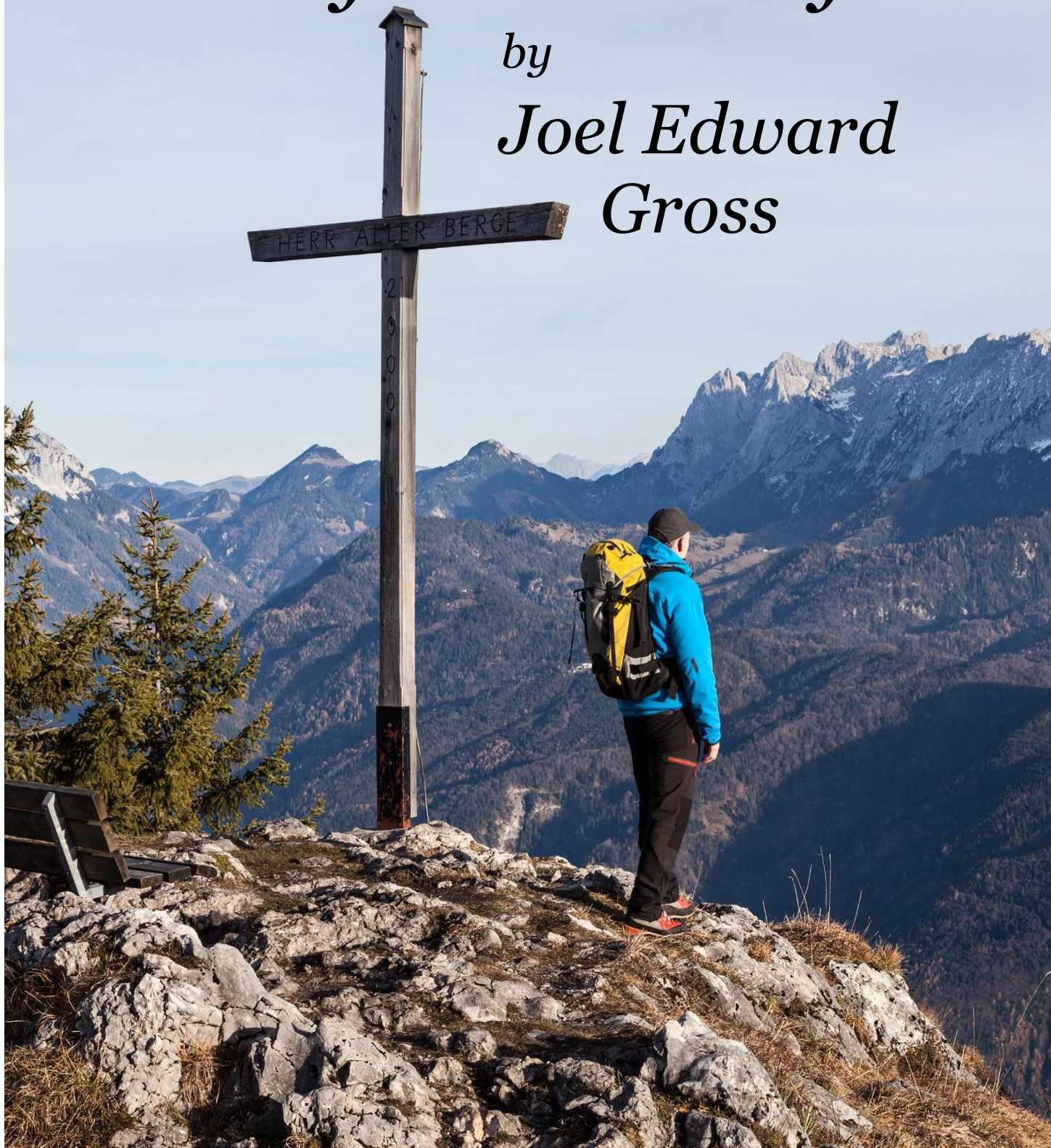


A Sojourner's Life

by

*Joel Edward
Gross*



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By Joel Edward Gross

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Editor's Preface

Who is the author of this book? What's it about? Why did he write it? These are questions we ask whenever we pick up a book, wondering if it's going to be worth reading, if it will be worth our time. They're valid questions to ask for *this* book. I think you'll find it's well worth your time.

The author is my brother, Joel Edward Gross, now gone to be with the Lord. It's not his biography, though he tells a bit of his story. He was a police officer in his younger days. This book, in a sense, is a *summons* – issued by him on behalf of his Savior Jesus Christ.

He wrote it to all those who sense this world isn't their home. They're sojourners, day-trippers, who don't seem to fit anywhere. They've got an itch they can't seem to scratch.

Joel knew that feeling well. He wanted to reach out to his fellow "misfits" to let them know there's a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is *death*. It's a summons to take the path less travelled, but infinitely more rewarding. This is his invitation to take a journey with him, even now.

He wanted to create a blog online, to open up a dialogue with those looking for *the path* – to meet them on it, and maybe talk along the way. But in God's perfect timing, that was not to be. Joel had his own summons to appear in Heavenly Court.

This book contains the preparations he made for his blog. Assembling them is my way, and his wife's way (Maria), of making sure that Joel didn't leave things undone. This summons is his plea to *you*, not to leave things undone.

There is a day and time fixed by God, for your own appearance before His Throne. Will you be ready for that day? What will you say to the charges the Accuser makes against you? Who will represent you at the bar of God's Justice? Your answer will determine your eternal destination, for which this life is merely a preparation.

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea,
A great High Priest whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me. ¹*

If you would know what that strong and perfect plea must be,
if you would make it your own, then read on.

William H. Gross
Pastor – Hope Chapel of Colorado Springs
5/7/2021

¹ *Before the Throne of God Above*, author Charitie Lee Bancroft, 1863.

The Timeless Being

by Joel E. Gross

The Timeless Being climbing to the top
of a little knoll towards a forest green
along a dusty road
strewn with rock and limbs,
he sees a Man
not young, not old
sitting on a rock
gazing at the heavens.

He feels a chill (a northern breeze)
touch his very bones
and the sounds of the forest
seem to disappear
as he approaches this Man of Mystery
to sit and talk of who he is
and where he came from.

This Timeless Being
speaks to him
but very strangely
as his lips do not move
and he hears not with his ears
but a whisper comes from within.

His face is that of someone known
in darkness prior
yet His face radiates
a light unknown
illuminating his very soul;
and this Person touches his heart,
without hands that reach.

He turns to the mountain
sees so much beauty
where once he saw
nothing but a gray towering rock —
an eagle screams
the leaves now rustle
the breeze blows warm
and bright colors appear
where he once saw darkness.

He turns to speak
to this Timeless Wonder
but He is gone
back into the forest
without a sound
of feet now treading
on a path towards home
leaving him to stand alone
wondering if he saw
anything at all.

Welcome!

This Sojourner

I am a semi-ancient senior citizen living in South Florida. I've been blessed to have worked all over the world with some very wonderful, and sometimes very dangerous people. I have done some exciting things (at least to others when I tell them about it), and I've done some very dangerous, and sometimes stupid things. I've faced certain death, not only when I was young and immortal and indestructible, but when I was older and allegedly more experienced. My life has not been that of an arm-chair theorist. I've faced and made some hard choices — some were difficult and wrenching, some were just plain stupid. I am not perfect. Far from it!

I've held almost every type of job imaginable, including military and law enforcement. I've witnessed and been involved with more death and destruction than one should, and dealt with some very dangerous human predators in hostile situations. My life experience has involved identifying and resolving critical risks for people, for governments, and for organizations.

I have been to the Pit, to the very edge of the Abyss — in real life, not in some movie or in a book. During my Sojourning, I heard Christ's gentle sweet call; but it was faint, and I wasn't really listening. It was at that Abyss that I met Jesus Christ. I had given up hope and was in total despair. I thought that there was no possible salvation for a guy like me! His Shepherd's call, what I believed was my *final* call, was by God's Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, and to the Glory of God alone — in Latin, *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Through all of my sordid life God never left or abandoned me. He promises that He will never leave or forsake His people (Hebrews 13:5). The word translated “never” means never, never, *ever* never. Amen! And we can say with absolute confidence that “... *the Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*” (Hebrews 13:6). Again, a hearty “Amen!” resounds to that.

Yes, I am a Christian — the *noun*, not today's buzzword *adjective*! Theologically I am “reformed,” organizationally a Presbyterian. What does all of that mean? I hope to unfold these and other terms later. I am not a Gnostic, so I won't use esoteric words or dance around issues. While I like dancing, I'm not a good verbal dancer. A friend of mine once warned others to be careful when asking me questions, because they'll get an honest answer — but perhaps not the answer they wanted to hear.

A fellow Sojourner, John Newton, said it well: “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but *still* I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.” In the event that his name rings no bells, John Newton wrote “Amazing Grace” and other hymns and works. His life was a story in forgiveness — much the same as yours or mine. If you are a fellow Sojourner who is at that crossroad, read on. If you want to learn more about Christ, I pray that what I write will be of great benefit to you.

I thought at one time that perhaps the very purpose of my life was to serve as a warning to others. I remain pained by that thought. Many of the talents which I believe God has

blessed me with, will never be fulfilled, due to my rebellion. And that brings me to my knees every day.

My testimony is not the Gospel, the “Good News.” The Gospel is not about *me* at all, but about *Jesus Christ!* It proclaims His Person and Work. It explains how one can be saved — by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to God’s Glory alone! It provides guidance along the path to our eternal Home, through whatever storms may come your way.

Hopefully, through this Blog, a reader might better prepare themselves. Each of us brings his or her own unique knowledge, skills, insights, and experience to the journey, and hopefully to fellow Sojourners. While we may each follow different paths to our final destination, all our paths have hazards and dangers.

I have learned much along my path, some of it very painful — to me and to others. But I had a most gracious and loving Guide — in spite of my being a difficult and sometimes unlovable Sojourner.

Here I stand on a path laid out before me, moving forward towards my final destination, which is at home with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and yes, I will face His Judgment, as we *all* must, Christian or not. I give thanks and praise that He will be my Defender at God’s judgment seat.

At this stage in my life, I can look back at the broken trail I followed, and see where I’ve stumbled and fallen. Perhaps I can offer some insights to other Sojourners, so they don’t do the same. As the old adage goes,

*“A wise man learns from his mistakes.
A wiser man learns from the mistakes of others.”*

I urge you to read, or re-read Proverbs 4 for guidance. Think of it as a trail guide. And if you want to read even more about your final destination, and the path to follow, read the Bible cover to cover — and not just once! More on that will follow.

So! Welcome to this Resting Place! Grab a cup of coffee or tea, something to eat or snack on, and think about where you are and where you are going. Take an opportunity to share your thoughts with other Sojourners. Offer your own insights, or just listen in on any discussions. Check out the references to books, or other websites.

Let your queries, insights, or responses be Christ-like. If you’re a non-Christian, you’re welcome here too. Let your responses be thoughtful, not aggressive or threatening.

Shared your thoughts and comments in prayer beforehand. Hopefully, His Holy Spirit will move in your thoughts and deeds, quiet you, perhaps bring you to your knees, as He did with me.

Keep these two Bible verses in mind: “*Be still, and know that I am God!*” (Psalm 46:10); and “*Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.*” (Jeremiah 33:3) Those are two great verses to memorize, and follow!

Welcome, my fellow Sojourners! God’s love to you!

The Journey

The Journey, the Path, the Road

You are here at this Blog for a reason. It is not by accident! Nothing is by accident — God is sovereign in ALL things, not just in some! If you doubt this, keep tuned!

At some point today you probably arrived at a totally different place in your life than where you planned, doing something different than what you thought you'd do. Perhaps you've travelled along a path that somehow seems foreign to you, or you've found that the path you're on leads to nowhere. The Bible, which should be your survival tool, advises that "... There is a path (a road, or a way) that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Proverbs 14:12, and again in Proverbs 16:25).

Perhaps you need a different perspective; it's time to look at where you are and where you are going, through different lenses. My Pastor once said that "If you want to hear God laugh, tell Him what your plans are." God must have really laughed at mine ... He must have a great sense of humor!

I cannot understand boredom; I won't acknowledge it, it's such a foreign concept! When I hear someone say they are bored, I feel compelled to say something about it to them. *How can you be bored??* You need to take a new approach to your journey!

When I awaken, I look around me. I'm excited to be alive! There's so much to do, to see, to read, to learn, to understand and comprehend. I look at the sky, the clouds, the surrounding area; and if there are people around me, I *study* them. I observe the birds, the insects, the flowers and trees. And if this has been a good day, where I've exercised (bicycle, Total Gym, Bodylastics), I *stretch*, feel my muscles and bones, think about good positive things, and I laugh, or at least grin, giving thanks for another day.

I fire up my computer to see what's going on. There's a lot that I *don't* want to see or read — probably 90%, especially what purports to be "fact," but is more "fancy;" and what purports to be "scientific" but is far from it; it's imaginary and childish. I have a huge — and I mean HUGE reference electronic library — Christian, religious, scientific, philosophical, hobby-related — and much more. I have a digital camera to record what I see, if I'm in the mood; a folding bicycle to admire and hopefully ride around on; an old four-string Stella guitar I bought when stationed in California in 1960. I just liberated it from the closet, all dusty and in need of cleaning and retuning; with some harmonicas to learn to play. How could I be bored? So much to do, so much to read, so much to learn — and so little time!

I just retired in my late 70s. Since I separated my work from my life — my wife helped me with this — I've found so much to do, so many places to visit, so many people to learn from. It's exciting! However, I'm still growing, regarding being social. Very **not** Christian!

Most everyone visiting this site is at a different place in life. They're ready to embark on, or continue on a journey today — or tomorrow, or later; perhaps traveling along a path they've chosen to follow, or a path they feel that they didn't choose at all. Instead, someone or something else set the path for them to follow.

Some Sojourners are *trailblazers*, cutting a path that others haven't traveled before — or at least there's no evidence others have traveled it. Trailblazers are those who find *new*

paths to travel. By contrast, *pathfinders* are those who find the paths made earlier by those intrepid trailblazers. I've been both. I prefer being a pathfinder, especially at this stage in my life. I've done some trailblazing, and it was exciting for a time, but there are many hidden dangers on an uncharted path. And no one believes you when you describe what you've found anyway. I'm smiling at this, because that's happened to me!

It's interesting that some people starting out on a journey take the time to give it some thought, some planning. But when planning for their *life's journey* they make no plans. They just *experience* it; they go forth with little or no planning. Even Christians go forth expecting God to take care of it all. They think that's what the Bible says. So they hurtle through life in their temporary residence earth, which spins at 1,000 mph at the equator, revolves around the sun at 67,000 mph, and hurtles through space at 490,000 miles per hour. Amazingly, many have no "compass" or "map" to plan their brief life here on earth. They just hurtle through space — and then suddenly, *it ends!* For most, *unexpectedly*.

When starting on *any* journey to a particular destination, you should take time to plan. It doesn't matter if you're on foot, on a bicycle, or taking a car. Do some research; bring a map (preferably a topographical map), and a compass — two vital tools for navigating. Some rely on a GPS, battery-operated or not. That's OK. But what happens if the battery fails or it's damaged, or there's no reception, or the GPS is incorrect, or the address isn't listed? I've heard that GPS is accurate only 90% of the time. What about the other 10%? That being said, I prefer a reliable *mechanical* compass, especially if there's no specific road to get to my destination, perhaps no road signs, and no known information regarding conditions there. *Life's journey* can be like that. Let me continue the metaphor.

A good magnetic compass and paper maps can help you find your way in the wilderness — and *out* of that wilderness to a place of safety. There is much to consider. Ask an experienced person about the various compasses, to help you know what you'll need, want, or can afford. A compass can have a sighting mirror, a declination adjustment, or a global needle. It might have a magnifying lens for maps; it could be luminescent so you can read it in the dark.

Take a class on how to use a map and compass properly. Even better, take a field navigation course with actual hands-on practice so you gain practical experience. I don't recommend trial and error, self-teaching, or reading directions which are limited. Before setting out, an experienced traveler has a checklist, and it's *written* not memorized.

I learned map reading and compass navigation as a kid in Boy Scouts. I hiked along trails in places both known and unknown, traveling with others more or less experienced than I was. I learned incidentally a great deal about being part of a team, and a brotherhood. It proved invaluable later on, in the military.

Yes, there's a lot to it! And no, it's not easy! But neither is life's journey.

Experience has shown me that most people don't think about the consequences of what they do, and the dangers of where they travel. They don't think about death, about that finality, about judgment, or about eternity. While these may appear to be metaphysically heavy topics they're not. They're very simple terms with far-reaching implications.

Park at a safe place and observe an intersection or a busy road. Watch the traffic, and see what drivers do — speeding, following too closely, not using turn signals, no concern for anyone on the road, texting, talking on their cell phone, reading a book or map, turning

to talk to someone in the passenger seat or behind them, changing lanes suddenly, totally unconcerned with anyone else on the road. When they kill or injure someone, they think they'll find it easy to say, "I'm sorry," but with no real feeling behind it. They think "I'm sorry" erases the damage caused by their unwillingness to consider their actions *before* they caused the pain. I was defensive driver instructor and trainer, and a police officer for fourteen years. I've experienced a lot. I've witnessed some horrendous accidents, and the *aftermath*, most of it preventable.

Again, think about where you are and where you are going. Have a plan. Consider eternity and the inevitability of death. Consider God's word as your travel guide on the journey, and the destination that awaits you.

When I gave classes on safety, I sometimes asked at the end, "How many of you think you'll make it home tonight?" It's a sobering thought, isn't it?

A Sojourner's Path

Before retiring past normal retirement years, my profession, my calling, my work, my life, was protecting things of value, in any form, against any threat, all over the world. My dad had taught me that hard work won't kill anyone. It hasn't! In fact, one should take pleasure in work. I did just that, but perhaps at the expense of those closest to me, and of my having a life. It has been for me "The Tyranny of the Urgent" versus the *important!* I encourage you to read that booklet by Charles Hummel.

I've worked in just about every field imaginable, beginning with cleaning toilets, sinks, and floors. I was a geriatrics orderly. I've done manual labor; warehouse operations; driving and loading trucks, I've been a research lab tech; worked in sales, and bartending. I served in the military and law enforcement; developed corporate safety and security strategies; been involved in private investigations; done risk management consulting; casualty insurance; and high-value claims adjusting. I've served as an adjunct college professor, lecturer, and guest speaker; and testified as an expert witness in civil litigation.

I delivered newspapers at age 13; sold Christmas cards; became a grip-man for a traveling salesman, and from there to stock boy, later to salesman. I went to college at age 17. But my mom was sick, and there was no health coverage back then. Seeing my dad working hard to support his three kids and pay the bills, and with the tradition of the eldest son stepping up to the plate, I dropped out of college. I went to work as a warehouse loader at night, and a trucker during the day, just to help pay the bills. As I said elsewhere, sometimes the path you're on, was set for you.

After five years in the Navy, I returned to get my degree under the GI Bill at Seton Hall University. My return to civilian life is a story about which I should write, if for nothing else than as a cathartic. I continue, even at this late age, to learn and to explore all that exists. As I tell my classes, the last time I knew it all, I was... 13.

I still find life exciting and I'm not handling retirement or aging well. But I am *blessed*, even with my recently discovered Wegener's Disease and angiosarcoma cancer, both fatal.² But I'm still here; and with God's grace, I hope to be here well into the future.

Hard work is good; but it's not everything. I hope through this Blog, to warn people **not** to pursue the paths I traveled without Christ, **not** to lead the empty life I lived without His grace, but to rely on Him, to seek Him first, and to follow His direction along the path He has laid out for you. Your own path may be found through prayer and supplication!

We are each Sojourners, aliens and strangers in this world, on a path to our eternal home, to our final destiny in eternity. I've been with people as they left this life. I've been to the Pit, to the *Abyss*, to the very edge of eternity. But though wounded and scarred, God was always with me. He knew me before the foundations of the earth. I have been saved by His Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, and to God's Glory alone — *Soli Deo Gloria!*

² That was in October 2017. Joel went home to be with the Lord in April 2020; during his last year he was unable to do what he would. **Psalm 90:12**, "So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom." – WHG

This site is about sojourning from a Christian perspective; and theologically, from a *reformed* perspective.³ *“For we are strangers before You and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow...”* 1Chronicles 29:15.

Christians are aliens in a foreign land, who both impact and are being impacted by the people they meet, and the culture in which they live. It is a culture that has run amuck. Cultural, moral, and ethical relativism is being taught in a pagan, Godless, God-hating, intellectually arrogant, and morally bankrupt society.

But take heart: **Ephesians 2:19**. *“So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household.”*

What that means to each of us — Christian or non-Christian — with its impact, continues to unfold over time. Hopefully, the contents, references, and commentary on this site will benefit you during your own sojourn, and then benefit others, even society itself.

The depth, breadth, and width of topics on this Blog will change over time as will our observations, interests, concerns, and comments. Topics may include bicycling, music, the arts, reading, social-political-secular activism, personal health, defensive tactics, weapons, war, peace, science, work, and much more. ⁴

There is so much to be curious about, to study, and to understand — to become excited at the many opportunities presented to us during our Sojourn on this tiny blue planet tucked into galaxies created by God from nothing. We are hidden away in the vast recesses of the universe and all of its galaxies. With so much to explore, see, do, and experience, we have so little time to do it all.

“Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.” (Ecclesiastes 9: 11-12)

So, this site is **not** about boredom. With so much to explore — physically, mentally, and spiritually — how could one possibly be bored? But we *are* faced with time limits; we don’t know what time God has allotted us. *Man knows not his hour!* God does, as He has numbered our days.

This site’s main purpose is to encourage you, to exhort you as a Sojourner, to study, probe, question, think about, and resolve for yourself who Christ is, what He did for you on the Cross, and *why this matters!* You, the Sojourner, will influence and impact your friends, your community, and others while on your journey. Admit it or not, you will influence the culture, society, politics, and economy of the areas where you reside or journey to.

³ That is, the theology of the Reformation, of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. It’s marked by the Doctrines of Grace. Joel repeatedly uses the five *solas* (the “alones”) to describe them. They were the battle cries of the Reformation: we’re saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, standing on the authority of Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. Some point to the acronym TULIP to describe the Doctrines of Grace, but that was the reformed answer to the Remonstrance Articles of 1610, nearly a hundred years after the Reformation began.

⁴ He never fulfilled this goal. Hence his confession, “Many of the talents which I believe God has blessed me with, will never be fulfilled, due to my rebellion. And that brings me to my knees every day.” *Our plans, God’s plans...*

My ultimate purpose is to provide you with a deeper, richer understanding of God, to learn who He is, and to build a stronger richer relationship with Him. He's interested in having a relationship with you! That's why he created you and gave you a heart, soul, and mind so you can know Him, and can explore all that He created, to *enjoy* Him and your life, and to love those around you.

You can and should joyously celebrate, and share with others, the truth that Salvation is by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the Glory of God alone. If you don't know Him, seek Him while He still may still be found (Isaiah 55.6). We know not our hour, nor where our Sojourning may take us — to those places He has appointed us to go, along that path and with those people He would have us meet, to befriend, love, and cherish them, as He does us.

Soli Deo Gloria! Amen!

What is a Sojourner?

This term was used in the Bible in the 1400s BC. It refers to a resident alien, a non-citizen in a country in which they reside more or less permanently, enjoying certain limited civic rights. The **sojourner** is one who actually *dwells* among another people, in contrast to the **foreigner**, who is a non-resident alien. Resident aliens (sojourners) are repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament. They were large in number during Solomon's reign, apparently the remnant of conquered tribes.

The sojourner in Israel enjoyed many privileges; they held a position unparalleled in early legal systems which were usually far from favorable to strangers. Because the sojourner was at a natural disadvantage, he became favored under legislation which was designed to protect the weak and helpless.⁵

A Christian is a Sojourner. He or she dwells among other people as a stranger and exile on this earth, seeking a homeland. They are persons of influence. God protects them, requiring His people to “*render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.*” (Zechariah 7:9–10).

In Hebrews 11:13-16 it says of His chosen ones, prior to Christ's advent:

“... these all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles [the word means pilgrims or sojourners] on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

In 1 Peter 2:11: “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*”

That will be the final leg of our sojourn — going to our final destination to be at home with our God! As explained in Ephesians 2:19: “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household.*”

Again in Philippians 3:20: “*...but our citizenship is in heaven — and we also await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ ...;*” in 1 Peter 2:11 he addresses Christians as foreigners and exiles with responsibilities:

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

As Sojourners we recognize that we're not permanent residents, and we're aware that God placed us where we are — for a purpose! “*And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.*” — Acts 17:26

⁵ From the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE), article on “Sojourner.”

We are to live where God has placed us, purposefully — as Sojourners, foreigners, aliens — behaving as Christians do, with love for and fellowship with all others. You know, or *should* know, that the second of the two greatest Commandments is to love your neighbor as yourself.

You may ask, “And who is my neighbor?” The Greek word is πλησίον (plēsion) — it refers to the people we meet along the way, our next-door neighbors, fellow travelers, those whom God placed in our path — irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, or nation of origin. That can sometimes be tough to deal with — but it’s *commanded*, not suggested!

Of those we may meet along the way and in the nation in which we live, the Apostle Paul said this:

“...Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.”(1Corinthians 2:6-8)

Things haven’t changed. God-hating rulers and alleged leaders, along with ignorance, arrogance, and hatred *still abound* — until that final Day. Maranatha! ⁶

We should give great thought to the Prophet Jeremiah’s exhortation to the Jewish people who were living in exile in Babylon:

*“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in **its** welfare you will find **your** welfare”* — Jeremiah 29:7.

We have a purpose as Sojourners — and it is not just to pass through on our way to Eternity! We are commanded to tell others along the way about God, and what He has done for us — to accomplish that which He has designed for us to do.

Soli Deo Gloria!

⁶ *Maranatha*: from 1Corinthians 16.22, “our Lord, come!” echoed in Rev 22.20, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

My Early Sojourning

Proverbs 14:12: *There is a path that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*

During my early Sojourning, I heard Jesus' gentle sweet call; but I didn't respond. I was too self-absorbed. Finally, years later, lost and at a crossroad, I was in total despair. I had believed that for a guy like me, there was no possible forgiveness! It was at the Abyss, that I met Jesus Christ. I heard His Shepherd's call — what I believed to be my *final* call. I responded, on bended knees, and then on my face, to His call. This was by God's Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, and to the Glory of God alone. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Looking back through my sordid life, God had never left or abandoned me. He promises in His written Word that He will never leave or forsake His people. Translated from Greek it means never never (οὐ μὴ = ou mē, absolutely *never ever*) (Hebrews 13:5). Amen! We can say with absolute confidence that "... *the Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*" (Hebrews 13:6). Amen! God is always with us, no matter what happens — whether my arrogance and stupidity, or my two recently acquired rare diseases — Wegener's Disease and angiosarcoma. Just before their "discovery" I was considered "a poster child for old people," as my doctor described me. Ten I ended up in the emergency room.

A friend warned me not to go into politics because I was terrible at lying. He interpreted for me in the "gray areas," because I saw everything in absolutes — black and white, good and evil. Still do! He would explain to clients, "What Joel means by this is..."

If you are a fellow Sojourner who is at a crossroad in life, as I was, read on. There is hope! Do not despair! There is forgiveness — redemption! If you want to learn more about Him, and your relationship with Him, I pray that what is contained here, and what I hope to make available to you, will be of some benefit.

I said earlier that I thought perhaps the very purpose of my life was to serve as a warning to others. My arrogance masks my low self-esteem, and hides my ongoing lack of wisdom. I have lots of knowledge, but very little introspection. This brings me to my knees every day. I remain humbled by God's continuing Grace, by His forgiveness, as I am a man who deserves judgment; but instead, He has shown me Grace and Mercy! *Soli Deo Gloria!*

This testimony is **not** the Gospel. The Gospel is about Jesus Christ! The Gospel proclaims how one can be saved — by God's Grace alone, through God-given Faith alone, placed in Jesus Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, for God's Glory alone!

The Gospel is the Good News, it is the central theme of the Bible, which is God's Word now revealed to His people. It serves as a compass and road map for life, along the path to our eternal home, for those who read, believe, and obey it. It provides shelter in the time of storms and tumult (Psalm 65.7).

The Sojourner's path can be difficult, but seek wisdom from those who have gone before, and learn from them — walk together with the Guide who has never changed.

Hopefully, through this Blog, you might better prepare yourself for your own journey. We each bring unique knowledge, skills, insights, and experience to this shared journey. Maybe we can assist fellow Sojourners along the way. We may follow different paths to

our final destination, each fraught with hazards and dangers; but with the proper Guide, we can be prepared.

While my own sojourning may have been difficult and challenging, it is nothing compared to others whose travails are heart-rending and sometimes fatal! My dad used to quote this adage: “I cried because I had no shoes, and then I met a man who had no feet.”

I can now look back at the long trail I walked, and see where I stumbled and fell. But I can also see where my Lord God was with me. He never forsook me, never gave up on me; He was always there! Hopefully my insights can keep other sojourners from making the same mistakes.

I’ve learned much about life, love, and myself, along the rocky path I traveled. Had I read, understood, and followed more of what God says, my life might have been easier and less painful. Or maybe in God’s Providence, it needed to be hard and painful. The Book of Ecclesiastes talks about that learning curve. It’s a great read for any young man or woman!

So here I stand on a path laid out before me, with choices still to be made, moving forward towards my final destination with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for all eternity.

This site is for other Sojourners with questions, those who seek insights into all that’s going on around them, who question what people, cultures, or societies *should* be like, compared to what their own experience has shown them.

At the risk of using some philosophical terms here, I affirm that we won’t deal with questions that are **epistemological** (the nature and limits of human knowledge; questions about truth, belief, justification; the exploration of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge — what we know and how we came to know); **ontological** (the nature of being); **metaphysical** (about reality; about the origin, structure, and nature of what is real); or **existential** (freedom and self-expression; life experience over knowing — *willing* over *thinking*, action over contemplation, love over law, personality over principle, the individual over society).

Why not? Because I’ve been there, done that, hung out at places like the old Sancho Panza in Monterey, California, in the old days, playing guitar, singing, drinking lots of coffee, reading lots of books, sitting around the table and talking into the wee hours about abstract concepts that had no real answers.

Reality set in when I was transferred overseas. No philosophy there! Life becomes real, not ethereal. Been there, done that, got the wounds, scars, tattoos, and tee shirts. My face is a road map of where I’ve been, what I’ve done, what I’ve seen, and experienced. And it’s not a pretty face! But for God’s Grace, I would be dead many years!

Had I listened to my dad, his fellow Marines, or the Marines at Seton Hall, or to God Almighty in His Word, perhaps things would be different. That would be an interesting theological discussion, at least for a guy like me.

This site is about good and evil, darkness and light, the reality of life and the finality of death, about eternity, and judgment! Life is short, ephemeral, a vapor! I am still working through it all. For me, Ephesians 6 is a great read (*Put on the whole armor of God*). I should have read and studied it more closely, but ...

This site was designed around spending eternity in either heaven or hell — THAT reality. You may be at that decisive crossroad, one way or the other! God is there with you! You are *not* alone— despite what you may know, or *think* you know, or what others tell you!

If I know anything, I know for certain that God exists, from before the very beginning (or He wouldn't be the Creator of all things), and extending unto all eternity. I know that there is an absolute Truth — and that *He is that Truth!* And I know that He has been with me from the beginning, from before the foundations of the earth, that He will never leave or forsake me, and that I will spend eternity with Him. That's a *fact!*

For my sojourning friends, my brothers and my sisters in Christ — you weary Sojourners who are seeking direction, solace, and comfort — may this be a place to rest, a place of comfort, and a source of refreshment for you!

Soli Deo Gloria!

The Bible

The Bible — Absolute Truth

I suggested in a previous post, that it's always good to take some time to think about where you are, the path you're now on, the direction of your travel, how you're going to get there, and your final destination.

But it's also good to think about how you're going to handle things *when*, not *if*, something goes wrong. For some of us, this is a *daily* process. For others, it's only at a *crisis* point. I've been through both, and found that the daily process is best.

As Sojourners travelling a trail to eternity, we need to rely on something that doesn't change, *ever!* We need something like a compass or a map, but even more reliable. In a world of moral, ethical, and cultural relativism, there **is** an Absolute Truth, *revealed by God!* God has not changed, and He will *never* change! I give thanks to Him daily that there *are* absolute truths — that there's a right and a wrong; good and evil; light and darkness, the judgment to come, and either an eternity with God, or an eternity in hell.

God reveals Himself to us in two ways: through *General Revelation* — meaning what the creation, the heavens and earth, and human experience reveal; and secondly, through His Word, a written *Specific Revelation* of who He is, of who we are, of His perfect law, of what has occurred in history and *why*, and most importantly, the solution to our guilt before a Holy and perfect God, for violating His law.

As we'll see, this solution is found through His Son, Jesus Christ. He redeemed us with His perfect life — fully obeying God's law to uphold God's justice, because our own lives are imperfect. And then, in love, Jesus laid down his life for us as an atoning sacrifice, to pay the debt we owed to God for violating His law — life for life — so we wouldn't have to pay with eternal punishment in hell. Hell is not *temporary*, but *eternal*. Hell is not an *annihilation*, but an *ongoing* punishment. Apart from Christ, we will be separated from God for all eternity, suffering sorely under His wrath. I fall on my face when thinking about it!

Salvation through Jesus Christ, and Him alone, is an amazing story; and even greater than that, it is true! How do I know that?

God created us with a *rational mind* by which to think, to inquire, to understand and comprehend Him — His thoughts and His creation. And He provided us with emotions, and an awareness about ourselves. He created us to have a personal relationship with Him. He provided us with a *free will* with which to make rational choices, *meaningful* decisions. We have the power to choose between good and evil, and bear full responsibility for our choices.

That freedom which He provided us, gives us the ability and power to consider, analyze, and evaluate what we are doing, and to be creative with the choices we make regarding our life's plans, purposes, and direction.

As I said, God is generally revealed in many ways. My studies of science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, philosophy, and other areas, confirms for me that God not only exists, but is *alive* — contrary to what many scientists and philosophers conclude. And my ongoing study of the Bible in particular, provides an opportunity for me to know

God personally, and to have a deeper, fuller relationship with Him. It points the direction home; it lays out the pitfalls along the way; and it reveals a Guide who will always be with me — through mountains and valleys, through storms and in peace!

Even a compass or a map can change; a GPS tracker may provide the wrong direction or route. But God's revealed Word, the Bible, is always true, always right. It never changes! God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow! (Heb 13.8)

The Bible — Is it *Your* Compass and Map?

I referred to the Bible as both a *compass* and a *map*. But how? Well, it provides a history of good and bad choices when things go wrong. It tells us the direction others chose, in *opposition* to the wisdom that God provides. That opposition is rebellion — “I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it and how I want to do it!” As you can see, it's an “I” problem. Satan has that problem! So did the rulers of Babylon. So do many of the rulers in the United States — the current Babylon!

In sojourning through life, we constantly decide which is the correct path to take. We're under constant *pressure* to choose; and in our *haste* to choose, we may overlook the moral and ethical issues that underlie a particular path.

The Bible provides us with the insights, guidance, and experience of others who, when faced with similar choices, likewise failed to consider the ultimate choices of good and evil, glorifying God or glorifying ourselves, enhancing our image in the sight of God, or in the sight of others. And the Bible shows the *results* of those decisions — some ending very badly, and many with eternal consequences! The Bible also provides insights concerning those who made Godly decisions.

Based on what the Bible provides, which is absolute truth and wisdom, we can make a sound decision as to the path to take when confronted with moral and ethical choices. And this is true, even if sometimes, the decision has already been made for you by others. I'm thinking of Psalm 23. It sustained me during some really bad journeys.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

I think some Christians go through life looking for verses to support their choices, in lieu of rational, analytical, godly thinking. They forget that humans were created as rational beings, capable of introspective and analytical thought, analysis, and evaluation.

And yet, all our rational capabilities are insufficient *of themselves*, to hear, understand, and properly apply God's word. Its truth must be *revealed* to us, by God. We must be *born from above* before we can see His Kingdom (Joh 3.3; 8.38-45).

Because of Adam and Eve's choice to rebel against God, our free will and rational faculties became clouded, *corrupted* by that original sin. Their choice affected all of their offspring as well; that's us! We're enslaved by this sinful nature; everything we think and do is tainted by it; and so we constantly sin. We stand before God convicted and condemned.

We're spiritually dead and *unable* to please God; dead people *cannot* see or hear. We need God to open our eyes to see the Kingdom, and open our ears to hear His voice.

How do we know if He's done that? *Read the Bible*. Take the Book of John, for example, the fourth gospel. Does it make sense to you? Do you believe it? If so, that's by God's Spirit. Otherwise, in your natural or sinful state, it would be foolishness to you, showing that you are still dead in your sins and trespasses (Eph 2.1), not regenerated (made alive) by the Spirit of God (1Cor 2.14).

My brother Bill and I were recently discussing the following from his Boot Camp Course, which I really enjoy reading and re-reading. I pass it on to you:

The Reasoning of Revelation:

“The Bible is the word of God. It may be circular, but the following is undeniably and unavoidably the line of “reasoning” taken by every true follower of Christ:

The Bible is the word of God ...

because it says it is and because Jesus acknowledged it as such; and Jesus should know because he is God, because the Bible says he is God; and I know that the Bible is true because the Holy Spirit has convinced me of it, because that's what the Bible says the Spirit will do if I have faith; and I have faith because that's what the Bible says I have when I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he saved me from my sins and rose from the dead; and I am able to believe these things because I am one of the elect; and I am one of the elect because I believe them, which I couldn't do if I wasn't elect, because the Bible says that only the elect can believe them, and I believe what the Bible says, because

... the Bible is the word of God ...

“However, the bible is not true because it *claims* to be true. It is true because it has been ***revealed*** to be true. It is “obviously” true to anyone who believes it to be true. Such believers are the only ones who really care whether the Bible is true, and yet they are the very ones who don't care whether its truth can be proven to anyone else.”

The Bible — An Overview

You may have heard this overview before. But even at this stage in my life, I revisit it from time to time to affirm what I know. Seasons change, the culture changes, people change, life changes, and the morality of men is fickle. Nothing on earth is constant or solid; there's no anchor for my ship, no solid foundation for living, no unwavering truth. Everything here is subjective, situational, and relativistic!

In a world that seems to be in utter chaos, with moral and ethical disintegration, I am grateful that one thing remains constant: God's Word. “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*” Isaiah 40:8.

Bible and Fact

The Bible is comprised of 66 books, written by some 40 different authors, over a span of approximately 1500 years. It is totally unique among all books ever written. Its authors come from every conceivable walk of life, including fishermen, shepherds, lawyers, kings, butlers, priests, a tax collector, and a tent maker. The books of the Bible were written in three languages — Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek, on three different continents. And yet all

these books have but one theme with no contradictions. It explains man's creation, rebellion (sin), redemption, reconciliation with God, and restoration to wholeness.

The Bible accurately predicted specific events in great detail many years, sometimes *centuries* before they occurred. There are approximately 2,500 prophecies in the Bible with about 2,000 of them fulfilled to date — exactly and with no errors. There are 85 Messianic prophecies that have been fulfilled through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The remaining 500 or so prophecies, reach into the future and may be seen unfolding as we live, and as our days go forward. They are unfolding even now, but go unnoticed by those who are too busy to look around, analyze, evaluate, and comprehend current events.

It has been conservatively estimated that the probability of any one Bible prophecy being fulfilled by chance, is less than 10%. For the most part, these prophecies are independent of each other, so that the odds that *all* these prophecies are fulfilled by chance — without error — is less than one in 10^{2000} or 1 with 2,000 zeros. An illustration of those odds (one I heard some years ago), would be to fill the state of Texas with silver dollars, toss a marked silver dollar in the midst of it, and ask a blind man to find it.

In his book, *Prepare to Answer*, Dr. Rubel Shelly described it this way:

“If a fragment of stone were found in Italy, another in Asia Minor, another in Greece, another in Egypt, and on and on until sixty-six fragments had been found, and if when put together they fitted *perfectly* together, making a *perfect* statue of Venus de Milo, there is not an artist or scientist but would arrive immediately at the conclusion that there was originally a sculptor who conceived and carved the statue. The very lines and perfections would probably determine which of the great ancient artists carved the statue. Not only the unity of the Scriptures, but their lines of perfection, suggest One far above any human as the real author. That could be no one but God.”⁷

So, let's look at what we know to be true about the Bible so far. We come to know God through *General Revelation*, that which is revealed in the heavens and earth. We also know Him through *Specific Revelation*, the Bible, God's written word. And we know Him through the ministry of *Jesus Christ*, who is God incarnate.

⁷ <https://www.alibris.com/Prepare-to-Answer-A-Defense-of-the-Christian-Faith-Dr-Rubel-Shelly-Ph-D/book/5310698>

Synopsis of the Bible

Credit for the structure of the following synopsis is given to Mark Dever, Senior Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington (<https://9marks.org/>). I also acknowledge my brother in Christ and by blood, William H. Gross, for his contributions to what follows, and for his never-ending battle to stand firm, to confirm and document sound theology, logic, and reason. Bill is co-Pastor at Hope Chapel in Colorado Springs (<http://www.hopechapelcs.org/>). I'm an ordained Deacon at North Creek Presbyterian Church in South Florida (<http://www.northcreektoday.org/>). *Soli Deo Gloria!*

The Bible can be summarized as Creation, Rebellion (Sin), Redemption by Christ, and our Response to the Gospel call: faith in Christ, which Reconciles us to God, and Restores our relationship. This is further explained in the following outline:

God – *Who is He?*

He is our creator. He is loving, holy, and just. One day He will execute perfect justice against all sin.

Humankind – *Who are we?*

We are people who are made in the image of God. We are beautiful and amazing creatures who have dignity, worth, and value. But we willfully and sinfully rebelled against God, turning from being His children and having a relationship with Him, to becoming His enemies. However, the Gospel calls *all people* to a restored and loving relationship with the living God.

Christ – *Who is He? What did He do?*

The answers to these two questions will help you not only to understand where you are, but to determine where a church stands. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, both God and man, whose sinless life perfectly fulfilled God's law, and made Him the perfect sacrifice. Through His death on the cross He ransomed sinful people, paid for the sins of all those who come to him in Faith. Christ's resurrection from the dead is the ultimate proof of the truth of these claims.

Response – *How must we respond to be saved from God's justice?*

God requires us to acknowledge our sin, repent of it, and believe in Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on the Cross. We turn from sin, especially the sin of unbelief, and turn to God in faith, with the understanding that we will follow Him all the rest of our days here on earth.

Supporting Scriptures

GOD:

God is Holy.

Isaiah 6:1: In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Exodus. 15:11; "Who is like to you, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

Isaiah 57:15. “For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

God is the Creator.

Genesis 1:1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Colossians 1:16-17: For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Psalms 8:1-4: O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

God created man in His own image.

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.

God hates sin — He is Just.

Genesis 6:5: The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Romans 1:18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God is Loving and Merciful

Jeremiah 31:3: ...I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

MAN:

We are made in God’s image.

Genesis 1:26: Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

We are all sinners.

Romans 3:9: What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

We are all dead in our transgressions.

Ephesians 2:1: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

We are in rebellion against God.

Isaiah 53:6: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

We are separated from God.

Isaiah 59:2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Death is the penalty for our rebellion — Justice.

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHRIST:

Jesus is the way to God (*because he is the Son of God*)

John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 14:6: Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Jesus died for us (Why? To pay for our sins *in our place*, to redeem His people)

Romans 5:6: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1John 2:2: He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

God’s gift of eternal life is through Christ.

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God gives Grace to us in Christ.

Ephesians 2:4: But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the

heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

God reconciles us to Himself in Christ — Atonement — to become At One with God

Colossians 1:19: For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Christ lived a perfect life (Why? To fulfill the law on your behalf)

Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

1Peter 2:22: He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

Christ rose from the dead (Why? To prove his authority over sin and death)

John 2:18-22: So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

1Corinthians 15:3: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Christ came to give life.

John 10:10: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

RESPONSE:

Confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts.

Romans 10:9: because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Repent

Matthew 4:17: From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Luke 13:5: No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Acts 3:19: Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

Follow Jesus.

John 8:12: Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Matthew 10:38: And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Hear Jesus’ word

John 5:24: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. ²⁵ “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Believe in Jesus’ name (His name is Son of God, Christ/Messiah/Savior, Teacher, Lord, Word, etc.)

John 1:12: But to all who did receive Him, who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God,

Philippians 2:9: Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THE COST:

Christ redeemed us by His blood.

1Peter 1:18: knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

God saved us by His grace.

Ephesians 2:8: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We must deny ourselves and take up the cross.

Luke 9:23 “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

The Truth of Salvation

Perhaps you’re at a crossroad in your life; or you’re in a storm somewhere, seeking shelter or relief; or you’re in need of something or *someone* to hang onto as everything swirls about you — something solid and unyielding, someone on whom you can depend, who’ll be with you through thick and thin, a rock in the midst of turmoil.

You may be asking, “*What must I do to be saved?*” The Biblical answer to that question follows, in **The Good News**.

The Good News

For the Sojourner seeking Eternal Life

The Truth of Salvation

Perhaps you are at that crossroad I've been talking about. You're in a storm somewhere seeking shelter or relief; in need of someone or something to hang onto as everything swirls about you — something solid and unyielding; someone you can depend on and trust; someone who will be with you through thick and thin, and will never leave you alone and forsaken; a rock, some solid ground in the midst of chaos and turmoil.

For me, that crossroad came on a military mission that we knew would end badly. I recalled a verse memorized during my early childhood, from our Catechism — the 23rd Psalm — *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* It was reassuring to know this. that He is with me at all times! But I didn't know Jesus Christ personally, and what His death on the Cross meant to me!

You may be seeking an answer to the eternal question: “What must I do to be saved!” Please read the following and rejoice!

A summary of the answer to this question was provided by Dr. D. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, who developed *Evangelism Explosion*, a tool to help those who don't know God, to understand the Gospel, the Good News of salvation by grace:

- Heaven is a free gift! It is not deserved and cannot be earned. It is a gift!
- Humans are sinners who cannot save themselves from the penalty for sin!
- God is loving and merciful! He doesn't want to punish us, but He is also just. To uphold His holy law, Justice requires that sin must be punished by death.
- This presents a dilemma, answered in the person of Jesus Christ, the infinite God-man. He was without sin. He died on the cross to pay the debt we owe God for our sins and to purchase a place for us in heaven. Christ's death provides the sinner with mercy instead of justice!
- This gift is received by saving faith — trusting in Jesus alone for our salvation, resting on what he has done rather than relying on what we have done. Salvation is a gift. You cannot earn a gift!

The Bible alone provides answers to the question of sin and salvation:

God loves you.

- John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”
- Romans 5:8 “... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

- 1John 4:10 “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”
- Galatians 1:4-5 “... who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The Fact of Indwelling Sin

- 1John 1:8 “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”
- Romans 3:10-11 “... as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”
- Romans 3:23 “... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”
- Ecclesiastes 7:20 “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”
- Jeremiah 17:9-10 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”
- Isaiah 64:6 “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

The Penalty for Sin — Judgment and Death

- Hebrews 9:27 “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...”
- Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Ezekiel 18:4, 20 “Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”
- James 1:15 “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”
- Romans 14:12 “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”
- Revelation 20:12 “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”

Our Inability to Pay the Penalty

- Romans 3:20 “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
- Isaiah 64:6 “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”
- Galatians 2:16 “...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”
- Titus 3:5 “...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit ...”
- Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

God’s Provision — Redemption and Reconciliation Through Christ Alone — Eternal Life

- John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
- Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- Romans 5:8 “...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
- 1Corinthians 15:3 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures ...”

Your Responsibility

- Acts 3:19 “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out ...”
- Acts 20:21 “...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- Acts 16:31 “And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

- John 1:12 “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ...”
- Romans 10:9-10 “...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”
- Romans 10:13 “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Assurance of Salvation

- John 3:18 “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”
- John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
- 2Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”
- Romans 8:16-17 “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”
- John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”
- Romans 8:9 “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

Does any of this make sense to you? If so, I pray that you proceed as follows:

A Prayer for Salvation

- My Lord God, I admit that I am a sinner, that my sins are offensive to you and to others.
- I understand that the penalty for my sins is death and hell, which I deserve. I also believe that there is a Judgment Day coming when I will have to account for every word I’ve uttered and every deed I’ve done, for every sin I’ve committed.
- I humbly confess that you are my God and Father, that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior, and I trust in Him alone. I give thanks and praise to You through Him who died on the cross in payment for my sins, your Son who redeemed me.
- I repent of my sins, and turn from them to Jesus Christ, trusting in Him alone for salvation.
- I know I can’t continue to live as I’ve lived up to now. But I can’t change unless you **enable** me to change. Let me live a life of faith, and godliness, to honor you. Let me live to you only, from now to eternity.

- I swear before you, my God, to publicly identify myself with Christ through baptism in a believing Church.
- I ask these things in the name of my Lord and my Savior, Jesus Christ. In Him alone do I stand.

AMEN.

It is not this prayer that saves you! It is your response to Jesus Christ in thanks for what He has already done on your behalf on the cross at Calvary. This prayer demonstrates that you belong to Christ and that you desire to honor Him by your obedience.

You have been saved by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, on the authority of Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. These are five memorable and essential truths that are the foundational truths of Scripture, revealed in the Gospels.

If you have acknowledged that you are a sinner, if you have confessed your sins and truly repented, and you believe in and accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, your sins have been forgiven, and you have been declared as righteous. You are justified before God! You have been saved!

You must now find a Church. See the Appendix on “Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.” There are two questions to be answered by the Church that you are considering: who do they say Christ is? And what do they say He accomplished on the Cross?

If they do not, cannot, or refuse to answer these questions according to the Scriptures you just read, if they won’t say where they stand on these questions; or if their answers are contrary to Scripture — then look elsewhere.

- God’s Church believes and teaches that the Bible is the inspired Word of the living God. God has spoken. He has revealed Himself to His Church in His Word. He has not left His people to search blindly for truth.
- God’s Church teaches and preaches the deity and humanity of Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ is truly God and truly man. If *they* do not, then avoid them!
- God’s Church proclaims salvation by Grace through Faith in Christ alone. As the Bible says, it is not through works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is completely separate and apart from any human effort. How can we possibly pay the price for what is owed, which is our death and eternal damnation? Jesus Christ paid our penalty. He redeemed us through His death.
- God’s Church confirms what the Bible teaches, that in accordance with Scripture, you have been bought with a price and are saved by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

It is never Christ *plus* something else. It is Christ alone — not by works; it’s not something you can do. You can do nothing to earn it! It is a free gift. How could anyone repay someone for a gift that they gave to you? That’s not a gift! A gift is free! God’s gift to you is eternal life through the suffering and death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

If someone adds something to what Christ did for you on the Cross, they are anathema (cursed)! Again, it is NEVER Christ plus ... It is always salvation by Grace alone, through

Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the authority of Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. This is what Scripture teaches.

Welcome to beginning an exciting new path to your eternal Home. There is so much to learn, so much to see, so much to do, so exciting! The paths to your eternal home may be varied, but no matter what path you may travel, God is with you!

Amen, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Amen! Soli Deo Gloria!

Marks of the True Christian

Language changes with time, just as culture does. There was a time when the word “Christian” had a specific meaning. It wasn’t just someone who believes Jesus existed, and who attends a local church to worship by hearing a sermon, and singing some songs. It was a *lifestyle*, where the Christian committed to honoring Christ by living in a Christlike way. The word “evangelical” also had a specific meaning. It described someone who *evangelized*. They not only believed the Gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone, but they were in search of others whom God elected to salvation from eternity past, to bring them to Christ. Prior to 1950 you could say “evangelical” and “reformed” in the same breath. But that’s no longer true.

The culture changed, as it always does. Unfortunately, Christian beliefs, practices, and worship changed with the culture. The *definition* of a Christian became a moving target. Instead of being fixed in the text of the Bible, and in the life and work of Jesus Christ, it morphed with the life and practices of whoever might call themselves Christians. Instead of having a set standard by which to assess a Christian’s beliefs and practices, Christians themselves set the standard.

Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses called themselves *Christians* and the secular world accepted their claim. Liberal theologians who rejected the truth and authority of the Bible likewise called themselves *Christians*; and the secular world accepted their claim. Major seminaries where thousands of pastors were taught and equipped, embraced this liberalism; and their graduates were then instrumental in changing the beliefs and practices of many churches. Catholicism, both Roman and Orthodox, were caricatured by books, TV shows, and movies. It was portrayed as ignorant and superstitious, and was widely mocked. It was rare that a reformed believer was included as a character in any work of fiction, or interviewed by the press.

Televangelists and book authors, sound in doctrine and practice or not, reached a far larger audience than any church was capable of. Charlatans were bilking their worldwide audiences, and they too set the standard for defining a Christian. The character of Christ ceased to be the character of Christians; and perversely, the character of these alleged Christians was perceived as the character of Christ. The reputation of the Church, and of Christ, suffered. It was made possible by widespread biblical illiteracy, even in the Church.

This dismayed Joel no end. Almost every time we talked, he would ask, “What is a Christian?” It’s not that he didn’t know. It’s that the *World*, and too often the *Church*, didn’t know. That was part of the impetus for his Sojourner project. What follows is the *biblical* definition. – WHG

Romans 12:9-21: Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If My People – Chosen by God

2 Chronicles 7:14: *if my people who are called by my name* humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

1Pe 2:9-10: *But you are a chosen race*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Matthew 25:32 *And before him shall be gathered all nations....* That is, all that have professed the Christian religion in all the nations of the world, whether Jews or Gentiles, high or low, rich or poor, wise and foolish, such as have had greater or lesser talents; though it is also true of every individual of mankind of every nation, tribe and family, of every sex, age, and state, that ever has been, is, or will be. Yet Christian professors seem only here intended, as the following distinction of them, their final state, and the reasons of it show. This collection of them before Christ, the righteous judge, will be made by the holy angels, who will come with him for this purpose; and being mighty, as they are, will be able to accomplish great a work; and especially as being under the direction, influence, and authority of so divine, glorious, and illustrious a person, as the son of man will then to all appear to be,

And he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: they shall be gathered before him, as they were together in their visible church state, as being all under a profession of religion; some wise, some foolish virgins; some sheep, and others goats; some industrious, diligent, faithful, and laborious servants; others wicked, slothful, and unprofitable ones; many of whom pass undistinguished and undiscovered now: but then the judge, who is of quick understanding, will easily discern the one from the other; such as have the oil of grace in the vessels of their hearts, together with their lamps, from such as have only the outward visible lamp of a profession, but destitute of the grace of God; and good and faithful servants, who have made a right use of their gifts, from such who have been negligent, careless, and remiss; and though these have been folded together, sheep and goats, in the sheepfold of the church, where they have all bore the character of the sheep of Christ; yet now when the Chief Shepherd appears, who knows his own sheep, and calls them by name, he will as easily separate the one from the other, and more so, than any shepherd, among men, can part a flock consisting of sheep and goats. Hypocrites in Zion shall now be no more, nor sinners stand any longer in the congregation of the righteous, nor both together as one body, and on one side in judgment. ⁸

⁸ These comments on the "Chosen" verses, were taken from John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible* (1746-63).

A Christian Defined

In an interview between Al Mohler and Gregg Frazer in 2012, came this observation from Frazer's book, "The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation and Revolution."

Mohler: One of the greatest achievements, I think, of your contribution here is the definitional contribution you make. And, as a Christian theologian, I'm always frustrated when I see the denominator *Christian* — Christian used as an *adjective*, without any substantial definition.

And you're very clear in your book that when you talk about Christianity, you're talking about **orthodox, biblical Christianity**. You're talking about *doctrines*, as you articulate — including the Trinity; the fact that God is active in human affairs; an affirmation of the deity of Christ; of original sin; the virgin birth of Christ; the atoning work of Christ; the substitutionary, satisfactionary form of understanding the atonement; resurrection; eternal punishment for sin; justification by faith; and the inspiration and authority of the Scripture.

Frazer: My centerpiece of my argument is my conviction that the terms *Christian* and *deist* have been so broadly applied to the founders that they've become virtually meaningless categories... The definition of Christianity that I use here, what I actually did ... is I looked at the creeds and confessions of the 18th century American churches and put together a list of ten fundamental doctrines that they all agreed were central to Christianity. ... The core issues for deism were the effective absence of God; that God created and then went on a hike, went on vacation. God left; He's no longer present and active in the world. Or if He's out there, He is just viewing as a spectator; He's not involved. And the other is that there's no *written* revelation from God; that there's no revelation other than *natural* revelation. The deists believe that all we can know about God is what we can see in nature...

And what I argue is that ...the ten doctrines that you rattled off are the core doctrines, ***the fundamental doctrines of Christianity***. And everybody would agree in the Christian community, that if you don't believe those fundamental things, you're not a Christian. So really the definitions were constructed to say more who's *not* a Christian or *not* a deist, than who *is* a Christian or who *is* a deist.

[What Did America's Founders Really Believe? A Conversation with Historian Gregg Frazer — AlbertMohler.com](#)

In 1980, prior to his conversion, Joel had given one of his usual safety lectures. At the end of class, a big man came up to him. He was covered in tattoos, and very serious. For some reason, he asked Joel, "Are you a Christian?" Joel said, "Yes, I think so." The man asked, "Do you go to church?" Joel admitted he didn't. The man said, "*You're not a Christian*. I'm not going to talk to you about it. But you're going to get a call from your brother. He'll lead you to Christ." Joel laughed. "You don't know my brother."

Three weeks later, I had just come to Christ myself. I called Joel, all excited, and told him about my conversion. He said, "Funny you should call." He told me this story. Not long after, he gave his life to Christ; he was never the same again. *What's a Christian?* – WHG

Created and Destined for Eternity

The following is from my brother Bill's 2019 sermon, "God is Eternal."

We were made for eternity. And that's why God is preparing us for eternity, on this earth. Yes, there is gospel work to be done, summoning the elect to salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. But in the process, in the course of fulfilling our duties as ambassadors of Christ, we're being prepared to eternally praise God's glory, with the heavenly host, and all creation.

Now, ***what does that preparation look like?*** How does God prepare finite beings, living on a finite earth, so they'll be equipped for eternal praise?

1. You must receive the Holy Spirit through believing the Gospel (Act 19.2). If you haven't come to Christ, you don't have the Spirit – you don't yet belong to Christ; you are none of his (Rom 8.9). You lack the means and the power to do the work that God has called His people to do.

But if you've come to Christ

– if you believe that the penalty for sin – for breaking any of God's laws – is eternal damnation in hell,

– if you've confessed that **you're** a sinner, and you've repented of your sins, and turned to God to save you;

– if you believe that you're saved by God's grace alone, not because of anything you've done, or *can* do to earn it;

– if you believe that Jesus died on the cross *in your place*, to pay your infinite debt to God, which you couldn't pay;

– if you believe that Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's law on your behalf, so that God considers HIS righteousness to be YOURS;

– if you believe that Jesus is returning to judge the world, and you need to prepare for His return;

then you're eternally saved, and you need to move toward having an eternal view of life.

What's the most effective way to obtain that eternal view? Through the word of God, through prayer, and through fellowship with the people of God. You were baptized into the Body of Christ, but you've been called to serve in a local church, and to exercise the gifts that God gave you, for the good of that local church. *Do that*, and do it *regularly*. Sit under the teaching of God's word, sing His praises, fellowship with other believers, love one another, and serve one another, in the love and with the authority of Jesus Christ.

2. Proclaim the Gospel, whatever the cost (Luke 14.28f. Cf. Isaiah 55.1). You can't proclaim the Gospel if you don't know the Gospel; but if you came to Christ, then you **do** know the Gospel. *You just heard the Gospel*. What keeps you from proclaiming it? Maybe it's not lack of *knowledge*, but lack of *conviction*.

How can you be convinced and convicted of the need to proclaim the Gospel? Through the word of God, through prayer, and through fellowship with the people of God. Proclaim

the Gospel to one another; live out the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

3. Demonstrate the mystery of “Christ in you” – *the hope of glory* (Col 2.2). The Gospel isn’t just *informational*. It doesn’t just fill your mind. It changes your mind, your heart, and your whole life. You can’t remain as you were. The truth of God transforms the people of God, so that they’re *visibly* and *eternally* His. The issue now, as it has always been, is how does the world see Christ in you? What is *Christlike* about you?

Through the word of God, through prayer, and through fellowship with the people of God, you’ll become more and more Christlike. Help one another put away your old habits of sin, and teach one another to put on new habits of liberty in Christ. Do it *daily*; do it every time you meet a fellow believer.

Love one another as Christ loved you. Love your *enemies*. Return good for evil. Care for one another; comfort one another. Encourage one another. Talk about the things of God each day, with *believers* and *unbelievers*. That’s how you’ll learn to cherish the things of God.

Learn Christ. Teach Christ. Live Christ. Do it so others can see Him in you.

4. Live in constant expectation of Christ’s return (Phi 3.20; 1Pet 2.11). It’s easy to fall back into old habits, old ways of living in familiar surroundings. That happens whenever we lose sight of *eternity*. If we stop expecting Christ’s return today, we won’t expect his return tomorrow, or in our lifetime. Then there’s no *urgency* – no pressing need to invest our talents. We set eternal things aside, and turn to satisfying ourselves with temporary things.

What will drive home to us today, that same sense of **urgency** which drove the early believers to prepare themselves, as a Bride adorns herself for her Groom?

It’s realizing that whatever you’re going through – whatever joys and whatever pains; whatever losses and whatever gains – it’s all *temporary*, a “momentary affliction” compared to eternity with God. So praise God *whatever* your circumstance. Learn the secret of being content whether you have a lot or a little. Depend on God for whatever you have, or *don’t* have.

God’s promise of a Redeemer, decreed from eternity, has come true. God’s promise to dwell with His people, decreed from eternity, has come true. And because God is eternal, what He decreed for us *before* eternity, will remain true for eternity *to come*.

May His name be praised *forevermore*.

Amen.

Appendix: Nine Marks of a Healthy Church

<http://www.9marks.org/what-are-the-9marks/>

Say you're heading to another city, speaking to someone you may never meet again. You faithfully proclaimed the Gospel, they accepted Christ – now what? Now you encourage them to attend and serve a Gospel-believing, Gospel-teaching church. What is it they should be looking for in such a church?

1. Expository Preaching – This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation. It is a commitment to hearing God's Word and to recovering the centrality of it in our worship.

2. Biblical Theology – Paul charges Titus to “teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Our concern should be not only with *how* we are taught, but with *what* we are taught. Biblical theology is a commitment to know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

3. Biblical Understanding of the Good News – The gospel is the heart of Christianity. But the good news is not that God wants to meet people's felt needs or help them develop a healthier self-image. We have sinfully rebelled against our Creator and Judge. Yet He has graciously sent His Son to die the death we deserved for our sin, and He has credited Christ's acquittal to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. *That* is the good news.

4. Biblical Understanding of Conversion – The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion need not be an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself in godly fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion.

5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism – How someone shares the gospel is closely related to how he understands the gospel. To present it as an additive that gives non-Christians something they naturally want (i.e. joy or peace) is to present a half-truth, which elicits false conversions. The whole truth is that our deepest need is spiritual life, and that new life only comes by repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus. We present the gospel openly, and leave the converting to God.

6. Biblical Understanding of Membership – Membership should reflect a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service; otherwise it is meaningless, worthless, and even dangerous. We should not allow people to keep their membership in our churches for sentimental reasons or lack of attention. To be a member is knowingly to be traveling together as aliens and strangers in this world as we head to our heavenly home.

7. Biblical Church Discipline – Church discipline gives parameters to church membership. The idea seems negative to people today – “didn't our Lord forbid judging?” But if we cannot say how a Christian should *not* live, how can we say how he or she *should* live? Each local church actually has a biblical responsibility to judge the life and teaching of its leaders, and even of its members, particularly insofar as either could compromise the church's witness to the gospel.

8. Promotion of Christian Discipleship and Growth – A pervasive concern with church growth exists today – not simply with growing numbers, but with growing members. Though many Christians measure other things, the only certain observable sign of growth is a life of *increasing holiness*, rooted in Christian *self-denial*. These concepts are nearly extinct in the modern church. Recovering true discipleship for today would build the church and promote a clearer witness to the world.

9. Biblical Understanding of Leadership – What eighteenth-century Baptists and Presbyterians often agreed upon was that there should be a plurality of elders in each local church. This plurality of elders is not only biblical, but practical – it has the immense benefit of rounding out the pastor’s gifts to ensure the proper shepherding of God’s church.