

What Christ Has Done For Me

By Paul Juris

My birth took place in a very predominately Catholic section. I attended a parochial grade school for eight years. I was baptized, confirmed and received the Sacraments regularly.

Upon reaching the fifth grade, I was taught some of the Latin prayers, became an altar boy and assisted the priest at the Sacrifice of the Mass.

I accepted the priest as mediator between God and myself. From early childhood I had been taught that the priest was merely performing the duties given to him by God. So it seemed natural for me to observe him saying the mass, hearing the confession of sins, changing the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ and many other such duties.

When I went to confession, I confessed my sins to the priest as sincerely and truthfully as if I was speaking to God Himself.

At a very early age, in fact, as far back as I can recall, **there was one thing that disturbed me greatly**. It was this: Among the many things taught to me as a Catholic, I was told that I was to love God. I was given many reasons why I should love Him. However, to be perfectly honest with you and myself, I can not say, in looking back, that I really loved God.

My reason for serving Him and trying to stay out of sin was not motivated by love. It was motivated by fear, a fear of what God would do to me if I sinned. I had the feeling that if I were to die while in the state of sin God would surely send me to Purgatory or even possibly to Hell. I never revealed this fact to anyone. I felt that the church, established by Jesus Christ and following His teachings from the time He was here on earth, was doing all in her power to make myself and other candidates fit for heaven.

I never doubted or questioned anything that was taught me. In fact, **I considered it a privilege to be a member of the one true church**. It was beyond my understanding why anyone in his right mind would ever want to belong to any other religion. Surely, the fact that I could not love God was no fault of the church. I thought that perhaps I was one of the few who ever felt this way about God. I felt that by faithfully following the leading of my church, that eventually I also would come to love God as I thought others loved Him.

But as I grew older I was faced with more and greater temptations. **Fear held me in check** in my early years, but as I grew older something that seemed to go **beyond fear** entered my life. This "something" was a passion for sin.

There were periods in my life when sin had a complete upper hand. But in a short time fear would return. I would stop myself, examine my conscience, make a good confession, do the prescribed penance, go to Holy Communion and generally amend my ways.

Each time after having gone to confession, I would experience a great feeling of joy and relief. The whole world seemed happier and brighter to me. I felt that once again I had gotten right with God. I felt utterly ashamed of the way I had behaved and I also knew for certain that I could do much better in the future. However, after a few short days I would be back committing the same sins over again.

It was not as though I was making insincere or bad confessions. **I could not be a hypocrite with God**, and because of this, I always made certain of meeting the full requirements asked by the church for making a good confession. I was certain I was meeting this requirement because it was not all uncommon for me to hear the priest make some comment to the effect that he thought I had made a very good confession.

I was so determined to do better that often, after a confession, I prayed to God and asked Him to punish me in any way that He saw fit if I would ever be so foolish as to risk going to Hell again. Yet in a very short time I would be back in the same condition of sin. This "condition of sin" always came back in spite of all I could do to ward it off.

Outwardly, to the casual observer and to my acquaintances, I was a good and faithful member of the Catholic Church and a good Christian.

Inwardly, my soul never knew real peace, save for those few days after each confession, WHICH I THOUGHT WAS PEACE.

During this time **the worst thoughts that could enter my mind were the thoughts of death and eternity**. While I was busily occupied, these thoughts never bothered me. But there would be times when I would awaken during the night and the thoughts of death and eternity would literally send chills up and down my spine.

Think of trying to find the end of eternity. I have an eternal spirit. Where will I spend eternity? At a time like this, I actually wish I had never been born.

By this time I had reached my twenties, I had resigned myself to this fate. **A long painful stay in Purgatory was already a well-established fact in my mind**. In fact, I would have considered myself lucky to be able to go to Purgatory.

Actually, the only real hope I had of escaping Hell was the hope that I might be fortunate enough to get to a priest and confession at least seven days before I would die.

One day, during lunch time, I casually fell into **conversation with a fellow worker** at the shop. How we got on the subject of religion, I do not know, but presently he asked me the question, "Do you know that salvation is a free gift?" I objected to this because I was certain we at least had a part in earning our salvation.

He said, "Well, **I can prove to you that salvation is a gift.**" So to avoid any argument I said, "O.K., go ahead and prove it."

He walked away, but returned a short time later and handed me a little slip of paper with some markings on it. He asked me to look up those references in the Bible and they would show me that salvation is a gift.

He seemed like such a nice fellow. In order not to offend him, I took out my wallet, tucked the slip into it and told him I might look them up sometime.

The following day I avoided the place where we had met. However, I ran into him in another part of the shop. He asked if I had looked up the references. I told him I was too busy.

Well, for one solid week, this fellow kept after me every day, asking the same question: "Have you looked up the references?" Finally I began to run out of patience, not to mention excuses for not looking them up. So, I took him aside and said, "Look buddy, I'm going to be real frank with you. I never intended to look up those references. In fact, I couldn't even if I had wanted to **because I don't even own a Bible.**"

I felt this would end our conversation on religion. But I was wrong. The next day he presented me with a New Testament and said, "Now you can look them up."

By now I was quite amazed and I said, "Well, this still doesn't do me any good." Taking the slip of paper out from my wallet, I asked him, "**What in the world do these markings mean?** For example, Ephesians 2:8, 9. Is that Ephesians, page 289?"

At this point he explained to me how to look up Scripture references in the Bible as follows: "Ephesians" is the name of the book. The first number "2" means the chapter in that book. And the number or numbers after the two dots means the verse or verses in that chapter.

I took the New Testament with me. But after thinking it over, I returned it to him the following day. I told him that in all fairness to my religion, **if I were to read my Bible it would have to be the Catholic Bible.** We began spending lunch time together. We exchanged views on every religious topic we could think of.

It was during this time that my interest in the Word of God was aroused. **I took it upon myself to purchase a Catholic New Testament.** I had determined in my heart to read it through, mostly out of curiosity.

Each day I read a few verses, sometimes a whole chapter. I understood many verses of Scripture that were pointed out to me by this fellow at the shop from time to time.

From the time I decided to read the New Testament, **I accepted the Bible as truly being the Word of God, as my church teaches.** However, it puzzled me when this fellow pointed out verses from the New Testament which seemed to mean so very much to him. Yet when I read the same verses, they meant little or nothing at all to me.

After several months of discussions this fellow convinced me of exactly nothing. I still believed as I had always believed. I could never, regardless of how appealing it was, accept any belief that I was not firmly convinced in my heart was the absolute truth.

I felt certain that the teachings of my church were the truth, even when put to a test. Yet something urged me to continue reading the New Testament, which I did.

Returning in memory to a certain Saturday night in February, at about 9 o'clock, I happened to be alone this night. I had intended to spend the evening watching my favorite television programs.

However, as I was about to settle down, the strangest thing happened. Something prompted me to turn off the television set and meditate. I did this. I took the New Testament I had been faithfully reading for several months. I began leafing through the pages, reading the underscored verses. These verses as I read and reread them still didn't make sense to me.

Presently after about 2 1/2 hours of meditating I **began to ask myself some of the following questions:** "Paul, just what can you do to save yourself? Does being baptized save me? No. Does being confirmed save me? No. Does going to mass regularly save me? No. Does being a good, faithful church member save me? No. Does making a good confession save me? No."

After coming up with a negative answer to every conceivable thing I could think of to do to save myself, I **came to the most wonderful realization I have ever known.**

Of course, **Jesus Christ did it all.** He bore the same, suffering and penalty I deserve for my sins. I am certain He must have shed at least one drop of that precious blood, at Calvary, personally for me.

"Christ also has suffered for you." (St. Peter 2:21)

"Who Himself bore our sins in His body upon the tree...And by His stripes you were healed." (St. Peter 2:24)

Upon realizing this wonderful truth I immediately fell to my knees and with tears streaming down my cheeks I said, "Lord, you know every one of my sins, I've confessed them to you so many times. I repent, I'll turn from my wicked ways." (Luke 13:3) **"Right here and now I trust in you. I receive you as my personal Saviour..."**

"But as many as received Him He gave the power of becoming the sons of God: to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

"Him who comes to me I will not cast out." (John 6:37)

That night I slept very well and soundly. The following day and for many days after I was beside myself with joy.

Had this wonderful experience really happened to me? I had to actually pinch myself to make certain I wasn't just having a pleasant dream. **Truly, my life has taken on an entirely new meaning.**

"If then any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. The former things have passed; behold, they are made new." (II Corinthians 5:17)

It seems as though a veil has been lifted from my eyes. The Bible is no longer a book of confusion to me. Rather, it becomes more clear and understandable each time I read from it.

"And if our gospel also is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded their unbelieving minds, that they should not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (II Corinthians 4:3,4)

These same verses which little or nothing to me a short time ago now mean so very much. They have become precious because in them God speaks to me.

I NOW KNOW FOR CERTAIN that God has forgiven my sins.

"To Him (Christ) all the prophets bear witness, that through His name all who believe (trust) in Him may receive forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:43)

"Be it known therefore, brethren, that through Him (Christ) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and in Him everyone who believes (trusts) is acquitted of all things which you could not be acquitted by the Law of Moses." (Acts 13:38,39)

No longer do the thoughts of death and eternity haunt me. I am taking God's Word for it that I will spend eternity with Him.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh." (Romans 8:1)

"For whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

"He who believes (trusts) in Him is not judged; But he who does not believe (does not trust) is already judged, because he does not believe (trust) in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." (John 3:18)

"Amen, Amen, I say unto you, he who hears my word, and believes Him who sent me, has life everlasting, and does not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 4:24)

See also John 3:14, John 3:16, John 3:36, Romans 10:9, Romans 10:11

Praise God, I CAN KNOW, NOW, that I have eternal life. God says so.

"And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life; and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who has not the Son has not the life.

These things I am writing to you that **YOU MAY KNOW that you have eternal life**-you who believe (trust) in the name of the Son of God." (Epistle I John 5:11-13)

The best part of it all, is that I no longer need to rely on my own feelings or trust in something I may THINK IS SAFE.

"Being fully aware that whatever God has promised He is able to perform." (Romans 4:21)

Truly I have found real peace of mind and soul with God through the one who is our peace.

"But now in Christ Jesus you, who were once afar off, have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace." (Ephesians 2:13,14)

No longer do I serve God in fear. **At long last I am happy to be able to say that I NOW LOVE GOD. My motive for serving Him is out of love and appreciation for all He has done and is doing for me daily.**

It's true that temptations are still present but, thank God, I am not fighting them alone. I have the Holy Spirit dwelling in me (I Corinthians 3:16,17; I Corinthians 6:19,20; and Romans 8:9-11), and the love of Christ (Romans 8:37-39) to combat and overcome them.

If and when I sin, I confess the sin directly to God and He promises forgiveness so I may remain in good fellowship with Him (Epistle I John 1:7-9).

DOES GOD REALLY SAY THAT SALVATION IS A GIFT?

"For by grace (unmerited favor) you have been saved through faith (believing or trusting); and that not from yourselves it is THE GIFT OF GOD: not as the outcome of works, lest anyone may boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9).

"For the wages of sin is death, BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS LIFE EVERLASTING in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23).

The Word of God has convinced me beyond a shadow of a doubt that outside of JESUS CHRIST ALONE, there is no salvation for any of us.

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing (trusting) you may have life in His Name." (John 20:31).

Jesus said unto him, "I AM THE WAY, the truth and the life. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER BUT THROUGH ME." (John 14:6).

The apostle Peter speaking of Jesus says, "NEITHER IS THERE SALVATION IN ANY OTHER. FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN TO MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED." (Acts 4:12).

What Christ has done for others, Christ will do for you.