indeed a provocative question, so provocative he had to wait until the speaker answered it and then he would turn the dial. The speaker? One of America's premier clergymen, Donald Gray Barnhouse, pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

And the question he posed that prevented Kennedy from turning the dial was this. If you were to die today and stood before your maker and he were to ask you, why should I allow you to come into my heaven?

What would you tell him? It was provocative, all right. Well, what would you tell him? Dr. Barnhouse went on to recite the usual wholly inadequate and inaccurate answers most people would give, centered around how good they were most of the time, how hard they tried to do the right thing most of the time, and how they never killed anybody or robbed any banks, etc., etc., the usual lame things that we hope would register with some merit.

[42 : 27] But Dr. Barnhouse dashed them all, saying there were perhaps a thousand wrong answers, but only one right answer, only one answer God would and must accept, and it was, Jesus Christ, your Son, whom you provided to pay the price for my sin by dying in my place, he is the one in whom I have placed my faith and trust.

I have nothing more to recommend me than his gracious act of redemption. By the program's end, the dial never did get changed, but D.

James Kennedy was changed. Kneeling by the side of the bed that Sunday morning, he became a new creation in Christ Jesus, and as they say, the rest is history.

This question is still referred to as the Barnhouse question. It is a wonderful tool for diagnosing one's position before God. How would you answer the Barnhouse question?

If you were to die today and stand before your Maker, and he were to ask you, why should I allow you to come into my heaven, what would you tell him?

[43 : 38] Will you offer one of a thousand wrong answers, or the one right one? The Diagnosis and Cure for Our Sin God is capable of using all kinds of circumstances and situations to bring individuals to a saving faith in Christ.

He is the God of unparalleled diversity when it comes to ways and means. And despite the varied circumstances God orchestrates in bringing one to faith, the motivation for actually coming appears to be just one, and it's the same for everybody, including the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, to the average John Doe of today.

It is a singular two-part dynamic that absolutely has to be in place in order for the conversion experience to take place. No matter how different or extraordinary the circumstances that brought them to the crisis of faith and commitment, if this two-part dynamic is not present, the regeneration that would result in salvation cannot be accomplished.

So, what are these key ingredients? They are, part one, a recognition of our spiritual and moral lostness, that is, our utter inability to rectify our own situation, and part two, a recognition of Jesus Christ paying our sin debt, which earned him the title of Savior.

Anyone refusing to acknowledge their moral deficiency, who view themselves acceptable as they are, they will see no need in trusting in an all-sufficient Savior, and they won't.

[45 : 28] They do not accept part two, because they never got past part one. Part one is the diagnosis, and part two is the cure. But who needs the cure if you don't have a diagnosed disease?

But, you ask, don't we all have the disease? Has not the scriptures made it resoundingly clear throughout that humanity in its entirety has a terminal disease?

Indeed it does. And does not the world we live in reflect the reality of our universal moral lostness via the way we are and the way we treat one another? Indeed it does.

Well, then, who could possibly deny their lostness? People in denial. People who think they are an exception. A common view held by many before they moved out of denial into reality.

This reality is the part one. And if one does not complete part one, part two that answers that need of part one is redundant. This would mean that in the capacity of Savior, Jesus Christ is unemployed.

[46 : 39] Perhaps we could say his position has been eliminated as being unnecessary. Well, there are enough who have found this Savior not only necessary, but they're very all in all.

They own part one and part two, because they see themselves as God sees them, lost, undone, without God and Christ in the world. And they see Christ who knew no sin being made sin for us. They embraced him as their Savior and Lord. These two parts, the diagnosis and the treatment, must both be in place, or the transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life cannot occur.

Personal Salvation and Our Emotions There is no question, especially to those who have experienced it firsthand, that coming to faith and undergoing the new birth is the most far-reaching spiritual experience one can have, to say nothing of the significant eternal implications that accompany it.

Everyone who has had this life-changing visitation from God himself has received the same life, benefits, provisions, etc., as everyone else.

[47 : 59] There is no reason to believe God does different things in the life of each who come to Him. All get the same complete forgiveness, the same salvation, the same Holy Spirit who indwells, the same baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, the same sealing of the Spirit, the same adoption as sons and daughters, and so on.

While all these glorious benefits originate from God and are provided to every new believer upon believing, nearly all are unaware as to what God actually did in them and for them at that point of salvation.

But most are surely aware that something did in fact happen. They can sense that things are different and will continue to be different, assuming their coming to faith was genuine.

Commonalities are several and across the board for all believers. Yet while these things are common to all, are inward and spiritual, there are outward physical and emotional responses that may be very different among the same people.

And this is because people possess varied emotional and psychological profiles that cause them to respond to the spiritual experience of salvation in different ways.

[49 : 21] It's simply the way people are wired and put together, no two of which are precisely alike. Consequently, it is unreasonable and unwise to require others who claim to have trusted Christ to reflect the same emotional response we had when we came to faith.

Some may even go so far as to say, unless you experience the same feeling and sensation I did, then yours could not be real. Well, the critic may be very sincere and yet sincerely wrong.

Some, but not all, refer to the sensation of feeling cleansed. Some, but not all, refer to an enormous weight being lifted from them.

Some, but not all, weep profusely, and they may not be the weeping type. Some, but not all, speak of feeling a love for everyone, and they may not be the loving type.

Some, but not all, want to thank the one who led them to Christ by wanting to give them something of value, perhaps even money. Some, but not all, really say little and feel little emotionally.

[50 : 32] So which of these had the genuine experience of salvation? Conceivably all of them. In actuality, God above knows. But we have no valid basis for doubting or questioning the reality of any of them, especially on the grounds of their not relating on emotional experience like ours, or at least similar to ours.

People are different. God made them that way. The Sinner's Prayer What is the sinner's prayer?

This is a term used by Christians who see this prayer as a kind of formula. But does it actually provide a verbal formula that, when uttered, results in the salvation of the one praying it?

No. It's actually a misunderstanding based on Luke's Gospel, chapter 18, where Jesus is talking of two men who went up to the temple to pray.

The first was an obviously self-righteous Pharisee who believed himself to be quite worthy of God's favor. He proceeded to recount his status and personal virtues before God in a brazen and proud way.

[51 : 46] But then Christ cited the opposite example of a community low-life individual, but who was honest enough to admit his moral deficiencies. He smote himself on the chest as a sign of self-contempt and uttered those words that forever since became identified as the Sinner's Prayer.

His words were, God be merciful to me, a sinner. Well, clearly this unworthy but honest man was pleasing to God simply for his frank admission.

Today, well-meaning Christians encourage unbelievers to recite this prayer, God be merciful to me, a sinner, and then add to it, and save me for Jesus' sake.

Thus, this so-called sinner's prayer, upon reciting, is believed to pass one from spiritual death to spiritual life. And while no one questions their sincerity or zeal to see others come to Christ, yet it must be understood that there is no formula, no open sesame, no mantra or incantation that, upon being spoken, causes one to receive new life as a Christian.

If one's faith or trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is not there, mere words can be recited ad infinitum, and nothing of a transformation takes place.

[53 : 10] If one truly does believe in the substitutionary death of Christ on their behalf, that is what saves them. And if one does recite the prayer, God be merciful to me, a sinner, but is lacking the inner heart belief and trust, then his reciting that prayer is in vain.

Most sinners know they are sinners, and do indeed want God to be merciful to them. And God does want man to acknowledge his sinfulness, and he stands at the ready to dispense his mercy.

Yet, God will not bestow his mercy upon anyone who does not acknowledge the very basis for God's mercy becoming available, and that is through the sacrificial death of Christ for the sinner's sin.

Any effort on the part of any Christian to encourage someone to acknowledge their moral unworthiness outside of Christ is certainly commendable, and any effort to assure people that God's mercy is abundant and available is likewise commendable.

We must make certain, however, that those who would seek to avail themselves of God's plenteous mercy are made aware that the only vehicle through which it must be appropriated is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, not by uttering or repeating words.

[54 : 39] Being lost before being found. Vance Havner was a well-beloved preacher of the previous generation, and he had a way with words.

He is quoted as having said, The greatest reason you can't get people saved today is because you can't get them lost. Well, he was right. In a day of religious pluralism, I'm okay, you're okay, an old-fashioned garden-variety sinner is hard to come by.

It seems nobody sins anymore. We now all have faults, mistakes, imperfections, blemishes, and exercise poor judgment.

Whatever happened to sin? Well, that's too unsophisticated. It's too outdated. And yes, too judgmental. Yet, we may be certain that Jesus Christ did not die for our faults, mistakes, and poor judgment.

Jesus died for our sin. And if he was gracious and loving enough to die for our sin in our place, the very least we can do is own up to it. After all, we aren't admitting something that is true only of ourself.

[55 : 53] It's a condition systemic to all of humanity across the board. Of course, it's embarrassing and humbling to acknowledge we are what the Scriptures say we are. But we are all sinners.

Yet, it's that very acknowledgement that qualifies us to receive God's gracious offer of salvation. Because only admitted sinners can have it. No one else need apply.

So, when one is ready to stop playing games and get honest with God and with oneself, then the transaction between sinner and Savior can begin. But until then, there's nothing to talk about.

We have often described this coming to grips with our sin as the hard part of the gospel. And it is. Because this is the part that makes us look bad.

Because we are. But we naturally don't want to look bad, even though we are bad. So, when once we face the reality of our sin, we have cleared the hardest hurdle that many can't get over because they are intent on protecting their image.

[56 : 59] But if we understand the gravity of offending a righteous God, who will in no wise acquit the guilty, then we should arrive at, what can I do?

What must I do to be saved? And now comes the easy part of the gospel. Because Jesus Christ stands ready to save all who come to him, and he who comes to Christ will never be rejected or cast out.

To save us, Christ requires us to dismiss all else in which we may trust, whether our personal morality, good intentions, church affiliation, or religious ceremonies, and transfer, with an act of our will, all of our confidence and trust to him.

Because only the Savior saves. No one else is qualified to save but the Savior. And no one else is qualified to be saved but the sinner. Think of it.

The trust of one sinner placed in the hands of one Savior equals the eternal salvation of that soul. It's the most glorious thing ever to take place in the life of a human being on this planet.

[58 : 18] Eligible for Salvation Justification is by faith and faith alone. No doubt about it. The clarity with which the Scripture speaks of it is indisputable.

It simply means that one is brought into a right relationship with God by belief or faith alone. It's a very core doctrine of biblical Christianity, first related to Abraham in Genesis 15, literally secured and provided for by our Lord Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection, and repeatedly confirmed by the Apostle Paul in his several writings, particularly the book of Romans.

So if one comes to the place in life that being accepted by God is a priority item, what is it that brings him there? It's a vital question with an unpleasant but equally vital answer.

What do we mean unpleasant? What's unpleasant about it? Well, the answer begins with another question. Can you think of anything pleasant about sin?

Sin? Sin, you say? Yes, sin. Not sin in general, but sin in particular. Your sin.

[59 : 37] Is not that idea unpleasant? Are you bristly? Indignant? Denying? Or perhaps abused by such an outdated concept as sin?

Sin is now the venue of comedy routines and late-night talk shows. Essentially, we are a nation awash in denial as regards morality.

With the ejection of moral absolutes being replaced by a fuzzy relativism and some I'm okay, you're okay thrown in, we are hard-pressed to identify a self-acknowledged sinner.

Oh, we do hear a lot of, I don't claim to be perfect. We all make mistakes. Blah, blah, blah. The point is this. While justification is by faith alone, there is an often overlooked prerequisite to believing, and that is where sin comes in.

Because, you see, there is really no basis for seeking to be justified by faith apart from the recognized awareness and acknowledgement of sin with an understanding of its consequences that prompts us to look for a way of salvation.

[60 : 51] This awareness cannot be bypassed while en route to justification by faith. God can only justify or declare righteous those who admit they are unrighteous.

Our admitting it means we are agreeing with God's assessment of our condition, and we desperately need a Savior. Then, and only then, do we even see a need for salvation.

That's it. A knowledge of and conviction of our own personal sinfulness alone can bring us to a Savior who can declare us forgiven and righteous solely on the basis of our belief in Him.

Christ Jesus can only save admitted sinners. Are you qualified? God says we all are. Can you agree with Him? If so, you're a candidate. Reasons and Excuses There are reasons and there are excuses.

Very often we tend to separate them based on their validity or invalidity. A reason for something expresses a rationale, a solid justification behind an attitude or action.

[62 : 14] But an excuse strikes us as illegitimate in its justification. All of us are very capable of throwing excuses up to God and trying to pass them off as good and sufficient reasons.

Actually, an excuse is merely a ploy we use to avoid doing something we simply don't want to do. But it doesn't sound good to simply say, I don't want to.

So we fashion lame objections, often dishonest objections about why we don't want to do a certain thing or why we can't do it. And we often deceive ourselves in the process.

This lame excuse scenario can even be tried out on the Almighty. Picture the setting, if you will.

Here is the God of the universe, very maker of heaven and earth, all wise, powerful, knowing, loving, never known to fail, impeccable track record throughout all human history in delivering all that He has promised.

This one, whose love and care for mankind extended even to becoming one of us and managed to pay the price for our sin on that old rugged cross.

[63 : 27] Then He makes available to wayward humanity the gracious opportunity of being united to Him and sharing all He purchased when He gave Himself for us, not the least of which is eternal life.

What, then, is the human response to that? For many, it is a joyful and thankful, wholehearted commitment to this one as the rightful Lord and owner of all whom He purchased.

But for others, excuses. Why do they not also embrace this one as the lover and Lord of their souls? Just excuses.

Excuses why they just can't do that. They're too old now, or too young, and have things they want to do before they get religious. Or I'm good enough as I am, certainly better than most.

Or actually, I'm too bad, and God wouldn't want anything to do with me. Or, so-and-so says he's a Christian and he's a real nerd. And my neighbor goes to church every Sunday and he's a big hypocrite.

[64 : 34] I wouldn't want to be like them. Ad infinitum, ad nauseum. All excuses. Excuses. Not a valid reason among them. And get this one.

It's a classic. I don't want to give myself over to God and trust His Son Jesus as my Lord and Savior because, because, that would mess up my whole life.

Surely you just mess up your whole life? Is not He who orders the universe 24-7 capable of ordering your solitary existence?

If you don't trust Him simply because you just don't want to, be honest to God and yourself and admit it. No more excuses, please.

God isn't buying it. And, in your heart, you can't buy it either. God's Logic Versus Man's Logic It just doesn't make any sense.

[65 : 38] Do you mean to tell me that a guy who never did do anything really bad, was a decent father, would give you the shirt off his back, never cheated on his wife, paid his taxes, was an upstanding citizen and an asset to his community?

That guy could still miss heaven? And then along comes this character who lived a life far below the other, oftentimes just out of reach of the law, cheated on his wife and the IRS, was a sorely lacking father.

This guy gets really sick, is declared terminal, and has a so-called deathbed conversion days or hours before he dies, and this guy is going to heaven?

Like I said, just doesn't make any sense. God can't possibly operate that way. What goes around comes around. That guy deserves to go you know where.

Well, my friend, one must agree with you. That's where he deserves to go. No question about it. Guy number one lived an exemplary life, and guy number two did not.

[66 : 51] Big differences. But there is a difference even greater than that. It's the difference between man number one attempting to secure for himself heaven on his own terms, versus Jesus Christ securing heaven for man number two on God's terms.

Who do you think paid the greater price? Would you prefer to put forth your own merits as a means of securing heaven, or would you prefer to trust in the merits of Christ and the price he paid to secure heaven for you?

While it doesn't make any sense when we are reckoning sense and logic from our human point of view, it most assuredly makes good sense to the one who planned the work and worked the plan. Isaiah 55, God tells us, My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. Well, just how different are they?

Isaiah continues, As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Well, the distance between heaven and earth is considerable.

[68 : 00] And the putting of one's faith in his own flimsy, inconsistent deeds, versus putting one's faith in the sinless Son of God, and his death on our behalf, that difference is considerable also.

Infinitely different, we might add. And most of all, it's this latter plan that saved the undeserving one on his deathbed that is the only plan actually authorized by God himself.

As such, it's the plan called justification by faith, based upon God's unmerited favor toward the one believing on Christ. Justification by faith is the official methodology God uses to save sinners, and it's the only one he authorized.

We should be ever so grateful that while salvation by grace through trust in Christ may not make sense to us, it made perfect sense to the one who devised salvation's plan.

Grace, grace, God's grace. Grace that is greater than all our sin. Faith is the divine rationale.

[69 : 12] So, what's the big deal about faith? Why is it emphasized so much, particularly in Christianity? And isn't one faith as valid as another?

Doesn't it only mean that you need to believe in something, and whatever that might be is just as good as whatever someone else believes? Well, faith is a big deal.

And nothing makes more of it than Christianity. But faith was not instituted by Christianity. It predates Christianity and goes back even beyond the root of Judaism.

We are told about Abraham who believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness in Genesis 15, predating both Judaism and Christianity.

What did that actually mean, and how did it work? Here is how it seems to have played out. God instituted the principle or methodology of faith because in doing so, he was able to require something that man could provide that was not works or deeds oriented.

[70 : 22] Man was simply required to believe. Who couldn't do that? Precisely. It is one reason the gospel of grace through faith is such good news.

Anybody can believe. But back to Abraham, who believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. It? What was it?

His belief. Abraham's belief or faith was counted for righteousness. Notice the text does not say Abraham was righteous.

It says his faith or his belief was counted to him for righteousness. Abraham's faith was a substitute for the personal righteousness that he did not have.

Since the quality of one's faith is determined by its object, what was the object of Abraham's faith? It was simply God himself and God's promise to Abraham.

[71 : 22] Follow me now. Here is God, a perfectly righteous and utterly holy being, who demands holiness of character from any being in his presence.

But like us, Abraham didn't have that. How then can he connect with God and be accepted by him? Only by faith. In other words, only by his trust and confidence in who God was and what he said.

It is as though God is saying, Abraham, I am well aware you are a flawed, fallen human being, as is all humanity. And I know you cannot fulfill or measure up to the standard of holiness that will allow me to accept you.

So if you will place your trust in me, make me and my promises to you the object of your faith, I will accept your faith in place of the righteousness you do not have.

It, of course, all ties in with the expression in Hebrews 11 that, without faith, it is impossible to please God. This is why faith is such a big deal.

[72 : 30] God made it a big deal. And through it, we are declared righteous. It's called justification by faith. And it is indeed good news. You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman.

Preview of Volume 21 Upcoming An assortment of topics that are frequently misunderstood and in need of clarification has been undertaken on the preceding 20 segments on this 20th volume of Christianity Clarified.

While all misunderstandings are too numerous for Christianity Clarified to possibly cover, yet we are confident that we are somewhat able to address and hopefully clarify many of those misunderstandings that perhaps are most common among the public as a whole.

And such will continue to be the goal on the upcoming Volume 21. Additional clarifications will be treated that we hope will be as enlightening and edifying as the 20 segments on this 20th volume. You are most welcome to join us and invite others to do so as well. If this content of Christianity Clarified has been helpful and enlightening to you, we would encourage you to think of others who also might benefit from them.

[74 : 07] And if you do, you need only provide us with their name and mailing address and we will send them the volumes you would like them to receive, free of charge, postpaid, no strings attached.

And in addition, you may be assured that any of the friends you recommend to receive Christianity Clarified will never receive letters from us requesting donations.

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[75 : 21] Emails may be addressed to gracebiblespringfield.com. Thank you so much for being a willing listener to Christianity Clarified.

Our sincere hope is for your enlightenment and edification. This is Pastor Marv Wiseman at Grace Bible Church, thanking you for your interest and participation. God bless you.