

Running from God

I grew up hearing the message of the Bible. My father was an army chaplain and a pastor, so we always went to church and pretty frequently had family devotions where all of us kids were taught from the Bible and we prayed together as a family. I was entirely convinced that all of us are sinners rightly condemned by God, but that God had made a peace plan, sending his Son, Jesus Christ into the world to save us. I believed that accepting Jesus Christ as Lord was the only way we could ever be pardoned of our sins, escape eternal punishment, and once more know God as our loving Father.

This was what I was convinced of intellectually, and as a kid I had a pretty good mind. The problem was that, while my mind was good, my heart was bad. The very things that Jesus told me not to do were the things I wanted very much to do. The thought of bowing down to Jesus Christ as my Lord and submitting to him all my obedience was extremely distasteful. Unbearable. So I didn't. We must acknowledge the truth about ourselves. How can this most central of all relations be made new if we keep suppressing the truth and living in denial? Acknowledge God as the always present, infinite, eternal, holy, just Being in whose presence you have sinned times without number. You have broken his Ten Commandments in your thoughts, in your words, and in your actions. Your love for him and for others has been riddled with selfishness. Confess the sins which have separated you from knowing and loving your Creator, and which have caused him to withdraw his holy presence from your life. Simply speak to him, whether silently or audibly, and he will hear. This is the beginning of true prayer, and true prayer is the beginning of relationship with God. We must acknowledge the truth of what God has done for us. Because God is holy and just he cannot simply overlook our sin and pretend it never happened. That is, while he is willing to forgive our sins, he cannot simply forget our sins. Instead, what he did was to provide a perfectly suitable substitute who suffered the death penalty of sin in our place. Now, in order to gain the benefit of his substitutionary death on the cross for sinners and be freed from hell yourself, you must believe in Jesus Christ.

This means that you must acknowledge as true the cardinal facts about Jesus Christ, that he is the divine Son of God, who became a man, lived a sinless life, was crucified, died, buried, rose again, and has ascended into heaven, from which he will come again at the end of this age to judge all mankind. The Son of God died for sinners like us, bearing our due penalty from God. Unless we believe that he suffered as our substitute, we shall bear our own penalty, which is misery, isolation, and guilt in this life, and the same continued forever in hell after death. When you cry out to God for this new life in Jesus Christ, he will renew you spiritually, and cause his Holy Spirit

once more to dwell with your spirit in closest love and harmony. This is the beginning of the new heavenly life of joy forevermore, and the beginning of the end of the old life of fears and endless psychic turmoil.

That is, we cannot hold these truths as mere intellectual convictions. If our lives are not changed radically, we show that we really have not believed and received God's offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ. If conviction of sin does not cause us at times to bow our heads with sorrow, if joy does not break in like sunshine through clouds when we cast our eyes once more to the healing cross where Jesus died for us, if obedience to God's commandments does not become our new goal, then we are not walking in the truth and not walking with God.

This new life will involve many changes. Your willingness to reconfigure your lifestyle to the Christian pattern of life described in the Bible will be one of the chief evidences that your faith is genuine. Christians pray regularly and frequently. It is how they speak to their Creator and Savior God, offering him worship, professing their gratitude, and making humble requests. So Christians must also listen to God speak to them. He has said that he will speak to his people from the Bible, so that the words written there are living and active and powerful, ancient but ever new, informing and comforting and convicting us as the need may be. Christians also worship God together on the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead, Sunday. They delight in hearing the Bible read and taught by his ministers, and in singing and praying to him with other believers. So you also, if you would live the new life, must find a church that recognizes the full authority of the Bible and there become involved and committed to the cause of Jesus Christ with other believers. The shared life of those who love Jesus is one of the most wonderfully satisfying aspects of biblical Christianity. We have published this booklet so that you might also come in from the darkness and join with us in our community of light. Come, and welcome to the great unity we have believing in Jesus.