



Believe, Just Believe!

Baby steps of a believer

Dr. Shivam Natarajan



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“You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free”
(John 8:32)

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I
am,
God? Who?
Why? For you?
So, you may believe,
Depend on Him to live.
And as you count your cost,
You are saved from being lost.
Puzzled, you start the struggle,
Making no sense of all the trouble.
Then, as a tiny seed, He plants faith,
Like a tree it grows towards heaven's gate.
His blood he pours, saving you from destruction,
His Word he leaves for your everlasting instruction,
And then you discover, He really is the Almighty Lord,
Heaven and Earth are His, your saviour and your God.

The Temple of God by Shivam Natarajan

The Cover

The cover illustrates the father and child relationship.

Our coming to God and walking with Him is only possible, if we come to him like a child comes to their father; dependant, trusting, loving, asking, crying, yearning, reverent, submitting, fearless...

“And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

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“It's much easier, after all, to learn mathematics from someone who's made a few mistakes. It's impossible to learn it from someone who always gets it right.”

– John Lennox

Declarations

In scientific publications we are often asked to make any personal declarations, lest we pervert the course of truth. I thought it was relevant to this work too. Below are my declarations to the reader. Please keep them in mind when reading the rest of this book.

- I am in no way an expert in the Bible or have undertaken any professional theological degrees. I confess that I haven't even read every word of the Bible in full, from first to last. These are purely from my experience with Christ and what my understanding is of the Word that I have read so far and what God inspired in me.
- I am, like Paul says, as bad a sinner as you could get—“Chief of sinners” (“*sinners—of whom I am the worst.*” (1 Timothy 1:15)). So, in no way am I suggesting that I am good and know all the truth and am better than you. Rather the opposite may be the case.
- Like all scientists and doctors who seek evidence for what they write and tell, I too sought evidence- and it's the Bible and my heart and my experiences only to vouch for in this book. So, if that's not worth your time I am sorry I don't have much more to offer.

- I have not walked in the life of Christ for many years to be able to give that total comprehensive view of many great preachers and teachers. You can consider me to be a beginner in faith. But “Believe” I do and think that was qualification enough to share a point of view as many of us stay in that “beginner stage” for long.
- Like most things this is a continuous work. It is just a small beginning and in no way the whole truth or complete, and I am sure it will evolve. But of one thing I am sure- I believe!
- The doctrines and verses I have highlighted and explored does not mean in any way the rest of the Bible is not relevant. So please get back to your Bible for the whole truth.
- The Bible is the “Living Word”. It speaks to your heart. So, you really must experience it first-hand to possibly grasp the depth of reality and truth, in the spirit.
- I only intended to write the truth as per the Bible. It will hurt or convict some or almost all of you- that’s the nature of the Word. Not me! - *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12).
- I can confess and assure that I have myself not been able to put into practice every truth I have written about here. Still that does not dilute the truth. We all are on a journey; at least I am and do keep falling daily.

- The Believer's life (especially the beginner) is not all rosy and blissful. Rather the opposite. I confess I am going through many trials and tribulations even as I write. So, if some of my messages are painted in pain or distress, that's the reality of following Christ.

Well for those who are now clear and brave I invite you to carry on into the wonderful world of Belief. God Bless!

“I believe that it is better to tell the truth than a lie. I believe it is better to be free than to be a slave. And I believe it is better to know than to be ignorant”

- H. L. Mencken

Preface

To many of my friends and family the first question in their mind when they hear about this book will be- Why? Why did Shivam even write this book? Did he really have to do it? Even before they read what have I written in it.

Honestly those same questions have ravaged my thoughts and conscience ever since I started writing the first chapter. Having authored and published many medical books before, I didn't doubt in my capability to write (although that is entirely God's gift). What I doubted was, the need for this book and if I was competent to do it? Do I really need to announce my faith to the world, and will that hurt me? Am I taking an unnecessary risk here? Am I going to lose "*my world for the Word*"? And God helped answer those very questions over the last year or so.

I might just be a beginner but size or might does not dilute the truth- *'the light of a match is light still'*. And what's there to fear when you have faith- "*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*" (2 Timothy 1:7). And when you are talking of the truth with God as your strength what's there to be ashamed of- "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*" (Romans 1:16)

The planting of the seed for this book possibly goes back to my very childhood, from my father. Every speech, debate or essay he helped me write in those early school days almost always had this quote from the Bible- "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*" (John 8:32). And to be honest I possibly didn't understand a word of it then. The journey from a typical Indian Hindu family to now a true believer of Christ has gone through many an ups and downs. From "Shiva to Christ" belief has taken me through death and resurrection in Christ. And what I felt was a truth and joy worth sharing. Not for my sake but for the glory of God.

And while going through this journey, although short, I discovered many a truth that was simply different from what I have heard or been taught before. I agonized many a times what most of us do when finding a truth late in life- "oh how I wish I had known that before". To be very honest my tryst with "the religion of Christianity" for most of my life took me far away from the truth rather than bring me close to Christ. How many tears have I shed on those lost years? Oh! How I really wish I had known Christ the way I know him now. And that is exactly what sparked in me the energy and zeal to write this book. That grace and mercy that God poured into me had to be shared- so others may be open to the truth before it's too late.

So, having addressed the why, let me delve a bit on my next question. Should I really do this? Am I competent or qualified to do this? Being a surgeon by practice I was reminded of two quotes that have guided me many a times when in doubt:

“Primum non nocere” - “First of all do no harm”

- Hippocrates

“The mere ability to do a surgery is not it’s only indication”

- Anon

So first, I had to be sure I was not doing something to harm the truth or the glory of God. And the second concern was to make sure I was not carried away trying to put my spin here as an author and write something merely because I could. How easy and dangerous it is indeed to misrepresent the truth; I hope and pray I have not done that mistake. The Bible did help me in that, it gave me the clear direction of trusting entirely in the Word of God.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

My intention has been to keep it plain and simple. This is not a PhD in theology. Rather an exercise in dissemination of the truth. For those who don’t believe I hope it gives some reasons for you to seek God. It is his grace and mercy that ultimately leads you to him, not anything you do. For those on the fence and still exercising that free will of man, there are many reasons to say yes to God rather than reject. And for those who are new believers in Christ, the journey to the narrow gate through the narrow path has just begun. Have hope and endure.

I wanted to share the difficulties I had in coming to grips with the truth. Eventually while the mind asks a million questions, it is the heart that's led to believe. And that's by the Grace of God. Have Hope.

In writing this book my only aim was to bring Glory to God rather than expound on the religion of Christianity. My focus has been on exalting the person and deity of Christ through the scriptures and not to dwell on the practices of Christianity. For in my view to be a true Christian one has to only believe- Just Believe!

God Bless!

Shivam

December 2023

“If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything.”

- Gordon A. Eadie

What to believe and why it is hard?

When someone asks us to do something the human mind automatically thinks of cost, time, money, risks etc. And then we take that decision to do it based on a balance of gain and loss or risk and reward. But here is one thing when asked to do without any cost, time, money, risk etc the human mind finds it most difficult to decide-

Believe! Believe in God! Believe in Christ!

To almost all non-believers or those not introduced to Jesus Christ the above line I am sure sent a sense of rebellion and immediate repulsion. Why?

Because belief is an act of the heart, of the conscience even before it reaches the mind. Belief is perceived as equal to surrender. And it is in that very heart that Jesus wanted to inscribe his commandment of love and belief in God.

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

(Romans 10:10)

As a person being introduced to Christ or even as a new believer in Christ there are quite a few barriers and challenges the world throws at us. As rational beings we have always been taught to question and prove, if possible, by science or logic before accepting anything. As emotional beings, the world has always taught us to believe in “self” and “happiness” as the goals in life. Believe what your heart says! Listen to your conscience! And many more such self-help tips have become the “truth”. The very nature of “absolute truth” has become questionable to the world. So, should I even hazard another attempt at answering this question? I do. For without the conviction and without that clarity at this very first step, the rest of discipleship in Christ becomes meaningless- “If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything.”- Gordon A. Eadie

The many denominations in the “religion of Christianity” and their many views and practices have not made it easy for the common man to comprehend and accept. We are not presented with the simple truth of Jesus Christ, instead the many variations and versions of it and often tainted and tarnished in the name of ‘religion’.

So, after great thought and trepidation I have tried to just present the simple truths here – those that I felt in me and I believe in, with all my heart and spirit. And with no other reference other than the Bible and Christ. For that’s where it starts.

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,
rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,
(2 Timothy 3:16)*

It takes utter humility and complete emptying of the self to really take that first step to believing. And being spiritual and not logical, it needs divine intervention and supernatural help to even start that process of belief. Or else we would be arguing endlessly like the scientists and the mathematicians of this world do.

*“For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,
and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”*

(1 Corinthians 1:25)

Although I am a student of science, I am also a firm believer in God. Does that make either science or God false? No! Belief goes beyond logic and rationale. And that’s where faith and hope in God is an essential foundation to knowing Christ. But for those who still want to exercise their grey matter and want a data driven logic to the truth in Christ please refer to an interesting exercise by a professor of Yale- <https://faculty.som.yale.edu/jameschoi/whychrist/>

And as I was dwelling in this thought of science versus faith, I stumbled on an interesting analogy between life of a believer based on biblical truth and a doctor’s work based on evidence (we call it Evidence Based Medicine). As a student of medicine, you are taught the basic facts and principles from great textbooks and teachers and graduate into a doctor. Along with this foundation you learn to treat based on best practices and experience. You constantly review this evidence and best practices and eventually contribute to and publicise them. As you mature into a senior consultant you become more passionate about preserving the right evidence and the practice of using

the evidence always. And when you see bad practice, you start fighting against that using good evidence.

Biblical truth to a believer in Christ, is like that ‘evidence’ to the doctor. Faith is planted in your heart through the hearing of the ‘Word’ and belief in the word creates a renewal of your mind (salvation). From then on you base your living on the truth and, the truth begins to take hold in your heart and soul. Any sin in you or others close to you, convicts you in your heart as you strive to walk in the narrow path of truth. Your love for God and your people propels you to spread the truth so others too can benefit from it. And eventually the yearning to guard it and persevere the truth; like the ethical clinician who hurts to see medicine being replaced by quackery and fights to establish evidence-based medicine. In fact, this reminded me of the motto of my alma mater, JIPMER, Pondicherry, in India where we were always taught to seek the truth in our quest for cure- **“VERITAS CURAT”- TRUTH CURES.** How apt!

Before dwelling deep into what Christ taught it is worth also agreeing on some fundamental truths, for, if you don’t believe in these you can’t believe in the rest. I will start by explaining grace and faith first before we tackle the rest, for all belief is by his grace alone and by faith alone.

Understanding Grace and faith

“By God’s grace” is possibly the most often repeated words by a believer. But what does it mean? How do we get God’s grace and how will it make a change to us? Let us explore on what the Bible teaches us.

I couldn't find a better description of grace than the below- "Grace is the opposite of karma, which is all about getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve."- Justin Holcomb.

But that exactly is why living a life in Christ is different. We are saved in spite of us. It is not through our human effort but rather His grace that saves us from this wretched human life. *The grace of God is the "unmerited favour and mercy" of God.*

Grace is His free gift to you for nothing you have done or deserve, given to you in spite of your sins.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

"And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."

(Romans 11:6)

So, everyone who truly believes and has faith in God and have surrendered to God's will, receives God's grace. And therefore, grace is intimately linked to faith. So, what exactly is Faith from a biblical perspective? *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."* (Hebrews 11:1). The key is in the last three words- things not seen. Yes, faith is that belief we have even when we don't have the full explanation or rationalisation. As humans our belief system has always been based on logic and evidence- hard facts! But

to really grasp the supernatural and to be committed to it, you literally may need “Blind Faith”- faith in things not seen. That doesn’t mean the Bible doesn’t stand up to rational thinking or it is not based on reality or evidence. True spiritual life is led by faith not by science. *“For we live by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7).* In fact, Jesus Christ put it in a different way- *“Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29).*

Faith can often be so difficult and complex we wonder how anyone can have it. We are led by the human curiosity to often seek an explanation or evidence that faith works. And even when we are shown the signs, we often find it difficult to attribute it to God. The Bible warns us against this conflict- *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight”. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

Faith comes from God himself and it is not something we can boast of as our achievement. *“... so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:5).* Left only to human wisdom it is unlikely we would have any faith at all. And by that same logic without the faith, we would not have God in our lives. It is faith given by grace of God that saves us on a daily basis and we come back to *“Ephesians 2:8-9 ...For by grace, you have been saved through faith”.*

Having this appreciation of the origin and interdependence of faith and grace is fundamental to making sense of the rest of this book. And I agree it makes no sense unless one can see it with a spiritual eye opened by God (a transformed mind).

Omnipotence of God

Understanding and believing in this first basic truth is the starting point of all belief. To the learned and scientific mind, it is hard to rationalise and quantify and hence difficult to accept. I don't intend to set forth here a debate on this topic as that needs many volumes. I plainly submit to my reader that without believing in the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent nature of the supernatural person of God, believing anything else becomes difficult and meaningless. 'Comprehending' this, I guess is impossible to human minds but believing in God starts in our hearts, not in our brains. The many attributes (eternal, faithful, impartial, infinite, just, loving, righteous, sovereign, transcendent, all knowing, all seeing, etc.) of God makes him a 'person' and cannot be often explained in words or measured in quantities, but can only be experienced. Hence the need for 'Divine Grace' to kick start the process of belief. For belief is not a scientific experiment to be proven in a lab but an experience to be felt in one's heart. You cannot believe in Jesus from merely reading about him in the pages of the Bible. You have to know the Jesus of the Bible. You must enter into a personal relationship with him.

Like Paul says:

"I know whom I have believed."

(2 Timothy 1:12).

Pastor Paul of Calvary Chapel Ontario (<https://www.ccontario.com>, there is a lot I have drawn from his sermons in many places in this book) explains it this way- " God has given humans the capacity to know that something exists, even if we can't know

‘HOW’ that thing exists. For example, I can know that there is such a thing as timelessness (eternity), and yet, as a creature of time, I also understand that there is ‘NOTHING’ in my life experience that I can point to that which displays the characteristics of eternity. In fact, ‘EVERYTHING’ around me is just as much a prisoner of time as I am. So, how do I know that there ‘IS’ such a thing as eternity? Simply because God communicates it to me in His Word. I accept it on faith.

“...He has also set eternity in the human heart...”

(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

It’s in our hearts, but ‘NOT’ in our minds to comprehend it. We must leave room for that as a mystery of God.” He goes on further to explain the limitations of human understanding. “You have convinced yourself that your inability to fathom the incomprehensible is actually a “doubt” as to the existence of God. It is not. It is simply the result of your being a finite human being who ‘CANNOT’ comprehend what is incomprehensible. The God who created all things and Who is yet uncreated has expressed it in His Word to us, when He says:

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.*

*“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

(Isaiah 55:8–9).

The Apostle Paul expressed it this way:

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”

(Romans 11:33).

Unchanging God

Embedded within that omnipotent nature of God is another core attribute of Him- Immutability! The Unchanging nature of God. God does not change his word or his promises as the world changes. This unchanging nature of God is core to all other attributes of God and his eternal being. Following excerpt from AW Tozer a great theologian of modern times helps explain this better:

God never changes moods or cools off in His affections or loses enthusiasm. His attitude toward sin is now the same as it was when He drove out the sinful man from the eastward garden, and His attitude toward the sinner the same as when He stretched forth His hands and cried,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

(Matthew 11:28).

God will not compromise, and He need not be coaxed. He cannot be persuaded to alter His Word nor talked into answering selfish prayer. In all our efforts to find God, to please Him, to

commune with Him, *we should remember that all change must be on our part.*

“I the Lord do not change.”

(Malachi 3:6).

We have but to meet His clearly stated terms, bring our lives into accord with His revealed will, and His infinite power will become instantly operative toward us in the manner set forth through the gospel in the Scriptures of truth.

*Fountain of being! Source of Good!
Immutable Thou dost remain!
Nor can the shadow of a change
Obscure the glories of Thy reign.
Earth may with all her powers dissolve,
If such the great Creator will;
But Thou for ever art the same,
I AM is Thy memorial still.*

—From Walker’s Collection

Triune God -the Trinity

Acknowledging the omnipotence of God could possibly not be that difficult for many, as many other faiths and belief systems also talk of that. But this next one- Triune God- One God but three persons (The Father, The Son and The Spirit) is rather difficult. I should confess that I find it hard to explain as I also find it hard to understand. But we are not called to explain or

understand divine concepts, we are called to believe it. I have taken the following commentary from the great book 'Mere Christianity' by CS Lewis which illustrates this the best:

“God is a Being which contains three Persons while remaining one Being....The First Person is called the Father and the Second the Son. We say the First begets or produces the Second; we call it begetting, not making, because what He produces is of the same kind as Himself.... The Son exists because the Father exists: but there was never a time before the Father produced the Son.... (He is always), so to speak, streaming forth from the Father, like light from a lamp... or thoughts from a mind. He is the self-expression of the Father – what the Father has to say. And there was never a time when He was not saying it.... Much the most important thing to know is that it is a relationship of love. The Father delights in the Son; the Son looks up to His Father....What the Christians mean by the statement “*God is love*” (1John 4:8) ... is that the living, dynamic activity of love has been going on in God forever and has created everything else.... In Christianity God is not a static thing... but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance”.

“The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know this is almost inconceivable but look at thus. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trade union, people talk about the ‘spirit’ of that family, or club, or trade union. They talk about its ‘spirit’ because the individual members, when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they

were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and the Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.... This third Person is called, in technical language, the Holy Ghost or the 'Spirit' of God. Do not be worried or surprised if you find it (or Him) rather vaguer or more shadowy in your mind than the other two. I think there is a reason why that must be so. In the Christian life you are not usually looking at Him. He is always acting through you. If you think of the Father as something 'out there', in front of you, and of the Son as someone standing at your side, helping you to pray, trying to turn you into another son, then you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you. Perhaps some people might find it easier to begin with the third Person and work backwards: God is love, and that love works through men – especially through the whole community of Christians. But this spirit of love, from all eternity, is a love going on between the Father and the Son”.

Commenting on CS Lewis approach Joel Edmund Anderson a biblical scholar wrote this:

“Even though the Trinity is something that is ultimately beyond our intellectual understanding, that “Trinity-life” is there for us to experience: God (the Father) is the one we pray to, God (the Holy Spirit) is also the thing inside us urging us to pray, and God (the Son) is bridge or road along which we are pushed to that goal. It is, quite simply, experiential.

Trying to get your head around Trinitarian life is going to be a futile endeavour: you never will, fully. But you can “know” it on a relational level, through others who are trying to do the same. Is it a difficult concept? Of course. But Christian doctrine isn’t going to be easy. As Lewis states, “We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with Fact. Of course, anyone can be simple if he has not facts to bother about.”

Going on further in the book CS Lewis makes one of his most often quoted arguments on Christ- ‘Lewis Trilemma’:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (Jesus): I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

Sin and its effects are real

Sin is not a myth. We all know it in our heart. We don't need the law to state it. "Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature... Sin includes not only individual acts such as stealing or lying or committing murder, but also attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes God requires of us." (Grudem, Wayne). I found the following explanations from the website: <https://www.Biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sin/> very helpful- "Throughout the Bible almost every sin reaches for things with some intrinsic value, such as security, knowledge, peace, pleasure, or a good name. But behind the appeal to something good, sin ultimately involves a raw confrontation between obedience and rebellion. Very often this is one concept where there is huge misunderstanding and often misperception of the belief in Christ and its implications on sin. The Bible typically describes sin negatively. It is lawless(ness), (dis)obedience, (im)piety, (un)belief, (dis)trust, darkness as opposed to light, a falling away as opposed to standing firm, weakness not strength. It is unrighteousness, faithless ness. Sin is elusive. Sin has no substance, no independent existence. It does not even exist in the sense that love or justice do. It exists only as a parasite of the good or good things. Sin creates nothing; it abuses, perverts, spoils, and destroys the good things God has made. It has no program, no thesis; it only has an antithesis, an opposition."

This has led to the perception of Christianity as a religion of lists- do's and don'ts and based on how this is conveyed to the world it also is the basis of the "Christian hypocrisy" label on true believers.

“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”

(James 4:17)

Once again in order to grasp the very nature of sin and its impact on faith, one needs to discern and agree with their heart aided by the spirit and the Bible- not by using simplistic human definitions or rules.

While sin has all the dismal qualities and is nothing but negative, the one consequence sin leads to is for us to appreciate the work of God. For without sin God would not have sent his Son Jesus Christ into this world to fight sin.

The consequence of sin is central to the doctrine of death and resurrection of Christ.

“For the wages of sin is death...”

(Romans 6:23)

Jesus Christ had to pay for our sins by his death to redeem us from our sins. There was no other way. Because God chose to redeem his people from it, sin has been the stimulus for God’s demonstration of his amazing patience, grace, and love.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

(Romans 5:8)

God had to be made human to therefore become a sin offering, a sacrifice to pay out for all our sins.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

We will see later in the chapter on salvation how true belief in Christ leads to redemption of our sins -past, present and future- this is very hard to believe and agree on because of our simplistic and human view of sin (right versus wrong).

We all are sinners- every one of us

So, having understood what sin is to some extent, the next obvious extension of that is to ask who really are the sinners? And why? Again, a very hard subject to approach through a rational and logical reasoning within the capability of human intellect. There have been a million arguments and counter arguments on the topic of “original sin” and I don’t intend to step into that quagmire. What however is clear and important to grasp and true in my belief is the “universality of sin”. The Bible unlike most other faith systems in the world has been pretty blunt and to the point- it says we all are sinners.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

(Romans 3:23)

I found this extract from a BBC website very helpful to convey that viewpoint:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/originalsin_1.shtml)

Original sin is a condition, not something that people do: It's the normal spiritual and psychological condition of human beings, not their bad thoughts and actions.

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

(Psalm 51:5)

The apostle John affirms about the universality of sin like this:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

(1 John 1:8)

While the biblical explanation of sin goes back to Adam and Eve, we don't need to go so back in history to discover the sinful nature in each of us. We all know it in our hearts. Like Mahatma Gandhi put it- “I would rather be known in life as a honest sinner than a lying hypocrite” And he also said this, “I found it that we all are such sinners that it is better to leave the judging to God”

While sin is universal and the offering to be saved is also universal, but only those who believe will be saved.

Forgiveness of sins

The whole design of the redemptive history of Christianity is how God brings the gift of forgiveness from sins, to the whole of humanity. Without this we are destined for eternal death. Christ Crucified- the death and resurrection of Christ was and is the basis of the forgiveness.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 6:23)

When you determined in your heart to trust Christ for the forgiveness He offers through His finished work on the cross, your eternal destination was sealed in His blood. You are His. Your sins are forgiven. There is now ‘NOTHING’ that He holds against you because total forgiveness has been secured on your behalf. The work is done! It is finished. The debt has been paid in full.

“For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

(Matthew 26:28)

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

(John 3:16)

This truly is a mystery of the cross and very hard to again rationalise and believe through logic. And this is also one of the very fundamental differences between Christianity and other faiths- you are forgiven not because of your good works or efforts (to balance good over bad)- you are forgiven through faith and faith only.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

To put salvation in man’s hand and his capability creates pride and negates the omnipotence of God. “Good people don’t go to heaven, only those who are forgiven”.

Christ’s death and resurrection was the epitome of humility and showed in one act both the finite human nature and the omnipotence of God. This brought salvation in reach of everyone, everyone who believed! Not the select few who thought they could get their sins annulled through sacrifices, uttering verses, feeding the poor, doing penance, worshipping idols and so on and so forth. God sacrificed his own son for the full and final price, once and for all for the whole of humanity to be saved from his wrath, by believing in Christ.

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

(1 John 2:2)

This is one of the hardest things for a non-believer to accept as it hits hard on human pride.

“but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,”

(1 Corinthians 1:23)

Born Again- Salvation

By now I guess you are getting to see that belief in Christ is through knowing and acknowledging the ‘mysteries’ of Christ. And one other mystery and doctrine central to both Christianity and Salvation is – ‘being born again.’ And nothing better explains it than the way Jesus described this to a Jewish scholar Nicodemus in the Gospel of John (3:1-15).

“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth

to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still, you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (referring to his crucifixion on the cross) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

So, unless one dies to their old sinful self and born again in the spirit, it is indeed difficult to both understand and also believe. Once again this has to be experienced to believe and hence my testimony to this fact.

The doctrine of death of your old sinful self and rebirth in God's righteousness is truth behind the great mystery of the Cross. The following excerpt from A W Tozer's book 'The Radical Cross' gives a poignant explanation of the Cross-

"The cross of the Roman times knew no compromise; it never made concessions. It won all its arguments by killing its

opponent and silencing him for good. It spared not Christ but slew Him the same as the rest. He was alive when they hung Him on that cross and completely dead when they took him down six hours later ...

“After Christ was risen from the dead the apostles went out to preach His message, and what they preached was the cross ... The radical message of the cross transformed Saul of Tarsus and changed him from a persecutor of Christians to a tender believer and an apostle of the faith. Its power changed bad men into good ones. It shook off the long bondage of paganism and altered completely the whole moral and mental outlook of the Western world.

“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

(Luke 9:23)

So, the cross not only brings Christ’s life to an end, it ends also the first life, the old life, of every one of His true followers. It destroys the old pattern ... in the believer’s life and brings it to an end. Then the God who raised Christ from the dead raises the believer and a new life begins. This, and nothing less, is true Christianity ...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

The receiving of the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation by the saved individual marks the change in his life. The indwelling spirit of God both renews the mind and the heart. Hence the phrase 'Being born again' signifies our dying to our old nature and being renewed by the Spirit. It is truly a complete transformation!

“When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in the worship of the creator.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

How to believe?

Having gone through the last chapter a clear yet difficult truth about Christian belief is that much of it is in the unseen! So how does one develop and strengthen belief in things unseen? Through Faith!

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

(Hebrews 11:1)

We all know the incident of the disciple ‘Doubting Thomas’ and how Christ had to help him to believe- **(John 20: 27-29)**. Thomas did not believe in the resurrected Christ that the other apostles had seen and experienced. Christ had to reveal it to him like he does to most of us in that state of ‘unbelief’

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

So, we really need some help from above to not only initiate the belief in us but to maintain it. If a disciple who lived with him had so much of doubt how much harder, it will be for us? Hearing the word of God, being receptive to his calling is crucial. There are innumerable testimonies of people like me who have been drawn to the Word of God miraculously. God makes his word know in many ways and we just need to wait for it and to be receptive of it.

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

(Romans 10:17)

He needs to plant the seed of faith in our hearts. His invitation is through the word and making known his creation to all. His invitation to everyone is echoed in many verses within the Bible. And the word has reached most of the world we know.

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will,”

(Ephesians 1:4-5)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

(Matthew 11:28)

“Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”

(Revelation 22:17)

This invitation from Jesus together with the drawing of the Father brings us close to the truth on a daily basis. How and if we cling to the word determines where we go forward with it. Do we truly believe and turn to seek the ‘face of Christ’ or do we just hear and forget?

“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

(John 6:37)

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

(John 6:44)

“He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

(John 6:65)

However, in His sovereignty and power, God decided not to demand—force—all people to actually be saved. If God is truly sovereign, He can sovereignly allow us to choose things He does not prefer, for His own reasons. The overall message of Scripture is that God does not desire anyone’s damnation. That is, He would prefer that all would be saved. His desire is for the whole world to be saved.

“who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

(1 Timothy 2:4)

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

(2 Peter 3:9)

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”

(Revelation 7:9)

Unlike in most faiths where the disciple goes searching for the god here, we see the reverse. Christ has already predestined and chosen you. And when you don't come, he sends many invitations to you. And if you still don't come to him, he comes searching for you, to your doorsteps. Knocking on your doors
What else does one need, to come to Christ?

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

(Revelation 3:20)

Another great instruction from Christ to aid us in our belief was to have a childlike faith. What he meant was, like children we should have total dependence on God, no ego, not ashamed to ask questions, ready to ask for help, eager to receive, and always in wonder.

“He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

(Matthew 18:2-5)

But in spite of all the above instructions on ‘how to believe’ we still find it very hard to take that first step. Man, as usual has provided many scientific rationale and pros and cons on religious belief etc. The below extract from the website of American Psychological Association <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/12/believe> show the very differing views of how science perceives ‘belief’:

“Harking back to Sigmund Freud, some psychologists have characterized religious beliefs as pathological, seeing religion as a malignant social force that encourages irrational thoughts and ritualistic behaviours.”

“Religion may fill the human need for finding meaning, sparing us from existential angst while also supporting social organization”

“Religion, in a sense, outsources social monitoring to a supernatural agent,” says Norenzayan. “If you believe in a monitoring God, even if no one is watching you, you still have to be pro-social because God is watching you.”

So, all the problem is with ‘man made religion’ not ‘God-sent Christ’. I too was trapped in this game of religion rather than seeking God for nearly all my life. But what I realised from my experience is, when you uncouple religion from Truth, when you separate religious rituals from the deity and person of Christ, you see a whole different world. You just see the Love of God and his free grace and mercy. And that and that alone is true belief- not any religious work. To truly believe one really needs to renounce religion but take up faith.

Religion corrupts, truth cures!

In the end as I said earlier, belief in Christ is a miracle in everyone’s life, for that belief sets you free- brings you salvation.

“All the world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming.”

- Helen Keller

Challenges of a new Believer?

If you have endured so far with this book, you realise by now following Christ is not a walk in the park. A true believer's life is full of paradoxes and often their circumstances add additional contradictions and challenges to their faith. So, knowing and persevering in the truth is very much a challenge for many. I confess it was and is an ongoing challenge for me. As I write in the previous chapter, the very knowledge of the truth while setting you free also starts the process of purification in your heart. And that is where the challenge actually starts. There are many false preachers who make it look like the moment you come to God all things become bliss. On the contrary being in the presence of God convicts you of your sin more severely. You become more acutely conscious of the nature and severity of sin which troubles many a heart. While you know and are assured of the salvation and the grace of God it is often a day-by-day spiritual warfare. The good news is Christ has been through it and is with you all along the way.

Joy of salvation versus struggle of sanctification

As a new believer the sense of joy and liberation one feels in receiving salvation is immense. For some I believe it is an out of world experience but for most like me, we just know that

we have been called and forgiven and Godly peace fills our hearts. We see new Hope in our lives! We see the change in our behaviour, attitude, thinking etc which we call as the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

“Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in his salvation.” (Psalm 35:9)

We are redeemed, and yet we await the day of full redemption when we will no longer struggle with sin. While salvation initiates that change, lasting change is not the simple flip of a switch. Sanctification in the Bible is the life long process of positive change in the life of a Christ-follower.

Dying to the past, Denying the world

And as we go through life, a new birth in baptism of Christ and renewed in our mind, the tension between the flesh and the spirit becomes obvious. The teachings of Christ and his commands become the focus of our lives. We can no more brush them aside. For, it is God’s intent and purpose that a believer is made worthy of His Kingdom. To be robed in the righteousness of Christ brings great joy as well as challenges to the carnal beings that we are. We cannot anymore ignore what is not right. We can’t continue practising what is not right without being convicted in our hearts or our conscience

being hurt and seek repentance. Denying the sinful past is often denying the comfortable and secure world (by human standards) that we knew!

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”
(Matthew 16:24)

To deny this world and its desires when we have been used to it all our lives is hard. To give glory and thanks to God when we are going through trials and suffering is not natural to our self. To give up on fame, money, possessions, pride, and all that we may have worked for as the natural man will not be easy. Taking up the Cross will mean you have to face the shame and ridicule of this world. You will be persecuted. You will face hostility. You will have to give up on friends and family if called to do so. Proclaiming your faith in a secular world today is even harder and not easy especially for the young.

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”
(Luke 14:26)

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”
(Luke 16:13)

Are we willing to put Christ above everything and everyone else in our life? In fact, Jesus makes it even more plain and difficult when he says - Those who follow their life (the worldly life apart from Christ) will in fact die. But those who lose their life following Christ will live and have everlasting eternal life

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

(Matthew 16:25)

Waxing and waning of belief

Seasons of unbelief and doubt is a reality in the life of a believer. Our carnal nature by default is meant to doubt. Some may doubt their salvation, some in the power of God and some in God's love. It is this doubt that slowly leads to unbelief. So, it is essential to overcome that in the power of Christ

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

James 1:5-8

The following excerpt from the book – The Triumph of Faith in a Believer's Life by Charles Spurgeon articulates so well the damage that doubt does to a believer:

“I know people who seem to be always shaping fresh nets of doubt to get entangled in. Like mariners who seek the rocks or soldiers who court the point of the bayonet, this is unprofitable business. Practically, morally, mentally, and spiritually, doubting is an evil trade. Doubt is sterile, a desert without water. Doubt discovers difficulties that it never solves and creates hesitancy, despondency, despair. Its progress is the decay of comfort, the death of peace. Believe is the word that speaks life into a man, but doubt nails down his coffin.”

When faced with doubt and unbelief let us pray like the father of the boy in Mark 9:23-25 prays-

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

And when still in doubt Paul tells us to test our faith.

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

To persuade one to believe was an easy task. But to tell someone that they are facing eternal damnation if they don't believe is hard. But that's not me but Jesus himself saying- He is very clear that there are no two options- you are either in or out.

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”
(John 3:18)

“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(John 14:6)

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”

(John 3:36)

Saved and still a sinner

Salvation begins the moment we receive, by faith, God’s offer of forgiveness through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–9; John 1:12). Jesus called it being “born again” (John 3:3). In repenting and giving up our old life, we receive the new life Jesus purchased for us with His blood (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21). We are washed clean, and God chooses to remember our sins no more (Psalm 103:12). But we soon notice that our propensity to sin is still part of us. How can that be since we are new creatures in Christ? We still sin because we, though forgiven, are still fallen human beings.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/still-sin-after-salvation.html>)

This has been quite a challenge for me and often controversial to the world and even amongst the different sects of Christians. What I am reflecting here is the challenge I faced. As a saved sinner we need to be confident that we have been redeemed from all our sins – past, present and future.

We are robed in the righteousness of Christ and yet we will often stumble and at time fall. The nature of those indwelt by the Holy Spirit is to live in righteousness.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.”

(1 John 3:9)

We also need to face the reality that being human we will continue to sin. Our holiness is the goal, but John acknowledges that we still sin:

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One”.

(1 John 2:1)

We may flip ourselves into sin at times, but we can’t survive there. The new nature thrives in righteousness and obedience to God. The degree to which we allow the Holy Spirit access to every area of our lives is the degree to which we live as God intended us to live.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

(1 John 1:9)

God’s desire for us is that we do not sin, and one day our sanctification will be complete at our death

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

(1 John 3:2)

But, until that time, we still inhabit fallen bodies in a fallen world, and we struggle with the flesh and sometimes lose the battle. But we will not be lost; Jesus Himself intercedes for us as our High Priest

“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

(Romans 8:34)

So, from being saved to being sanctified a believer’s life will see the turmoil of sin. Our faith and confidence in our salvation will be tested. We won’t have answers to many a life situation. And yet are we willing to pursue the narrow path to the narrow gate that Christ invited us to? We can, if we acknowledge that it’s through HIS grace and mercy alone, and not in our own human efforts.

The furnace of Affliction

This is an often-asked question- Why do saved individuals suffer? All human beings do face some level of suffering. So, is suffering in a Christian any different? I wanted to reflect here the turmoil of afflictions in a new believer and how it helps or thwarts the belief. How is the perception of suffering changed

after salvation? How will it shake your confidence and how one finds meaning in this affliction as a child of God?

In my own experience I can testify that it was a trial that brought me to Christ, and it is the many trials that keep me humbled and in constant touch with God. More than physical suffering it is the bleeding heart that Satan attacks very successfully. So as a new believer one is always prone to doubt and always asking ‘Am I saved, then why, why Lord?’. It took me a while to see the ‘Joy in the Suffering’ that the Apostle James wrote of:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

(James 1:2-4)

Below I have reproduced a poem by Martha Nicholson that glorifies God through her sufferings. Margaret Snell Nicholson was a woman who suffered from four incurable diseases. She struggled with pain more than thirty-five years, an invalid, bound to her bed. Her spirit was so triumphant through those many weary years, that she wrote some of the finest Christian poetry ever been written.

*I stood a mendicant of God before His royal throne
And begged him for one priceless gift, which I could call my own.
I took the gift from out His hand, but as I would depart
I cried, “But Lord this is a thorn, and it has pierced my heart.
This is a strange, a hurtful gift, which Thou hast given me.”*

*He said, "My child, I give good gifts and gave My best to thee."
I took it home and though at first the cruel thorn hurt sore,
As long years passed, I learned at last to love it more and more.
I learned He never gives a thorn without this added grace,
He takes the thorn to pin aside the veil which hides His face.*

Walking by faith not by sight,

“Walking by faith means living life in light of eternal consequences. To walk by faith is to fear God more than man; to obey the Bible even when it conflicts with man’s commands; to choose righteousness over sin, no matter what the cost; to trust God in every circumstance; and to believe God rewards those who seek Him, regardless of who says otherwise.” This above extract is from <https://www.gotquestions.org/walk-by-faith-not-by-sight.html> . One can easily see how this can be a huge practical challenge to a new believer. The joy and power of saving grace does help but the biggest hindrance I have seen is the ‘fear of not conforming’. Unless one really relies on the strength of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, walking by faith alone becomes impossible. Putting the ‘old person’ in you to death and a total rebirth is totally alien to our thinking as well as our friends and family. The shock and cost of righteousness, a perfect and total righteousness for someone living in sin just a few days back can be huge. Further, the so called ‘secular world’ with so much rationalisation becomes quite counterintuitive and difficult to neither embrace nor leave. So, for a period the new believer is battling between two worlds and this struggle I believe will only continue. It is only through the grace and mercy of God through the Holy Spirit we learn to put sin to death and finally endure

and hang on by our fingernails to the hand of God. The good news however is that once saved, it is not by our strength but by his strength, we will be saved, sanctified, and glorified for His glory and His names sake. We choose to live according to what God reveals to us, rather than trust our own understanding

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

It requires faith to live this way because we cannot see, hear, or touch anything spiritual. But the good news again is one experiences the peace and hand of God guiding you once He takes charge, and I can testify to that. And you start understanding that the walk with Christ is not about the perfection but the direction.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

(John 10:27)

Guilt of hypocrisy

As a new believer one is in a state of spiritual flux till, they learn and mature to discern and appreciate the peace of Christ. Through our living faith in the Lord Jesus, we continually overcome sin's power until we are finally delivered. But all Christians fail to perfectly live up to the standard the Bible teaches. No Christian has ever been perfectly Christ-like. However, there are

many Christians who are genuinely seeking to live the Christian life and are relying more and more on the Holy Spirit to convict, change, and empower them. No Christian is perfect but making a mistake and failing to reach perfection in this life is not the same thing as being a hypocrite. (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Christians-hypocrites.html>) But again God does not leave the new-born baby alone. He is a faithful and compassionate God and His word is the double-edged sword that he gives you to fight all doubt and fear.

“for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (1 John 5:4–5)

Spiritual confusion- false prophets

I should confess and say this was one other major hurdle I faced as a new believer. In today’s hyperconnected world we are swamped by all kinds of media and messages. It is easy for someone in a state of flux to be swayed like a reed in the wind or tossed in the waves. The Bible cautions us to it. Unfortunately, there is so much of “religion” and “sects” and “denominations” that the truth gets twisted, tortured and thrown out. And if you are not careful you fall prey to the deception of glamour and popularity. Again, God leads you if you trust Him completely.

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how

you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”

(1 John 4:1-6)

I should confess I still struggle here and constantly seek God to guide me in the right direction. The simple rule for me is to stick to the Bible. Go back to it when in doubt!! And he will reveal to you what he wants to be known. One does not just read the Bible, but feels it, discerns it, experiences it- It is the living word and only in that form it can be the truth. And as many say, as you read the Bible, the Bible reads you. Get ready for that awesome experience.

“The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.”

- Eric Hoffer

Blessings of believing in Christ?

By the time I came to writing this chapter I can testify that I have been through quiet a lot of what I mentioned in the previous chapters. But have I seen enough of a true believer's life? No! But have I seen enough to start seeing the glory of God? Yes! For sure. For my heart yearns to be with the Lord as often and as much as possible. That is where the benefit of believing Christ starts. John Piper in his book 'Desiring God' writes this: - *The Chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever!* I could end this chapter right here and say that encompasses all the benefits of believing Christ. But my zeal and energy to show you more wants to be more elaborate and give you more taste of what Believing Christ brings you. I will try to illustrate the benefits with verses from the Bible and you can only see the truth in them if you discern it with the 'eye of your heart' - biblically speaking that means 'to understand it spiritually'. In other words, being from the Word of God these are promises that the Father gives us and in which we can be a 100% sure. For he is a covenant, just, loving, sovereign, unchanging, infinite, eternal God. So here starts the list of those benefits (promises) in no order and even just one of them is enough to save you from

eternal damnation and propel you into eternal salvation!! They are all free and yes there is but just one condition- he expects nothing from you but believe!

Just Believe and Receive!

You are saved once and for all by his blood

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

(Matthew 26:28)

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”

(Ephesians 1:7)

“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

(Romans 10:9)

He always loves you

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16)

“Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

(Isaiah 54:10)

“We love because he first loved us.”

(1 John 4:19)

“The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”

(Jeremiah 31:3)

You are made ‘Children of God’

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”

(1 John 3:1)

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—”

(John 1:12)

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you

slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

(Romans 8:14-17)

None other than Jesus Christ mediates for you

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,”

(1 Timothy 2:5)

“Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

(Hebrews 7:25)

“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

(Romans 8:34)

He works all things for your good

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

(Romans 8:28)

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,”

(Ephesians 1:11)

He sees all and knows all- the best guide you have

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”

(Psalm 32:8)

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

(Joshua 1:9)

The Omnipotent God is in you- awesome!

“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.”

(1 John 4:15)

“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing.”

(Zephaniah 3:17)

No one can win against you when he is for you

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

(Romans 8:31)

“So, we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

(Hebrews 13:6)

He helps you fight all temptations

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

(1 Corinthians 10:13)

He strengthens and helps you

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

(Isaiah 41:10)

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”

(Isaiah 41:13)

You will not be condemned or forsaken

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

(Deuteronomy 31:8)

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

(Romans 8:1)

Nothing can separate you from the Love of Christ

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 8:38-39)

You will never be put to shame in God’s eyes

“Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”

(Isaiah 50:7)

“As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”

(Romans 10:11)

He is in all things- so be confident

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

(Philippians 4:13)

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

(1 John 5:14)

All things will be given to you

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 4:19)

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

(Romans 8:32)

Ask and it will be given

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

(John 15:7-8)

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

(Matthew 7:7)

He fills you with Hope

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give
you hope and a future.”* (Jeremiah 29:11)

You are set free with the mind and heart of Christ

“So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”
(John 8:36)

*“Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can
make them stumble.”* (Psalm 119:165)

You get a new heart, mind and body – a new creation

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I
will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a
heart of flesh.”* (Ezekiel 36:26)

He takes pleasure in you

*“the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their
hope in his unfailing love.”*
(Psalm 147:11)

*“He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no
longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing.”*
(Zephaniah 3:17)

No one can snatch you from His or the Father's hands

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”

(John 10: 28-29)

He will not despise you when you are broken

“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

(Psalm 51:17)

The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

(Psalm 34:18)

You need fear no evil

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.”

(Psalm 23:4)

“I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”

(Psalm 34:4)

He gives you wisdom

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

(James 1:5)

“For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

(Proverbs 2:6)

He is patient with you

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

(2 Peter 3:9)

He restores your health

He said, “If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.”

(Exodus 15:26)

He Disciplines and purifies you

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

(1 Peter 5:10)

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

He gives you stability- Rock of your life

“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

(Psalm 18:2)

My salvation and my honour depend on God, he is my mighty rock, my refuge.”

(Psalm 62:7)

You have found a friend for life

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command.”

(John 15:13-14)

“The end of confession is to tell the truth to and for oneself.”

- J.M. Coetzee

Conclusion and Confession

As I write this concluding chapter, I want to let you know it has been about 18 months since I started writing the first line of this book. There were many reasons why I didn't rush to publish this book; one of which was my fear of mis-representing God's words. The other, as I mentioned many times in the book, being an early believer in Christ was not easy. So, I really wanted to check things out for myself as much as I could.

The good news is, that nearly 2 years on from a renewal of my mind and heart by being called to Christ, I can say with confidence and conviction Christ has definitely taken hold of me. If I had to rely only on my will power to maintain this relationship with God I will surely fail. But in this period of trials and tests God has been kind enough to seal me with the Holy Spirit and bring me to a place of complete submission to divine providence. I am bold and brave enough now by the power of the Holy Spirit to make the following my own declaration too:

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one

thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 3:12-14)

I have seen the impact faith has had on me and my behaviour. Yes, it has been hard at times. On the other hand, the fellowship with God and other believers has clearly helped me to have a coherent and consistent view. I should confess that some of the doctrines like ‘unconditional election or pre-destination’ did significantly challenge my secular views. But I have become more confident and assured of the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Christ; the need to recognise sin, the need to repent of your sins, the availability of free grace-based forgiveness of your sins when you believe in Christ, the omnipotence and sovereign providence of God etc. I believe the revelations by the help of the Holy Spirit and the word of God has placed me now on a firm foundation of faith, and that nothing shall separate me from the Love of God in Christ.

I confess that I have continued to stumble all along. But now I have the hand of Christ holding me. The guilt I have is good guilt leading me to repentance. I can’t forget the forgiveness that Christ has bought for me with His blood. I have learnt to look at Christ in all circumstances knowing that He is a God of promises. And that all the promises of God are yes and Amen in Jesus Christ. I am learning to let go of my fears and anxiety through the Joy of knowing Christ. There is a greater understanding of my purpose and a living hope- a hope in an everlasting fellowship with the Glory of God. I have a deep yearning now to share

this joy of God with others. It is challenging, but as my arrogance, ego and pride dies day by day witnessing and speaking of God has become much easier. And God has been kind all along. He has been my refuge, my fortress, my strength, my ever-present help at all times.

He has brought a sense of balance in my spiritual life. A healthy presence of the fear of God has always kept me on my knees. And that same fear has blessed me to know a fearless love that I am realising is the basis of our communion with God. There is no true knowledge of God where there is no true fear of Him.

We can truly 'live in God' if we want to and he is merciful to always knock on our doors and wait. I invite you to open the door when you hear the knock. You won't regret it!

And even though we don't know what to do, let us keep our eyes on Him who knows what to do.

We don't know what to do
But our eyes are on you
When trouble from nowhere comes
Pain without cause tortures
When the evil lies invisible
The enemy seems invincible
We don't know what to do
But our eyes are on you
When death comes out of the blue
And your love is buried
When you are losing the fight
And courage takes a flight

We don't know what to do
But our eyes are on you
When our God seems untrue
Faith seems a mere fantasy
In darkness as we grope
Our hands can't reach that rope
We don't know what to do
But our eyes are on you
We know, we know, we know
That God, your eyes are on us.

shivam natarajan

“No man is to be credited for his mere authority's sake, unless he can show Scripture for the maintenance of his opinion.”

- John Wycliffe

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A gold medallist from both Universities of Madras and Pondicherry, India, Dr. Shivam is a surgeon by training and settled in England. He is an advisor to governments and health care systems around the world to improve health through technology. Humbled by the call of Jesus Christ, Shivam is passionate to spread the Word of God through his witness and testimony. Having struggled with belief

himself, he understands the concerns and challenges every one faces in accepting God. In his writings he addresses those fears and invites everyone to know the grace and mercy of a loving and living God.

From “Shiva to Christ” belief has taken me through death and resurrection in Christ. And what I experienced was a truth worth sharing. Not for my sake but for the glory of God.

For Belief is not a scientific experiment to be proven in a lab but an experience to be felt in one’s heart.

But what I realised from my experience is, when you uncouple religion from Truth, when you separate religious rituals from the person of Christ, you see a whole different world. You just see the “Love of God” and his free grace and mercy. And that and that alone is true belief- not any religious work. So, to truly believe, one really needs to renounce religion but take up faith. Religion corrupts, Truth cures!

Join the conversation with Dr. Shivam at:
www.the-plain-truth.org



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