

# What was God to Do?

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In a way, the *Bible* is a philosophical book: God says that His name is “I Am.” He doesn’t need rules because He has a fixed way that He is—a nature—and He is who He is by choice. Eternally He chooses to be who He is: He is Mr. Love; He is Mr. Self-for-Others; He is Mr. I’ll-go-to hell-for you. Guess what: He’s also Mr. Have-Fun. Everything ends up being about fun; let’s not lose sight of that. The Christian life is not hard; it’s excruciating at times, but it’s not hard to walk in the Spirit. So I tell people, “If you can ever bring those two together—the ease of walking in the Spirit and the sufferings of life—you’ve pretty much got it.”

Something can be both easy and painful at the same time. That’s where the fun is. So life is about having fun. As soon as the fun goes out of something, then I’m going to do something else. But I’m on safe ground because God is the ultimate laugh. I mean, a plan like *this*—a world like *this*—we should be laughing. If you see it, you’re laughing—and crying maybe a little—but through the tears, you’re laughing. Life is fun—the plan is about having fun.

So what makes the plan fun to God? What thought, before we even existed, before there was a world, would have excited Him as the most fun possible? Consider that the council of the Godhead always convenes on how to throw the biggest and best party possible. They ask, “How can we have the greatest time

imaginable?" Talking it over They say, "Let's create a pot. We want something made of clay; We want to do it out of dirt. And We want to blow on it, like breathing—like yoga or meditation."

See, all the others are imitators—they're posers. God is the real mediator-breather. "Let's do it out of clay; let's make a pot." And the Word says, "Yes!" The Father and Spirit say, "You said it first, but We thought it when You thought it! Let's get clay, and let's animate it, and let's make it human. Let's make MAN, and let's live in him. Let's be human! Let's be people." Doesn't that sound divine? So that was the plan—to be human and live in clay pots. That was the great plan; that was the idea for great fun. So God all along wanted to be you, and He wanted to be me, and He wanted to be everyone that comes under the category of Psalm 139—fearfully and wonderfully made.

## The Image of God

About the pot, God said, "Let's make this pot in our image." So what does it mean that God made the pot in His image? God wills, so let's make the pot able to will. God desires, so let's make the pot with the capacity to desire. You can't have any fun without desire. Fun means having desire and then fulfilling that desire; and then when you fulfill that desire, you have more desire, and you fulfill the new desire. This differs from lust because it satisfies. Lust never satisfies, but God experiences incredible desire with

incredible fulfillment. This never stops. When Jesus told the woman at the well that she would never thirst again, He didn't mean that she would never feel thirsty to drink water: He meant that she would never again know a state of thirst, meaning unfulfillment, where desire fails to meet with fulfillment. So the pot is going to will, and the pot is going to desire, and the pot is going to know. The pot has to know—be conscious—because God is conscious.

So the pot desires, wills, and knows, but the pot will never be God, but God is going to live His life in pot form. So the two are always to be one—that was the plan from the very beginning. Are they two? Yes, but the oneness is the real excitement. The two is not so exciting; two is not exciting. One is exciting. Two is not exciting unless they're being one. That's exciting. Do they cease to be two? Of course not. But life is about oneness. Think about marriage: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."<sup>1</sup> Do you think the husband and wife are really excited about the two-ness? No, they're excited about that one flesh part. They're not excited about, "You're you and I'm me." They're excited about what brings them together, that little incidental to the marriage, that one flesh—that extra little detail. Oh I know; you really married her for her mind, but you'll take the body too.

Paul recognizes this same thing—the point of oneness—when he says, "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."<sup>2</sup> That's the exciting part. We find physical union exciting, and it is; so think too how exciting oneness is to God! He's the one

who thought of this plan and made marriage a picture of it. His excitement and thrill abound incomprehensibly—to make man, and be man, and man be man, and God be God, but the two be one! He desires not only that He know it, but that we know it too. He knows it, but when we know it and so both know it, whoa! The vessel's all right then! It's all right.

I remember Norman Grubb used to say this, and I didn't get it twenty-five years ago. I didn't get it later, frankly, when I taught it. Nobody else has ever been there, right? I remember Norman in his Hawaiian shirt up in that rustic lodge in remote Wisconsin, in dairy land, and his little white deck shoes with no socks, saying, "If I'm good enough for God, I'm good enough for myself." I thought, "I don't know what you're good for: I don't know why I'm even listening to you, but I can't think of anything else that works."

He said, "If I'm good enough for God, I'm good enough for myself." I'm a little crazy; you're a little crazy; we're all a little crazy; and if we all only knew how crazy God really is, we might gasp. He's pretty crazy. He made you. If He made you, and you're pretty silly, and I'm pretty silly—He's pretty silly. So that's the plan. That's not a hard plan is it? What's hard about that? There's nothing hard about that unless you reject the plan, unless you decide not to like the plan, unless you decide you want life to be some other way.

Look at the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve lived covered with glory day after day. God would walk in the garden in the cool of the day. There we find Adam, there we find Eve, and

there we find the Lord. His clay pots are covered with the glory of the Lord, in Paradise, naming things, deciding things. Adam might get up in the morning and say, "What do we want to do today, Eve?" "Well, I don't know Adam. What do we want to do?" "Well," he says, "let's stay in the bower here for a while and then go out." "Sounds good to me," she says, adding, "Let's squeeze some fruits, make some nectar, and then name some more animals today. Let's check on those flowers. Hey, I'll race you!" "Yeah, whatever," he says.

They knew the presence of the Lord with them continually. Think of what it's like when you get a moment or an hour or a day or a week of anointing—total ecstasy—and think what it would be like to never know anything else. Adam and Eve had never known anything but ecstasy.<sup>3</sup> Imagine someone going to them in a time machine from the future, saying, "You don't know the hell people are going to go through because of your choice (but it was our choice too Paul tells us in Romans 5). You don't know the ecstasy you live in." They'd say, "Ecstasy? What ecstasy?" They didn't know. Total anointing and covering and glory...all the time. What would we do to have that on an experiential level? We do have it, but with suffering too, for now.

## The Fall

In comes the serpent. The devil never really changes, does he? He's going to convince them that they don't really have things so good. He's going to convince them that they don't have the total truth. "You're not knowers," he will say. "Knowers? What's a knower? Opposites? What are those? Well, there *is* something we can't do, and we've wondered about that."

"Oh, what might that be?"

"Well, who are you anyway?"

"I'm just a serpent—just one of the creatures here. Command me as you will; I'm just here to serve."

"OK, we *have* wondered why there's this tree we're not supposed to eat of."

"Well, you don't know? You don't know?"

"No, frankly we don't."

At this point, the devil doesn't say, "You need to go back and ask." The devil doesn't want you ask. He operates from, "Let me tell you," stirring up a little discontent.

"Well you see, the Lord knows. You think He's really got your best interests at heart; you think things are pretty good. But there's

something you don't know about the Lord. He holds out on you. He builds you up (as the song goes) just to let you down."

The enemy always thinks one way. Job almost fell for it when he started to think, "Ah, I see, milk and honey and friendship with You, God, when all along You knew You were going to pull everything out from under me and shoot Your poison arrows into me, You watcher of men<sup>4</sup>. You're just watching for the right moment." That's what Job thought: "You're just setting me up."

So Adam and Eve think, Eve first and then Adam, "Gee, it would be great to be like God. Wow, what's all this about being a pot and He being we and everything expressing God: We wonder what it would be like to just be ourselves?"

Well, the devil liked that: "Yeah, that's it; just be yourselves. Take control; be all you can be (in the worst sense)."

They went for it; we know the story. Some things, however, cannot change: a pot is always a pot—it's made for one thing, to contain, and God made them to contain Him. Scientists say that nature abhors a vacuum. Therefore, once they turned away from the Lord as their glory, their covering, and their indweller, well, who was going to come into the pot? That pot could not sit empty could it? God did not make it to sit empty, and, therefore, it possesses no power to live in a self-operating or self-sustaining way.

So two things happen: Satan comes in to the pot, and then Satan hides the fact that he came into the pot. The devil fuels only one way of thinking: “You can do what you want to do. You are you, and you are you only. You must get your way regardless of whomever you have run over or barge through. Everything is all about you”—a total ME-consciousness! That’s the loneliest, most anxious, fear-filled, lust-driven condition possible. After they fell, they experienced this. So what could Adam and Eve do to cover over their choice and get out of the terrible loneliness, fear, and dissatisfaction that filled them and began to drive them?

They turned to activity, meaning performance—anything that would mask or block out what now went on in their center, a terrible condition similar to what we find in the beginning of Genesis: a state without form—a void with chaos and darkness.

## **How the Law Prepares Us for Galatians 2:20**

So what was God to do? Did He know the fall would occur? Well of course. Had He already made a plan for when it happened? Yes, He had. Was He surprised—taken off guard? No, He wasn’t. Did the fall change His plan about having fun and living in pots as us? No, it didn’t. It meant, however, that the cost of bringing it about soared—through the roof—because the plan would need the Cross. But that was okay because that’s who He is anyway. He

didn't have to change and *become* the Cross. He already was; but He would now have to manifest the Cross in order to bring about the plan—the fun plan—for Him and for us.

A problem loomed, though, because these Satan-filled pots resisted the idea of anything being wrong with them. "Something wrong with me? No, no, it's not me! I'm fine!" Never mind the turmoil boiling in a rage underneath such resistant protest.

How would God get across to these Satan-filled pots some inkling of their true condition? He had that planned already in a three-letter word: L-A-W. Even so, before the law He gave the promise, beginning with the promise to Adam and Eve, of the messiah. He also gave promises to Abraham and the patriarchs; they knew about the promises. Because of the Fall, however, we do not cling to God's promises until He educates us and brings us to know what took place in the past, because what took place in the past affects us now.

Let's look at the past. Romans 5:12-19 says that when Adam sinned, we sinned. The text doesn't say that when Adam sinned we were affected by it. Rather, when Adam sinned, we sinned. How can it be that what he did, we did? That doesn't seem fair, does it? We would like to say, "Well, he did that; I wasn't there; I wouldn't have done that!" Sure. But what he did, we did.

Think about this, though: the whole plan of salvation hangs on the Last Adam doing something that, when He did it, it was also we doing it: "I am crucified with Christ." We didn't hang on a cross

2,000 years ago, but Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ." Therefore, when He died I *did* die. So what He did I did. The reasoning in Romans 5 means that what Adam did we did—but then, much more, what Christ did we did. When Adam fell, we fell; when Christ was crucified, we were crucified. So in the Bible's thinking, you don't have to be born later and do a separate individual act to have done it. The person that you're in is your utmost forefather—when he acted, you acted. And the new head of your family line—when He acted, you acted.

So, how will God get us to see our situation—our need? How will He do that? He gives the Law. Mired up in deception at first, we think that He gives the Law so we will keep it. He gives the Law, and we think that we'll keep it—or keep some of it, or part of it: we will at least get a passing grade, or He'll grade on the curve. "Well, I know I didn't get the laws *all* right." "Well, you didn't even get 90 percent right." "Whuh, whuh," we say. "You didn't even get 80 percent right." "Whuh, whuh." "You didn't even get 70 percent: as a matter of fact, you didn't even get *any* of it right! You just think you did!" "Well that's kinda harsh," we think.

What conditions us, however, is the Law. Now, God never EVER thought we could keep that Law. He never thought we had a *chance* to keep that Law. He's laughing His head off and has been continually over what non-Christians and Christians alike think about the Law. He's laughing, thinking, "They think they can *keep* it! They don't. Pshaw. Let's pour it on, commandment after commandment, even though they never seem to wear down. And to

get them to admit that they broke it, ohmygosh, is to start a war!" But that's really the way He went about to do it: He gave the Law.

I tell this to Bible studies, especially at the jail—well, not *especially* at the jail, for people there are no different than they are any place else, but their problems more obviously expose them. One inmate saw Mimi and me down there the other day and said, "Are you doing church tonight?" I answered, "No, it's not our night." He replied, "We *like* it when *y'all* come." This reminded me of a story I heard thirty years ago in the Navy in a training curriculum about listening skills. A group of patients once told their psychiatrist, "Doctor we *like* you," to which the doctor asked, "Why?" The patients said, "Because you're just like *us*." That explains why the people in the jail like me really; they realize I could wear orange. I did get arrested one time. I got the handcuffs and the ride downtown, and I would have landed in jail if the judge had not let me out on my own recognizance.

All right, God must convince us of our need so that He can save us, so that He can have fun with the ones that believe. His method to convince is the law. Non-Christians and Christians battle the law, and God means us to because the law awakens us from our self-satisfied view of ourselves. Now even Paul's testimony says, "I was alive without the Law once, right?"<sup>5</sup> But was he really alive? No, of course not; he didn't mean it that way. You would have to be a hyper-literalist to think that. He means this: "I felt good; a lot of things were going my way."

Dan Stone tells a great story about the spontaneity of lost people—a spontaneity he enjoyed in his carefree days before hearing the Gospel as a young man. After he got converted, he spent years trying to be like Christ, all the while secretly jealous of the non-Christians who still lived life spontaneously. After years of wearing down under the Law, Dan discovered that a Christian can live spontaneously by trusting Christ within to keep His own law. Dan saw that God uses the law to condition us away from self-effort and into Christ's life in us as our supply. So there is a spontaneous version of the spontaneous life for a Christian.

We long for that spontaneity. We sense something wrong; life shouldn't weigh on us as burdensome. John tells us in his epistle, "His commandments are not burdensome."<sup>6</sup> Experience at first doesn't line up with this. Getting into the Law as a young adult Christian, I remember reading that verse one day in our San Diego apartment. Before I could think and check myself, I said, "That's a lie!" Then I thought, "Wait a minute; this is the *Bible*! John just said that God's commandments are not burdensome, and I've just blurted out impulsively, 'That's a lie!' Who's right—John or me?" Figure the odds of me being right on that one.

I couldn't do anything with 1 John until ten years ago. I *never* could; I couldn't get the guy. I thought, "This is a deep, deep book. Man, I can never get it: the book is not organized correctly, or it's not outlined, or something. What *is* it? Everything's black or white here: sons of God or sons of the devil. Where's that middle ground where I just sort of be myself?" No such middle ground exists:

that's John's point. God by you will spontaneously be the pot. Satan will gladly also spontaneously be the pot. We are always the vessels, not ever independent selves. The lie of independent self is Satan's deception, and God gives law to break down that deception.

We start out thinking we can do the law. We make resolutions; we try. Therefore, when people at the jail talk about trying to be like Christ, I say, "That's a sin." I get some great looks on that one; I wish I had a camera. I see looks of revulsion, horror, shock, or disbelief—like, "What are you doing here then? Are you a blasphemer?" I say, "No, it's a sin to try and be like Christ."

## Sins and Sin

Then we look at Romans 5:20. The Law came in that the transgression might ... what? It came in that the transgression might increase—abound. I say, "God will never tell you that you can keep the Law. He'll give you the Law; He will command you to do it; but He will never tell you that you can do it." If somebody's telling you that you can do it, that person is deceived. Only two voices matter that speak about what we do with the law. God would never say, "You can keep it." The devil will say, "You can." So when Christians get on themselves or get on other people about trying to be like Christ, I'm sorry, who is it really talking?

Does mean that you're a bad person, that Christ isn't in you, that John 3:16 isn't true? No, of course it doesn't mean that. I believed John 3:16 as a boy, and I knew about sins a little bit—s-i-n-s—plural—a little bit, but really not very much. I didn't really worry about whether I sinned or not because, "I've got a Savior—so what if I *do* sin?" But by the time I reached age twenty-two, this cavalier attitude about sin had started to weigh me down because sin gets pretty depressing. Self-for-self living is hell. Being angry and taking things out on other people, or abusing people and substances, or always being upset and in turmoil, or trying to get your way—even trying to get your *Bible*-way—is hell. It just frankly is depressing.

I couldn't figure out at first my earlier cavalier and nonchalant attitude. Now at age twenty-two, in my first depression, the Holy Spirit opened the Bible for me a little. I had really decided, "Yes, I need to think about this sin thing. I want more than a Savior to *forgive* my sins; I need deliverance from the inner toll of continuing in sins—the depression and deep frustration. But the problem mounted in typical fashion when, the more I tried, the worse I got, and the more I read the Bible, the more horrified I was at what my life had been and still was, leading me to think, "I'm not anything like what this book says."

That horrified me. I started reading the Scriptures, going to church, and attending Christian conferences; and the more I learned about God, the more horrified I was at *me*. I thought, "There has to be a drastic change because I don't resemble and

have never resembled what this book says, not ever! Oh, I experience flashes here and there of victory and believing John 3:16, and an occasional Bible verse lights up; but when it comes to living life, I have *never* been and am not *now* like what this book says." This was a desperate situation—as it is for everyone who walks this way.

What you must decide when you start to walk this way is what you will do with the Law. You can say, "Well, nobody's perfect." But if you intend to go all out, and honestly say what God says, and do as God does—which is back to the fun plan—then somewhere you say, "This ship is sinking." But what we typically do first until we wear out is we get the bucket brigade, and we try to rescue things, fix things, learn more principles, and go to more seminars. We try harder, try, try harder, try more, try this book, try that author, try, try, try. "I'll try again; I'm sorry I failed. Forgive me. I'll try."

What about sins? We can't deny them when they are there. John in his epistle first says that we have all sinned. If we say that we haven't sinned, we lie. Then he says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." That was the most often asked-about verse during my year as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary. You would think that seminary students wouldn't ask that question; but the most often-asked question, when a professor opened up a discussion time, was about 1 John 1:9. It took me years to realize that people keep asking that question if they confess and confess, but do not believe the forgiveness. A sin consciousness hangs on that never goes away. Why, when someone

confesses, does that sin consciousness hang on? That's a good question, because through the Cross, it does go away.

Hebrews 9 and 10 is the best passage I know on that. The argument is that we cease to have a sin consciousness when we see that God will not do anything more about sin: He did everything in one complete sacrifice of His Son on the Cross. But Hebrews 9 and 10 are another subject, and Sylvia Pearce and I did over thirty half-hour radio programs doing a verse by verse exposition on the book of Hebrews, which series is available. Therefore, to stay on course here, let's get back to the broken Law and our trying, trying, trying. The answer lies in learning the difference between sins and sin.

We don't know at first that the problem isn't only sins—s-i-n—; the problem is also sin. In the book of Romans, Paul starts out—up to the middle of Chapter 5—dealing with sins and then turns his attention to sin, for sins are the products and sin is the producer. Both must get exposed; therefore, the thought behind Romans 5:20 is this: "In case you don't know, in case you haven't grasped God's plan, He means—He *means*—for sin to abound." Does He like sin? No. But He's *for* sinning in this sense: "I am for people to sin as much as it takes to expose it: grasshoppers, rabbits, mountains of it, continents of it, oceans. Let there be sin and more sin."

We can't imagine God saying that. But if by no other means will we see the problem, then let the sin begin! Let it flood, because it's already there anyway. Yes, it's already there. What

happens is that the ugly, humiliating exposure of sin starts to occur, but let it abound. God's thought is, "Let them try. Let them try more. Let them try more. Thankfully, in case you're hitting the panic button, where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more. Now, some would think—"ALL RIGHT! Yeah, sin! I kinda still like that sin. It's still fun! All right! I've got a fresh gust in my sail for the sin-livin' because of the grace aboundin' in the sin-livin'! So get with the sin."

The Lord hears this mentality and thinks, "You don't really hate it yet. You don't really hate it yet—more law," like a doctor writes a prescription: "Hmmm, still loves sin? More law. More law. We'll see who's standing at the end. We'll see who holds out the longest. You love sin? More law. More law. Where's that prescription pad? More sheets. More sheets!"

## **How We are Dead to Sin: The Body Death of Christ**

But listen to Paul: "But shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid." Then he says (this is amazing), "Do you not know that you are dead to sin?" What? What? I remember reading Romans 6 when I was at the University of North Carolina—a pretty good school. I learned my calculus and my Shakespeare and my history and my Pericles while playing way too much bridge until 12 and 1 o'clock and 2 o'clock in the morning; but I remember reading

Romans 6 one day and reading about dead to sin, and I thought, "That can't be right. That's not right, because I can still sin. And if I can still sin, I'm not dead to sin." I closed the book. Like I said, I was about twenty-two before life really got desperate for me.

What does Paul mean, "dead to sin?" We need to know what that means. He says, "Or do you not know?" Think back, if the problem originated with the devil getting into the pot, then the solution includes getting the devil *out* of the pot, right? Devil in—devil out. If he's in there, God must get him out. Now we didn't know that. We thought about law, commandments, particular sins—acts, deeds—all well and good. But as you know, when you cut down a plant, until you get the whole thing out, including the roots, everything grows back.

So part of God's plan, part of the fun plan, which He already knew from the beginning, included pulling sin out by the roots, and He already knew how He would get the devil out of the pot and put Himself in. So how would he do that? How would He get a pot that doesn't sin, that will be a divine pot, that will be the second member of the Trinity in pot form?

He had to crucify the pot by making Christ become, on the Cross, the pot with the devil in it—which is you and I—Adam—the first Adam. This is why Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:21, "He made Him to be sin, who knew no sin." He had to have a pot that would be who we were—fallen. He had to have someone who would be that pot—be the fallen pot. That's who Christ was on the cross; He was the

fallen pot: He was Adam and everyone born of Adam—the devil in the pot. That’s who He was on the Cross.

Christ poured out His precious blood for the forgiveness of sins. Crucifying the devil in the pot is what got the devil out of the pot, because God and the devil both want to live in a human body. Something fascinates any spirit about living in human flesh: God wants to do it; the devil wants to do it. Heaven wants to do it; hell wants to do it. It’s cool to be human. It’s all right! If God and the devil both want to occupy your body and live through you and be you, and yet you still know that you’re you, that speaks of an incredible plan. The devil knows the incredible plan. If he could have thought of it and implemented it himself, he would have done it.

Therefore, to recapture the human body and us as persons, Christ, apart from doing any sin, becomes sin. Romans 6 tells this story. We won’t go verse by verse. Sylvia Pearce nicknamed this point “the body death of Christ.” So I call it “the body death of Christ.” It sounds good to me. But when she first started talking about “the body death of Christ,” I thought, “What is this ‘body death of Christ?’ What is the significance of the body? Body? What about the body?” Then I saw that this is what the Bible says, what Norman says, and what Sylvia’s teaching emphasizes—“the body death of Christ.” Dan Stone used to say that the wine in the communion is for our sins, but people don’t know what the bread is for. Here’s the answer!

The mystery behind the bread starts with the devil in the pot on the cross and ends with Christ in us. But if you go up to somebody in your church and say, "We just had communion today; you just had the bread: do you know that was the devil in the pot on the cross? —2 Cor. 5:21—'He was made to be sin,'" the listener might freak out. Getting a little bit of grace in when people think that the Christian life means trying to be like Christ, can cause some horrified looks in your direction. Frankly, I feel depressed sometimes around other Christians, but I once lived the same way they do—trying. But once you get out of that, you want to say, "Brother, brother, let me tell you that life doesn't have to be that hard." God's plan is really pretty simple. Self-improvement is the big lie. The self doesn't need to improve; it needs to die and get resurrected as a new creature in which Christ Himself does the living as us.

So when the body of Christ died, the devil lost a body to live in. Christ's body went into the ground. Now we're dead to sin, but what else are we dead to if the body stays in the ground? We're dead to everything: a dead body won't sin, but a dead body doesn't live either. Death cuts us off from the sin spirit, but for us to live, Christ's body—remember it's us—must POW—rise in the resurrection. Forty days later comes the ascension. I'm secretly taking flying lessons myself. If that power can raise me from the grave, that power can teach me to fly too. And we're already seated in the heavenlies we learn in Ephesians 1. So if you're up that high, you might as well dip down and fly around in the clouds a little bit.

## What Dead to the Law Means

After the resurrection, who is back in the pot? Christ is in the pot. Therefore, Paul says, “Do you not know that you are dead to sin?” The devil’s *out* of the pot, and Christ is *in* the pot. At the jail Bible study any given week, I know what many of the inmates think: “Why do I still sin?” I say, “You know, you still sin if you don’t know you’re *dead* to sin, if you don’t know that sin lost its dominion over you.” This requires a huge idea of who Christ is in us. However, one’s idea of Christ living in us can be about as significant as a broom in a broom closet. Or it might be a little more elegant, like a jewel in a jewel box—precious and holy, but hidden away except for an occasional viewing or handling.

Consider instead an all-pervading, all-consuming, all-filling, all-controlling, all-keeping union. Christ is in the pot for more than some small role every now and then in a crisis. After receiving Christ, however, most get diverted into a “Be like Christ” outlook. Romans 7 helps us sort out that lie, which we won’t take the time for right now.

Let me just take a short cut, therefore, to my destination here. Trying ends when there is no more oomph to try—when one thinks, “I’m sinking into hell.” When I reached this point in 1993, I finally had no Bible. I didn’t want to read it because every time I opened it

up, a passage about doom confronted me. I felt depressed and absolutely at the bottom, not able to try again. Finally, I said to the Lord something I have said regularly since and will get to in a moment after I assure you that temptations never go away.

When a temptation comes, I think, "This is really sweeping me away; I'm just helpless! Lord, I feel terrible; I feel terrible also about how I feel; why did I even think I wanted that; have I lost my mind again?" Then I remember, "Yes, I *would* do that, Lord. I would *do* that! There's no sin I wouldn't do IF YOU DON'T KEEP ME; AND THANK YOU THAT YOU *ARE!*" The "I would do any sin" part is important; and the "if You don't keep me" part is important; but, the "thank You that You *are,*"—that is the capstone of the plan. We are back to the fun. We are back to the fun plan because it's fun to be kept.

It's fun to know that I can drive on the spiritual Autobahn of life knowing His keeping. If He wants me to slow down, He'll slow me down. If He wants me to go right, He will lead right. He keeps me from going into a ditch. I *am* a sheep, you know, and sheep aren't smart. I don't claim to be smart. I taught special education for a year on an emergency certificate. It's not really my field, but I'm glad I did it, and I love the kids; but you know, we're all special ed. to God. Even Einstein is special ed. to God. God could say to Albert, "Albert, you know a lot, but do you know what *I* know? I can name all the stars; can you?"

I say, therefore, "You know Lord, I would do any sin if You weren't keeping me. Thank You that You are." I live by faith. But wait a minute, faith by itself won't save you. The evangelist Bill Bright said, "Don't put your faith in faith; that's like casting your anchor inside the boat." Faith must have an object. Faith operates only when something is AVAILABLE. So what's available? Point one on faith is this: something must be available.

So what is available? Being dead to sin, knowing you're dead to sin, walking free from sin and not in slavery to it, walking in righteousness, being who He says you are and *being* it—these are available! That *is* your life. Christ *is* your life. "As He is, so are we in this world." Yes. I'm not uncomfortable with that in this clay pot. It appears ridiculous looking to my mind sometimes, but I answer, "I didn't think of it; You did—not my idea, Your idea. But You like the idea, so I like the idea. You love the idea, so I love the idea!" So point one: available—something is available.

## **Faith: the way God Keeps Us from Sin**

Do you know that a sin-free life is available? People freak out and want to protect the freedom to sin. Well, of course the freedom is there, but I'm often concerned that they want to protect, not the possibility of sin, but the cloak to still do it, as if we're *going to*. Says who? How bad are your sins? My sins got so bad that if I had

done them any more, I wouldn't be here; someone would be planting flowers by my tombstone. When people want to protect the actuality of sin, I think, "Are you stupid or something? Have you not gotten to the point where your sins will snuff your life off this earth, where, if you don't stop doing them, you will die? Or have you not gotten so out of control that even if you don't die, you will destroy your life and devastate others around you? Where do you draw the line?"

"We're going to sin; we're going to sin," many say. Who says that you have to? I'll grant you the freedom to sin, and some people probably will—you can see they're on the law treadmill, and they probably will; they think they're going to, so they will. But what if you ever said, "I don't have to; I'm not under sin's dominion; I can be kept. I can be kept—that is available." Point one of faith is availability; something is available. If you don't believe freedom from sin is available, if you don't believe it is possible, you will never go for it. You will default by saying, "I can never hold out; 'dead to sin' will never work; I'm going to end up doing the sin anyway, so why torture myself? I may as well give in and do it; God will forgive me."

What kind of plan is that? It's wonderful to be forgiven, but what does that say about the Cross? Does that say about the Cross what God says about the Cross? Absolutely not! Absolutely not. But when you get desperate enough that you think, "I can't go this way any more; is there a way out?"—yes there is. A way out is available. It is available.

Point two about faith is desire: you begin to *want* the rescue. You begin to want the keeping. You begin to desire the sense of human powerlessness and divine strength—God’s keeping and living through human weakness. You begin to accept a vessel as a vessel—a piece of clay. You’re willing to think, “I can’t do it—only Christ can do it in me.” But then, of course, through Him you do do it. It is you doing it, but it’s He doing it—it is two/one again, an exciting plan and so simple.

Desire alone, though, doesn’t guarantee faith. Desire moves toward faith as it grows by increased tension and appetite. Availability leads to desire, which leads to the possibility of taking. That’s why I say, “Thank you that You *are* keeping me”: that is taking. Jenny fixed a beautiful lunch today for our conference. It was available; it was desirable; and I noticed that people took it. With eating, we experience immediate gratification. In the spiritual life, we often experience delay and the sorry voice that says, “See, you took ‘dead to sin,’ and it’s not working. You said that He’s keeping you, but it’s not working. Look what you did; look what you said. Where is the witness of the Spirit? You have no proof. You can’t hold yourself up to the book of James.”

What will you do? Untake? Or will you take and say, “I’ve taken, and He is doing it, and if He doesn’t do it, it won’t happen.” What will you do, go back to trying? Paul makes this point in his lead up to Galatians 2:20. Rebuilding the Law causes the transgression to occur again. What will you do, go back to trying again? What if you don’t have any energy for trying again? What will

you do, make another resolution? Are you going to try to be like Christ again? Try? Are you going to rebuild what you destroyed? Will you pull Christ's body off the Cross with your trying? Are you willing to pull His body off the Cross, going back to your own effort to keep God's law? Or will you rise up and say, "If He doesn't do a thing, it won't get done." So you dust yourself off and say, "He is keeping me." You say, "Thank You that You are keeping me: it does work; it is working; I am walking in the Spirit; Christ is living as me."

" Uh...uh...am I God?" That's a silly question; we shouldn't even have to deal with that question. Is He now me? Yes! "But what about all of my crazy thoughts? What about all of my crazy feelings? What about...what about...what about?" So what! What about! So what! So what! The whole world groans and travails in pain together until now; so what about crazy thoughts? So what about feelings and lusts? So what about self-for-self pulls. I used to go and complain to my missionary friend, Norman Grubb, about all of this. Oh boy—Mr. Sympathy. I went to Norman one day at the annual September tent meeting, catching him between talks, and to my horror, he sat beaming as I poured out my travails. That outraged me because I was jealous. I thought, "I want what you have; what is it? How do I get it? "

As I poured out my pressures and temptations (not yet aware that everybody has them), his face beamed. He lit up, "Wonderful! Very healthy! Good practice!" I wanted to choke him. Another time, I called up Sylvia, back in 1980—not that this scenario ended there. No, it surely did not. I called her up and complained, burning the

wire with woe and lament, only to hear her say, " Brian, this is so good for you." I wanted to...arrghhh! I mean, how about when something hits you and it's true, but you just want to choke that person at the same time. I couldn't get any sympathy. So I went to Mimi, saying, "You know, I did this and I did that." She said, "You couldn't have done anything differently." I was purple with anger. I said, "What do you mean I couldn't have done anything differently?" "Well, you couldn't have done anything differently." "I should have done differently. I could have done differently." "Well, you couldn't have done anything differently." I didn't get it.

Now see that He *is* keeping. That makes the difference. Trying always produces the same results—sin. Of ourselves we can't do differently because trying is Satan's lie. That is the meaning behind Romans 7:11, "For sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me" (NASB). Satan authors the lie that the self can keep God's law, and when we try, we live out the same slavery to sin repeatedly. Sin ends up being Satan still hanging onto our members while we believe this lie.

If you want change, don't go back and rebuild the Law. God got the devil out of the vessel, and we have Christ in the vessel: let's start there. Freedom from sin is available. Failure increases the desirability to know it. That leads us to the insight from Romans 7 that dead to sin and dead to law go together for the power of sin is in the law. When crucified with Christ, we died to the Law as well as to sin, for dead to sin also means dead to law. Now when sin

knocks, we send Christ to answer, for unless He keeps his own Law, we will surely not keep it.

Why this insight becomes desirable to some and not others I do not know; I do not know the answer to that; I just know that I have to get through. So if only one in five get it, or one in ten, or one in a hundred, I must be one to get it! If someone comes to me and says, "Brian, the odds of you succeeding at this are one in a thousand or one in a million," my thinking is, "Well good; I'll be the one." I'm not trying to exclude anybody else, but as Tracey shared earlier in her testimony, "When we're standing before Christ some day, there's not going to be anybody else standing there with what anybody else did." Things got pretty lonely for Abraham, pretty lonely for Jacob, and pretty lonely for Joseph.

## **Life Remains Tough**

One of my favorite lines comes from Jacob's words when Joseph introduced him to Pharaoh. We hear a great man of faith, and I stand 100% behind what he said, because I know Jacob and when you know Jacob, you can take this line. Joseph introduces Jacob to Pharaoh, and Jacob says, "Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life." The years of his sojourn had been few and unpleasant. That doesn't sound like a great faith man, but he was.

Was he a kept man? You bet he was; I'll take Jacob's faith any day. But we have Jacob's faith; I have Jacob's faith. When I read his story now, I call him brother. I don't think anymore, "I don't know you or understand you." I think, "I do know you. God got you through, and you didn't like how it felt and how it looked, but He got you through."

The taking part of faith brings a difficulty—the Holy Spirit does not always give us the immediate witness of His taking of us. This is a test. In the early days of this taking, I had some miserable, hell-feeling days—hour after hour, day after day. But I walked in the keeping. One day, sitting down on my sofa at the end of the day, I told the Lord how bad I had felt all day and how miserable things had felt all day. He waited a few minutes and let me get it all out. Then this quiet voice said, "But did I keep you?" POW! Checkmate, baby! I said, "Well, yes." The little voice said, "You just didn't like how it felt or how it looked."

But you know what, when He said that, I was so relieved that He was pleased at the job that He had done. I thought, "Hey, I don't like how things felt, and I don't like how I looked, but the top voice of the universe just told me that He had done the job that I committed myself for Him to do." Wasn't it Paul who said, "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day?" And wasn't it Paul who said, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"?

So the plan is fun. It's an easy plan, one easy to walk in—simple. Is it excruciating at times? Yes, it is, but does that mean that He's not doing His job? No, it doesn't mean He's not doing His job; it just means tribulation along the way. The more you walk in it, things will get even rougher. God means them to. It's meant to be rough. You train for this; He trains you. That's why Paul compared us to soldiers, farmers, and athletes.<sup>10</sup> Are we back to works? No, we're not back to works, but He's singing that famous song line, "We've only just begun."

Why? What's the point in continuing difficulties? They come to us because we're part of the plan to let others know that the devil in the pot got crucified, and Christ is in the pot. We don't live by "do" and "ought," and He is keeping us—and we *say* that He is. If it doesn't look like it or feel like it, say He is anyway. If it still doesn't look and feel like it, say that He is anyway. You're going to suffer. Why not have fun while suffering?