

A MATTER OF
LIFE & DEATH

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

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This book is edited from the lectures and unpublished notes of R. B. Thieme, Jr.

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PRESUMED GUILTY

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT you are seated in a courtroom. You are on trial for murder, a crime that carries the death penalty. The evidence against you has been delivered to the jury and your attorney has presented your defense. Now you await the jury's verdict.

A hush falls over the courtroom as the jury foreman steps forward. You rise to your feet and face the judge. You know one fact no one else in the courtroom knows for certain: You committed the crime. As the jury foreman announces the verdict of guilty, you are not surprised.

The judge pounds the gavel and pronounces your sentence. You cannot escape the penalty and your

lawyer cannot protect you. You are helpless to save yourself.

But as you are led away from the courtroom in handcuffs, a man steps forward. This man is a stranger to you. “I will take your punishment,” he says. “I will be your substitute.”

The judge leans forward to question him. At last, satisfied by the man’s qualifications, he accepts the stranger as your substitute. The handcuffs are removed from your wrists and put on his. While this man undeservedly goes to his death in your place, you are set free. You are allowed to live—even though you are guilty—because someone else has taken your punishment.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

Every human being is born condemned under the death penalty. But God has made it possible to avoid that fate. He offers you freedom and eternal life with Himself as a gracious gift.

God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be your substitute and free you from the death penalty. The Bible, God’s written word, says:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten [uniquely born] Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send

the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten [uniquely born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18)

You are guilty, helpless to save yourself from this death penalty. There is no ability you possess or any work you can perform to redeem yourself. But God has provided an escape from eternal condemnation. The price for your freedom was paid by your substitute, Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross. You can receive God’s grace gift of eternal life by one simple act of faith.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” (Acts 16:31*a*)

Believing in Christ means you accept as true the fact that He died as your personal substitute. In the moment you believe you are declared innocent and your death penalty is removed. God gives you eternal life and guarantees your salvation. Instantly, you are brought into an eternal relationship with God.

SEPARATED FROM GOD

Until this moment you may not have been aware that you were born under a sentence of death. You

may think of yourself as a ‘good person,’ and you feel that God would *never* condemn you. But you are guilty, God has condemned you, and only Christ can save you. In Christ’s own words the Gospel message is:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”
(John 14:6*b*)

At the moment you were born, a barrier existed between you and God. This barrier separates man from God. Since God is perfect in every way, His standards are perfect. God cannot accept or approve of you because you are not perfect.

As it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.” (Romans 3:10)

The Bible tells us that man is not perfect. You as a human being are born flawed with a sinful nature that tempts you to commit offenses against God. As a result, your hereditary sinful nature makes it impossible for you, through your own efforts, to be accepted by God.

Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

For all of us have become like one who is
unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy
garment. (Isaiah 64:6a)

If you are honest with yourself, you will admit that you sin. But what you may not realize is that the temptation to sin originates from your inborn flawed nature. And because of this sinful nature you cannot meet God's standards.

For all have sinned and fall short of the
glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Our marred nature separates us from God. There are no 'good' people by God's standards. No one can be 'good enough' by his own desire or works to remove this barrier that separates man from God. Imperfect man is on one side of the barrier and perfect God is on the other.

TRAPPED IN THE SLAVE MARKET

The Bible calls man's side of the barrier a slave market. We are slaves to our own corrupt, sinful nature. Slaves cannot redeem themselves or purchase their own freedom. Every human being is *born* into this slave market. Christ said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” (John 8:34)

Inside the slave market, there is no future. The legacy of our slavery is condemnation, eternal separation, and punishment from God. Even though man is born under the death penalty, God's grace provides a means of escape. Grace is something you cannot earn. Because of His perfect love, God offers every human being a choice between death and eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

God does not abandon you in the slave market of sin. He has provided everything for you and every other human being to leave slavery and enter into an eternal relationship with Him.

THE BARRIER REMOVED

In order to free us from the slave market of sin, God designed a means by which His perfect standards can be met. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to remove the barrier between God and man.

Jesus Christ is unique because He is both perfect God and perfect man. Not only is Jesus Christ human, but He is also just as much God as the Father who sent Him: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

When Jesus Christ came to earth to become the God-man, He was born outside the slave market: His humanity was perfect. Because of His unique birth,

He alone had no sinful nature. He never committed a sin Himself, and no divine punishment was due Him. Only Christ was qualified on His own merit to meet the perfect standards of God. Only Christ could purchase our freedom because He was free from sin and outside the slave market. God the Father as the Supreme Judge accepted Him as your substitute.

As the only perfect man in history, Jesus Christ chose to be judged on the cross for man's sins.

He [God the Father] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

He paid the death penalty on the cross for you and every other human being. Every sin ever committed—past, present, and future—was judged on the cross. God the Father pronounced the sentence and Jesus Christ obeyed it.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

By accepting your punishment, Jesus Christ became your substitute. As your substitute, He met the perfect standards of God for you and removed the barrier between you and God.

THE SLAVE MARKET OPENED

Jesus Christ has removed the chains from the slave market. You are free to leave. You now have access to God. Everything necessary to remove the barrier between you and God has already been accomplished.

For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.
(1 Timothy 2:5–6a)

Jesus Christ has willingly accepted the death sentence in your place. You have been freed! You are no longer a prisoner of the slave market.

How do you escape from the slave market? There is nothing you must *do* or *say* or *change* to be free. You already have access to freedom. Faith is the only requirement. Faith is simply believing. God requires nothing of you except belief. In return, He gives you eternal life. You receive by faith the gift He is offering.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name.
(John 1:12)

GRACE AND FAITH

Your personal worth is not an issue to God. No one can meet His standards. Your personal sins are not an

issue to God. He has already tried and closed the case of human sin. Your good deeds and works are not an issue to God. He offers salvation by grace through faith, not by works.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

God's policy is salvation by grace through faith. Jesus Christ provides your salvation. Faith in Christ is the means by which you receive God's grace.

HOW TO BE SAVED

Faith, then, is the key to your salvation. Jesus Christ has set you free and that means you have been released to make your own choice about Him. You have the right to decide either for or against Christ.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Even at your best, you can never earn or deserve a relationship with God. Only the object of your faith, Jesus Christ, has the merit. Your faith in the work of Christ on the cross makes your salvation possible. Faith

is simply your decision to receive the message of Christ as true. Faith alone in Christ alone is salvation.

You respond to God the Father by simply forming the words privately in your mind, I believe in Christ. You are saved the moment you believe. God gives you eternal life. You are “born again.”

“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3*b*)

“He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” (John 5:24*b*)

LIFE OR DEATH

Your decision about Christ is the most important decision of your life. You choose your own eternal future. If you do not believe, you will remain outside of God’s family and never share His eternal life.

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25*b*–26*a*)

Your name is blotted out of the book of life if you die without believing in Jesus Christ. You will stand before the Supreme Court of Heaven to be judged and

condemned. Anyone whose name is missing from this book is sentenced to spend eternity in the lake of fire.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)

There is no eternal punishment for the believer. The death sentence has been removed.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:1-2)

For those who believe in Jesus Christ, God offers a life of meaning, purpose, and destiny.

LIFE IN GOD'S FAMILY

When you believe in Christ, you enter into a new and personal relationship with God. You are in His family. Every believer is God's child and always will be.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

Your new status as a believer does not mean you are now perfect. You still possess your sinful nature, and will continue to sin and make mistakes. In a family,

some children may turn out well and some may not. And so it is with believers. All believers will fail, some more than others. But God never abandons any of His children. No matter how often or how badly you may fail as a believer, you have a secure position with God that never ends.

And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:28)

Your new relationship with God is permanent and eternal. You cannot lose your salvation once you have believed in Christ. You have left behind the slave market of sin forever and you have the ultimate security: God's unconditional promise of eternal life.

God's perfection is your guarantee. He always loves you. He never alters His standards or changes a promise He has made to you. The barrier is gone forever! Nothing can ever again separate you as a believer from God. Nothing can take away your eternal salvation.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

AFTER SALVATION, WHAT?

As a new believer, you have entered into a new life. You now have a *permanent* union with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. You are a Christian.

Therefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

As a new believer, you immediately begin receiving divine support. God will always provide for you—both now, while you are on earth, and after you die, when you will live with Him forever in heaven.

And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

Even when you sin, God's grace furnishes a way for you to adjust your course and continue to fulfill His plan. Simply stated:

If we confess [name] our sins [to God the Father], He is faithful and righteous to

forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all [unknown and forgotten sins] unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Therefore, at the moment of your salvation, you have the resources necessary to live the Christian way of life. You can understand God's plan for your life by learning Bible doctrine from a pastor-teacher. The Bible, which is "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16*b*), is God's guide for your new life.

God provides pastors to clearly and accurately communicate His Word to you—if you have a desire to learn. What is important is listening regularly and concentrating on what the Bible has to say. By learning, thinking, and applying Bible doctrine, you will grow spiritually in your new life. Spiritual growth after salvation, as well as Christian good works, come only as a result of studying and using the Word of God.

YOUR ETERNAL ALTERNATIVES

Eternity is a long, long time. Compared to eternity, time is a drop in the bucket. Your finite mind cannot fully grasp the reality of time without end. You have only a few short years, perhaps less than you think, to prepare for life after death. Your life hangs by a very fine thread.

When you believe in Christ, you can look forward to

an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. (1 Peter 1:4*b*)

The Bible reveals little about heaven, but assures us that it is glorious beyond our imagination:

And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain. (Revelation 21:4*a*)

Most astounding of all, you will see Christ who is

the radiance of His [God the Father's] glory and the exact representation of His nature. (Hebrews 1:3*a*)

Now if you refuse to make this greatest and most important decision, you are choosing an endless nightmare. To spurn the One who suffered untold agony on the cross as your substitute has appalling consequences.

The alternative is the lake of fire, the final destination of the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). This place of eternal suffering and pain imprisons for endless eons all who refuse God's offer for freedom

from the slave market of sin. Glimpse into this torment and hopelessness for the unbeliever:

And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10*b*)

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

If you have not yet made a choice about your eternal future, you are without Christ, without hope, and without eternal life. You stand guilty, destined to the lake of fire. However, Jesus Christ had you *personally* in mind when He went to the cross. Christ took your place and accepted your punishment. He died as your substitute.

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died [as a substitute] for us. (Romans 5:8)

God has given you the freedom to make your own choice about Jesus Christ. Right now, at this moment, by a simple act of faith you can have eternal life.

“He gave His only begotten [uniquely born] Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16*b*)

This is your opportunity to receive God's gift to you. Your choice for Christ is a private decision. No one else can make that decision for you. And no one has the right to force you to make any decision. You must decide for yourself. In the privacy of your own soul, you can simply tell God the Father you are believing in Jesus Christ. In that very moment, your eternal future will be assured.

If you decide to believe in Christ, you can be confident you have eternal life. You will share an eternal relationship with God. You will live with Him forever in heaven. Faith alone in Christ alone *is* salvation!

The choice is yours.

DOCTRINAL BIBLE STUDIES

Bible doctrine, the body of teaching drawn from a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, is the standard for spiritual truth. Bible study provides spiritual nourishment for the Christian (Matt. 4:4).

The importance of Bible doctrine cannot be over-emphasized (Ps. 138:2). God commands the Christian to be inwardly transformed (Rom. 12:2). This transformation requires a daily renewing of the mind through learning and applying the Word of God (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23).

For many years doctrinal Bible classes taught by R. B. Thieme, Jr., have provided daily spiritual food for his congregation. Publications, DVDs, and MP3 CDs are available without charge or obligation. A *Doctrinal Bible Studies Catalogue* will be provided upon request.

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