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“Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” 1Pet 3:18

I sometimes wonder how many of us have actually seen our unsaved state through God’s eyes; that is our state prior to accepting his gift of salvation through the death of his Son, Jesus. As a result of this, we may not fully appreciate why he had to do this for us individually in order to prepare us for the fulfilment of 1Peter 2:5 in our lives, where we’re described as *“living stones which are being built into a living temple.”*

It’s easy to get caught up in that word temple, thinking of elaborate buildings, but remember, as far as God is concerned it means nothing more and nothing less than his dwelling place. In John 14:23 Jesus lays it out for us, *“If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our* ***home***with him.” And again in 1Cor 6:19, *“Do you not know that your body is a* ***temple*** *of the Holy Spirit within you?”*

But just as with any building in the physical, if faulty materials are used, disaster can easily follow. So in this temple each living stone has to be trimmed or dressed, taking away any rough edges so it fits into place causing no irritations or abrasions for the other living stones. As those who have been involved in building of any type know, if faulty material is used, it not only affects the materials immediately around it, but can cause problems throughout the whole structure as time passes, creating a weak point. I can’t help wondering if that’s why so many of man’s churches have collapsed and disappeared!

Our being prepared as living stones has to take place here in the spiritual quarry of this world. That was the pattern set down for us with the stones used in building Solomon’s temple. They were dressed and prepared in the quarry before being brought to the temple site. If you care to look it up, you can see this for yourself in 1Kings 6:7. The word tells us that pattern continues now, and 1Cor 15:46 states it this way, *“It is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, then the spiritual.”* In the same way, as unregenerate, unprepared stones, we cannot be brought as we are to the temple site in heaven.

I may seem to be labouring the point here, but from just listening to people over the years, it would appear many are troubled by so much suffering and hardship among Christians in the here and now. On occasion I’ve even heard this coming from the pulpit, and couldn’t help but think, “How sad, don’t you understand that without this preparatory work being carried out in us in the here and now we simply would not fit into the heavenly Jerusalem.”

The fact that building site is in heaven in the spiritual is clearly laid out in Rev 21:2 where John sees *“the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband.”* The reason we have to go through the fiery trials of 1Peter 4:12-13 in the here and now is so that when the Master calls us home we will then be fully prepared to be part of his bride, that new heavenly Jerusalem. *“Do not be surprised at the fiery trials which come upon you to prove you as though something strange were happening. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”*

Clearly, some stones, like me, need a lot more work done on them in the quarry than others do. But I wouldn’t want to try to take the analogy any further here, that’s the work of our one true Teacher, the Spirit of Christ. I can only share what he’s shown me so far, and I know I’ve a long way to go still.

Speaking of our situation of needing to go through the refining fires we see that our God says in Isaiah 48:10, *“I have refined you, but not like silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.”* Sadly many see these things as only physical and emotional sufferings brought about by other people. And while that can be so, yet as I’ve said many times I have personally found they are much more often due to the direct attacks of the devil and all his fellow evil, troubling, lying spirits, those fiery darts which he loves shooting into our hearts via our minds and emotions, **if we allow him to do so** by not keeping our shield of faith to hand so we can raise it quickly, quenching them. Eph 6:16. This is where training for spiritual warfare becomes so important and why it’s vital to fully take heed of of the exhortations of Eph 6:10-18. It’s there in verse 11 we’re instructed to *“Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all”* (that the Master requires of us), *“to remain standing.”*

I also wonder just how many were like me, living a very respectable life, that’s in man’s eyes of course, even sometimes being held up in man’s church circles as a good example for others to follow. Yet during those years I was completely unaware of what my heart was really like. I didn’t know what God had said about the human heart through his prophet. *“Man’s heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked or corrupt. Who can understand it?”* Jer 17:9-10. But I’m very grateful to you my Lord, for having *“searched my mind and tried my heart”*, exposing their wickedness to me, so I can now be refined and purified by the fiery trials which, because of your love, you allow to come my way.

My life up to the age of thirty-two had been all about doing what I’d been brought up to believe was right, and how good it made me feel when I did something to help someone else. I was busy working my way to heaven, which, in essence, was what I had, unwittingly on my part at least, learned to believe, but I won’t go into that here. Suffice it to say that the Master changed everything in that one glorious Saturday night.

In listening to many people, including myself, down through the years prior to the Lord saving me, there was one thought which seemed to be prevalent. “l believe I’ve lived a good life, I’ve helped people whenever I could” and so on. And it was only because the Master opened the blind eyes of my heart that I was blessed to be made aware of my situation, and of his amazing remedy through the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, his perfect, sinless Son.

I had been completely unaware of my own need of salvation! I never knew of, and could never have realised the truth of the words of Isaiah 64:6, even if I had known them. *“We have all become as one unclean and our* ***righteous deeds*** *are like a polluted garment or filthy rags. We fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away.”* I had never heard of the need of personal salvation through faith in what God had done through his perfect Son, Jesus Christ, on Calvary, or of how essential that was for us. And as for having a personal relationship with my God in Christ, I never knew such a thing was even possible.

But in looking back to the little I do remember of my old life before I was reborn of God’s Spirit, I can clearly see that it was his intention even back then to begin making me aware of his loving plan. That was why he came to me in that little tree at the back of my parents place in Ireland, making me aware of him as my loving Father, even though I had no understanding of any of it at the time, or of where or how he would take me to where he wanted me to be.

As I’ve just said, I didn’t understand, but somehow in a childlike way I knew he was my loving Father even then. I’m so grateful to him for the many times he came to me in that tree. Being the eternal God who *“inhabits eternity”*, he already knew I was his, though it was nearly thirty years later before he confirmed it in me. Such amazing grace! And astonishingly, I now know my name was written in the Lamb’s book of life from before the foundation of the world. Rev 13:8.

Sure, I knew that Jesus had been crucified that day at Calvary, but I had no idea of the real reason why. I didn’t know he had actually died for my sin so that I could live forever with him and the Father. I was completely unaware of the immense spiritual transaction which had taken place there, despite having spent three years in a religious monastery. Certainly I was aware of not being able to stop sinning, despite doing all the things I’d been taught were necessary, often going far beyond what I’d been led to believe was required. But I was unaware of the possibility of that bondage being broken forever by accepting in simple faith, God’s gift to us through his Son Jesus.

But now, having been set free from the controlling power of sin in my life, it makes me sad when I hear of 1John 2:1 being viewed as saying, **WHEN** wesin, whereas in fact it says, *“****IF*** *we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* How that one little word changes the whole picture from the inevitability of continuing to sin, to the *“glorious liberty of the children of God”*, Rom 8:21. We can now experience that liberty daily as his Spirit in us empowers our new nature to say a firm NO to every temptation and to walk away free. We can then watch as these lusts and desires disappear like the proverbial puff of smoke, having no controlling power in our lives any more. So I say this, all glory is due *“to him, who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think.”* Eph 3:20.

Clearly those who have been reborn of God’s seed have had the sin cycle broken in their lives in and through the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus our Lord. And what a terrible insult it would be to him if we don’t take hold of the fullness of what he accomplished there on the cross for us. It would make a mockery of his words in John 8:36, *“If the Son makes you free, you are indeed free.”* Thank you my Lord!

Now while I have absolutely no confidence in my own ability to live any day without sin, yet I do have complete confidence in my Lord to do it in and through me. I’m reminded of that confidence in Heb 3:14, *“We share in Christ* ***if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.****”* I do hope you have actually experienced that *“first confidence”* for yourself!

It was that word which he used to encourage and motivate me at a time when I was struggling very badly with a number of things. He also reminded me of his word in Matt 24:13, *“Those who endure to the end will be saved.”* Endurance in the face of failure is vital in every area of life, especially the spiritual; that is if we’re to know success and reap its benefits for eternity.

But my confidence can never be in anything of self, only in the Spirit’s ability to not only make it possible for me to live this day without sin, but to make it a certainty, **if** I will just rely on him completely, remembering that I’m the only **if** part of that equation. *“****If*** *we are willing and obedient we will eat the good of the land.”* Isaiah 1:19. If you have a problem with this, just trust the Lord to open your understanding as it’s really very simple.

In 2Cor 3:17 we see, *“The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty”*, which includes liberty from the controlling power of sin and everything else such as drugs, otherwise we’re not free. Again Jesus has said in John 10:10, *“I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.”* All he requires of us is a quiet, confident trust in his ability to do in us everything which we can’t do of ourselves.

*“In returning and rest you will be saved. In quietness and trust will be your strength.”* And, *“The effect of righteousness will be peace, and its result, quietness and trust forever.”* Isaiah 30:15 and 32:17. All I can say is, “thank you my Lord for such a glorious, certain hope”, and I pray that you also know the glorious liberty contained in those two scriptures.

Way back in my religious days, I had no clue about 1Peter 1:18-19, but now I do know that I *“have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from my fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”*

That became reality for me that special Saturday evening in 1970, when the Lord, who is the Spirit, opened my eyes to his truth. I then saw clearly that I could never have purchased or earned back the position God created us for; which was to be his children. This purpose of his is clearly shown in Luke 3:38 where the first Adam is called *“the son of God”*. Remember also what we’ve looked at before, Jesus is referred to as *“the last Adam”* in 1Cor 15:45.

But coming back to my complete ignorance of these things prior to 1970, I also had no idea that all of what we’ve just looked at was precisely why God had to send his perfect, sinless, only **begotten** Son, *“the* ***last*** *Adam”*, Jesus the Christ, to die for our sin, for **my** sin, in order to remove the curse of sin, which is death to God, and restore those who would believe and receive his gift to us through Jesus the Christ. *“To as many as received him and believed in his name; he gives power to become children of God.”* John 1:12.

Nor had I any idea that had to be done in order to wash away our sin and to break its cycle of control in us, bringing us back to himself, because, *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin”*, Heb 9:22. But, *“The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”* 1John 1:7. And we’ve already seen this in 1Peter 3:18, *“Christ died for sin once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”*

Jesus is the door by which we can enter into the presence of God. And speaking about himself in John 10:9 he said, *“I am the door, if anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go* ***in and out and*** *find pasture.”* Again in 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me.”* Then in John 6:44 he said something which he has written on, no actually burned into my heart, and I hope he’s written it on your heart also. *“No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

You will notice, nothing in all of this is about what we’ve done. Everything is about what our God has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ. He truly is *“the last Adam”*, who was sent to break the sin cycle for us and reverse the effect of what *“the first Adam”* did. I say again, all he requires of us is our complete, wholehearted trusting willingness to obey; he will do the rest. “*We all with open face, seeing the glory of the Lord,* ***are being changed*** *into his likeness from one degree of glory to another. And this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* 2Cor 3:18

If we are truly in Christ then we are clothed in a righteousness which comes to us from God himself. We see this in Phil 3:9, “not *having a righteousness of our own based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”* And what is that faith but a total trust in what God has said and done for us in and through Jesus Christ on Calvary. That was the good news he first allowed me to see back in 1970, though I must confess I didn’t even begin to understand the how of it at that time. He was so kind to me; he didn’t give me too much info that first night.

Now to follow on from that we’re told in Rom 13:14, we can and must *“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.”* Our proactive role in all of this is laid out for us in the three steps of Eph 4:22-24. *“****Put off*** *the old nature, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through its deceitful lusts.* ***Be renewed*** *in the spirit of your minds.* ***Put on*** *the new nature, created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

In my religious days I tried to put off the habits of sin without any success, but now it’s necessary to wear this new nature in such a way it may be seen by all that it’s by God’s power alone that I am enabled to continually do what is right **in his eyes**. *“Let your light shine before mankind* ***in such a way*** *that they may see your good works,* ***but glorify your Father in heaven.****”* Matt 5:16.

In each situation I’m faced with I need to look to the Lord for the wisdom I need to do that effectively. If I don’t, then the credit in people’s eyes most likely will come to me instead of going to my God. I need to remember here that *“Every good endowment and every perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* James 1:17.

All this means I can now walk on in the power of this new nature, wearing it like a garment so all can see it’s not me, but Christ living in me, always making that point as the Spirit gives me opportunity. My task is to allow his light to shine out in all its glory through my actions and words, so all may see and hear in my life the outworking of the good news which I have been so blessed to hear and receive. In light of this I’ve found it’s necessary that others know my human weaknesses, but only so they can see it’s by the grace of God alone that I am what I now am. *“We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all surpassing power belongs to God and not to us,”* 2Cor 4:7.

For me that’s what the word in James 5:16 is all about. *“Confess your sins to one another”*, all those failures, mistakes, wrong words and actions, those unintentional sins which we’re guilty of every day, and for which we can so easily excuse and justify ourselves. It’s these sins which the blood of Jesus cleanses us of in 1John 1:7 and 1:9.

As I’m fairly sure I’ve already said my threefold task is to continually “***Put off*** the old nature which belongs to my former meaner of life, and is corrupt through its deceitful lusts. ***Be renewed*** in the Spirit of my mind. And ***put on*** the new nature created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Eph 4:22-24. But like many other gems in the scriptures, it needs repeating often!

We must no longer give the old nature a chance to show its ugly self, either through our actions or our words. This can only be accomplished as we walk in the power of God’s Spirit at all times, never being judgmental of others but remembering only our own past weaknesses and failures, hopefully learning from them. *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”* Gal 5:25.

But it’s only these things which we can see in ourselves that we have the right to acknowledge and speak with others about. We have no right to, and we most certainly must never speak to anyone of the things we may see wrong in a brother or sister, unless the Spirit leads us to speak to them personally, and then only because of our loving concern for them.

We also need to be openly thankful to our God for his mercy and grace to us, speaking of our own experiences of his kindness, steadfast love and mercy at every opportunity. In this area, as in every other, I find I need to look to the Spirit for his wisdom as I remember Jesus’ words in Matt 7:6, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.” From my little personal experience all I can say is, not everyone wants to hear what we have to share. And while it doesn’t matter if I’m abused for speaking, I need the Spirit’s wisdom so that my God and his Christ are not ridiculed because my life is not reflecting what I share.

But coming back to this thought of cleansing, which for me is an ongoing daily process. Just as in the physical I need to bathe my body in water each day, so too I must bathe my spirit in the pure waters of the word every day. I can do this by feeding my conscious mind on the word at every opportunity. This washing is referred to in Eph 5:26 and its importance is laid out first in the physical in the book of Leviticus.

As I’m now very aware, there were times when I sinned without realising it, and sadly still do, though hopefully, because of my God’s good grace, not as often. Of course my unawareness of my actions is no excuse, because at least sometimes that’s due to a careless attitude on my part, like getting a speeding ticked on the road because I’m not concentrating on what I’m doing.

If I were to try using unawareness as an excuse when caught speeding, no police or court would accept that as a legitimate reason. Thank you again my Lord for your patience with me, never dealing with me in the way I’ve deserved, but always on the basis of your love, and thank you also for your grace which has kept me from sinning deliberately. What a scary thought deliberate sin is in light of Heb 10:26-31! Please familiarise yourself with that scripture if you haven’t already done so.

Yet when we are made aware of an offence, either by the Spirit’s conviction or by the offended person letting us know, it’s then necessary for us to turn in genuine repentance, confessing and acknowledging our guilt, humbly asking forgiveness of anyone we’ve offended, especially our God. *“If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* And remember, *“If anyone does sin* (unwittingly) *we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the righteous,”* 1John 2:1, and never forget 1John 1:9.

In doing those simple things, which at times were difficult for me because of vanity, I’m following the example of those saints in Rev 7:14. *“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* I find I also need to remember Rev 21:27 which tells us, *“Nothing unclean shall enter”* the new heavenly Jerusalem. But for any of this to occur in my life it’s vital that I *“be renewed in the spirit of my mind”* daily, as it’s only then I can put on and walk in *“the new nature, which is created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”*.

While I still live in this old body of flesh I need to wear that new nature like a garment in such a way that all may see it is not my righteousness, but is in fact a garment, a gift which has been given to me by my God to cover the nakedness and corruption of my flesh so I can be close to him. In relation to this I would strongly encourage you to read Rev 3:18-19.

I don’t know what others may have found, but for me, the Master began writing each scripture in my heart as he has opened it up to me, making it *“living and active”* in me. I also found I had a part to play in this by consciously soaking my heart, via my conscious mind, in the pure waters of the word in those bible scriptures. Although I must say he gave me such an appetite for the *“bread of heaven”* from that very first night - that bread being the flesh of Jesus Christ in the bible scriptures - that I just couldn’t stop devouring it.

This wonderful Master caused me to begin writing those living scriptures into note books and to carry them with me at all times, feeding on the living bread contained in them. *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became for me a joy and the delight of my life for I am called by your name Lord God of hosts.”* Jer 15:16. An interesting thought for me about that scripture is that the prophet Jeremiah didn’t say “I found your words”, but *“Your words were found”*.

This says to me that my part is not to actually find what God is saying to me, but by constantly listening, especially as I read through the scriptures, I can hear as he speaks to me from there; then eating his word by taking it into my heart so that the written word, the flesh of Jesus Christ, becomes part of me. He has said, *“You shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.”* Isaiah 29:13. And, *“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,”* John 6:5-58; for me the life-giving blood of Jesus which I must drink is the Spirit of the Word. Remember 1Cor 15:45!

My Teacher motivated me to use the scriptures he made alive to me to saturate my mind with the living waters contained there. Through this process the spirit of my mind was being continually renewed every day, simply because the word refreshed and renewed me no matter what honest work I was involved in at the time, even when it was physically filthy work, which was most of the time for me.

I’ve never ceased to be amazed at the cleansing power of our God’s word and its ability to renew even my physical strength. This latter was evident to me from the beginning. Back then, as I’ve said, I was involved in very heavy physical work despite from my teen years having had severe spinal problems, which on a few occasions had left me immobilised. But always the power and strength of my God’s living Word made everything possible for me, and that from even before I truly knew him.

The vital necessity of putting on this new nature becomes even clearer when we come to realise it’s only by living in it that it’s possible for us to come into God’s presence while we're still here in these corrupt bodies of ours. That’s precisely why Jesus had to die for our sin! Without what he did on Calvary we’d still *“be without hope and without God in our world”*, Eph 2:12, because, *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin”*, Heb 9:22. In my years growing up in religion I knew nothing of all that, instead I depended on a priest to forgive me. How sad!

In Rev 21:27 we see there are certain conditions which must be met before we may enter the new heavenly Jerusalem. “Nothing unclean shall enter it, nor those who practice abomination or falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” And in Rev 13:8 we see that none of *“those whose names have* ***not******been written*** *there”* will be allowed to enter it. I know that’s a bit of paraphrasing again, but that’s how the Spirit spoke it to me, and as far as I’m concerned the spirit of the word is unchanged.

My Teacher also caused me to understand that the people of Israel taking possession of the land of Canaan represent us taking full possession of our promised land, which for each of us is our own life. And just as the task for natural Israel was spread over a period of many years, so too our taking full possession of our lives is a slow process, with the old habits of the flesh being rooted out one after the other, though some of them fight hard to hang on.

But for us now, *“In this we rejoice though for a little while we may have to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of our faith which is more precious than gold, but which like gold must be refined, purified by fire, that it may overflow to us in praise honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ”*, 1Peter 1:6-7. That is when we will take full possession of our lives in the new body we are promised. Read 1Cor 15:51-58 for yourself; what a beautiful hope!

Under no circumstances can we make peace with any of these inhabitants of our flesh by accepting them for any reason. Sadly, that’s what natural Israel did with the Gibeonites, being so easily fooled by appearances without looking to their God for his direction, Joshua 9:3-15 and that became a major problem for them down through the years.

But we take possession of our inheritance, not by using worldly weapons of any kind, but by the power of Jesus’ shed blood and the indwelling Spirit of his Word, making full use of the spiritual weaponry both offensive and defensive we’ve been provided with, especially those listed in Eph 6:10-18 and Rev 12:10-12.

From what the Master has shown me, this struggle to take full possession of our lives is what he is speaking of through his apostle in Gal 5:17 *“The desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh. These two are opposed to each other to prevent us from doing what we would”*, but *“Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* 1Cor 15:57.

I know I’ve likely said this already, but the word Spirit in Galatians above always has a capital S, as in the Spirit of God, yet the Holy Spirit in me has always made it clear that he is actually speaking there through his apostle of the new nature or spirit which we receive on being reborn of God, not of himself.

The struggle is between the old nature, stirred up by the outside devil and all those evil, lying, troubling spirits, those fiery darts which he will shoot into our hearts if we’re foolish enough to allow him to do so by not always carrying our shield of faith with us. On the other side of this struggle we have our new nature, empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit who is *“mightier than he who is in the world”*. 1John 4:4.

But we need to take the words of 1John 2:1 to heart, because in this ongoing struggle with the desires of the flesh we’re told there, *“I am writing to you* ***that you may not*** *sin, but* ***if*** *anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* And our confident hope is this, “If we confess or acknowledge our sin, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1John 1:9. He will not only enable us to have victory in these battles, but will cleanse us of the very things in us which keeps dragging us down. And I can testify to that ongoing reality in my life!

For us who know our God in Christ Jesus, this is speaking of unwitting sin of course. All those things we do, or fail to do without being really aware of them because we’re distracted and not thinking of what we’re doing or saying at the time, which so often is due to our carelessness, and that is no more than an excuse, and definitely not a good reason, because, *“I can do all things in Christ who is my strength.”* Phil 4:13.

I know for me, if I don’t look to the Lord continually, asking him *“to set his guard over my mouth, and keep watch of the door of my lips”* Ps 141:3, it’s very easy for me to give offence to another by careless, gossipy words. Gossip is such a terrible evil in our God’s eyes. Read about it in Rom 1:18-32, with special emphasis on verses 29-31.

It’s there, speaking of the final depravity of man, that gossips are listed with murderers, haters of God, inventors of evil, those who are disobedient to parents and many other terrible evils which are completely overlooked and actually accepted as normal in much of today’s western society.

Clearly for me, we’re now living in the time of the reality of the word which tells us, “The time is coming when men will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.” 2Tim 4:3-4. That seems to me to be an apt description of today’s world, and also some of man’s many churches.

But be sure of this, there’s no provision made for us, *“****If we sin deliberately*** *after receiving the knowledge of the truth,* (because) *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a fearful prospect of judgement, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.”* Heb 10:26-27. Read also Heb 6:4-6 which begins with, *“It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.”* But I can’t suggest too strongly that you also read verses 7-8!

Then bear in mind Rev 3:15-16, *“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! But because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I spew you out of my mouth.”* Or from what I understand he’s saying there: “You make me sick!”

In Titus 3:5 we see that, *“God saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.”* Speaking personally, I spent the years prior to 1970 doing everything I had been taught I had to do in the hope it might be enough to maybe get me to heaven.

That was basically what I’d been brought up believing. I had no certainty for my future, though I’d gone far beyond the normal requirements of that system, hoping it would be enough. But on that Saturday night I was set gloriously free. The chains of religion were broken and fell away, and the prison doors of man’s doctrines and traditions were destroyed. I was free and knew the glorious reality of John 8:36. *“If the Son makes you free you are indeed free.”* Thank you my Lord!

As my life with Christ the Master rolled on, and as my body began to wear out from heavy physical work, in order to encourage me he again led me to the wonders of 2Cor 4:16-18, *“Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being* ***renewed every day****, for this slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* ***For we don’t look to the things we can see, but to those we can’t see,*** *because the things we can see are passing away, the things we can’t see are eternal.”* What a glorious hope **if** we maintain our correct focus!

Then to drive home the need for perseverance he challenged me with Heb 3:14, *“We share in Christ* ***if only*** *we hold our first confidence firm to the end.”* He did that at a very hard time in my life, a time I remember so well when I struggled with the forces of hell who were bombarding me with thoughts of hopelessness and failure. They had almost convinced me I was again lost.

But, as we’ve already seen in 1John 4:4, *“He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.”* He picked me up, putting my feet back on the unchanging Rock of his eternal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, Heb 13:8, even carrying me when I could go no further, encouraging me with Heb 3:14 to *“hold fast my confession”*. That confession being that Jesus Christ, the Word, is Lord and Master of my life, in complete control of everything which God allows to come my way, both in the hard times and in the good.

For me, that fact is clearly shown in 1Cor 6:19-20, *“You are not your own. You were* ***bought*** *with a price, so glorify God in your body.”* Again in Heb 13:14 we read, *“Let us* ***continually*** *offer up to God the sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of our lips acknowledging his name”*. How would praise be a sacrifice if we always felt good? Please read all of verses 13 to 16!

In this struggle to take possession of our promised land we must always follow the Spirit’s leading as he directs us to the next area of our lives which he wants us to take control of, the next tribe we are to conquer. That’s the pattern he showed us through natural Israel, and is one of the many reasons why we must read and make ourselves familiar with what he wants to show us through their history.

Another case in point for me of why the Old Testament as we call it, is so important, is found in the book of Leviticus, the book of sacrifices and offerings. He showed me clearly why I needed to read and reread that book, and it was simply this; it took all of those continuous sacrifices and offerings for sin to show just a shadow of the mighty work carried out by our Lord Jesus Christ that one day on Calvary. A single sacrifice and offering which was so perfect it never had or has to be repeated.

We read of this fact in Heb 10:12-14, *“When Christ had offered* ***for all time a single sacrifice for sins****, he sat down at the right hand of God; waiting till his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For* ***by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified****.”* Just how perfect and complete is that!

But coming back to taking possession of our promised land, we need to wait on the Master to give us directions; he will never fail us if we will just trust him completely. Remember, trust, just like faith and love, is only pure when it’s been put through the fires of trials and troubles!

Another point which he has just brought to mind here is the fact that as the tribes took possession of their allotted land, the enemies they faced were different in each case. So because I may have to fight hard to overcome a particular enemy, a particular sin habit, doesn’t mean that others will have the same hard battle. And conversely, if I find victory is quickly mine in a particular case, this doesn’t mean others will find the same thing. Each of us has his or her own personal demons to conquer, but victory is guaranteed us if we will fight and *“endure to the end”*, Matt 24:13.

This brings to mind what the apostle Peter had to face and deal with about himself in Matt 16:13-23. Jesus asked the disciples who they said he was and *“Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* In verse 18 Jesus said, *“****You are Peter, and on this Rock****”* - that isPeter’s declaration of faith that Jesusis the Christ of God - *“I will build my church.”*

Then in verse 21, *“From that time Jesus began to show them that he must suffer at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed by them, but he would be raised on the third day.”* Then when Peter began to rebuke him for saying those things, Jesus replied in verse 23, *“Get behind me Satan, you’re not on the side of God but of men.”* That must have been a big shock to Peter after what he’d just been told! I suggest you read that whole passage in Matt 16.

Sadly there is dispute in some circles about verses 18 to 19 and it’s a big issue for some, which I don’t want to get into here except to say, read the story of Simon the magician in Acts 8:9-24. And on this issue of forgiving or retaining the debts that others owe us, we need to read and take to heart Matt 18:21-35, especially that last verse.

But back to Peter in Matt 16:13-23; that incident shows us very clearly why it’s vital we be reborn of God, because at that time when Peter had rebuked Jesus he had not yet become *“a new creation”*. The contrast between the old and new Peter can be clearly seen when we compare his often brash statements in the gospels, including that one we just looked at above, to the humble child of God who shines out in his two letters which he wrote after his rebirth in Acts 2:1-4.

And let’s not forget, in all of our struggles we can never succeed in taking possession of anything in our own strength, but in Christ nothing shall be impossible for us to conquer. Our confession must always be like the apostle’s in Phil 4:13, *“I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me”*, which I think we’ve already looked at above. But most importantly, **our “Amen” to that must be**, “And I’m going to do what you require of me my Lord **because** you are my strength and my confident hope. Thank you my Lord!”

One day, when Christ returns for us; either as individuals in physical death, which can be at any time for any of us, or at his return in glory to judge all mankind; then this body of corruption will finally be put off, and the work of re-creation will be completed. At that time, because of the amazing sacrifice of himself on our behalf, we shall be changed and be just like him in all his perfection and glory forever.

We read of this epic event 1Cor 15:51-52, *“I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”*

**Again in 1Thess 4:15-17, *“This we declare to you by the word of the Lord, those who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep****. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will be raised first, then those who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with him. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”* But our glorious hope doesn’t finish even with that!

It’s then we’ll see the glory of Rom 8:29 fulfilled in us, *“Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order th****at*** *he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* I say again, what a glorious hope our God has given us, so let’s not be distracted, losing our focus.

Now back to Isaiah 64:6, which we looked at briefly earlier in this article. While a bundle of clean rags can be useful in many industries, a bundle of polluted or filthy rags is only fit to be burned to keep their pollution or filth from spreading. It would cost more than they’re worth to make them clean again. Those rags are for me a perfect example of firstly, my view of my life before my God opened my eyes, and then that view through God’s eyes. What a difference!! He and he alone in Christ could turn my life of filthy rags into something useful for his glory.

But like everything else in our lives here with our God, this cleansing process is personal and proactive. We see this in 2Tim 2:21, *“If anyone* ***purifies himself*** *from what is ignoble, he will be a vessel fit for noble use, consecrated and useful to the Master of the house, ready for any good work.”*

That in essence is essentially what taking possession of our promised land, our own lives, is all about. So let’s not lose heart when the struggle becomes particularly hard, but instead let’s *“Rejoice in so far as we share the sufferings of Christ that we may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”* 1Peter 4:13. Please read verses 12-14, though I realise we may have already looked at that!

It is also very clear to me why *“we must be born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”,* 1Peter 1:3. And all of the above reminds me of the title the Lord gave me for the book of Terri’s and my testimony, **“From spiritual rags to unimaginable riches”**. I know this following verse in Rom 6:23 is the old, old story, but every time I truly see it clearly again, as the Spirit enlarges my vision, it stirs my soul. *“The* *wages of sin is death, but the* ***free gift*** *of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

I love to remember that night he opened my eyes bringing me out of the darkness of my religious ignorance of his ways and into his beautiful light in and through Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour. That night my life was changed completely and forever, and by the power of his Spirit I became a *“new creation”*. I had been spiritually blind and deaf, but now I could both see and hear clearly. My hope is that you can say a resounding “Amen” to that!

Terri and I have said for many years that Isaiah 29:18 summed up both our testimonies because we each experienced it’s reality, though separately, and about eighteen months apart, neither of us being involved in the other’s experience; for which fact I’m very grateful because my flesh can now claim no part in it with Terri. *“In that day, the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of the gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.”* It was, is, and will for eternity be a day of rejoicing for us both. How about your experience!

To begin to take such a gift for granted would be infinitely worse than for me to become blasé about my Terri’s love for me and her devotion to me. And while, sad to say, that is what appears to have happened in many marriages and in many relationships with our God and his Christ, all I can do is look to the Spirit of Christ in me to make sure it doesn't happen with me again, as I must admit a few years ago I allowed it, unwittingly, to begin happening, but in his mercy he drew me back. I look to him for his grace to ensure it doesn’t happen to me again, just as he made sure it didn't happen with Terri. Thank you, thank you my Lord for your mercy and loving kindness to us!