

Christianity Clarified Volume 74

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[0 : 00] Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 1, Reviewing Literality, Futurity. As referenced on the two previous segments of Christianity Clarified, Volume 73, the core issues most descriptive of the Kingdom of Heaven coming to earth are its literality and its futurity.

When the Kingdom of Heaven does come to earth, it will be literal and material in every way. Such is required in order to correct the literal, material ruination inflicted upon the earth from the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3.

Second, the Kingdom, so central to the plan and program of God, yet remains future in its establishment. That it will be established personally by Christ Himself administering it is absolutely certain.

And that this present world is not that Kingdom is equally absolutely certain. Attempting to make it such generates and perpetuates massive confusion.

Both Old and New Testament prophecies reveal the Kingdom promised and to be established by the personal arrival of Israel's Messiah as being far removed from what is present today, calling itself the Kingdom of Heaven, only spiritually so.

[1 : 28] Neither the Roman Catholic nor Protestant counterpart can qualify as the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven with the current Pope as the Vicar of Christ.

A so-called spiritual Kingdom presided over by that spiritual Pope as Christ's representative on earth fall far short of what the prophets have foretold.

Corrupt humanity, with all its corrupt institutions, continue to fail in producing any resemblance of the promised Kingdom. Included in what that Kingdom will entail is the submission of the entire complex of nations of the world to Christ and to His personal authority.

There will be no opposing rulers or governments. There will be no military conflicts or nations striving for mastery over others.

This new world, called the Kingdom of Heaven come to earth, will be the epitome of all nations and peoples enjoying a peace and prosperity never known in this present fallen world.

[2 : 41] Peter, in Acts chapter 3, describes it as the times of restoration and times of refreshing. Nothing presided over today, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, even remotely fulfilled these requirements.

The attempt to redefine the expectations by calling them fulfilled and present today, only spiritually so, fails dramatically.

All such claims fall far short of the expectations promised by God through His prophets in both Testaments. So, if this today that is claimed to be the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is not that, then what is it?

And the obvious answer is just ahead. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 2, The Issue is Authority, Part 1.

The preceding segment concluded with a question, If this today that claims to be the Kingdom of Heaven, only spiritually so, rather than literally so, is in fact not the Kingdom at all, then what is this?

[4 : 06] It is the mystery of the Kingdom. Well, what is that? The mystery of the Kingdom is the Kingdom in absentia.

What? Precisely. Rather than this being the Kingdom literally or spiritually, it is instead the postponement thereof.

Its postponement is the very delay that is the mystery. So, how do we arrive at that? Well, I'm so glad you asked.

The answer given directly by Jesus in Matthew chapter 12 is the very key to this whole present day and age in which we now live. Something very dramatic by way of a shift is taking place here in

Matthew chapter 12.

And if we do not get the meaning and significance of this exchange between Jesus and one of the two specific groups before Him, we will miss out on the key to it all.

[5 : 12] So, please, hear carefully the issues in this dramatic scene. First, let's be reminded this is one of the many occasions that Jesus had opposition from the leaders of Israel.

This one began in verse 24. The Pharisees had just accused Jesus of casting out demons from possessed people by the power of Satan, the Lord of the demons.

The exchange continued to intensify, and in verse 38, the scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign or miracle from Him. Jesus did not give them a sign because He knew full well their motive for the demand.

Their problem was not the need for more signs or evidence. Their problem was their implacable will that prevented them from believing no matter the evidence.

Jesus told them there would be one more sign, but that would not make any difference to them because they were already locked in with their opposition to Him.

[6 : 22] He compared the Pharisees to the scene many years earlier when the Queen of Sheba responded positively to the wisdom of Solomon.

Then He compared the positive response of the Ninevites when Jonah told them judgment was coming, and they repented. But, said Jesus, Now, one is in your presence with greater authority than either Jonah or Solomon, yet this is not sufficient for you.

Jesus clearly revealed that these opposing Him refused to believe no matter who the authority was. It was a stinging but well-deserved indictment.

Can we not see how their exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees is another example of, The issue is authority. The issue is authority. Always has been.

Always will be. He then goes on to reveal to them their true situation, and so shall we, just ahead. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 3.

[7 : 33] The Issue is Authority, Part 2. Matthew 12 and 13 are huge, watershed chapters that represent a pivotal point in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

And what the actual pivot was had to do with Jesus being convinced Israel was not going to accept Him as their Messiah. Even though His disciples and the common people did, yet they were not the decision-makers for Israel, as were the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and chief priests.

They were the shakers and movers, the ruling establishment with all the clout. The volatile issue had just erupted in Matthew 12 in regard to Jesus having cast a demon out of a man, and He drew strong criticism from the Pharisees, saying Jesus had done that through the power of Beelzebub, another name for the devil.

Jesus insists that for the devil to do such a foolish thing would undermine His own efforts. Then the opposition demands that Jesus do another miracle, but He knew full well their motive and told them there would be no more miracles except that of the experience of Jonah.

As Jonah spent three days and nights in the sea monster, Jesus would do so in the heart of the earth. And He then compared the present generation of Jews He was dealing with to those of Nineveh and the Queen of the South.

[9 : 09] He reminded them that the men of Nineveh heeded the words of Jonah the prophet and they repented of their sin. And then when the Queen of Sheba heard the words of Solomon and his wisdom, she believed Him.

So Jonah and Solomon both were mere men. But Jesus then went on to say, And now one greater than Jonah is here, yet you refuse to hear Him, meaning of course Himself.

He then went on to liken that present generation of opposition to a demon that had been cast out of a man, and then went seeking rest but finding none.

Then the demon says, I will return to my house from which I had been cast out. And it did so, and found it empty, cleaned, swept, and put in order.

Then the demon goes and takes with it seven other spirits even more wicked than itself. Thus, the last state of that man who was possessed became worse than his first state.

[10 : 19] Then said Jesus, That is the way it will be with this present evil generation. And drawing upon that comparison, He then likens it to the then present condition of the generation of Israelites to whom He had come to minister.

The conclusion was obvious. Jesus was telling them, Their refusal to repent of their sin will leave them far worse off than when He had first come to them, because He was one of far greater authority than Jonah or Solomon.

Yet they refused to hear Him. Unto whom much is given, shall much be required, is an age-old axiom that bears repetition.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 4, The Issue is Authority, Part 3.

The previous segment noted the important differences between the audiences Jesus addressed in Matthews, chapter 12 and 13. Jesus contrasted those differences as those existing between the multitude in general and His disciples in particular.

[11:44] He described the multitude to whom He spoke in parables in verse 15, saying, This people's heart is wax gross, Their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

That was His diagnosis of the crowds to whom He addressed in parables. And then, in a clear contrast, He said to His disciples, But, Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

His use of eyes and ears are understood as chief human avenues for receiving information. But then, the heart is inserted as the avenue of understanding.

But be assured, the use of heart here in Matthew 12, as in many other places, does not refer to the blood pump organ in our chest. Rather, it refers to the very core of our being.

The epitome of our thinking and reasoning ability. The 20th century New Testament simply translated the use of the word heart, which is *kardia* in the original Greek, as mind.

[13:15] The mind is not only where reasoning occurs, but it also contains our volition, or decider. Herein is where we all decide what we will do with our will, as regards to what we have seen and heard.

We may think of it as being our so-what factor of our reasoning. Jesus described the crowd as people dull of hearing and closed eyes, that prevent their understanding from the heart or core of their being.

The difference is between people who recognize the authority over them, as opposed to those who recognize only themselves as their authority. The former are prepared to obey what their authority requires, as in the disciples to the authority of Jesus.

But the latter will hear what an authority tells them and requires from them, and then they will decide whether they will obey.

Hence, as we are often reminded, the issue is authority. Always has been, always will be. The one who recognizes God's authority over his own is going to say, Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.

[14:39] The majority in the day of Jesus, as well as today, is actually saying, God can speak if he wishes, but then I will decide whether or not to obey.

This has been the attitude of the majority of humanity from Genesis 3 to the present day. Why else do you think the world is in the mess it is?

Who is the authority in your life? You, the creature, or God the Creator? The answer to that can explain a lot. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 5.

The Issue is Authority, Part 4. Following hard on the heels of the preceding event of Jesus likening that present generation to one of being evil, we indicated it all pointed to a pivotal point in his ministry.

It was here, here in Matthew 12 and 13, that a dramatic difference becomes obvious. In addition to his now couching his teaching by way of parables, rather than his usual method of forthright language, Matthew 12, as well as Mark 3 and Luke 8, all record another element of change that is noticeable.

[16:04] In each, Jesus is informed of the nearby presence of his mother and brothers who wish to see him, but are unable to get to him because of the great crowd of people.

When someone succeeds telling Jesus his mother and brothers are looking for him, his response by asking, Who are my mother and my brothers?

Then, looking on those sitting around him, he said, Behold, my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

Using that designation, it in itself indicates something is different. Indeed, something is, and all three of the synoptics mention it.

Jesus, now with his eye upon the entirety of humanity and what he has come to do for it, begins to surface more and more as he contemplates the coming cross of Calvary.

[17 : 15] His role of son and brother is diminishing in view of his role as Savior. In this substitutionary role, he will be identified as intimately related to all who are truly related to God.

All of them, in view of their natural, mutual, collective humanity, are brethren. We may be sure none of them recognize the enormity of that saying, but the synoptics all pick up on it.

This, too, is part of that watershed issue of which we spoke. Here is the pivot away from Jesus the Son, the brother, to the larger role that now defines him, Yeshua HaMashiach.

Now, as it were, his role is strictly business. Do not for a moment think Jesus was unkind or disrespectful to his family or to anyone.

With the obvious final answer from the leading Jews and their rejection of him, he now looks to the only remaining thing on his agenda. After all, was not this the very thing for which he was sent by his Father?

[18 : 37] Now, only that relationship to his Heavenly Father matters, and all other relationships pale by comparison. It was as if he heard his Father saying, This, my son, is the beginning of the end of your earthly sojourn and mission.

Keep your eye on the objective, the cross. It was all about perspective and objective, and Jesus had them both right.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 6. The Issue is Authority, Part 5. Chapters 12 and 13 of Matthew's Gospel have been described as pivotal.

Something has changed. A turning from something to something else. And to turn away from one thing, to turn to something else, is to pivot.

Matthew chapter 12 records Jesus pivoting in his teaching method. Instead of teaching plainly and straightforwardly as he had been, he pivots in his teaching method from that to teaching in parables instead.

[19 : 58] His disciples recognized the difference immediately and came to Jesus for explanation as revealed in Matthew 13.10, asking, Why do you speak to them in parables?

Jesus replied that he did so because he wanted the truth he had to convey to be hidden from them since they really had no eyes to see nor ears to hear.

He then quoted a passage from Isaiah 6 where the prophet gave the same description of the Jewish audience to which he spoke 700 years earlier.

The reason that neither got Isaiah's message nor the message of Jesus was the same. Both groups had eyes but did not see and ears but did not hear.

Why not? Because they were dull of hearing. Today, we would say, they just don't get it. And why they didn't get it was because what Jesus said did not comply with their mode of understanding.

[21 : 09] It conflicted with their preconceived notions and simply did not fit their already held positions. This is a common malady of mankind, not only back then, but today as well.

Human nature has not changed one bit. It's a perfect reminder of the moral and mental impairment with which we are all born. Add to that the fact that, as Jesus said in John 12, 14, and 16, that Satan is the prince of this world and his modus operandi is to deceive.

This, too, is reinforced by Paul in writing his second letter to the Corinthians in chapter 4 that Satan is the god of this world and he blinds the minds of men to prevent them from hearing and understanding the gospel.

Add that all up and we learn that as fallen humans, we are born impaired and have two strikes against us as human beings. We require repeated hearings of the gospel before we ever get it. Initially, when we heard the gospel, it was like water off a duck's back. We just didn't get it. We didn't want what little we did get and it required repeated hearings before we started connecting the dots, sometimes years later.

[22 : 34] The only reason the apostles got it was due to their having been repeatedly exposed to Jesus and his patient teaching of them.

That, plus an honest openness to the truth, an admission that you don't understand but honestly have the will to do so, that's the ticket.

Has yours been punched? Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 7. The Issue is Authority, Part 6.

Reminding ourselves that Matthew 12 and 13 are extremely enlightening, they deserve special attention. It is in the events described herein that the curtain of death is hovering over Jesus. His teaching has so rankled the leadership of Israel that they are no longer willing to tolerate Him. This comes with crystal clarity in Matthew 12.

[23 : 38] The issue began when the Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples. They were walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath day. They became hungry and began to pluck newly ripened grain heads of grain to eat.

The Pharisees saw them and complained to Jesus, Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful on the Sabbath. What were they doing?

They were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them together in their hands to separate the wheat from the chaff that covered the grains of wheat.

You can't do that on the Sabbath. That constitutes work for winnowing the wheat and eating it is work on the Sabbath, forbidden by the law.

Inwardly, Jesus must have sighed deeply and thought to Himself, Here they go again, the tail wagging the dog. Jesus then reminded them that King David and his men who were hungry on the Sabbath ate the bread that was displayed in the temple and reserved for the priest and their legitimate hunger was satisfied, nor were they guilty of violating the law of Moses.

[25 : 00] Then Jesus said something that must have made them absolutely livid. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

What? How dare he make such a statement? He is Lord of the Sabbath? And their blood began to boil.

And Jesus isn't done. Upon entering the synagogue, there was a man with a paralyzed hand.

Looking at Jesus and the man, they asked the question, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

Clearly attempting to entrap Jesus. He asked them, Tell me, if one of you has a sheep that falls into a ditch on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?

Clearly labor on the Sabbath? Then, looking upon the man with the injured hand, Jesus said, Stretch forth your hand. And it was restored as the other.

[26 : 07] No doubt the healed man was rejoicing. But you needn't look for rejoicing among the legalistic Pharisees. Their response was to go out and counsel together how they might destroy him.

Didn't the law of Moses prescribe death for anyone who works on the Sabbath? Winnowing grain is threshing, and that is work. Healing is practicing medicine on the Sabbath, and that is work.

How dare he? And then to announce himself to be Lord of the Sabbath is blasphemy on the order we have never heard. Such and one is worthy of death according to the law, and we will see to it.

And so they did. Christianity Clarified Volume 74, Track 8 The Kingdom Remains Postponed At the outset of this Volume 74, the long-anticipated Kingdom of Heaven was revealed to be in absentia.

That is, postponed, delayed, put on hold indefinitely. That the Promised Kingdom will be established here on earth physically and literally is absolutely certain.

[27 : 36] And that that which exists now is not the Promised Kingdom, not spiritually, and certainly not literally, is also certain.

It is revealed in Matthew 30 to be held in abeyance or deliberately postponed rather than established. But why?

Because, as stated earlier in chapter 12, verse 14, the final decision of the ruling class had been made. Their claim of Jesus violating the Sabbath by healing the man with the paralyzed hand on the Sabbath, and then his justification for doing so was not only out of sympathy for the man, but also due to the fact that Jesus had called himself Lord of the Sabbath?

They full well understood the implications of that. Either Jesus really was the Lord himself and therefore was justified in calling himself the Lord of the Sabbath, or he was no such person but rather one who violated the Sabbath by doing what they classified as work in healing the man.

And convinced that latter was the case, what did the law of Moses prescribe for one who violated the Sabbath? Stone him to death! Therefore, according to the legalistic manner of reasoning, they were completely justified, in fact, even required to kill him.

[29 : 11] This was merely one more faulty assumption men all too often make, again, with disastrous consequences. Two important side issues must be clarified here because in the Matthew text they are not explained, yet they are very critical for clarification.

First of all, Jesus had presented himself to be the Messiah of Israel, sent by God his Father, as prophesied in Genesis 3, and identified as the seed or the offspring of the woman Eve.

Though he indeed affirmed his identity when declared as such by the Apostle Peter in Matthew 16, saying, You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Still, the extent of his presentation to Israel as their Messiah was one in which he was to be offered and accepted as such, not as one who would impose himself upon Israel whether or not they chose to accept him.

In this, he was careful to respect the volition men had, rather than simply override it by forcing himself upon him. That he would not do.

[30 : 34] In addition, it was prophesied by Isaiah 700 years earlier that their Messiah, when he came, would not be accepted by his own people.

Now, we need to examine the ramifications of that, and we shall, just ahead. Christianity Clarified Volume 74, Track 9, The Kingdom and Human Volition The important clarification was undertaken on the previous segment, explaining why it was that Jesus, being who he really was, didn't simply overrule the objections by the Jewish leaders as to his being their long-awaited Messiah.

Once again, here is an example where the volition factor comes into play. God, as Creator, did not give us humans the ability to use our own free will and then to merely overrule it whenever we're going to make a bad choice.

Human volition is genuine. It's real. Our exercise of it becomes the basis for our personal evaluation before God when that time of accountability comes.

And it will come. For believers, it will be the award throne of Christ, the Bema, where our rewards or lack thereof will be determined on the basis of our deeds and for what we use the volition we were given.

[32 : 08] That is addressed in 1 Corinthians 3. For those who are not believers, their day of accountability is found in Revelation 20 at the great white throne of judgment.

They, too, will be evaluated by the all-seeing, all-knowing eye of God who will determine their degree of punishment rather than rewards.

God, being the only one who is fully aware and knowledgeable of everything, will be able to dispense justice that is totally appropriate.

You see, God does not grant us volition merely to override it then when we use it poorly. Overriding volition would be an act of God whereby He would violate our volition.

No. Our volition and the negative use of it brings the negative consequences of our actions into play. Volition is that ability to make decisions as a human being and it is a very serious thing.

[33 : 21] So, be assured for good or ill at the Bema seat or the great white throne one or the other you and I and all others without exception will be held accountable.

Those who may think they are flaunting God and doing as they please will then sadly discover they were not getting away with anything.

Hebrews chapter 10 informs us it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. That, my friend, is what awaits everyone who refuses to fall into the arms of a loving God.

There is that fateful passage in Revelation chapter 20 that describes the coming great white throne of judgment. God gave his servant, the apostle John, a vision of that coming day and there is no doubt it was recorded there so that all living on this side of that fateful judgment day may be able to escape it.

And my earnest desire right now is that no one hearing my voice will have the sad, sad memory of having done so as they stand before the one on this throne.

[34 : 40] The vivid description of which is given from Revelation chapter 20 and it's just ahead if you think you can handle it. Christianity Clarified Volume 74 Track 10 God's Will and Human Volition Part 1 A great misunderstanding of the volition God granted to angels and humans contributes to the confusion that many have about the plan and program of God.

All too many think that because God is far more powerful than either angels or humans that he can just simply superimpose his will upon their will and achieve whatever he wishes.

After all, who could withstand God? Yet, this is not to say God cannot act independently of human wishes because Scripture reveals multiple times when he has done that, particularly in the Old Testament and especially on behalf of his covenant people Israel.

Just think of the frequency with which God acted regarding Moses, Joshua, David, and on and on. More names could be added. So, no one is saying God seeks or needs man's permission to do anything because he is unquestionably the sovereign God of the universe who works all things after the counsel of his own will.

2 Chronicles chapter 20 records an example of that with Jehoshaphat, the king of Israel, as praying thusly, O Lord, God of our fathers, art not thou God of heaven and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen?

[36 : 32] And in thine hand is there not power and might so that no one is able to withstand thee? Well, all of those rhetorical questions asked by Jehoshaphat have to be answered affirmatively.

However, all of that involves God's sovereignty and God's power. It must still be in compliance with his holiness, nature, and character.

God will not make a sham out of giving humans an angel's volition or a will to do of their own choosing and then turn right around and countermand it with his own will any time they wish to pursue a course he does not approve of.

So we emphasize again, our volition, our capacity to act as free moral agents is a very serious thing to possess.

It is, in fact, the very basis for our future accountability before God. Whether as believers in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 before the award throne of Christ, the Bema seat, or as unbelievers in Revelation chapter 20.

[37 : 56] So as your teacher here on Christianity clarified, I very seldom inject anything of a personal nature because what is needed to be taught are the truths that clarify Christianity.

But because the personal illustration from my own life so vividly demonstrates the issue of human volition and how each of us is accountable to God for our use of it, it is a fitting example of how and how not we are to use that volition.

Have you ever heard of passing the buck? Sure you have. Well, have you ever heard of passing the buck to God? You will have if you hear the next segment right here on Christianity Clarified.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 11, God's Will and Human Volition, Part 2. It was December 1956.

There we were, madly in love, though we had met only four months previously. Barbara was 19 and worked as a secretary in the state capital of Washington in Olympia.

[39 : 10] I was barely 21 years old from Springfield, Ohio, serving in the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Louis, Washington, just a few miles from Olympia.

It was indeed a whirlwind romance that began when we met while I was on a weekend pass. I was as much a pagan as anyone could be.

I could have been described as one who didn't even have a clue that I didn't have a clue. Barbara was just the opposite. She was a Christian, I mean a real Christian.

And as clueless as I was, I thought I was probably a Christian too, kind of. After all, my best buddy who was with me on that unforgettable weekend when Barbara and I met, it was Dave.

Dave was Jewish, and I didn't know what Jewish meant, but I was pretty sure I wasn't Jewish. And some of my buddies in the barracks were Catholics. Wasn't real sure what they were about either, but I wasn't a Catholic.

[40 : 18] And then I remembered my dog tags. When I enlisted, the Army had stamped a P on my dog tags and told me that it stood for Protestant.

I guess that's what I was. And I was also told that, well, yeah, Protestants are Christians. Okay. Little did I know that Barbara really was a Christian, and she knew enough about Christianity to know I wasn't one.

And like a lot of buddies in the barracks, I could curse up a blue streak for 15 minutes without repeating myself. But Barbara, well, I recall her giving me some religious things to read.

I think she called them tracts. But it's really hard to read anything when you have stars in your eyes. Still, when Cupid launches one of his arrows that goes straight to the heart of both of us, biblical prohibitions are pretty hard-pressed to compete.

So Barbara began rationalizing that because we were truly in love, we should and could get married. And even though she was a real Christian and I was a imaginary Christian, she was the only one of us that truly knew the situation about her being a believer and her intentions about marrying an unbeliever.

[41 : 45] She also knew she had no business marrying me, and the Bible, I later learned, made that quite clear. So Barbara prayed. And I had no idea that she had prayed thusly, but later she told me she had, that God, if you don't want me to marry Marv, you surely have the power to prevent it.

And if you don't, that will convince me it was okay. After all, I will pray for him, and he can always come to Christ after we were married. That's called passing the buck.

But passing it to whom? Barbara was passing the buck to God. Can we exercise our volition by just passing the buck to God? Well, no, really, we can't.

But that didn't keep Barbara from trying. So there is a stalemate at the altar. You're invited to tune in the next time for the happy ending, and I do mean happy.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 12, God's Will and Human Volition, Part 3. There we were, sitting across the desk from Pastor Sweetland, asking him if he would do us the honors of joining us in marriage.

[43 : 00] It was December 8, 1956. I had obtained permission from my company commander at Fort Lewis to get married, and was granted a two-weeks leave. Barbara's mother had refused to give her blessing for the marriage, but Barbara and I were both of legal age, even though barely so, in the state of Washington, so she really could not prevent it.

I told her I loved her daughter very much, and Barbara expressed her love for me as well, but mother was not budging. When I asked her what the problem was, all she could tell me was, well, it's a spiritual problem.

Oh, I said, well, that's no problem. I'd be glad to join your church. And then she said, well, no, church has nothing to do with it. And that really confused me.

And then she said, Pastor Sweetland, with whom we had an appointment to talk to about marrying us, would explain it. So off we went about 30 miles away to a little town called Ellensburg, Washington.

And after exchanging the pleasantries of our making acquaintance, we asked if he would do us the honors of marrying us that same evening. He asked Barbara if she were a Christian and she said, yes, she was.

[44 : 19] Then he turned to me and said, and Marvin, how about you? Are you a Christian? I thought as quickly as I could to my dog tags with that letter P stamped on them that stood for Protestant, and I knew Protestants were Christians, so I said, well, yeah, I guess so.

He paused and then said, well, no, I don't think so. Now, little did I know that Barbara's mother had filled Pastor Sweetland in on the whole situation.

So here he was telling me that I wasn't a Christian and knew pretty well on good authority that it was true. And then he added that he was unable to marry me because that would be an unequal yoke.

A what? An unequal yoke? I never heard of such a thing in my whole life. In fact, I was somewhat offended because he didn't know me from Adam, and here he is telling me that he did not think me to be a Christian.

And then he remarked, well, there is a justice of the peace around the corner, and he was quite sure that he would marry us if we had our license, but he wouldn't recommend it.

[45 : 29] And Barbara and I looked at each other and actually was about ready to leave when the pastor said, Marvin, would you like to know what it really means to be a Christian and how you can become one?

I remember thinking, well, of course, who wouldn't want to know that? Does this pastor know how to make somebody a Christian? I'd always thought there probably wasn't anyone who really knew God or how to connect with him.

But one thing I did learn in the army was that there were chaplains, some of them were Protestants, like what the P stood for on my dog tags, and some of them were Catholics, and some of them were Jewish.

And my best friend, Dave, who was with me when I met Barbara, he was Jewish. They were all religions, I guess. Now, here is a pastor telling me that I could actually become a Christian, so I honestly said, well, yes, I would like to know that.

Can you do that? And he opened his Bible and read some verses, and the rest is history. But I do want to tell it again, and I will if you'd like to listen.

[46 : 41] It's upcoming. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 13, God's Will and Human Volition, Part 4.

Pastor Sweetland had just informed Barbara and me that he was unable to marry us because even though I thought I was a Christian, and my army dog tag said I was a Protestant with that P stamped on it, and everybody knew that Protestants were Christians, yet that didn't seem to convince Pastor Sweetland.

When he then asked if I would really like to know what it meant to become a Christian, my immediate thought was, well, of course. Who wouldn't want to know that? Do you know that? I mean, really knowing God and all that stuff, I wondered, can this guy somehow make me a Christian? He opened his Bible and began reading and explaining things to me, and I was thinking to myself, hey, this really is stuff about God.

And all at once, things started making a lot of sense to me, just like a light came on. I thought, so this is really all about Jesus.

[47 : 58] Sure, I knew about Christmas and even had a part in a Christmas program in grade school, but what I heard from the pastor was really different. Barbara had even read some things to me as she found them in my Army New Testament and tried to explain it to me, but I had stars in my eyes.

I was fully focused on this beautiful girl who's reading stuff to me, but my mind wasn't on what she was reading. It was on the one reading it. But now, Pastor Sweetland had my undivided attention for an entirely different reason.

I was totally engrossed with what he was saying. He was telling me something I had always wondered about, whether anyone could somehow really connect with God, and this was what he was actually talking about.

And then he asked if I wanted to do something about what he told me. I said, well, yes, but I didn't know what that would be or how to do it.

He said, if I wanted to, we could kneel down right then and there, and I could tell God whatever I wanted, and then he would pray also. Well, I was really quite self-conscious because I'd never done anything like that in my life, and I certainly never prayed out loud.

[49 : 18] In fact, I'd never prayed before at all, except as a kid when my mom had told me a little prayer about, now I lay me down to sleep. But, well, forgetting that, I mumble stumbled through an awkward but very serious and sincere prayer.

And then Pastor Sweetland prayed, and we both stood up, and not knowing what else to say, I asked him, well, is that it? He then asked me, Marvin, did you really mean what you said in your prayer?

I said, well, yes, sure. And then he shook my hand and said, welcome to the family of God. And my response was, okay, that's good.

And then he said, come back at seven o'clock and I will marry you. I was elated. But little did I know, or even suspect, that all was not good with Barbara, who was witnessing all of this, nor her mother at home.

What they both would be dealing with never entered my mind. In fact, I never even knew about it until later. Amazing, if you care to hear it, it's up next. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 14, God's Will and Human Volition, Part 5.

[50 : 43] Pastor Sweetland had just told us to come back at seven o'clock and he would marry us. So we thanked him and left the church going back to the little town of Roslyn where Barbara grew up and where her mother was waiting.

She had said that she was unable to explain why she didn't want Barbara to marry me. And I thought that was so weird, but after the pastor led me to Christ, even I began to see her reasoning. Without realizing it, having just received Christ, little did I know that I had also received some kind of a new understanding. We arrived back at the house and Barbara told her mother that I had just become a Christian.

And her response was, without even so much as a smile, said, That's nice. That's nice. That's nice. Here I had just made a life-changing decision that had already begun to impact my thinking and attitude as I'd mulled over what I did and her response was, that's nice.

[51 : 48] I was sure she would be as elated as I because I thought that would answer her objection to our marriage. But Mama was apparently not at all convinced.

Well, I was, even though I didn't understand it at the time. Yet I knew, I mean, I knew something had happened to me on the inside that I was completely unable to explain it. And then when the pastor said, Then God has saved you. Welcome to the family of God. And all I could muster was, That's good. I guess that's about as convincing as her mother's. That's nice. But at any rate, when I made that decision and did receive Christ, I never had a feeling of elation or sensation of being cleansed or forgiven. I never sensed a great weight or burden having been lifted. I never felt or thought, Now the Spirit of God is living in me. In fact, I didn't even know there was a Spirit of God. [52 : 49] But I did know something I could not explain had really taken place on the inside of me. That I could sense. And I must confess, I did wonder, Was this new saved life I was now supposed to have, was it real?

Or would I sense this tomorrow? Or was it just some emotional feeling that I couldn't explain that will pass and tomorrow I will return to feeling and thinking the way I always have before? What did happen, really? I didn't know. But I knew it was not a mere feeling or emotion. Still, I did sense something different somehow. And I had an actual kind of conviction or assurance about it. And where did that come from? All I did was believe those Bible verses the pastor explained to me. And I really did believe them. There was no doubt about that. But how could that make all this difference about how I was now thinking and I was elated and confused at the same time? [54 : 09] I guess I was also thinking, what a way to start a marriage. Well, it really was. And it was a different way to start a marriage and it was absolutely wonderful.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 15, God's Will and Human Volition, Part 6. So there we were, back at the church at 7 p.m., like the pastor said. Barbara's mother and father were there also, her younger sister, and a couple of family friends that stood up with us as witnesses when we exchanged our vows. It was over in just a few minutes. After a few parting hugs, Barbara and I left the church and headed for what we thought would be our honeymoon in nearby Canada. But after on the road for only a couple of hours, we ran into very heavy snow. In fact, it was so thick, the windshield wipers could not clear it enough to drive safely. So when we came to a little town called Yakima, we decided we better stop there for the night because the snow wasn't letting up and it was getting late.

[55 : 27] We checked in at the City Center Motel and I carried in our luggage. And then I told Barbara, first thing I need to do was call home.

I'd promised my family back in Ohio that we would call them and tell them how the wedding went. It was such a hurried up thing that we decided to do. Even though Mom and Dad would have liked to have been there, Ohio to Washington State on such little notice was really out of the question. So I put through the call and my mother answered and after the hellos, how are you and all of that good stuff, I told her, Mom, you will never guess what happened to me today. She replied, well, I think I know. You did get married today, didn't you? I said, well, yes, we did, Mom.

But Mom, I got saved today also. I became a Christian right before the wedding. It was a long pause. I guess she really didn't know what to say about that or what to make of it. [56 : 32] And all she could do was say, well, well, we are very happy for you and we're looking forward to meeting Barbara when you're able to get to Ohio.

And that wedding day was December 8, 1956. I still had three months to go on my enlistment in the Army. Barbara continued her secretarial job in Olympia and I joyfully moved out of the Army barracks at Fort Lewis, moved in with her in her small apartment in Olympia. I began commuting daily to my job of company clerk in my unit on the base while she continued with her job there at the State Capitol Building. Then I told Barbara, now there are two things I really wanted to do as soon as possible. And the first was to buy a Bible, a whole Bible, because all I had was that little New Testament I was given when I enlisted in the Army. We walked downtown and came to a Christian bookstore and we had just opened a joint checking account at a local bank. So while we were there, we looked over their Bibles and they had a great selection and the one that caught my eye had a zippered cover.

So as newlyweds, the very first check we wrote from our newly opened joint account was to pay for that Bible. It remains one of my well-used greatest treasures to this day, even though it's been retired and replaced when the pages began falling out.

[58 : 05] But let's go back now for a moment to 1956 and one more really significant thing I never knew about until months after our wedding. And I still view the whole incident with grateful amazement.

In fact, I'm eager to relate it to you. I think you'll find it amusing as well. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 16.

God's Will and Human Volition, Part 7. It wasn't until months after we were married, early in 1957, as I recall, that Barbara related to me how upset she was right after we had exchanged our vows at our brief ceremony.

What? You were upset? I thought you were as happy as I was in getting married. You were, weren't you? She went on to say, well, no, not really.

In fact, I was a nervous wreck. What? I was puzzled. I can understand a girl being very nervous just before the wedding, but afterwards?

[59 : 20] She went on telling me, she said, actually, all the way from the church to the motel, she was an emotional basket case. At the same time, I was elated, but ignorant of how my new bride actually felt.

She continued to explain, reminding me that none of her family wanted her to marry me because they didn't think I had actually become a Christian at all. She said her family was convinced I really hadn't made a genuine decision, but had simply gone through the motions and made a profession of faith just to get Pastor Sweetland to marry us.

Actually, that never even for a moment had crossed my mind. Yet, they had believed that and had tried to talk Barbara into not going through with the ceremony.

She did, she said, have to seriously consider that their doubts might have been correct. She wavered back and forth over it in her mind.

Because if they were right and she was wrong, then she had just joined herself in marriage to a class A lying manipulator who would say or do whatever was necessary in order to get what he wanted.

[60 : 39] She added, that was the reason for all my anxiety and nervousness. And all the while we were on our way to the motel, I was desperately pleading with God to give me some sign or reason to believe you really meant what you said when you and Pastor Sweetland prayed earlier this afternoon.

So when we checked in at the motel and you placed that long distance call back to Ohio and you told your mom you had been saved right before we were married, she said, I cannot begin to tell you the enormous weight taken off my mind.

I was sure, I was sure I knew you well enough to know that if you had not been for real in your profession of faith, you would not even have mentioned it to your mother.

I cannot explain the peace and gratitude to God that flooded the heart and mind of this new bride on that wedding night. Well, as I assured her then, I had never been more sincere or genuine or intentional about anything in my life than I was that day when Pastor Sweetland explained the gospel to me and I was saved.

And now, dear friends, almost 70 years removed from that day in Washington, that commitment is getting greatly intensified far more than it was in 1956.

[62 : 19] Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 17, Back to Passing the Buck, Part 1. Earlier on Track 11 of this 74th CD, you were given an example of how we can all be guilty of passing the buck, as we call it.

It's just a slang expression we use when someone doesn't want to take responsibility for their own actions or the questionable decisions they're planning to make. So, passing the buck is merely another name for blame-shifting.

And behind it is the idea of being able to blame someone else if that course of action we decided on doesn't turn out. Well, it's not my fault. Actually, it's those other guys.

They made me do it. You see, blame-shifting is as old as the hills. Actually, it's even older than the hills. Blame-shifting goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 3 and records the first incident of blame-shifting that was the only excuse our first parents could manage.

And it hasn't been improved upon since. Blame-shifting is a fine art that we develop at a very early age in an effort to avoid responsibility or other negative consequences.

[63 : 34] So, join with me if you will. Let's use our imagination a little bit at the make-believe conversation that could very well have taken place between God and Adam and Eve.

When God asks Adam, Have you eaten of the forbidden fruit that I told you not to eat of? Adam replies, Well, it's the woman that you gave me.

She gave me of the fruit and I ate. Don't blame me. It's not my fault. Well, that's bad enough to blame a fellow human being for all our actions.

But Adam went even further, implying that It was the woman you gave me. If you had not given her to me, she would not have given me the fruit and I would not have eaten of it.

Therefore, God, you are really the responsible one here. So, it's not my fault. Okay. Mother Eve, You are also a guilty party for giving that to Adam.

[64 : 34] What do you have to say for yourself, Eve? Eve replies, I'm not to blame. It's not my fault. It was the serpent who deceived me and it is all his fault.

Ha ha, yes. Now, if we extend our facetiousness a bit further, the serpent, who is none other than Satan in disguise, didn't have a leg to stand on.

Okay, okay. It was corny. But you do get the point, don't you? About how good we all are in the skill of blame shifting or passing the buck, as it's called. And my dear wife, Barbara, was no different when she tried to pass the buck to God.

It's a common malady and I'm sure I have been more guilty of doing it than my sweet wife ever was. Still, this is how she tried to pass the buck. And how she did it was this way.

She knew I was not a believer and she also knew, of course, that she was. And she knew the biblical prohibition regarding a believer marrying an unbeliever.

[65 : 39] In 2 Corinthians 6, we read, So, there it was, clear as could be.

A loophole. That's what's needed. That'll work. Yep. And here's how it's coming up next. Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 18.

Back to Passing the Buck, Part 2. Barbara and Marvin were madly in love back there in 1956, living in Olympia, Washington.

Neither had any question but that they were definitely intended for each other. But, there was a hitch to their getting hitched.

Barbara was a devout Christian and Marvin didn't even know what that meant. But Barbara did. Essentially, it meant that these two young lovers were coming from two different worlds.

[67 : 00] Hers, from a Christian worldview with biblical standards and values. Marvin's, from the opposite. Marv believed there was a God.

Even believed the Bible was true. But as regards anything about knowing or living by any of its standards, Marvin was as dumb as a box of rocks.

But Barbara wasn't. She was well aware of biblical truths and standards. And she was also well aware she had no business marrying Marvin, just like 2 Corinthians 6 stated.

So, here was her neat little game plan of passing the buck to God. She prayed thusly, Now, God, if you don't want me and Marv to marry, you have the power to block our plans to do so.

I really want to do your will, so I expect you to intervene however you choose to prevent this marriage from happening. And as you know, it's scheduled for this coming weekend.

[68 : 11] So, God, it's all up to you if you don't want me to do this and if you do not prevent it, then I will believe you have made an exception in my case and Marv and I will marry tomorrow.

Now, isn't that just neat and sweet? Here's a delightful, star-struck little teenage girl passing the buck of responsibility to God.

And if God does not respond by doing any one of a thousand things that he can do to prevent this, then it's his responsibility more than hers. So, what's wrong with this picture?

Everything, as Barbara herself would admit later. She needn't have asked God to make a special case of that by not preventing it. He would, in essence, be saying, well, I won't step in and stop this by preventing it, so I will allow it, even though I have already forbidden it in the scriptures.

Folks, we are all prone to this kind of nonsense. It's called rationalizing, buck-passing, blame-shifting.

[69 : 28] As humans, as Adam and Eve, it's part of our DNA. She needn't have prayed and asked God at all, because he had already given his answer 2,000 years earlier, and it was, Barbara, no,

that's an unequal yoke, and I forbid it.

And it's very important, by the way, to know why and where God is coming from in all this, and it's up next. As I've said, very important stuff.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 74, Track 20, Rationalizing is Easy to Do, Part 1.

Like the disappointed child, we don't even have a clue regarding what we are being protected from, but God does, and in His wisdom, He put ample protective prohibitions in place before we ever came along.

So what's the moral of this story? Simply put, it is this. God has clearly and frequently revealed His will and standards throughout the Scriptures.

[70 : 44] One of the most frequent reveals the undeniable difference between those who are believers and those who are not. Each does indeed represent a different world from the other.

The unequally yoked or planning to be such does not mean they do not truly love each other. I know Barbara and I did, but romance and emotional attachment aside does not negate the unequal yoke principle that is clearly forbidden by God.

In our case, it was the commitment of Pastor Sweetland to that biblical principle that saved the day, saved the potential unwise marriage, and truly honored the Lord.

How easy it would have been for him to rationalize the situation, not wanting to disappoint those love-struck young people, and simply allow his own sympathy and emotion to rule the day.

But God be praised he refused to do that. You may be sure there are many who would have caused by yielding to the pressure of the situation.

[72 : 00] How easily he could have rationalized by saying, well, I'll just go ahead and marry these kids. I don't want them to think I'm an old meanie. Besides, I'll make it a point to make Marvin's need for trusting in Christ a serious matter of prayer before God.

And there's no reason why Barbara cannot be the adequate influence that Marvin needs so as to win him to Christ. And, in fact, it would be even more wonderful for the wife to win her husband to the Lord than merely for any preacher.

Now, we don't know that Pastor Sweetland ever had those thoughts. Probably, probably he did not. But the potential for it was there, you may be sure. The point is made because, even though the pastor did not do so, rationalizing is always a temptation when one is confronted with a difficult decision.

So, here is a word of warning to all. Please, please be advised. The easiest thing in the world is to rationalize ourselves right into a situation that presents itself with the need for a decision, a direction, and we are all prone to do this, and no matter what the Bible says, oh, God will understand how I just could not resist.

[73 : 33] After all, He will forgive, won't He? He will understand why I did that, won't He? And so, even though, yes, I knew it was wrong, but I'm only human, and God could have stepped in if it meant that much to Him, and He didn't.

So, what about the forgiveness factor when we knowingly acted contrary to God's will? And that's just ahead. Christianity Clarified, volume 74, track 20, Rationalizing is Easy to Do, part 2.

The previous session illustrated the inborn tendency we all have that can enable us to rationalize our decisions and behavior for just about anything we want to do.

And, it's scary to realize this, but we may be sure there are very few, if any, adults who remember a decision or course of action they rationalize themselves into, fully persuaded that God would understand how you just weren't able to resist the temptation and you acted contrary to what you knew to be God's will.

Just couldn't help it. How many of us must admit, been there, done that? And, how many have to add, and you know what?

[75 : 02] It still hurts. I still have my regrets. Man, would I love to have opportunity to relive that. You know, a do-over.

And I sure would have done it differently or not have done it at all. But even though I did it and have my regrets to this very day, can't God still forgive me?

Well, of course. And not only will He forgive you, He wants to forgive you even more than you want it. Why? Because that was a real part of the reason Jesus died for you, to make that needed forgiveness available.

And in forgiving you fully, freely, and forever, there is also something God does not do. He does not eliminate the consequences that resulted from your violation.

You will continue to live with them as an embedded part of your personal history. Does that somehow cancel or negate God's forgiveness for what you did?

[76 : 11] No. Not at all. His forgiveness remains intact. And it is just as real as was the thing you did that needed His forgiveness.

Forgiveness, based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, is just as real as your need of it. And the fact that it doesn't erase the thing you did that caused the need for forgiveness is nothing more than God respecting reality.

He doesn't erase the deed nor the consequences thereof, but the forgiveness for it is just as real as the remembrance.

And that forgiveness you should cherish as much as you regret the deed that required the forgiveness and never lose sight of the singular fact all forgiveness for all humanity that appropriates it by faith is due solely, exclusively, entirely to what Jesus Christ accomplished on that cross.

He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

[77 : 39] Absolutely amazing. Free, full, forgiveness forever, even though consequences are tagging along.