

An Introduction to Christianity

It all began at some undisclosed point in eternity past, when a desire apparently arose in the heart of God for a created being that would, in the midst of chaos and suffering, against all odds, chose to gain access to the very heart of God. Love is best satisfied when the object of ones love is strong enough to withstand whatever challenges are brought to bear against it.

What would it take to create such a being? At what cost to them and to him would it take? I don't know what was pondered, or what discussions may have taken place, but the evidence is presented in the Holy Bible of what was the outcome of it. The story of the creation of heaven and earth is given as a matter of fact. God himself exists without any explanation concerning how, when or where. We are left to ponder if we will, or to believe on the basis of the evidence presented.

I was once confronted with the question of the existence of God and simply stated that I believe in God because I am here. The question of why is there anything is an imponderable question for which there is no apparent answer; however, we can look to the earth itself, or to the heavens that are visible, or to the existence of what is not discernable without the aid of scientific instruments, and the answer seems to be, though I can't explain it, it is without question true.

The Bible tells the story of the creation of mankind, the fall into sin, and ultimately the story of redemptive love. In this presentation we will discuss many related subjects with the hope that the result will be a more accurate and complete understanding than we previously had.

It is my conviction that if we don't adequately understand the question, we will not appreciate the answer. It is for this reason I will set out, with the aid of the biblical story, to define the questions and then look at what God has said to provide the answers. May the Lord open our understanding so that in the end we will have and unshakeable love and faith.

Chapter One

What happened to mankind anyway?

Violence, sexual assaults, burglaries, lies, and every other form of attacks on the health, happiness, and wellbeing of humans on earth are so commonplace that we have to have laws and law enforcement agencies that are skilled in detection and interrogations, along with the whole gauntlet of forensic science and a legal system that will punish evil doers.

After thousands of years of human history the problem of sin is no better now than it was right after the serpent encountered Eve in the Garden of Eden. We don't know all the immediate effects of the fall, such things as arguments, irritability, selfishness or any other emotional disorders that might have emerged. What we do know is that two brothers had a disagreement about what ought to be offered to God in sacrifice and as a result of God honoring the sacrifice of the lamb of Abel rather than the vegetables of Cain; Cain killed his brother Abel, the first murder.

What is it that caused such a change in the nature of human beings? For the answer we will consider the fall and what God said would happen. First we will look at the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Why was it given that name, you may ask? Why not an apple tree; as some have nicknamed it? At a glance from my point of observation, I notice that we are introduced to the concept of positive and negative.

When we think of positives and negatives we think of opposites such as love and hate, hot and cold, light and darkness or electrical charge and ground. In each of these cases of positives and negatives we note that the positive is energy, while the negative is the absence of the energy. Life and death also falls into this category of thought. Likewise good and evil is also positive and negative and if what we have observed in other instances of energy and absence of energy would it also follow that good is a tangible like energy, while evil is the absence of good? I believe that is exactly what we are to take from this story of the fall. I also believe that this good of which I speak comes exclusively from God.

Up to this time Adam and Eve were receiving the energy of life, or the life sustaining nutrients of life, from the fruit of the tree of life. As long as they had access to the tree of life they would live indefinitely. If the nutrients that sustained life could be derived from a tree, why wouldn't what produces good also come from the fruit of a tree? God could have made it so, but instead he made a tree that would give them some good and some evil. In other words, there wouldn't be enough good to fully sustain them psychologically, mentally and spiritually, therefore a void would also be present with them.

This was one more instance where we see that a positive is real but the absence of it has a name as well. The reason this condition would be possible in the first place is that eating fruit from this tree involved disobedience to the only command that God had given them.

Disobedience bears consequence and in this case loses of life or the energy of life would follow. The question arises, was the energy of life spiritual or physical? Perhaps both, is the logical answer. Is life a tangible energy such as heat or is it a spiritual energy with its origin from a little understood source I call God.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve were supplied with good because all was good. There was no mention of death, pain or lack. Adam and Eve were in fellowship with God and it is conceivable that energy was being radiated on a spiritual plain that gave them completeness in every way. Once that fellowship was altered there were lacks in them that only a restored relationship with God could restore.

When we are speaking of these sorts of subjects we must realize that what is true in the natural physical is also a teaching aid to help us understand spiritual matters. There are energies that come from natural sources, such as light comes from the sun, or some other artificial source, but there is also spiritual light that enables man to comprehend spiritual truth. God is the only true source of spiritual light and life.

God knew that if Adam and Eve would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that some very basic changes would take place. For Adam and Eve to experience evil, the natural energy of good would have to be greatly diminished.

When the Lord was instructing me on this subject he took my mind to what happens in the case of life. I had read a definition of life in which it was stated that life is a constant condition of readiness to react. This explanation was totally inadequate because the Bible teaches that there is a spirit of life, I concluded that life is thus an energy that comes from God. Where life is present in its perfect form, there is always beauty. When some condition or enemy attacks or altars the life, beauty fades. When life is no longer present, beauty gives way to decay.

We cannot consider this subject without speaking about the heart of God in this matter. There is no doubt in my mind that God cares very deeply about the fate that man is experiencing. It was, I believe, the deep need to have objects of love that drove God to this painful decision. No one knows better the extent of suffering that sinful living inflicts upon the human race than God. If he didn't care, would he have come here in human form and die on the cross to redeem us from the fate that our choices deserve?

What little good is in man in the natural sense, like natural life, must be protected and nurtured or the void will manifest in decay and decadence. The human condition without a relationship with God leaves one to only experience what natural life and natural good can supply. When either is allowed to go unattended, sin in all its ugliness will soon manifest. What are we to do, what answer is given? Live in relationship with God! It was what Adam and Eve did before the fall; it is what we do now that we have received Christ.

Chapter Two

Holiness, Love and Justice

We have all heard the complaints by skeptics that if God is a God of love, why are there wars, famines, diseases and on and on goes the list of what they conclude are contradictions to that premise. Is it a valid argument? A picture comes to mind of a child standing outside a house in the midst of a storm, wet, cold, shivering and crying and in the door a father stands inviting the child to come on in where it is dry and warm and all provisions have been made for its comfort and sustenance. All the child has to do is come in, but instead it has made the choice to remain outside but wants all the benefits of living inside. That is just how simple it is. Humanity has chosen to live outside the provisions of God but wants to blame God for the results of their decision.

I was driving from California toward Reno Nevada one evening where I was going to conduct a Bible study. It was one of those evenings when the sun was low in the clear sky and Reno looked very beautiful from my vantage point. I thought, how beautiful, but then the thoughts of all the activities that go on in the buildings and streets of the city filled my mind. I knew about the people who would come to Reno for a quick marriage or divorce. I knew of the people who came to Reno hoping to make it big in the gambling establishments. I had been told about the people who had lost everything and how badly they were treated when they would ask for enough money to get home. As I was thinking about this a question came into my mind that I believe was from the Lord. "Do you know what the most evil thing a person can do is?" Almost instantly I was given the answer, "It is rejection of God's love gift to the world, Jesus Christ and what he suffered when he paid the penalty for all the sins a human being can commit." The thought was revolutionary to me, I thought I knew what evil was but when the impact of what was spoken fully developed, I understood why God would say such a thing.

The subject at hand has to do with the whole question of justice. From God's point of view holiness is a very practical and comprehensive concept, not a mystical super religious attitude or a religious weirdness that make people freaky to behold. I have defined righteousness as rightness and holiness as wholeness. Does that seem like an over simplification? Perhaps it is. The problem we have as people is that when God tells us to be something like "be perfect" we don't even know what perfect is. How can any person ever be acceptable to a perfect God, totally righteous and totally holy? No matter how hard we try, we fall short partly because what we want seems more important to us than what we think God would want of us.

I have stated that "If we don't understand the question, we will not appreciate the answer."

Have you ever seen an abandoned building that had become an eyesore to the community? Then one day some trucks and tractors arrive and proceed to demolish and crush everything on the lot. After reducing it to rubble they load it on trucks and haul it away leaving a clean bare lot that is now ready for something to be built that is remarkably beautiful!

Fact is, there is nothing about the world of sin that can be salvaged. What we don't seem to understand is that before coming to Christ and receiving the gift of Life Eternal, that wonderful gift of transforming power, everything about us was the result of the death within. There was the dry rot of neglect of spiritual things, cockroaches that fed on the filth of unclean and sinful thoughts and actions, termites that came from allowing dirt to build around the building of our

lives giving ready access to them to come on in and eat the structure of a misspent life. Where there is no life, death takes its toll. Where there is no spiritual life, sin takes its toll!

One day a friend said to me, that the difference between the man who was a sinner and the man who was a Pharisee in the story of two men in the temple, that Jesus told, was that though they were both sinners, one knew he was and the other was but didn't know it. How profound! This is the result when we don't understand the nature of the problem. The reason people sin is there is death inside.

Even when they smile and laugh it is because the "death life" is being fed and satisfied in some way. Oh, it's true that people without the spirit of eternal life are capable of good but it takes vigilance to nurture it. Psychology is a study of how to nurture and develop the remnant of good that remains from the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Often we see people trying to accommodate the sin nature by going on sin binges that are seemingly harmless thinking that they are better for it, when truth is they have only hastened and fed the destructive power of the death within.

One day, all at once, I realized that even if a person lived a life that was totally within the boundaries of what was perceived as good and righteous living, that it still was not acceptable with God! "There is none righteous, no not one." (See Romans 3: 9-18, Gal. 3:22) The bible declares! There are two realms, one lower fallen and void of eternal life, and one that is from a different realm where there is life, love, joy and peace. The justice of God has more to do with what a behavior springs from than the behavior itself. If we live in the Spirit we will not fulfill the lustful desires of the flesh.

The story in Luke 18:9-14 of the two men, of whom I have already spoken, who went to the temple to pray, one a sinner the other a Pharisee, tells us that the Pharisee was a conscientious religious man who did everything as right as he knew how and if what he said about the other man was true, he was really bad. Yet Jesus said the sinner left justified and the righteous man didn't gain justification. Jesus went on to explain that it was an issue of self exaltation which we know is pride. Pride is the core issue of the fall. The serpent's temptation was a manifestation of pride (the desire to be something we are not) that leads to rebellion. Self exaltation stands on pride but humility recoils at self exaltation.

The justice of God stands on the premise that rejection of the gift of God is the root cause of ALL sinful manifestations. The question will be, were you living and acting for Spirit, or for flesh. There is a natural realm where the Holy Spirit is the engine that drives all activities, conversations, thoughts and motives. When the Spirit is the power that directs us we are pleasing to God. We read that we are not to live after the flesh to fulfill its lusts but rather to live in the Spirit. Come on in, is the invitation. Why stay where your life is being ripped apart and the desires that you fulfill are back again because sin never fully satisfies?

Chapter Three

Love

Love, Light and Life, I call the three big Ls that are the central theme of the writings of the Apostle John. They are three spiritual energies that come from God. They are not the same, but are so interrelated that one cannot work without the others! Light is what reveals the essence of truth, and truth is vital to love, and without life, love and truth are tainted and distorted.

Sometimes we Christians speak of revelation power. Revelation power and spiritual light are one and the same. Revelation power is an attribute of the Holy Spirit as his mission is to reveal and lead us into all truth.

There are several different subjects regarding love that are of great interest to us. At the head of the list for many people is romantic love, but long before romantic love immerses on the scene of our life we are involved with the love that comes from families and friends. There is no love stronger in normal life experience than the love of a mother. How sad it is when because of tragedy, sickness or death a child is deprived of the love of a mother. Nothing is, however, more devastating than when it is simply sin in the life of a mother that is the cause of that deprivation. Such things as drug addiction, alcoholism, immorality and simple selfishness sometimes are the cause of the lack of a mother's love being bestowed upon a child.

Though not immediately evident, the love of God is the most vitally important love there is to any human being. The love of God is capable of neutralizing many evil emotions that have their origin in the sin nature.

Natural love is very powerful and even wonderful. The love of family, the love of community, and not to be diminished is the love of individuals that are bound together in clubs, churches, synagogues, and military units. People who are fighting common enemies whether diseases or armies and sometimes disasters that strike find a bound of love they would never experience under normal circumstances.

Transcending all this is the love of God for lost souls. It is a love that truly amazes anyone who is in a position to see it in action. When even a spark of desire for God is detected in a human heart great effort goes into salvaging and saving that soul.

(John 3:16-21) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

It is not natural light that evil men fear; it is the light of an all knowing God. In this world good and evil are in constant struggle. Yet, it is God who pursues us because he loves us. When we run from God, he is right there trying to get our attention, wanting to draw us into the fold of his love.

(Luke 15:3-7) Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

To begin to express the love that God has for lost sinners is beyond us, how can we mortals understand such a God? How can we understand a love that would cause God to take the form of man and subject himself to the misery of life on this plain of existence? Humans are so accustomed to the struggles of this world that we seldom stop and ponder why it is that in this world man will struggle and work and save and build and then in a few moments something awful will happen and all that a person has worked so hard to build up is swept away. In such a moment the tempter is there to tell us, blame God for this calamity, or perhaps he will say to us that it is all our fault. Truth is it is neither our fault nor God's; it is a demonstration of the futility of human effort in a world that is destined to destruction. All that is of this world will pass away, but what is done on a spiritual plain is what has lasting value.

Jesus didn't come to accumulate the wealth of the world. He didn't come to change the political landscape, or to build great buildings. What Jesus came to do was to save lost sinners and to remind us that nothing in this world that seems important is important after all. Only one thing is important, it is our relationship with God. We have a destiny, an appointment if you will that appointment is with God, he will examine us and evaluate us on the basis of our obedience to his call to us. What did we do in response to the love of God?

In all of our endeavors of life, only one thing really matters very much, it is our love for God and our love for one another.

John 13:24 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Now that we have become Christians, we must learn to think differently. What mattered before is of little value now. When we come to the end of our life on earth, what sort of person will God see? Will he see a person who has walked with him, or will he see a person whose interests were for what pertained to this world? Will God see a person who would go to church to receive a blessing or a person who would go to church to be a blessing? Will he see a person whose interests were focused upon what God wanted or will he see a person who wanted to use God for his own advantage?

It's easy to forget what really matters, because we are all sheep after all. Our natural orientation is selfishness, so what we seek is pleasure and comfort. When we find a comfort zone, we want to stay there, not considering what God wants of us. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15) Jesus also said that "my sheep know my voice." Learning to hear the voice of the Lord is not a natural thing to do. We don't just wake up one morning and know the voice of our shepherd. When we first receive Christ, his voice is not the voice we have always followed. His voice is a gentle voice of love, a strong voice that brings comfort, a stern voice that guides us away from what will harm us and a voice that teaches us to love our Father in heaven. We don't just come to Jesus; we come to be a part of his body the

church, and to be brought into fellowship with our Father. When we come to Jesus we are introduced to our Father and a new relationship has begun. Jesus said,

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. (John14:23-24)

Yes, God wants to make his home with us! Now that's love that is beyond anything we could know or understand. God wants to be a permanent resident in our lives. He wants to be considered in every aspect of what we do, what we think and wants to be consulted in every decision we make. The house I occupy is no longer just my house; it is where God and I live. When I was working on job sites as a builder, I would often ask the Lord, "How are we going to do this?" Very often a sense of direction would be given and sometimes the result astounded me. The love of God is real, it is intimate and it is constant. It is emotional at times and at other times it is practical. It is for all who will come to Jesus, because the love of our Father flows through Jesus and only Jesus.

I was at a meeting of the pastors of our community one day when I was asked to pray. I remember saying in my prayer that God loved the world through the call, "come to Jesus." I don't think I ever really understood that Jesus is the object of God's love and that to get in on the love of the Father we must become a part of Jesus, but that is profoundly what it is. Many of my fellow pastors believed that God's love is for all mankind and some of them even believed that it really doesn't matter what you call him or what you believe about him so long as you are sincere. Well, now I really understand that that is not the way it is, we come to Jesus and he brings us into relationship with his Father. God does love the world and all the people in it, that is why he is calling to this world, "come to Jesus" because unless we do we will die in our sins and that means we will face the judgment without any hope of salvation.

Chapter Four

The Cross

Crosses have become the icon of the Christian faith. Many churches have them everywhere you look. People wear little ones on their lapels, hang them on a chain around their neck, some are earrings and on it goes, but why? What makes the cross that was invented to be the place of excruciatingly painful death something we now use to symbolize hope?

Only the wisdom of God can transform a symbol of punishment and death into the hope of the world. You see, when God took the form of a human being and lived among us without once violating the rules of true righteousness, though the temptation to do so was all around him, he qualified himself to be the sin sacrifice for all the sins of all humanity.

Wicked sinners and religious sinners came together in unity to crucify the Lord of Glory. They thought they mocked him but he who sits in heaven laughed at their folly. (Ps. 2:4) God took their act of hatred and allowed them to place a crown of thorns on him and thus they crowned him King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Symbols are used in the scriptures to teach us spiritual truth. This occasion of the crucifixion of Jesus is no exception. Even the crown of thorns is filled with symbolism.

The thornbush, or bramble as it is called in the King James Version, has roots in the narrative of the Scriptures. The first clear indication of its symbolic meaning occurred in Judges 9:7-15 where the parable of the trees of the forest is given. As the trees of the forest go forth to crown a king to rule over them they first encounter the olive tree. They ask the olive tree to come and be their king but the olive tree declined their invitation because he knew that if he accepted the invitation it would require him to become something other than his intended purpose. They then went to the fig tree and then to the grape vine and each of them responded in like manner. Then they went to the bramble and posed the same question, but the bramble or thornbush responded in quite a different manner. In essence what the thornbush said was that it wasn't going to change to become king, but rather, the trees would have to change.

This is the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a nutshell, how absurd to think that the trees of the forest would bow to the thornbush! Trees are symbols of strength and pride. To bow and put their trust in the shadow of the thornbush would mean that the trees would have to get down really low to put their trust in the shade of the thornbush! To trust in the man who wore the crown of thorns means that we too must truly humble ourselves and divest ourselves of all selfism to make him ruler over us.

Is it reasonable for mankind to give so much authority to Jesus Christ over every aspect of our lives? My question is simply, why not?

The biblical revelation ascribes all power and authority to Jesus who is declared to be the primary actor in all creation whether that which is called heaven or that which is declared to be temporary. The bible reveals the fact that all that is matter, whether stars, galaxies or planets, all are going to come to an end. But that which is heavenly is eternal and unfading.

We who are found to be a part of Jesus as his body, the church, are destined to rule and reign with him forever, eternally. What that will look like when fully manifest is a point to ponder, however, by faith we reach for it.

Again, the rule of positives and negatives comes to mind, with confidence I embrace the knowledge of the love of God, the faithfulness of God and the justice of God. I embrace God who is totally positive; and therefore, he is totally good in every way. Heaven is totally positive; therefore there will never be any form of pain, suffering or want in heaven.

Now, can you begin to comprehend what the alternative would be like where the presence of God is not at? Hell is the place where heaven is not! Hell is the place where the love of God is not at, no not at all! Pain, suffering, no love and no possibility of ever experiencing the mercy of God, ever, that is hell.

It is revealed in the scriptures that the day of salvation is now. This is the time to humble ourselves and reach for God's love gift to all humanity without any qualification or limitation except that we are willing to accept him, love him and put our total trust in him.

Receiving Christ in the Biblical sense could be illustrated as Christ being a bus and the destination of the bus is heaven and furthermore the only way to get to heaven is to be in the bus. As the bus moves so do those who are in the bus, but those on the outside are not. As I ponder this, I realize that believing that the bus is going to heaven is not enough to get there, nor is applauding the bus going to get us to the destination. The only way to get to where the bus is going is to get on board the bus.

So it is that when we say yes to God, we must get on board and go wherever God wants to take us. If we decide the road is too difficult or the journey too long, we can get off, but we won't be on the inside of the bus any longer. So never get off the bus, yet some people do. They get off and then after doing their thing for awhile they come back and after repenting they get back on the bus again. The problem with that is that we never know when the bus will come to the point where it leaves this world never to return again.

In our study of the cross we learn that the cross is where the transaction of our salvation was sealed. It was the place and time when all the sins of mankind were paid for in full from beginning to end, all that has to be done now is say yes to God's wonderful gift and turn over our all to him. What a load of guilt rolls off us. What joy fills our hearts, mind and soul as we come to realize that God is not our enemy anymore, he is our dearest friend and confidant. He is the driver of the bus. He is the one who loves unconditionally those who are found to be in Christ.

Conclusion

Won't you accept this Jesus, it is so simple, yet it is so profound. Earlier in this presentation I spoke of a little child standing outside the door of a house with the door open to it and the child's father asking it to come on in. Friend that may be you right now pondering what has been presented in this dissertation concerning what Christianity is all about. You are hearing the inner voice of God calling to you to enter in where there is love, joy and peace and everything you ever really wanted. All that is asked of us is to lay down all affections, all selfish interests and everything that is of this temporal sphere for what is of eternal value and reaching for true substances that are eternal. Jesus is the door that we must enter. We enter through him by accepting the sacrifice of his death on the cross as being our death to all that is outside the parameters of his love.

Can we give up trusting in what this world has to offer to cast our affections upon a treasure that will never fade away? Sometimes we fear what cannot be controlled, things happen in this realm of pain and suffering and sometimes we say that this or that is not fair and Satan comes to us telling us that God is not fair, that he is to blame for our pain or loss.

Truth be told, it is a loving God that is shouting to all mankind to stop trusting what cannot save us, things that will never satisfy and to look up ask him to help us, confessing that no amount of the genius of man can ever help us with the big issues of life and death. Only a loving God can ever really help us when all else is failing around us. If you have tried it all and nothing has satisfied a deep longing in your heart to be truly loved, ask Jesus to take residence in your heart and be your dearest friend. You will never be disappointed, EVER.