

*The following is an excerpt from the book "A Breath of God"*

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### ***Life and death***

A hospital usually has two wings. In one, we grieve for the sick and dying, in the other we express joy at the arrival of a new born babe. Here again we see that we are ready to come to terms with our own death when a loved one dies, yet we fail to come to terms with our own birth when a loved one is born. We have trouble seeing things as they really are because most religious teachers dare not think that perhaps our after-life may be more earth-bound than it is heaven-bound. The western world has been deeply affected by religious thinking when it comes to matters of life and death. Most funeral sermons are a testimony to that statement. The consequences of our sins are not solved by simply having faith in Jesus because we show an act of contrition and repentance. Some preachers teach that "faith alone" is the means of getting a "free ticket" to heaven. When the Apostle James said "*faith without works is dead*" he was not at loggerheads with Paul as many theologians claim. Rather he was expressing the exact sentiments as Paul was in Rom 6. When the woman in Jesus' day was caught in the act of adultery she wasn't told: "Your sins are forgiven, now go and struggle with your weakness", rather Jesus said: *Go and sin no more*. Likewise, the Apostle John later said: *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God* (1 John3:9).

The scriptures do not teach that sin naturally reigns in our body. We choose to let it. (See Rom 6:7-12). The content of most sermons and religious discourses imply that we are naturally inclined to obey the urges of sin, that we are inclined to sin because we are not entirely free from it ( Rom 6:7 ). Why then does Paul say that our natural urges are to *bear fruit to holiness*? ( Rom 6:22). We are either "holy" or "unholy". There is no excuse for us to sin. If we regard ourselves as "sinners" knowing that our "old man" was *crucified* with Him, and our body of sin has been done away with so we are no longer slaves to sin, why do we still regard ourselves as "sinners"? ( Rom 6: 14-23). Paul's explicit teaching in Rom 5:19 shows that not "all" are sinners by one man's disobedience but "many". Likewise, not "all" are righteous through one man's obedience but "many". It should also be noted that Paul is not addressing Gentiles in Romans 3 to Romans 5, but Christian Jews who were keeping the law as a means of righteousness.

We do not need signs and miracles and supernatural proofs to strengthen our faith when we understand the nature of good and evil. The entrance of the knowledge of *Christ* marks the beginning of our everlasting spiritual life. If we continue to believe that we are born with inherent sin, not fully free from sin until the "second coming" of Jesus, we are denying the power of the Gospel of Christ.

### ***The nature of Law***

Herein lays the paradox. To most fundamentalist Christians, the old friend I met on the plane is regarded as a *sinner* because he has never accepted Jesus as his Saviour. This is despite the fact that he nurtured and loved his children, was a faithful and caring husband and lived a commendable, hard working life supporting his family. Conversely, a person who has committed murder, robbery, rape or any other hideous crime, providing he has *confessed with his mouth* and accepted Jesus as his Saviour

by “faith alone”, is in better standing with God than my old friend. In fact, according to some theologians, a reformed *sinner* can sit on his hands for the rest of his life, do absolutely nothing except have faith in Jesus.

There are many proof text messages in the Bible that may lead to that conclusion. For example, John says, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1John 1:9). But then James says, *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-and tremble* (James 2:19). The Apostle Paul delivers a sound argument for his stand on “justification by faith alone” but bear in mind that Paul is talking to Christian Jews living in Rome who believed they were saved by keeping the law. Paul was simply arguing that there is no justification in keeping the law if the heart isn’t transformed by works of love (Rom 3: 19-31). Paul continues arguing this point in Rom 4: 1-25, because the Jews were dependant on the keeping of the law. Paul was trying to make them see that “faith” puts both Jew and Gentile right with God (Rom 5:1-21).

### *The nature of faith and love*

It is clear that without faith we cannot please God (Heb 11:6), but what is faith? As the writer of Hebrews says; *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Heb 11:1). As James says; *But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works, and I will show you my faith by my works* (James 2:18). We find a very interesting argument in Paul’s writings which demonstrates there is no excuse to reject the Spirit of God (Rom 1:18-32, Rom 2:1-16)). When Paul says; *for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing them or else excusing them* (Rom 2:14-15). This is why we need to define and understand the nature of faith and love, as it relates to good and evil. But if there is something Christians need to come to terms with, it is the correct knowledge that affects our faith in a positive way, knowledge and understanding of the *mystery* revealed to the Apostles. It took them forty years after the crucifixion to grasp the nature of it.

The following study will show that *being saved* is not necessarily attained by a simple confession of Jesus. It is my considered opinion that Christianity, the bearers of the cross of Christ, the forerunners of the Gospel, the ones who should be a light in a dark place, are themselves in many respects further from the truth about Christ Jesus than they could ever imagine. If there is something to confess it is the confession that one believes in the *Christ*, furthermore, that *Christ within* and the transformation of what this knowledge does to the heart is the most important topic of the following study. Christians should be sure what they are really talking about when they ask, “Do you confess Christ?” In the early first century it may have been necessary to prove one’s faith by confessing belief and knowledge of Christ Jesus, but bear in mind during this time Jew and gentile converts were in their infancy. There was much to learn about the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but he really only taught two simple principles: Love God and love your neighbour, the by-product of this being *whatever measure of judgment we use against our neighbour, it will be measured back to us* (Mat 7:1-2).

The apostle Paul revealed what the essence of *Christ within* truly is:

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I have nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek it’s own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things,*

*endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love (1Cor 13: 1-13).*

This is what the substance of what *Christ in you* really means. There is no excuse not to let love reign in our hearts. We have the ability to love as Jesus loved. It is our choice to love or hate, to be good or evil. Jesus was our example of what it means to have the fullness of *Christ within*, and by example he showed how humanity should live and love as one body.

### ***Original sin?***

Children have a natural inclination towards being affectionate and loving rather than evil, but end-time Bible teachers would have us believe the opposite. An infant is not born with “sinful tendencies” due to Adam’s transgression. It is a sad fact that this belief is so ingrained that few have even considered the possibility that the second and third century church fathers may have got it wrong. Many contemporaries of Jesus in the late 1st century had it right, but the “church” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3rd centuries deliberately lost the true meaning of the nature of good and evil. Sin and sinners, hell and death, fire and brimstone, eternal damnation, anything that would instil fear was used as a psychological tool to contain the masses. We cannot ignore Biblical texts such as *there is none righteous, no not one*, but they should not be used as proof texts to endorse the doctrine of original sin if they do not necessarily reflect the overall N. T. theme. We tend to dwell on the negative aspects of evil and forget that we are by nature just as potentially good.

If we were fortunate enough to have been nurtured by loving parents we are usually secure and confident throughout life. If parents choose to be unlovable and uncaring, children tend to see life differently, battling through it with an enormous lack of self confidence. Most people in Christian and Moslem countries at least, don’t appreciate the effect religion has played in shaping their thinking in regard to love and fear. The more we love the less we fear. Those who choose not to love often live with fear of death and separation, since fear has no place where love is. Christians, Jews and Moslems regard the Ten Commandments as the basic rule of social behaviour and the basis of their present governing laws but the fundamental difference in the understanding of the law of God is that one is written in stone, the other on the heart. If we have genuine love for our neighbour that is born from our love of God we fulfil the law of God, for *love is the fulfilling of the law* (Rom 13:10). Preaching hellfire is the emotional means by which many evangelists persuade the multitudes to fear God. Should we only refrain from sinning because of the consequences we fear? Too often, the function and nature of the law of God is overlooked when the motive for abiding by the law of God is not born from love.

### ***Love never fails***

Notice that Paul says *love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up* (verse 4). This verse alone indicates the opposite of what most of us practise. How many envy their neighbour’s success? How many have learned to react with kindness and long suffering when faced with conflict? How many live beyond their means because of self image, status etcetera. But love - *genuine* love - does not envy or have any self interest. *Love does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked and thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the*

*truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things.* We hear songs about love every day but true love is not related to romance and sexual desire. Music and poetry about love is not what Paul is referring to here. *Love never fails.* Contrary to what we think, if we are put in a position where the law of love needs to be applied our efforts will not fail. Whatever the scenario, be it a dispute with the neighbour, a conflict with a friend, a threat of violence, whatever situation we are faced with, if the rules of love are practised the promise is: *love never fails.* We may have to be long suffering, we may have to be kind when we don't feel like being kind and we may have to stretch our emotions as far as we possibly can without breaking, but we will have the victory because *love never fails.* But what is it that can motivate us to love as Jesus loved?

When we practise love we begin to experience and discover the power of *Christ within* our lives and what John means when he says; *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God* (1 John 3:9). This is how we pass from death to life. There is no law that can condemn any man who abides by the law of love. In fact, this is the law that contradicts every false religion. The bottom line is if you love your neighbour as yourself, you abide in God. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God* (1 John 4:7). The term of our life extends beyond this life. This world is not doomed because of sin. When spiritual things are discerned there is nothing to fear. Undoubtedly, believers and unbelievers will come and go for centuries to come.