

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANS

WILLIAM M. MILLER



A Letter To A Friend

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FOREWORD

In presenting the BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANS, the author has, apart from basing the whole book on the Holy Bible, quoted a number of verses word for word. In order to help the reader to find these verses in the Holy Bible the references have been given in brackets at the end of such quotations. The first reference mentioned (Mark 12:29-30) is found on page 6. This reference means that the section quoted is found in that part of the Holy Bible that is called MARK, in chapter 12, verses 29 to 30.

Where the author has only mentioned statements of the Holy Bible without quoting the actual words numbers have been inserted. For instance, on page 9, on the next to the last line, the number 1 has been put after the word "Him". This means that at the end of the book, on page 80, under number 1, you will find the name of the section of the Holy Bible and the chapter and verse numbers where something is said on the subject.

It will give the reader a more thorough knowledge of the subject of this book if he acquires a copy of the Holy Bible and reads these references along with the book.

All scripture references quoted in this book are taken from a modern translation of the Holy Bible called RSV.

The Publishers

My dear friend,

I hope you are well both in body and in spirit. I send you cordial greetings, and thank God for your friendship. Your earnest desire to find the truth, and to be guided in the right way, the way which leads to God and to salvation, gives me great joy. Often in the past you have asked questions about the beliefs and practices of us, your Christian friends, and there has never been enough opportunity to give you all the information you sought. I have, therefore, resolved to write you a long letter telling you in detail what we Christians believe, and what our religious duties and customs are.

As you know, there are nearly 1,000 million people in the world today who call themselves Christians. Some are true believers and some, sad to say, are Christians only in name. We Christians, like people in some other religions, are divided into many sects, which differ from one another in various matters of doctrine and worship. It is, therefore, impossible for me to tell you in this letter what all Christians believe, or to make a statement to which all would agree. However, I am sure that there are millions of Christians in all parts of the world who would agree to the truth of what you will read in the pages that follow. I pray that as you read carefully this explana-

tion of the Christian religion, you will be drawn closer to God; you will know Him better, love Him more and obey Him more perfectly. I will now attempt to reply to your questions one by one.

I. WHO IS GOD?

I am sure, my dear friend, that your first question is, "What do Christians believe about God?" The most important thing in any religion is its idea of God. I know you have been informed by some ignorant people that Christians worship three gods. Some have even supposed that we worship the cross, and even images of men. Let me assure you that these statements are false. True Christians have always believed in the One True God, and if any have ever worshipped other gods they have been in great error. Listen to what Jesus Christ said to one who asked him which is the greatest of God's commandments. Jesus replied: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12: 29 - 30). All God's prophets in ancient times proclaimed the Unity of God, and cried out against idols and all who worshipped them.

Christians also believe that God had no beginning, and will have no end, for He is eternal. We believe that God possesses all knowledge and power, and that He created all things, seen and unseen, by His Word. If one looks upward at the sun and moon

and the millions of stars, and begins to understand even a little of the greatness and wonder of all creation, he will exclaim as did the prophet David: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." (Psalm 19: 1). How great is the wisdom and might of the God who not only created but also sustains both the largest suns in distant space, and the smallest flowers and insects on the earth! God is Almighty, and is able to do whatever He wills to do. He has a purpose for the world, and nothing can prevent Him from accomplishing it.

We believe that God is not only very great, He is also very just and holy. In ancient times the Greeks and Romans, who believed in many gods, thought their gods were like men, who lied, stole, murdered, committed adultery, and did other evil deeds. But in the Holy Books of the Christians much is written about God's perfect holiness; that is, His complete separation from all impurity.

One of God's servants in a vision saw some holy beings in the presence of God praising Him saying: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty." (Revelation 4: 8). Therefore, though God has all power, He cannot do anything contrary to His holy nature. For example, God cannot lie, nor can He act unjustly.

God, of course, does not have a body as men do, and He is not limited to one place or time, but is

always and everywhere present. However, we sometimes speak of God's hands, or eyes, or heart using these physical terms with a spiritual meaning. For while God is the Most High and is greatly exalted above us, we believe He is also very near us. So we say He sees us with His eyes, and upholds us with His hands, and loves us with His heart.

While all of the attributes of God are of the greatest importance to us, we Christians are especially thankful that the God whom we worship is a loving God. So important is this quality of love that in the Holy Bible it is stated that "God is love" (1 John 4 : 8), that is, that all that God thinks and does is done in love. God shows His love to men in providing them with rain and sunshine, food and drink and clothing, and all that is needed for their lives on earth. He also shows it by sending prophets to tell us about God. The greatest act of His love was the sending of the Saviour, as I will explain later. God loves everyone whom He has created, and seeks the good of all. The prophet David expresses God's care for him in these beautiful words: "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." (Psalm 23 : 1 - 3).

It is natural that God would love those who love and obey Him. But does He love people who disobey

Him? Of course, since God is holy, He loves all that is good and hates all kinds of evil. When men do the evil deeds that God hates, He is angry with them, as David said to God: "Thou hatest all evildoers." (Psalm 5 : 5). God shows His hatred of evil by punishing those who practice it and refuse to obey Him. When we read the Holy Bible we see how God destroyed both individual men and also whole nations that turned against Him and refused to repent, that is, be sorry and leave their evil deeds.

But let me tell you a wonderful truth. Even while God hates evildoers, He wants to save them from their sins. He loves them as a kind father loves a son who has disobeyed his command. This amazing love of God for sinful men is clearly shown in a parable which Jesus Christ spoke, in which he told of a son who, while his father was still alive, asked for and received his inheritance. Then he left his father's house, and wasted all his money in evil living. But when he had nothing left and was about to die of starvation, he decided to go back to his father and confess his sin. As soon as his father saw him at a distance he ran to meet him, hugged and kissed him, and made a feast in honour of his return. The father, because he loved him, forgave and welcomed the son who had been so wicked. Jesus Christ said that is the way God loves the people who sin against Him.¹ My dear friend, it is good news for us sinners to know that God loves us

and wants to forgive us, and is ready to receive us when we return to Him!

In the Holy Bible we find many names for God, such as, the Almighty, the Lord, Jehovah, the Everlasting, the Living, the Most High, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the King, the Judge, the Creator, the Saviour, and the Shepherd of His people. However, the name which we Christians love best is Heavenly Father. When Jesus Christ spoke of God He usually called Him "my Father", and He told His disciples when they prayed to say to God, "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (Matthew 6 : 9). Could anyone enjoy a greater privilege than this of being a spiritual child of God, and of knowing that the Most High God is his loving Father? This high privilege is given by God to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

At this point you perhaps wish to ask what Christians mean when they speak of the "Holy Trinity". If you will kindly wait a little I will later explain this important doctrine to you.

II. WHO IS MAN ?

Now, my friend, having explained briefly, and in part, what Christians believe about God, I will try to tell you what they think about the nature of man. For having a correct idea of man is almost as important as having a true knowledge of God. Our understanding of who man is comes chiefly from the Holy Bible.

In the very beginning of the Bible² it is written, that when God had finished creating the heavens and the earth and all plants and animals, He then "created man in His own image ; in the image of God He created him ; male and female He created them." This of course does not mean that God has a body, and made a body for man like His own. Rather, it means that man was created in spiritual likeness to God. God gave man a mind with which to reason, a heart with which to love, a conscience with which to distinguish good from evil, a will to do what is right, a tongue that could speak, and a spirit through which he was able to fellowship with God. Thus, being created in the image of God, man was able to know God and to communicate with God. He was, therefore, the highest of creation.

Man was not God, as some have mistakenly affirmed. But he was very close to God, and was completely good, for there was no evil in him. He was not a machine, for God gave him a will with ability to choose. God made man a free agent, so that he of his own free will might choose to obey and love and serve his creator. It was God's desire that the people He placed on this earth should be His true children, loving Him as their Father, loving one another as brothers, and happily doing God's work on earth. Today there are on the earth many races of men, with differences in features and colours of skin and languages, but all are of one blood, all belong to one family, and all are loved by God who created them all.

But, sad to say, God's desire for man was not realized. Instead of using his freedom of will to obey and serve God, man used it to rebel against God, as is told in the second and third chapters of *Genesis*. God had commanded Adam and Eve, our first parents, not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree was in the midst of the Garden of Eden where God had placed them. He told them that if they disobeyed and ate that fruit they would surely die. Satan entered the Garden in the form of a serpent and persuaded Eve to eat the fruit. Then she gave it to Adam, and he also ate it. This act of our first parents was not just an error, a thoughtless mistake, but was a conscious act of rebellion against God their King. In other words, they wanted to be God. They did not want to be subject to the will of God, instead, did just as they themselves wanted. What was the result? God spoke to them, rebuked them severely, and put them out of the Garden to live in a world of suffering.

Much worse than that, however, Adam and Eve lost contact with God, and as a result were completely changed. Previously they had been holy and pure, but now they became impure. Before they disobeyed God they had been able to do all that God wanted them to do, but now, though they knew what was right, they lacked the power to do it. They began to hate that which was good, and to love that which was evil. This rebellion against God is, in the Holy Bible, called sin and its result is death.

This story of man's first sin is of great importance for us, for from it we are able to understand the condition of mankind today. The people of the world are not pure and holy as were Adam and Eve when God created them. To realize this we do not need to look at others, let us look at our own hearts. Do we not often do what we know is wrong? We say it is wrong to lie, but sometimes we speak untrue words. We know that love is better than hatred, but how often we hate others! Why do we act thus? Because we have inherited the sinful nature of our first parents, and like them are both unwilling and unable to obey God perfectly.

When a baby is born into the world it seems to be pure and sinless, but very soon evil begins to appear in him. As the prophet David said of himself, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51 : 5). So we are compelled to admit that all men are sinners, and to agree with God's Word which states : "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt ; who can understand it ?" (Jeremiah 17 : 9). For Jesus Christ said : "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man." (Mark 7 : 21-23). And God who knows the hearts of all men has said : "None is righteous, no, not one."

(Romans 3 : 10). However, there is one exception, one person who is greater than man, about whom I will write later.

How terrible then, is man's condition ! Having by his disobedience destroyed his relationship with God, he is like a lost sheep about to perish in the desert.³ Having ceased to be a true child of God he has become an enemy of God and a slave of sin and Satan.⁴ Being unable to walk in God's holy path he is indeed dead in sin.⁵ As God told Adam, the result of sin is death, both physical and spiritual.

III. WHAT IS SIN ?

At this point, my friend, I must try to make it quite clear what sin is. Sin is not merely doing wrong things like stealing, or committing adultery, or getting drunk, or committing murder. Sin is basically separation from God, and is anything against the holy will of God. Not only is an evil deed sin ; pride and envy and hatred and lustful thoughts also are sin. Jesus Christ said that the two greatest commandments of God are to love God with all one's heart, and to love one's neighbour as one's self.⁶ Since these are God's chief commands, then failure on our part to love God perfectly and to love others as we love ourselves are the greatest sins. Is there anyone who has kept these commandments perfectly ? No, all have broken them except the sinless person, Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life, and that is what God requires of us. His

commandment is : "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5 : 48).

But how can we sinners, whose hearts are full of evil, become perfectly pure and good as God commands us to be? A man who has a cancer does not need good advice about keeping the laws of health. What he needs is a skilled doctor who is able to cure him. Just so, a man sick with the disease of sin needs more than good laws and good moral sayings telling him what to do and what not to do ; rather, he needs a spiritual doctor who is able to create in him a new mind and heart and will, and to give him the power to do what God requires of him. It is evident that all men everywhere need someone who is able to save them from sin and make them into children of God. I will explain later how God in His great mercy provided such a Saviour for the world.

IV. DO YOU BELIEVE IN PROPHETS AND ANGELS?

Now, my friend, I want to answer the question you asked about the belief of Christians concerning the prophets. Yes, Christians believe that God sent prophets to speak His Word to men. Because of their sins most men did not want to hear God's voice, or else because of their spiritual deafness were unable to do so. However, there were some men and women who repented and were forgiven by God. God spoke

to them and appointed them to speak His message to others. Thus they became prophets of God.

Our knowledge of the prophets comes from the Holy Bible, which contains accounts of the lives and words and writings of a number of those chosen by God to be His messengers to men. Here are the names of a few of the prophets mentioned in the Bible: Abraham, Moses, Aaron (brother of Moses), Miriam (sister of Moses), Nathan, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Joel, Daniel, and John the Baptist, who was the last of the prophets before the coming of Jesus Christ. Abraham, who is called the Friend of God and the Father of Believers, was chosen by God to be the father of many peoples. He, in his old age, was given a son, named Isaac, from his wife Sarah. Abraham, in obedience to God's command, was ready to sacrifice Isaac when God provided a ram for the sacrifice in Isaac's place.⁷ Then God promised Abraham that from Isaac's descendants salvation and blessing would come to the world, and this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. After Jesus came other prophets, such as John and Peter and Paul, who spoke God's word to men and taught them to believe in Jesus Christ. It is our belief that they were the last of God's prophets. However, in a broader sense, anyone who speaks God's message truly to men might be called a prophet.

Since the belief of Christians regarding the pro-

phets differs in some respects from the belief of people of other religions, I want to state clearly several important truths :

- (1) The number of the prophets is not known, nor do we know the names of most of them.
- (2) All the prophets, as far as we know, were from the descendants of Abraham the Friend of God and his son Isaac.
- (3) The prophets were sent by God during a period of about 2,000 years.
- (4) The prophets were sent chiefly to the people of Israel, whom God had chosen to be His special people, in order that from them the truth of God might be made known to all the people of the world.
- (5) The prophets were not sinless, but were believers whose sins had been forgiven.
- (6) The prophets came from different classes of society, some being rich, some poor, some with much learning, some with little education, some were old, and some were young.
- (7) Some of the prophets like Elijah and John the Baptist wrote no book, while others, like Moses, David, Isaiah, John, and Paul, put God's message into writing for later generations to read.

- (8) God's Word came to the prophets in various ways. Some heard God's voice, some received the message through angels, others saw visions and dreams, and no doubt still others received the message in their minds and hearts. However, all were sure that God had spoken to them, and were able to say with confidence to men, "Thus says the Lord."
- (9) To some of the prophets was given the power to perform miracles which proved the truth of their message, such as Moses and Elisha and Peter. Others, like John the Baptist, performed no miracles.

The prophets who came before Jesus Christ told the people who God was and what He required of them, and warned them of God's anger if they disobeyed Him. They also assured them of His forgiveness and blessing if they should forsake their sins and return to God. Through Moses, the only one of the prophets who was a law-giver, God gave many laws to the people of Israel. The prophets who came after him urged the people to obey the laws which God had given through Moses. But since men were sinners it was impossible for them to obey, perfectly, God's Holy laws. Hence the law was not able to save them but, like a mirror, it showed them their sinfulness and made them realize how much they needed a Saviour.

One of the most important things that the prophets

did was to tell the people that God was going to send them the Saviour, whom they needed. When I tell you about Jesus Christ I will mention some of the wonderful promises which are found in the books of the ancient prophets.

In the Holy Bible there are many references to beings, other than men, who were created by God and usually called angels. They are God's messengers, and were often sent by God to make His will known to prophets and other believers. Angels appeared in human form to Abraham, Moses and others. The names of only two of God's angels are given in the Holy Bible, Michael and Gabriel. It was Gabriel who informed Mary that she would have a son named Jesus.

In addition to the holy angels who are obedient to God, we are told in the Holy Bible that there are other spiritual beings who are disobedient and are enemies of God, the chief of whom is called Satan or the Devil. Many Christians think that Satan was created good, but because of pride disobeyed God. As a result, he and the spirits who followed him fell from their high and holy position in heaven. They are now doing all they can to destroy God's work on earth. It was Satan who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, and ever since then he has been trying to turn people away from God. He even tried to persuade Jesus Christ to disobey God, but he failed.⁸ Satan has great power, but he is not equal to God, and he is under

God's control. Christians do not need to fear him or his evil spirits that injure so many people in body and soul. In the strength which Christ gives us we are able to resist and repel him. God will finally cast the Devil out of the earth into eternal fire.⁹

V. WHAT HOLY BOOKS DO CHRISTIANS ACCEPT ?

Now, my friend, I will reply to your question regarding our Holy Books. You know that from ancient times Jews and Christians have been called "People of the Book". This title is appropriate and well-deserved, for both Jews and Christians have shown deep concern for the preservation of their Holy Books.

What are the books which Christians consider "Holy"? They are sixty-six in number, and while often bound in one volume which is called the Holy Bible, they may be divided into two parts; usually called the Old Testament and the New Testament. We will discuss these two parts separately.

(I) The Old Testament.

This section contains thirty-nine separate books, all of which are considered "Holy Books" by both Jews and Christians. These books were written in the Hebrew language. They were written by many different authors, over a period of at least one thousand years. The first five books are known as the Torah (*Taurer*) or Pentateuch. The material for these was gathered from ancient records and written down by

Moses and others under the guidance of God. The first book, called *Genesis*, begins with an account of the creation of the world by God, and tells of Adam and Eve, and Noah and the Flood. It also relates how Abraham at God's command left his home in Iraq about 2000 B.C. and went to Palestine which God had promised to give him. It tells of Isaac and Jacob, and of Joseph who was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt, and who later became the vazir of Pharaoh. The other four books of the Torah tell how God gave strength to Moses to lead the people of Israel, who were the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel), out of Egypt about 1300 B.C. to Palestine. These books also give in full all the laws which God gave to Moses for His people Israel at Mount Sinai.

After the Torah come the historical books which tell how the Israelites, under the leadership of Joshua, son of Nun, conquered Palestine. They relate how God sent Samuel the prophet to annoint with olive oil David as king of Israel about 1000 B.C. They also tell how David, who was both king and prophet, defeated all his enemies, and how his son Solomon built a temple for the worship of God in Jerusalem. After Solomon the kingdom was divided, and the descendants of Solomon ruled over the tribe of Judah in Jerusalem, until it was captured in 586 B.C. by the armies of the king of Babylon. Many Jews were carried into captivity to Iraq and Iran. Fifty years later Cyrus the King of

Persia captured Babylon, and encouraged the Jewish captives to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of God which had been destroyed. This they did, but after 586 B.C. no descendant of David ruled as king of the Jews, for foreigners controlled Palestine.

After the historical books of the Old Testament come the poetical books, such as the book of *Job*, the *Psalms* of David, and the *Proverbs* of Solomon and others. Then come sixteen books written by different prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Zechariah and Malachi. Most of these prophets lived in Judah between 800 and 400 B.C. It seems that after Malachi (about 430 B.C.) God sent no prophet till John the Baptist appeared (about 26 A.D.).

(2) The New Testament.

The number of books which compose the New Testament is twenty-seven. These books were written in Greek by about ten different authors during a period of some fifty years following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The term "Old Testament" refers to the covenant which God made with His people Israel through Moses.¹⁰ "New Testament" refers to the covenant which God made with His new people, namely, those who believe in Christ.¹¹

The first four books of the New Testament are called "Gospels", or *Injil*, which is from a Greek word

meaning Good News. They were written by four different authors, and are four independent accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. They do not contradict but rather supplement one another, and are like four photographs of one person taken from different positions. Frequently all the books of the New Testament are called *injl*.

The fifth book of the New Testament is the *Acts of the Apostles*. It tells the history of the spread of the Christian faith from Jerusalem to Rome during the thirty years after the death of Jesus Christ. It especially tells about the work of the apostles Peter and Paul. Next come twenty-one letters written mostly by the apostles Paul, Peter and John. These letters were written to groups of Christians in a number of cities in the Roman Empire, or to individuals. They explained what they should believe, and how they should live. The last book which is called *Revelation* describes the visions which John the Apostle saw. It pictures the punishment which will come to unbelievers, the final victory of Jesus Christ, and the glory of God's eternal kingdom.

While both Jews and Christians accept the books of the Old Testament, Jews do not consider the New Testament to be from God.

Probably you now want to ask what Christians mean when they say that these books are "Holy" and are "from God". First of all, we do not mean that

God dictated all these books to their many authors as an executive would dictate a letter to his secretary. For when we read the different books we see great differences in the style. David did not write like Solomon, nor did Paul write like John. They all had different personalities and therefore wrote differently. Then, you ask, were the books they wrote only human documents which, like other books written by men, might contain error as well as truth?

No indeed! For though these books were composed by men, Christians call all of them the Word of God. It is our belief that God by His Spirit so guided these authors that what they wrote would be true. We believe that God made known His truth and His will to the prophets so that they could give His message to men. In the same way God made His truth known to the men whom He chose to write these books. And so each author, with his own pen and his own human characteristics, under the guidance of God's Spirit, wrote God's Word for us. In the Holy *Injil* or New Testament it is written: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1: 21). Just as they spoke from God, so they also wrote. The Holy Bible is God's written Word.

Therefore, we Christians consider the Bible to be different from all other books in the world. We believe that in it is to be found all that we need to know

about God, and our duty to Him and to our fellow-men. For this Book tells us of the Saviour Jesus Christ, who alone has the power to change sinful men and make the world what God wants it to be.

Now may I explain several matters?

- (1) First, let me say that though there are many different sects of Christians in the world, all of them accept these sixty-six books as true, and consider them to be the unique guide to doctrine and life.
- (2) Christians do not think that later books abrogate (*tansikh*) or replace earlier ones. For example, we do not think that the *Injil* has taken the place of the Torah. Jesus said: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." (Matthew 5: 17). As in school the books used in the tenth class do not contradict or abrogate those of the lower classes but rather complete them, so the later books given by God do not cancel out the earlier ones, but give men a more perfect understanding of God's truth. We Christians, therefore, read all the books to learn all the lessons God would teach us. If a book should be written by anyone which does not agree with what God has said in the Bible, we know that this book is not from God. For God never contradicts Himself.
- (3) If you have ever heard it said that Christians have changed (*tahrif*) their Holy Books, and that the

books we now have are not trustworthy, I assure you that this charge is utterly false. Christians love their Holy Books, and would never permit evil persons to destroy or make changes in them. Moreover, Greek manuscripts are in existence today which were written by hand more than 1,600 years ago and it is from them that our present translations are made. God gave His Word for all mankind. Christians have endeavoured to translate the whole Bible or parts of it into every language in the world, so that everyone may read it in his mother tongue. The Bible or parts of it have been translated and published in more than 1,400 different languages. And, in every language the message is the same. Did you know that more copies of the Bible are distributed each year than of any other book in the world? Surely this would not be the case if it were believed that this is a false book!

Moreover, it is impossible that God who gave His Word for the guidance of men would have allowed it to be changed, so that it would mislead men. No, God Himself is the guardian of His Holy Word, and He has kept it for thousands of years from anything that would destroy it. Hence, it is perfectly trustworthy.

- (4) One of the remarkable things about the sixty-six books of the Bible is that though they were written by many writers over a period of some 1,500

years their message is one. They tell who God is, and what God requires of man, and what God has done to save sinful man. This shows that God is the real Author of all these books and not the men who wrote them.

- (5) Another remarkable thing about the Bible is that it is easy to understand. Though it was written in ancient languages long ago, it can be translated into any of the languages of the world today, and even people of little education are able to understand its message. I have often heard of men and women in remote parts of the world who, without any teacher, just by reading a part of the Bible, came to know God and found forgiveness of (salvation from) their sins. Of course learned scholars have written many books which help us to understand God's Word more perfectly, and councils of the Christian Church have composed statements of doctrine which have guided believers in the way of truth. But usually if one studies the Bible carefully one will find that it explains itself. The Bible tells us all we need to know about God and salvation, and our duty to God and man. Therefore, every Christian has the privilege and duty of studying the Bible. With the help of other Christians, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he may interpret it for himself. Many Christians have the habit of reading a portion of the Bible every day and meditating on its teaching.

Perhaps you have wondered why I did not say that the *Injil* was written by Jesus, or was given by God to Jesus Christ. The truth is that as far as we know Jesus wrote no book, and had no book in His hand which had been given Him by God. As I will explain later He was Himself the living Word of God, and God spoke to men through what He was and what He did, as well as through what He said. He Himself was the perfect manifestation of God. Hence, God guided Matthew, John, Paul and others to write the books portraying Jesus Christ to us. This helps us to see Him, and to hear God's message through Him.

Therefore, my friend, you realize from what I have written how very important the Holy Bible is, and how necessary it is for everyone to read it, or listen to its contents. For only from it can one gain a true understanding of the Christian religion and of the way of salvation. I hope you will buy a copy, and read the New Testament first. Then turn to the Old Testament, which you will understand better after reading the New. May God speak to you through every page of His Holy Word!

VI HOW WAS JESUS CHRIST BORN, AND WHAT DID HE DO?

We now come, my friend, to the most important part of our explanation of the Christian faith, namely, the consideration of who Jesus Christ is, and His relationship to God and to mankind. But first I will

narrate to you briefly the history of His life on earth, which is found in the fourfold Gospels.

One day the angel Gabriel announced to a virgin named Mary that she would have a son whom she should name Jesus. He would be called the Son of the Most High, and would be the Everlasting King.¹² This was a fulfilment of the words of the prophet Isaiah spoken more than 700 years before the event, which said: "A young woman shall conceive and bear a son . . ." (Isaiah 7:14). Later the birth of Jesus occurred in Bethlehem, a small town near Jerusalem, where David had been born a thousand years earlier. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem had been predicted by Micah the prophet who, like Isaiah, lived more than 700 years before Christ. "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." (Micah 5 : 2). At the time of His birth an angel announced the event to shepherds near Bethlehem, saying: ". . . I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2 : 11). Mary became the wife of Joseph, a carpenter, who acted as a father to Jesus. In His youth Jesus also worked as a carpenter in the town of Nazareth where He grew up. Until the age of thirty He gave no teaching and performed no miracle, and the people did not know that He was the

Messiah whom they were expecting.

When Jesus was about thirty years of age the time came for Him to begin the work for which He had come to earth. He, therefore, left Nazareth and went to John the Baptist who was then speaking God's message to many people who had gathered about him. He bade them repent, and baptized them in the river Jordan when they repented, as a symbol of cleansing from sin. Though Jesus had never once in all His life committed any sin He told John the Baptist to baptize him, and John obeyed. When Jesus came out of the water the Spirit of God descended from heaven on Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of God was heard by both John and Jesus, saying: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3: 17). (I will later explain for you the meaning of the title "Son".) Then Jesus went into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for forty days, while Satan tried in vain to tempt Him to disobey God.¹³

After this victory over Satan, Jesus returned to John the Baptist, who, on seeing Him, spoke to his disciples: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! . . . He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1: 29-34). By calling Him "Lamb of God"

John was saying that Jesus would die as the sacrifice for the sins of all men. Jesus then began choosing His disciples from whom He later selected the Twelve Apostles. They were not great or learned men, for Peter and John and others were fishermen, and Matthew was a tax-collector. But they realized that Jesus was the Messiah, and they left their various occupations and, without any promise of money or material gain, followed their Master for three years or so as He went about the country on foot. During this time Jesus trained them for the work they must do, as His apostles, after His going to heaven.

Jesus then began to preach to the people as John had done, saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15). He spoke God's Word to the people in their places of worship or in their homes, and when they gathered about Him on the hillsides or by the Lake of Galilee. All who heard Him were amazed at the wisdom and authority with which He taught, for He spoke not as a prophet would speak, but like God. The prophets all said, "Hear what God says to you." But when Jesus spoke to the people He said, "I say to you."

Soon Jesus began to heal by a word or with a touch of His hand the sick people who came to Him. A leper fell at His feet and said, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will, be clean." At once he was fully healed.¹⁴ Many

people possessed with unclean spirits came to Him, and He cast out the demons with a word. He touched the eyes of the blind and they received their sight. He even raised several dead people to life. Naturally, great crowds of people followed Him, and sometimes Jesus was so busy teaching and healing them that He had no time to eat food. He forgot His own needs as He showed His love for others. Never once did He perform a miracle for His own benefit, or show His power to make people marvel (or, wonder). All His mighty works were done to comfort and save sick and suffering people, and in this way reveal God's love to them. Once when He saw the poor and needy people about Him, Jesus spoke to them this gracious and comforting invitation: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11 : 28). None who came to Him were ever turned away.

Once a paralytic (crippled man) was carried by four men to Jesus and laid before Him. Jesus, knowing that the man needed both physical and spiritual healing, said to him, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Some of the religious teachers who were present thought in their hearts, "Why does the fellow talk like that? This is blasphemy! Who but God alone can forgive sins?" Jesus knew their thoughts, and told them that by healing the man He would prove to them that He had not blasphemed, and that He had authority to forgive sins. Then He said to the crippled man, "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet (bed) and go

home." And the man at once did so. (Mark 2 : 1 - 13).

From that time many of the religious leaders of the Jews began to oppose Jesus, for they were jealous of His great popularity with the people. They criticized Him for associating with sinful people, whom Jesus wanted to save, and for healing the sick on the Sabbath (Saturday), which was their holy day. Soon their hatred became so great that they determined to destroy Him.¹⁵ Jesus knew this. He might have used His divine power by which He raised the dead to life to destroy His wicked enemies but He never did. He taught His disciples to love their enemies and to pray for them, and He set them an example by the way He treated those who opposed Him.

At that time the Jewish people were not free, for the Romans ruled over them. They longed to cast off the Roman rule. When they saw how Jesus fed more than 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, in the wilderness, they tried to take Him by force and make Him their king.¹⁶ They were sure that if He led their armies no one could defeat them. But Jesus refused to become an earthly king, for His kingdom was a spiritual one. He wanted to rule, not from a throne in Jerusalem but in men's minds and hearts. When the people saw that they could not make Him their tool in a political revolution, many of them turned against Him and became His enemies. Jesus always refused to please men, and obeyed God only.

About two and one-half years after the baptism of Jesus, when the opposition of the religious rulers had become fierce, Jesus one day asked His twelve apostles: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" They replied that people thought He was one of the great prophets of the past who had come back to earth. Then Jesus said: "Who do you say I am?" Peter at once replied: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus then blessed Peter for his answer, and told him it was God who had revealed this truth to him and said that on this truth He would build His church, and nothing could destroy it. Then He announced to His apostles that He must go to Jerusalem, and there be condemned to death by the religious rulers, and be crucified, and on the third day be raised again to life. The apostles who loved their Master were horrified, and Peter said to Jesus: "Heaven forbid? No, Lord, this shall never happen to you." But Jesus rebuked Peter, and told him that this thought of his, that Christ must not die, was from Satan. For Jesus knew that it was God's will that He should die on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of men, and anyone who tried to keep Him from going to the cross was a tool of Satan. Then Jesus warned His apostles that they also must be ready to take up the cross, that is, they must be ready to die for Him.¹⁷ It must have been very difficult for the apostles to stay with Jesus after He told them that He must die, and that they too would have to suffer for His sake. However, they did not leave Him, and six months later

went with Him to Jerusalem where He was to suffer death.

It was springtime in Palestine, and many Jews from near and far began the journey to Jerusalem to be present at their greatest yearly religious festival, the Passover. This festival was to help them to remember the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. So Jesus and His disciples joined the crowds, and went up to Jerusalem for the festival. The events of this last week in the earthly life of Jesus are recorded at length in all four of the Gospels, and I can give you here only a very brief summary.

On a Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on an ass, as had been promised by the prophet Zechariah hundreds of years before. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." (Zechariah 9:9). He went to God's Temple, and cast out those who were making it unclean by buying and selling in that Holy House, and who were also stealing from the people who had come to worship. He severely condemned the religious rulers for their unbelief and their hypocrisy and wickedness. He also foretold the complete destruction of the Temple by their enemies as God's punishment for their sins. He warned the people not to be deceived by the false prophets who would come and try to lead

them astray. He said He was going to return from heaven with great power and glory, and would judge all the nations, welcoming some people to God's Kingdom, and condemning others to eternal punishment.

On Thursday evening of this week, which Christians often call Holy Week, Jesus observed the custom of eating the special Passover meal with the twelve apostles. At this time He took a loaf of bread and gave thanks to God and divided it among the apostles, saying: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And after supper He took a cup of wine, which was always drunk by the Jews as part of the Passover meal, and said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (I Corinthians 11:23-25). In this way Jesus made known to His apostles that by His death the new covenant was to be instituted. Before they left the room Jesus gave them most important teaching about their duty to love one another. He told them again of the persecution they would have to endure for His sake. And He promised them that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide and help them after He went to heaven.

Then at midnight He led His apostles to a garden outside the city where He prepared Himself in prayer for His death. His prayer to His Father was: "Yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." While He was still praying a band of armed men came to the garden

led by Judas, one of the Twelve Apostles who had become a traitor. Judas approached Jesus and kissed Him, so that the men with him would not make a mistake in the darkness and arrest the wrong man. How easily Jesus might have destroyed Judas and His company with a word! Instead, He surrendered Himself to them. When Peter drew a sword to defend His Master, Jesus forbade him, and touched and healed one of the enemies whom Peter had wounded.¹⁸ Then they took Jesus to a place where a number of religious rulers were assembled and tried to find some excuse for killing Him, but they failed. Finally, the chief ruler put Jesus on oath, and asked Him: " 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am' ". (Mark 14 : 61-62). Their judgement was unanimous: that He was guilty and should be put to death.

Since the Jewish rulers were not permitted to put anyone to death without the approval of the Roman government, they took Jesus early on Friday morning to the palace of Pilate the governor. They told Pilate that Jesus was an enemy of Rome, and that He wanted to make Himself a king. When Pilate questioned Jesus he realized at once that this accusation was false, and wanted to release Him. But the Jewish rulers stirred up a mob to demand His death. Pilate, fearing there would be a riot, yielded to their will and gave the order for Jesus to be put to death on a cross. Jesus was at once taken outside the city of Jerusalem

by Roman soldiers and nailed to a cross. As this was being done Jesus prayed for those who were killing Him, saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹⁹ What amazing love this was, to pray that God would forgive the men who were driving the nails into His hands and feet!

Jesus might have asked His Father to save Him from the agony of the cross and take Him to heaven, but He did not do so. He knew that it was God's will that He should suffer and die as a sacrifice for sinners, so He obeyed His Father and suffered on the cross for about six hours. Then at three o'clock in the afternoon He said: "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!"²⁰ Having said this He died. A soldier stuck a spear into His side and the officer in charge reported to Pilate that Jesus was dead.

Two influential Jews who believed in Jesus then went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body, and it was given to them. They took it from the cross, covered it with 100 pounds of spices and perfumes, then wrapped a linen cloth about it and placed it in a tomb carved out of solid rock, like a cave in the hillside. Then a large stone like a millstone was placed before the entrance, and Pilate ordered that it be sealed and soldiers placed so that no one could enter the tomb.

Jesus had previously told His apostles on several occasions that He would be crucified, and on the third day would rise from the dead. They thought He was

speaking a parable, and when He died and was buried they had no hope of seeing Him again on earth. However, on Sunday morning when some of His disciples went to the tomb they found it open. When they entered they saw the cloth which had been wrapped about the body, but it was empty—the body was gone! Soon Jesus appeared alive to some of them and spoke to them, and they knew Him. That night, though the doors were shut, He entered the room in which the disciples had gathered, and spoke to them, and convinced them that He was alive.

During the next forty days He appeared to His disciples a number of times in various places, and explained to them why it had been necessary for Him to suffer and die. He also commanded them to go to all peoples everywhere in the world to tell them the good news, that through believing in Him as their Saviour and Lord their sins would be forgiven by God. He directed His followers to remain in Jerusalem a few days till the Holy Spirit would be given them to equip them for their work. And finally, after promising that He would Himself be with them in spirit till the end of the world, He was taken up to heaven in their sight. Before His ascension He did not appoint anyone to take His place, nor did He foretell the coming of a prophet who would succeed Him.

The disciples did not weep when their beloved Master disappeared from their sight, for they knew He would always be with them in spirit, and would one

day come again, as He had promised. With joy they spent their time in prayer as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised to send them soon. Then ten days after His ascension to heaven, at the time of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, when about 120 of the disciples of Jesus were met together, a wonderful thing happened. They heard a sound like wind, but it was not wind. They saw something like tongues of flame descending upon them, but it was not fire. Then they began to speak various foreign languages which they had not learned. A crowd of people from different lands gathered about the disciples, and each person heard the message of God spoken in His own mother tongue, and all were amazed.

Thereupon Peter stood up and addressed the crowd, telling them that Jesus had just then poured out on them the Holy Spirit which He had promised to give them. And in the power of the Spirit Peter explained why it had been necessary for Jesus to die for sinners, and how God had raised Him from the dead. He said that he and the other apostles were witnesses of His resurrection, and he urged all the people to repent and believe on Jesus Christ that their sins might be forgiven. The Holy Spirit used Peter's address to touch their hearts, and on that day 3,000 of these Jews believed and were baptized with water in the name of Jesus as a symbol of their cleansing from sin.

After this the apostles and the other followers of

Jesus continued to tell the good news of salvation in Jerusalem and in other cities, and many more people believed. Later the Jewish rulers persecuted the believers, as Jesus had foretold, and killed some of them. Many of the followers of Jesus then fled from Palestine, and everywhere they went they told the good news of Jesus, and many more Jews believed. Later God guided Peter to go to the home of an army officer who was not a Jew and give the message of salvation to him and his family, and they all believed and were baptized and received the Holy Spirit. So it became evident that God wanted to save all men, both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews).

One of the Jewish rulers named Saul was bitterly opposed to the followers of Jesus, and was engaged in imprisoning and killing them. As he was on his way to Damascus (Sham) to arrest the believers, Jesus Christ appeared to him from heaven, and said: "Why are you persecuting me?" As a result of meeting the living Christ, Saul believed and was appointed by Christ to be one of His apostles. He later became known as Paul, and did more than anyone else to carry the good news of Christ to Greeks and Romans. He also wrote thirteen of the letters in the New Testament.

When one reads in the New Testament the account of the spread of the Christian faith after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, one sees clearly that the work of Christ did not end when He went to heaven. What Peter and Paul and other believers did

was really what Christ was doing through them. Since He rose from the dead and is alive He did not need to appoint someone to succeed Him as is sometimes falsely supposed. He is Himself always present with His followers. How wonderful it is to have such a loving and mighty Saviour, who is alive and ever ready to help those who trust in Him!

The remarkable spread of the Christian religion in the first one hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ was not accomplished by war, nor by political influence, nor by the learning and wealth of the Christians. In all parts of the Roman Empire, as well as in other lands, multitudes of Jews and idolaters became believers in Christ and thus children of God. This was done through the telling of the good news of God's love in Christ and the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of those who heard the message.

VII. WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

My dear friend, I am sure you now want to ask the question which many ask, and which is one of the most important questions in the world, namely, who is this great person whose history I have just briefly related to you? Many large books have been written in answer to this question, and though it is difficult to explain briefly who Jesus Christ is, I will now attempt to do so. Since the only entirely trustworthy information regarding this matter is found in the Holy Bible, I will depend on it alone for what I will now write.

From the accounts of the life of Jesus Christ which we have in the four Gospels we see that He was truly a man. Though he did not have a human father He was descended, through His mother Mary, from David the great prophet and king of Israel. He grew in body and spirit as other boys do. He ate food and slept. He worked as a carpenter, He grew weary, and was acquainted with all the joys and pains and sorrows that people experience in their life on this earth. He is, therefore, able to sympathize with us in all our human experiences.²¹ Since Jesus was a man He might have married and had children, but He did not do so. His decision was no doubt made in obedience to God's will for Him.

However, while Jesus was truly man, He was in some respects quite different from other men. As already explained, all men, even the prophets and holy men of old, have sometimes disobeyed God and are therefore sinners. But in all His life, Jesus never did, or said, or thought, anything contrary to God's holy will. He is the only sinless man.²² Not only did He commit no sin, His will was perfectly one with the will of God. He is indeed the one Perfect Man who has ever lived on the earth.

The people who witnessed the deeds of Christ were amazed at His power. Once He met a man blind from his birth and gave him sight. On another occasion, when a great storm was about to sink the little boat in which He and His apostles were crossing the Lake of

Galilee, He commanded the wind and the waves, and the sea became calm. He called from the tomb a man named Lazarus who had been dead four days, and the dead man arose and walked out alive. And, most amazing of all, Jesus, having predicted that He would come to life and meet His disciples on the third day after His death did just that. What man other than Jesus has ever done such deeds as these? What man has risen from the dead and never died again? No one! Hence it is evident, that while Jesus was truly man, He was much greater than the greatest of men. Who then is He?

As I previously stated, Jesus Himself claimed to be the Son of God. Not only at His trial before the Jewish council but many times before that trial, Jesus made this high claim for Himself. Moreover, He usually referred to God as 'my Father'. Once, when He said: "I and my Father are one," His enemies wanted to throw stones at Him, for they thought He had spoken blasphemy. But we know that Jesus was not a liar or a blasphemer, for all that He said was true. We should remember that if anyone should say that Jesus is not God's Son He makes Jesus a liar, and if He is a liar no one should believe on Him. But Jesus, in claiming to be the Son of God, was only repeating what God had said to Him in a voice from heaven at His baptism, which was: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."²³ In all the books written by the apostles of Jesus it is stated many

times that Jesus is the Son of God, and all the Christians of the world have always believed this to be true. You, of course, understand that this term is used not in a physical but in a spiritual sense. It is evident that God did not take a wife and have a son, for such a thing is utterly impossible and unthinkable.

In the *Injil* Jesus is also called the "Word of God". While the title "Son of God" expresses His closeness to and His oneness with God who is His true Father, the title "Word of God" tells us that it is through Jesus Christ that God speaks to men. It is thus written: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1 : 1 - 14).

This means that God, who had previously revealed Himself through prophets and their books, finally revealed Himself perfectly in a perfect person. That person is much greater than a prophet, and is truly one with God. For this verse from the *Injil* tells us that that person is the Word of God, and is the Son of God. He was from the beginning one with God, and through Him all things were created. Then, at the appointed time, the Eternal Word of God put on

the garment of humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and became Jesus Christ. So we see that He had two natures, one divine and the other human. Jesus Christ is both man and God.

Those Jewish apostles who first believed on Jesus were strict monotheists, that is, they believed that God is One. However, after being with Jesus for more than two years, they became convinced that their Master was one with God. Thus Peter confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16 : 16). Also, Thomas, when he saw Jesus alive after His resurrection from the dead, cried out: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20 : 28). In both instances Jesus commended these apostles for their faith in Him, and to Thomas He said: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." (John 20 : 24 - 29). This blessedness is ours today if we believe that He is the Son of God.

Now I know you wish to ask, "How is it possible for Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and one with God since God is 'One'?" This is indeed a mystery too great for our little minds to comprehend. Who can fully know the essence (zat), that is, the nature or character of God, except God Himself? But we must remember that God is almighty, and nothing, that is not contrary to His holy will, is impossible for Him. Moreover, we see in the world of nature, which God created, something which illustrates, though imper-

fectly, this great reality. Look at the sun in the heavens—it is so great and so hot that if it should come nearer to the earth we would all perish. And so the sun sheds forth the sunlight, which is really one with itself, and, through it, lights and warms our earth. In a similar way our great God sends His Light, which is one with Himself, into our world to give us life. God calls that Light His Word and His Son. That Light became Jesus Christ, who said of Himself: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8 : 12). When we see the sunlight we see the sun, and likewise when we look at Jesus Christ we see God. Jesus once said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (that is, God.) (John 14 : 9). Therefore, we Christians are sure that God Himself has come to us in His Son Jesus Christ.

My friend, does it seem strange to you that the Almighty God should come in this way to our earth to save sinful men? But, remember, God, who is so great, always acts in love, and in coming in Christ to our world He has perfectly revealed His divine love to us. No doubt you have heard the story of the good king who loved the people of his kingdom so much that he sometimes would put off his royal robes, dress as a poor man and go to the homes of the people to talk with them and help them. This is an inadequate illustration of how the Son of God, who was one with the Father, left His heavenly glory, came to earth and

lived in poverty as a man to reveal to them God's love and bring them to Him. What amazing love was this !

VIII. WHAT WAS CHRIST'S' WORK ON EARTH ?

As we have just seen, Jesus Christ came to earth to reveal God to men and to bring men close to God and to establish God's Kingdom on earth. I explained in Section II how man became a rebel against God, and not only was separated by a wall of sin from God, who is holy, but was utterly unable by himself to obey and live close to God. So God undertook to remove the wall of sin, and to change the evil hearts of men so that they would be both willing and able to love and obey Him. How did God do this ? I will now try to explain one of the most important doctrines of the Christian religion.

As I related before, the Holy God told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed they would die. Our first parents disobeyed God's command about eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and God sentenced them to death. But even as He punished them He gave them a promise to prevent them and their descendants from losing all hope. Satan had come in the form of a serpent to deceive them, so God announced to them that one of their descendants, whom He called "the seed of the woman", would at some future time strike at the serpent's head, and the serpent would

strike at his heel.²⁴ By this God meant that a Saviour born of a woman would come who would defeat Satan, but in doing so would Himself be wounded by Satan. This was the first promise of the coming of Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, who, by dying on the cross for sinners, and rising again, defeated Satan.

Long after this promise God gave a clearer and fuller promise through His prophet Isaiah. In his book, which was written many hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah predicted the coming of One who would suffer and die in the place of sinners, that they might be forgiven and live. Isaiah, writing as though the event was past, said: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities;...with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray;...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah Chapter 53). In brief, the Saviour whom God promised, will die as a sacrifice for the sins of men.

As I explained above this was just what Jesus Christ did. John the Baptist said that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.²⁵ And Jesus, just before His death, said that His blood would be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁶ Then He voluntarily gave Himself up to be sacrificed. He revealed God's love to men, as well as His own divine love, by giving His life to save sinners.

As the Apostle Paul says : "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5 : 8). And Jesus said : "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3 : 16).

Since God is just He will not forgive sinners unless the penalty for their sin is paid. No man is good enough and great enough, even though he were a great prophet, to be the sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, or even for his own sins. So God in His great mercy and love came in Christ to take our sins on Himself. In the death of His Son, who is one with Him, God has paid the penalty for the sins of all who believe on Him. God's Son is so great that His one sacrifice is sufficient to atone for the sins of the world. Hence, no other sacrifice is needed for sin. Thus Jesus Christ, by His voluntary death on the cross, removed the barrier between man and God and made it possible for sinners, who have been forgiven, to come close to the Holy God. Jesus not only told men more about God than anyone else has ever done, He also, by His holy life and His love in dying for us sinners, revealed to us the very mind and heart of God. A holy man in Iran once said to me, "Before I became a Christian I thought I knew God, but I did not. I came to know God truly only when I saw Him in Jesus Christ." Any seeker for God will find Him in Christ.

Before leaving this consideration of Jesus Christ,

I would like to mention some of His names and titles :

1. His name is Jesus, which is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "Jehovah is Salvation".
2. His chief title is "Christ", derived from a Greek word meaning "Anointed". He was anointed by God to be the Eternal King. The same title in Hebrew is "Messiah", which was the title used by the Jews, for the king whose coming was predicted by the prophets.
3. He is "Emmanuel", which means "God with Us".
4. He is the "Son of God".
5. He is the "Word of God".
6. He is the "Son of Man", a title often used by Jesus in referring to Himself. He is both God and Man.
7. He is the "Lamb of God".
8. He is the "Saviour of the World".
9. He is the "King of Kings".
10. He is the "Lord".
11. He is the "Good Shepherd".
12. He is the "Way".

13. He is the "Truth".
14. He is the "Life".
15. He is the "Bread of Life".
16. He is the "True Vine".
17. He is the "Last Adam".
18. He is the "Judge".
19. He is the "Great High Priest".
20. He is the "Resurrection".
21. He is the "Lord of Glory".

IX. WHAT MUST ONE DO TO BE FORGIVEN BY GOD AND SAVED FROM SIN?

We now come, my friend, to a question that is very important to you and to me and to everybody in the world. Since we know that we are sinners, we must ask God to show us what He would have us do in order that He might pardon and accept us. As you know, many different opinions exist in regard to this matter. Some people think that because they are members of a certain race, or followers of some religion, they will certainly be accepted by God. Others believe that by doing good works they will be able to cancel out their evil deeds, and in this way earn their own salvation. Still others hope that some prophet or holy man will pray for them, and persuade God to

pardon them. However, the Bible teaches that in none of these ways is it possible to secure eternal salvation. No one is good enough to be accepted by the Holy God.

Is there then no hope for us sinners? Yes, praise God, there is hope! What we could not do for ourselves, and what no prophet could do for us, God in His great love has done. The Bible says: "He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 2 : 2, 1 : 7, 9).

We see, therefore, that the way which God has opened for us sinners to come to Him and be received by Him is faith in Jesus Christ, the God given sacrifice for sin, and there is no other way. For Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14 : 6). God sent His Son to save all the peoples of the world, and Jesus invites everyone to come to Him. He said that He would never reject anyone who came. This means that any person in the world who hates his sin and sincerely repents and believes on Christ, the Son of God, as his Saviour will surely be forgiven. Anyone, old or young, poor or rich, learned or unlearned,

bad or good, may come. However, it should be understood that faith in Christ is not merely intellectual opinion that Jesus is the Son of God. Faith in Jesus Christ is committing one's self to Him, as a sick person puts himself into the hands of a skilful doctor whom he trusts to cure him.

We rejoice that Christ is not dead and buried, as are Moses and the prophets of old. No, He is alive and near us in spirit. As He healed the sick people who came to Him, in faith, when He lived as a man in Palestine, so He is able, in the same way, to save us today. Like the sunshine, Jesus is both on earth with us and also in heaven with His Father. He is ever in the presence of God and, there, continually prays for those who have believed on Him. The Bible says: "Consequently He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7 : 25). His death on the cross for us, and His continual praying for us, are effective not merely in saving believers from hell, but in bringing them close to God, and making them pure and holy while they are still living in this evil world. My earnest prayer, my friend, is that you and all who are seeking God may be willing to receive His gift of salvation through Christ. No one can buy salvation, but God gives it as a free gift if we will stretch out the hand of faith and accept it.

X. WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT ?

You remember I stated above that when Jesus

was baptized by John the Baptist the Holy Spirit descended on Him. Also, before His death Jesus promised to send the Spirit, whom He called the Comforter, to guide and give power to His apostles in their service after His ascension to heaven. Accordingly, ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out from heaven on all the believers. In power they gave Christ's message to men, and hundreds believed on Jesus Christ. Who is this Holy Spirit? Some have thought the Holy Spirit was the angel Gabriel, or else a prophet. Others have supposed the Spirit was merely a holy influence. However, from the Bible, we see that the Holy Spirit is not one of God's creatures (created beings), but is the Spirit of God, and is one with God. This becomes evident when we take note of what the Spirit does.

Jesus once told a learned man named Nicodemus that he must be born again in order to enter God's kingdom. When Nicodemus asked in surprise how a man who is old could be born a second time, Jesus replied that the new birth is the work of the Spirit. It is evident that as only God can create physical life, so only God can give men spiritual life and make them new beings. When men live in sin they are children of the devil, but God is able to change them by His Holy Spirit, and when they are born again they become children of God.

Also, the Holy Spirit is the author of God's holy

books, for it was He who taught and guided the Old Testament prophets like David and Isaiah. Likewise, it was the Holy Spirit who guided Matthew and Luke and Paul and the other writers of the books of the New Testament for, as the Bible says: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1 : 21). Just as God's Spirit guided those who wrote the holy books so the Spirit is the only perfectly true guide of those who read them. Jesus Christ said: "But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14 : 26).

Of course the followers of Jesus were distressed when He told them that He would be crucified, and afterward would go from the earth to heaven. But Jesus comforted them by promising to send His Spirit to guide and strengthen them, and said that He would Himself be ever with them by the Spirit. Ten days after the ascension of Jesus the Holy Spirit descended from heaven on His followers and transformed them. From that time to the present this same Holy Spirit has been dwelling in Christ's true followers, and He will abide in them forever as Jesus promised.²⁷

It is important to remember that only God's Spirit is able to open the blind eyes of sinful men and enable them to know who Jesus Christ is, as is written in the

Bible: "And no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12: 3). Hence, it is not strange that those who do not have the Holy Spirit find it impossible to call Jesus "Lord" and "Son of God".

As the Holy Spirit gives believers a new birth and a true knowledge of who Jesus is, so He also opens our eyes to the sinfulness of our hearts and enables us to repent and forsake our sins. As soon as anyone believes on Jesus Christ, God forgives him and accepts him as His child, and gives him a new heart. But the old sinful nature remains and continues to draw him toward evil, and Satan ever ready to tempt him to disobey God. However, the Holy Spirit, which is in him, helps him to resist the devil, and creates in him the holy qualities which God desires, such as love, purity, truth, joy, and peace.²⁸ This work of the Holy Spirit in believers goes on as long as they live on earth, changing them gradually and making them more and more like their Master Jesus Christ. For this is God's purpose for us, that we all become perfect like His only Son. However, only when we reach Heaven will we become perfect like Christ.²⁹ In many other ways also does the Holy Spirit help us, teaching us how to pray, and guiding and strengthening us as we serve Christ.³⁰

What we learn from all these facts is that the Holy Spirit in believers is really God abiding in them. What

a priceless privilege, that the Great and Holy God should abide in man by His Spirit! Truly this is the greatest gift that God could give to men, the gift of Himself. To whom is this gift given? We know that in ancient times God gave His Spirit to His prophets and to holy men. But when God gave His Son to be the Saviour of the world He also gave His Spirit to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus once said: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"³¹ God is faithful, and whenever people believe in Christ and submit to Him as their Lord and ask God to give them the Holy Spirit, He always does so. As we ask each day for our bread, so, as long as we live, we should continually ask God to fill us with the Spirit. Jesus said: "Ask, and it will be given you." (Luke 11:9).

XI. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TRINITY?

Now, my friend, I come to the question you have been wanting to ask ever since I told you that Christians believe in One God. For I know you have heard that Christians worship three gods: God and Jesus and His mother Mary, and that these three are called the "Trinity". As I explained before, if Christians have worshipped any of God's creatures in place of, or along with, the Creator, they have greatly sinned. The Virgin Mary is a very holy person, but she should

never be given the worship which belongs to God only. It is true that Christians worship Jesus Christ, but we do this not because He was a holy prophet, but because He was from eternity the Word of God and the Son of God, perfectly one with God. He is not a man whom we have exalted to be a god along with the One True God. Rather, He is from eternity one with God, and He became a man to save sinful men and bring them back to God. Hence He is worthy of worship, for He is God indeed.

Also, we have just explained that the Holy Spirit is not one of God's creatures, but is one with God, and is God. The Spirit does in and for man what only God is able to do, and is therefore worthy of worship just as the Son is worthy of worship. What then are we to say? Are there three Gods, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? By no means! We repeat, God has always and will always be One. Yet from eternity there have been in this Divine Unity, Father, Son and Spirit. The Father, whom human eye has never seen, is the source or spring of Deity. Once in human history the Son perfectly manifested the Unseen Father. The Spirit was given by the Father and the Son to accomplish the divine purpose in men. So, my friend, rest assured that Christians worship One God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to this Trinity in Unity when He commanded His apostles to go everywhere and persuade men to become His disciples, and baptize believers "...in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28 : 19). I will later explain what baptism is.

XII. WHAT IS THE CHURCH ?

You have perhaps heard people speak of the building in which Christians worship as the “church”. This is often done, but the real meaning of the word “church” is not the building, but the believers who worship in it. “Church” is used to indicate the local group of believers in Christ, and it is also used for all believers, both those alive on earth, and those who are with Christ in heaven.

In ancient times God chose the Children of Israel to be His special people. He gave them His laws through Moses, and gave them Palestine as their land, and sent them prophets to teach them and to tell them about the coming of their Messiah. When Jesus the Messiah came at the appointed time to Israel, some of the people believed on Him, but most of them refused to believe. Then, from those who believed on Christ, God formed a new people for Himself, called the Christian Church. Originally only Israelites were God’s chosen people, but men and women of every race on earth who believe on Christ are God’s new people. The rite of admission to membership in Israel was circumcision, which God commanded for Abraham and his male descendants. But the rite of admission to the Christian Church, which is composed of God’s new people, is baptism, and circumcision no longer has

a religious significance. Baptism is administered as Christ commanded to those who repent and believe on Him, indicating that they are members of God's family. Baptism itself does not save anyone, for sinners are saved only by faith in Christ. Baptism is a sign or symbol of cleansing from sin and of a new life in Christ. In some churches it is the custom to pour or sprinkle water on the head of the person who is baptized, and in other churches the person is immersed or put under the water. Baptism is administered only once to a person.

In the New Testament the Church is called the "Body of Christ". Christ is the Head of the Church, and all the members of His Body are one in Him, whatever their race or language or colour may be. Accordingly, the Church is one, as Christ is one. The Church also is holy, because it belongs to the Holy God. However, when we consider the state of the Church in the world today, we see that it is divided, and sometimes has in it much that is evil. Why is this? In the first place, there are many people who are in the Church who have not been born again by the Holy Spirit, and so are really not Christians at all. The Bible says that anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ.³² Also, all the members of the Church are like sick people who have come to a hospital for healing. They have put themselves in the hands of the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, and He is gradually making them well and

curing their disease of sin. Also, as long as Christians are in this world, they are not entirely free from the effects of sin, and all of us need to confess our sins and repent. All men are sinners, and the difference between Christians and others is that true Christians are submitting themselves to the Physician whom God has sent, and are taking His medicine and obeying His directions, while others are not.

While all true believers are one in Christ, there are, as you perhaps know, many different sects of Christians. The two largest groups are known as Roman Catholics and Protestants, and within these two groups are numerous branches. However, all these Christians have the same Bible. They all believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross and rose again, and is the only Saviour and Lord. Though they differ in certain matters, some of which are very important, most Christians desire unity—to be one in faith and love, as Christ wishes them to be.

What is the purpose of the Church? Part of its purpose is to enable believers to grow in the knowledge of God and in faith and love and to have fellowship with other believers. Every believer should obey Christ's command to be baptized and become a member of His Church. Every Christian needs other Christians just as every member of the human body needs the other members, and no believer should cut himself off from the fellowship of other believers in the Church.

Also, the Church has been given by Christ the responsibility for doing His work in the world. When Jesus Christ was on the earth as a man He spoke God's Word to men, He healed the sick, comforted the sorrowing, and saved sinners. Before He ascended to heaven Christ commanded His followers to tell the Good News of Salvation to all the people in the world. It is the primary task of all Christians in all lands to give Christ's message to all the people, and invite them to believe on Him. Christians must also show the love of Christ to people of all races and religions by healing the sick, teaching the ignorant, feeding the hungry, and preaching salvation to the captives of sin. Jesus Christ spent His life in serving people, and members of His Church must follow His example.

As every flock of sheep needs a shepherd, so every group of believers needs leaders who will teach and guide and encourage them, and who will, whenever necessary, rebuke those who have gone astray. From the first, God has provided such persons for the care of His children in His Church. Jesus Christ chose twelve men to be His apostles, to give His message to the people of the world and to establish His Church. Then, as we see in the New Testament, God appointed others to be pastors (shepherds) and teachers and evangelists and deacons and elders and ministers and bishops (supervisors). All these spiritual servants of Christ are in the Church today.

XIII. WHAT ARE THE RELIGIOUS DUTIES AND PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANS ?

Since the worship of Christians differs in some respects from that of followers of other religions, it has sometimes been mistakenly supposed that Christians have no religious duties. However I want to make it quite clear that the purpose of worship of Christians is not to earn salvation and forgiveness of sins. As I have explained above, salvation cannot be bought by anything we do, but is given to us freely by God when we believe in Christ. Hence, we worship God not in order to gain salvation, but in order to show our love and gratitude to Him for His gift of salvation to us. Let me tell you briefly about Christian worship.

(I) Prayer.

Jesus did not give to His followers prayers which they must repeat daily at fixed times in the Hebrew or Greek languages as they face a certain direction. Instead, He told them to come to God as children would come to their father, at whatever time or place they wished, and speak to Him out of their hearts in their mother tongue. The form of prayer is not important, but it is essential that we worship God sincerely, and with our minds and hearts.³³ Christians pray when they meet together with other believers in their church buildings, with their families at home and silently when going about their daily work. Many Christians have the habit of reading a portion of the Bible and

praying in private each day. In their prayers they thank God for His many gifts, they confess their sins and seek forgiveness, and they pray for the healing of the sick and for the salvation of unbelievers. They also pray for their rulers, and for the peace of the world ; Jesus said we must always pray.³⁴ Since Sunday was the day on which Jesus Christ rose from the dead, every Sunday is a holy day for Christians. Usually worship in the churches is conducted on Sunday, and often on other days also. In the church worship the Bible is read, sacred songs are sung, and a sermon is preached by the minister. If you would like to attend a meeting for Christian worship perhaps one of your Christian friends would take you to his church with him.

(2) Fasting.

Jesus Christ did not appoint any special days or times of fasting for His followers, hence, fasting is optional for them. However, He told them that whenever they fasted they should do this to please God and not, like the hypocrites, to get glory from men.³⁵ Some Christians refrain from eating meat on Friday as this is the day on which Jesus was crucified. Others refrain from eating certain foods during "Lent", the forty weekdays prior to Easter, the festival of the resurrection of Christ. These customs were not commanded in the Bible, but it was commanded that we refrain from doing and saying all evil things. And I will add

here this teaching of Christ, namely, that all foods are clean and lawful. He said that what makes a person unclean is not what goes into his mouth, but the evil which comes out of his heart, such as adultery, stealing, killing, envy, pride, etc.³⁶

(3) Almsgiving.

Jesus did not appoint a fixed proportion of one's income or capital which should be given by Christians to the work of God and to the poor. However, He taught that all we have belongs to God, and we should use our money, be it little or much, as God directs. Christians, therefore, express their gratitude to God by giving willingly of what He has entrusted to them to support their pastors and the work of their churches, to help the poor and the sick, and to send the Good News of Christ to people who have not heard it. Christ said His followers should give generously to please God, and many Christians give one tenth of their income to God, but not in order to get honour and praise from men.³⁷

(4) Pilgrimages.

Jesus Christ did not command His followers to go on pilgrimage to any holy place, for God is everywhere and one may worship Him in every place. Some Christians like to visit Palestine and see the land where Jesus lived, but going there has no religious merit. It is impossible to honour the body of Christ by visiting His tomb for it is empty—He is alive !

(5) Festivals.

Jesus did not command that certain feast days be observed by His followers. However, Christians usually observe at least three important feasts : first there is Christmas, the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ. Most Christians observe Christmas on December 25, but some observe it on January 6. However the exact date of Christ's birth is not known. The second feast is Easter, when Christians rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The date of Easter, being at full moon, varies from year to year, but it always comes in March or April. Then there is the feast of Pentecost when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christ's disciples, seven weeks after His resurrection. These are all religious festivals. New Year (January 1) is a civil and not a Christian festival.

(6) Holy Rites (Sacraments).

Jesus appointed two rites to be observed in His Church. The first is Baptism, which I have already described. It is the rite of admission to membership in the Church. (See Section XIII). The second is Holy Communion, also called the Lord's Supper. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus Christ gave bread to His apostles, saying: "This is my body." He also gave a cup of wine, saying: "This is my blood". Jesus used the bread and wine as symbols of His body and blood. And He commanded His followers to observe this rite in memory of Him. In most of the churches

throughout the whole world this command is now obeyed. Christians gather in their places of worship and each takes a bit of bread and a sip of grape juice, remembering Christ's death for them, and receiving His strength by faith in their hearts. Christians receive great spiritual blessing from this holy rite.³⁸

(7) Marriage.

According to the command of Jesus Christ, one man and one woman are to be united in marriage, and are to love one another and be faithful to one another as long as they live. Jesus said: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." Divorce is therefore forbidden, except in the event of adultery.³⁹ The Apostle Paul has written that the love between husband and wife should be similar to that which is between Christ and His people.⁴⁰

XIV. WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY ?

In the Old Testament we find many laws which God gave to His people Israel. In the "Ten Commandments" which are found in Exodus, chapter 20, God commanded us to honour our parents, and forbade murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting what belongs to another. He also gave many other moral laws, one of which was: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Leviticus 19 : 18). Jesus did not change any of these God-given laws, but He perfected

them by explaining their real purpose.

For example, Jesus said that if anyone looks lustfully at a woman, not his wife, he is guilty of adultery. Thus, while the old commandment condemned the evil act, Jesus condemned the evil in the heart. He commanded truthfulness in speech, and forbade swearing, saying that one's every word should be as true as an oath. He told His followers that not only must they love one another but also their enemies, and must pray for those who persecute them. He forbade drunkenness and every form of immorality. And He said that God's children must be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. No standard could be higher than that.⁴¹

Jesus also gave a rule of conduct which is applicable in all lands and in all ages, namely: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12). Because of its great value this has often been called the "Golden Rule". This perfect and complete principle does not merely forbid doing wrong to others, rather it encourages doing all the good to others that we would like them to do to us. It is noteworthy that the *Injil* does not have detailed regulations about food and dress and other matters that would have to be changed as the centuries pass. Rather, its principles are applicable to any situation and are therefore abiding.

All of the teachings of Jesus can be summed up in the one word "love." The love of Jesus Christ was perfect love, and He commanded His disciples to love one another as He loved them.⁴² We Christians well know that we do not have this Christlike love in ourselves, but when we remember how Christ loved us and died for us, we in turn will love others.⁴³ The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of love, and when Christ puts His Spirit in us we are able to love all men, even our enemies, just as He did.⁴⁴ This love is not merely to be in our hearts, but must be expressed in deeds. The Apostle John says that if one has the means to help his poor brother and fails to do so, God's love is not in him.

A most beautiful description of love was written by the Apostle Paul, a part of which I quote :

"If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have . . . but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind ; love is not jealous or boastful ; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way ; it is not irritable or resentful ; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends . . .

So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the

greatest of these is love." (I Corinthians chapter 13).

The love of Christ for people was expressed not only by words, but by healing the sick and feeding the hungry and giving His life on the cross to save sinners. It is this love which gives Christians the desire to establish hospitals for the healing of the sick, homes for orphans, schools for children, and other agencies to serve people of all races and religions. Jesus wanted love to be the distinctive mark of His followers.⁴⁵ We Christians must confess with shame that our love is often very imperfect, but all true Christians desire to love others as our Master did.

XV. WHAT DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE ABOUT FUTURE THINGS ?

As I stated at the beginning of this long letter, Christians believe in the Almighty God, who has a purpose for this world and whose purpose will most surely be accomplished. When mankind rebelled against God and became sinful, God sent His Son to save the world.⁴⁶ Those who believe on Him are saved, and those who reject Him are condemned. At the end God will subdue all His enemies, and will establish His eternal Kingdom, in which no evil whatever will be found. In the Bible there are many prophecies regarding these future events, but God has not seen fit to make everything perfectly clear to us, so, Christians

have often interpreted these predictions in different ways. I will mention here the future events about which most Christians are agreed.

(a) The Return of Jesus Christ.

Before His ascension to heaven, Christ repeatedly assured His followers that He would come back to them, and Christians are still awaiting His return. His first coming to earth was for men's salvation, but His second coming will be for judgement, and for the complete establishment of God's kingdom. Once when the apostles asked Jesus when He would return, He replied that the time of His coming was known to God only, and He urged them to be always ready, for He would come when people were not expecting Him. He told them He would come in glory with the angels, and His appearing would be as visible to all as is lightning in the sky. He warned His followers against false Christs and false prophets who would come to deceive people. We know that during the past 1,900 years many such liars have come, but wise Christians have not been deceived by them. For Christ made it clear that whenever it is said: "Christ has come, He is in such and such a place", that man is a false Christ. When the true Christ comes from heaven, all the world will know it at once, and there will be no need for anyone to tell another this news.

When Jesus was ascending to heaven, angels said

to His disciples who were watching Him : "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11). Hence, Jesus will not come as a baby born of a human mother, to live again on earth as a man and die as He did the first time. For the Bible says that Jesus died once for our sins, and will never die again, for death no longer has rule over Him.⁴⁷ From this it is evident that Christ has not yet returned since His ascension, for there has been no one who has not died and been buried.

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead His physical body was changed into a spiritual body not subject to death, in which He was able to appear and disappear like the angels in heaven. Having this spiritual body, He is today in heaven, and we believe that in this body He will return, and will appear to men again. Since Christians have always erred in predicting the date and place of Christ's return, it is well for us to avoid making this same mistake. We should all so live and serve our Lord that whenever He comes we will be ready to welcome Him.⁴⁸

When Christ returns, what will He do ? The answer to this question is not entirely clear from the Bible. Some Christians believe that Christ will abolish all the evil in this world, will establish God's Kingdom on earth, and will rule as King. All will obey Him, and there will be an era of perfect peace and justice. Life on earth will then be as God wanted it to be, and as

it would have been if man had not rebelled against God. Other Christians think that the rule of Christ will be not as a temporal king on this earth, but as a spiritual ruler in the eternal Kingdom of God. When He comes, what He does will no doubt be far more wonderful than anyone has ever dreamed. It is not necessary for us to know all these mysteries, but it is necessary that we all be prepared for His coming.

(2) The General Resurrection.

Jesus once said: "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His (Christ's) voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement." (John 5 : 28-29). In this statement Jesus Christ claims that it is He who will raise all the dead to life, as He raised a few dead people when He was living in Palestine. When the dead are raised, in what kind of body will they appear? The Apostle Paul said that the physical bodies of believers will be changed in the resurrection, just as a seed planted in the earth dies, and comes forth from the ground as a plant.⁴⁹ And Jesus told those who questioned Him that in the future life there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, but believers will be like the angels of God.⁵⁰

(3) The Last Judgement.

Not only will Christ raise the dead, He will also be the judge of all men. He said that all nations would be gathered before Him, and He would separate them

from one another, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. To those who had shown love to the sick and needy He will say, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you!" And, to those who have failed to show love, He will say, "... Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." They will go into eternal punishment, while the righteous will enter eternal life.⁵¹ Yes, God will judge all men through His Son Jesus Christ. All of us, whatever our race or religion, will one day stand before Christ's judgement seat to be judged according to our deeds when we lived on earth.⁵² The Judge is just, and will judge with both justice and mercy.

Are there any people who do not need to fear this awful Day of Judgement? Yes, there are! Those who have truly believed on Christ the Saviour will not fear Christ the Judge for He said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears my word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24). Yes, though believers in Christ are not sinless they will be accepted by God because they have believed on Christ who died in their place. In the Judgement the believers in Christ will be rewarded in proportion to their faithfulness.⁵³

And what will be the fate of those who refused to believe on the Son of God? They will be condemned and punished, as Jesus said: "He who does not believe

is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:18-19). Those who reject God's Son have rejected God Himself, and no sin is greater than this. So you can realize, my friend, why we Christians are so eager that all men everywhere know and believe in Christ, for if they reject Him, God will reject them.

(4) Heaven and Hell.

From what has already been said you will have understood much of the Christian belief about the future life. Those who have been accepted by Christ go to the Presence of God, to live forever with Him in love and joy. Jesus said: "In my Father's house are many rooms . . . when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:2-3).

At the very end of the Bible the Apostle John thus describes the glory of life in God's Presence: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, . . . I heard a great voice from the throne (of God) saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more . . . He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my Son'." (Revelation

21:1-7). This is the Heaven prepared for God's children. It will be far more glorious than we can imagine, as the Bible says : "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9).

And what will be the portion of those who are not God's obedient children ? God says : "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8). Hell is complete separation from the light and love of God, and no figures of speech are adequate to portray the horror of it. O, that all men would choose eternal life instead of eternal punishment !

(5) Death of Believers.

Do believers in Christ fear death ? No, they do not. For Christ promised that when they die they will be with Him.⁵⁴ The Apostle Paul, as he faced possible execution in Rome, wrote : "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." (Philippians 1:23). Sometimes people are surprised that Christians sing hymns of joy at the funerals of their loved ones, and the reason is that we know they are not really dead. They have gone to be with Christ, and for that we rejoice, while we shed tears for our own loss of them.

CONCLUSION

Now, my friend, I must bring my long letter to a close. I hope I have been able to give satisfactory answers to some of your questions. No doubt you still have other questions which I have not answered. For example, you may be wondering whether the discoveries of science make the faith I have described impossible. Not at all! God is the author of all truth, whether it be in the Bible or in nature, and there is no conflict between true science and true religious faith. Some of the greatest of modern scientists have been devout Christians. The more the scientists discover of the marvels of this vast universe, the better we are able to understand the greatness of the wisdom and the power of God who created and upholds all these things.

Or, you may be troubled, as many people are, by the terrible problems of war and poverty and injustice in the world, and you ask why God permits all this evil to exist. The answer which the Bible gives is that these evils are caused by sinful man and not by the Just and Holy God. God is even now judging and punishing the nations for their sins. And finally, as we have seen above, God will judge every man according to his deeds. God is in control of the universe, and though we cannot understand fully why He permits all the evil that has come into His world, we know that at last He will cast Satan into Hell, and will establish His holy and eternal Kingdom.

My earnest request of you, my dear friend, is that you will study the Bible carefully and pray that God will guide you in understanding its teaching, and will believe in the Saviour Jesus Christ and become a child of God. And then I hope you will serve God and men as long as you live on earth, and will then go to be forever with Christ in God's House above.

Your sincere friend

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