

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

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Transform Your Life in 2002

By Gary Petty

Conversion is God's metamorphosis of our minds, emotions, motivations, desires and actions from the way of the natural person.



HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT, "I do so many things wrong. I try, but I'm just so inadequate. How can God love me?" Today I want to give you God's solution for human weakness. If you really want to know how to turn your life around, this information is absolutely necessary.

Back to the beginning

When we turn to the Bible as God's revealed knowledge for humanity, we find in Genesis 1:26-27 that mankind is created in the likeness of God. Human beings were created to have a relationship with their Creator.

The Bible also tells us in Genesis 2:7 that the first man, Adam, became a "living soul" (KJV). Both the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 18:4 and the New Testament apostle Paul in Romans 6:23 tell us that "the soul who sins shall die" and that "the wages of sin is death." Decay and death are the natural results of living life differently than the way directed by the Creator.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God in Eden, they came under the influence of the fallen angel Satan. From that point onward all humankind has been under Satan's tutelage, and human nature has developed in the opposite direction of God's nature. Mankind has literally become the enemy of God. Paul writes in Romans 8:7 that the natural human mind is "...enmity against God...."

Cut off from God, subject to the influence of a powerful and evil being who wants to destroy us and condemned to death because our very nature is corrupted by sin, every human being is in a real sense lost and hopeless.

God wants to heal the sickness in your nature, your thoughts, your desires, your emotions, your values.

If you have any kind of Christian background, you've been taught that God sent His Son to save human beings from eternal punishment. This is true, but Christ does more than that. God wants to heal the sickness in your nature, your thoughts, your desires, your emotions, your values. He wants to change you to reflect His nature. This process is known as conversion.

Read what Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 18:1-3: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

Contrary to some popular teachings, the Bible reveals that Christian conversion is more than an intellectual acceptance of God's existence. It's more than belief in Jesus as the Savior. It's more than proclaiming a certain set of religious teachings. Conversion takes place when a person, of his own free will, repents of his sinful nature and submits to the bonding of God's Holy Spirit to his mind, thereby becoming partakers of God's nature.

Sounds a little farfetched? Can a human being actually share the thoughts, love and life-changing power of the Creator?

The apostle Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 2:9-14 that a real relationship with God's Spirit produces genuine life change, not just a one-time emotional experience of "giving your heart to the Lord."

Paul writes: "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

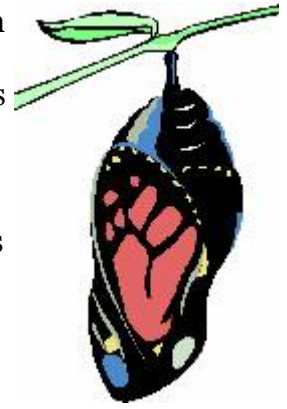
You see, human beings are the only incomplete physical life form on earth. God isn't finished with our development; and as astounding as it may seem, unless we receive a "Spirit" from God we can never become completed creations.

The conversion process

Conversion is a process comparable to the metamorphosis of some insects. One of the most fascinating of all insect metamorphoses is how a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly.

Did you know that a caterpillar's skin can't stretch except when new? As

they consume food, their skins quickly stretch to the limit. The only reason they can grow larger is that a new, soft skin forms under the old one. After a while the old skin bursts open and is discarded. The caterpillar continues this process until it is as large as it can get.



Then the process gets really interesting. By creating a small patch of silk, the caterpillar attaches itself to a twig. It sheds its skin and now appears as a totally different insect. This strange sack like creature is called a pupa.



The caterpillar may spend weeks as a pupa, but inside that sack something marvelous is taking place. The organs of what was once a caterpillar are dissolving and becoming nourishment for a new creature forming inside the sack. When completely developed, the exquisite butterfly emerges from the pupa.

Conversion is God's metamorphosis of our minds, emotions, motivations, desires and actions from the way of the natural person, which guarantees death, to the spiritual character of God. God isn't interested in just remodeling your character. He wants to replace it with His nature. God wants to change us from mud crawlers into creatures who can fly.

This process of conversion isn't easy. It involves a struggle between our own selfish nature and the new nature being created by the Holy Spirit. True conversion isn't a simple matter of accepting certain religious teachings or doing good deeds. True conversion is the sometimes painful, sometimes exhilarating commitment to the struggle of allowing God to create in us a brand new person.

Do converted people sin?

How then do we explain when we see Christians sin?

Understand, since conversion is a process, Christians are in various stages of the spiritual metamorphosis of having their human nature changed into godly nature. All Christians, even with God's Spirit, wrestle with sin. All Christians from time to time return to selfish ways.

Human beings are the only incomplete physical life forms on earth.

The apostle John writes about this subject starting in 1 John 1:8. He writes: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Will God give up on me?

It is common for human beings, faced with our own inadequacies, to fall into the trap of "What can God see in me? It seems that I change and overcome so slowly. Isn't God going to

someday just give up on me?"

It's true that God doesn't condone sin, and unrepentant sinners will receive eternal punishment. So how does God look at a Christian who has received His Spirit, someone who is struggling with sin and sometimes loses a battle with their old nature or Satan?

God's vision and perseverance with us can be illustrated by the following story.

In September 1924 a stout, robust man of 60 years was spending many hours hiking the rugged area around the Harney Range of South Dakota. He searched the crest of every mountain peak looking for something. Some thought this man's dream was unrealistic. There was doubt about how the project was to be funded.

But this man was driven by a dream that filled him with one purpose. Where other people saw rugged crags and inhospitable rocks, this man saw faces.

His son, Lincoln, wrote in *Mount Rushmore--The Story Behind the Scenery* about what it was like when his father found and chose a remote mountain as the place to complete his dream: "This was the monolith my father had been searching for: a gigantic mountain of solid granite, towering above the surrounding peaks and well separated from them. Most important, the major face of the rock was to the southwest, an aspect essential for maximum sunlight during the daylight hours. As he talked in that positive, mesmerizing way of his, I began to see in the great peak the colossal mountain sculpture he could create there."

Where other people saw rocks, Gutzon Borglum saw the faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. It took years of hard, sometimes seemingly impossible work to complete the project. Dynamite was used to sculpt the peak into general shapes. Hundreds of men, sweating in the summer heat and freezing in winter, driven by the will of one man, shaped Mount Rushmore into one of the greatest feats of sculpture accomplished in history.



God's creation is driven by one dream--the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of His children. Then God will change the saints into spirit, and they will finally see God "face to face." This is the promise to all who wish to submit to God's creative conversion process in this lifetime.

When Christians look into the spiritual mirror, sometimes all we can see are the rocks, the unsightly cracks and outcroppings that make us so imperfect. What God sees is the emerging faces of His children. You can be one of those children if you let God work with you in the transformation process.

This article is based on the transcript of a Good News radio broadcast. Good News Radio is heard on stations across the United States. For an Internet listing of stations and times or to download radio programs, go to

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The Bible and Harry Potter

By Gregory Dullum

Hollywood's latest offering breaks all attendance records. Is this just an innocent tale? Or can there be sinister consequences to public? See what the Bible clearly says about sorcery.



TITANIC HAS SUNK. *The Lost World* has lost. Attendance records set by previous Hollywood blockbusters were shattered last month as people came out in droves to watch *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

Titanic still holds the record for the largest total box office income of any movie; but if the current trend continues, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* will break that record as well.

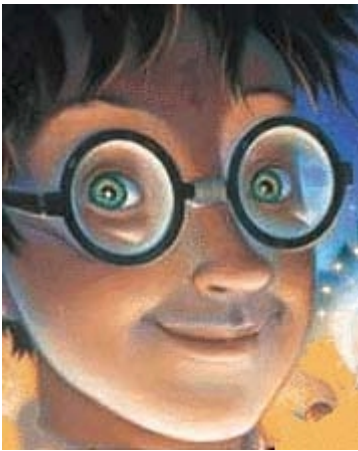
The movie is based upon the popular Harry Potter book series by J. K. Rowling that has sold 100 million copies worldwide.

Louis P. Sheldon, chairman of Traditional Values Coalition in Washington, D.C., expressed concern about these books' contents. He wrote:

"Christians are rightly concerned about the spiritual messages being conveyed through the Harry Potter books. Wicca or witchcraft is clearly condemned in both the Old and New Testaments as an abomination to God. Practitioners of Wicca worship mythical goddesses, including the goddess 'Gaia' (the earth).

"Both Christian and non-Christian parents would be well-advised to take a long, hard look at the Harry Potter series before allowing their children to read them. Two good starting points would be: *Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged*, and *Dr. Jones' Spirit Wars*. Parents and pastors should be deeply concerned about Harry Potter's influence over children by introducing them to a pagan religious system."

Sheldon's view may seem extreme to some who say that the movie



and the books upon which it is based are, after all, entertainment. They are fiction. The writers of fiction need to create good guys, bad guys and some type of plot to tell a story. The best fiction teaches good lessons upholding moral standards. One comes away from good movies and good fictional books encouraged to be a better person. The message may be to love more, to appreciate the blessings one has, to persevere through obstacles, to avoid greed and selfishness. But even movies and books that have some good lessons can carry other messages. When do these sometimes subtle negative influences outweigh the good?

In the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the boy named Harry Potter learns that he is a warlock, a male witch. Viewers may be beguiled into thinking witchcraft is okay or fun or something positive. They could be encouraged into getting more involved in real witchcraft. And that is the real danger.

Most viewers will come away from the movie having enjoyed the story and having been bedazzled by the special effects. Those who have read the books will enjoy seeing the characters "fleshed out" and made real. It is doubtful that most viewers will rush out to join a pagan, Satan-worshipping cult.

But while they may not desire to become full-fledged witches and warlocks themselves, viewers of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* may not be aware of how evil sorcery is and what God says about it. This popular movie could help make sorcery more acceptable.

Thousands of young children will acquire Harry Potter toys and begin to act out the part of being a witch or warlock. Is this appropriate play? Is Harry Potter a proper role model?



What does God say about witches and sorcery?

Shortly after giving ancient Israel the Ten Commandments, God gave the following instruction: "You shall not permit a sorceress to live" (Exodus 22:18). That statement is short, simple and to the point.

God gave further instructions in Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:6: "You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.... Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.... And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people."

Witches and warlocks have magical "superpowers." But the source of their powers is different from other fictional superheroes. For example, Superman received his special powers because he was an alien. Earth, with its yellow sun and different gravitational field, gave Superman special powers. But the source of a witch's power and magic is Satan. This probably is not told in the Harry Potter movies and books. To become a witch or warlock, one must become a tool of Satan. And this, of course, is condemned by God.

God further told Israel, "A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:27).

Thousands of young children will acquire Harry Potter toys and begin to act out the part of being a witch or warlock. Is this appropriate play?

God makes His thoughts about witchcraft plain when He said, "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD..." (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

In the New Testament, sorcery is condemned as one of the "works of the flesh" and we are told, "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Jesus Christ revealed to the apostle John that sorcerers will be "outside" the kingdom of God (Revelation 22:14-15). Sorcerers, unless they repent, are doomed to burn in the lake of fire: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Perhaps the view of Sheldon and the Traditional Values Coalition is not as extreme as it first seemed. God thoroughly condemns witchcraft and sorcery. This fascination of American culture with sorcery and witchcraft shows how far removed this nation is from God and His ways.

Mentors Promote Success

By John Elliott

Success can be as close as someone helping you through an obstacle... and your helping someone else through his or her obstacle.



THROUGH THE CRISP BLUE SKY the morning sun radiates its mellow warmth onto the forest canopy below us. Mel is our pilot as we soar 4,500 feet above the meandering Ohio River valley. The experience is familiar to me, having piloted aircraft for 21 years.

But there is something unique about this particular flight.

It is Mel's first flight as a licensed pilot, and I am his first passenger. As we share the multitude of cockpit tasks on this cross-country flight, we also reminisce about the myriad events we've had during his pilot training.

Mel had first flown with me two years ago as a passenger. That day we flew over the urban spectacle of Cincinnati, Ohio, then over woodlands and farm fields that stretch forever in all directions. Subsequent flights would take us cross country over lakes, forests, rivers and mountains. Often I let Mel take the controls as I concentrated on pilotage, navigation or just staring out the window. Through sharing the experience of flight with him, his desire to become a pilot intensified.

One day he said, "I'd sure like to fly! I've wanted to get a pilot's license since I was 15 years old. But I'm sure I could never get one now after being disabled in that railroad accident." Worse, he has been plagued with severe dyslexia for over 50 years. "But boy do I wish I could be a pilot!" he exclaimed in frustration.

Besides learning to fly an airplane, a student pilot must also learn aspects of mechanics, structural engineering, physics and meteorology. All these elements are in constant play during every flight. And any unusual circumstances require that they



each be used in an appropriate manner. With Mel's limitations he considered becoming a pilot an impossibility.

But with my encouragement he decided to go for it. When he ran into snags in his pilot training, I tried to help him. Mel hit some serious obstacles as he neared his written and practical flight tests. Having already experienced various flight tests, I was able to act as a mentor to him--to share information and a perspective that helped him maneuver through the process without

a hitch. It made me reflect back to earlier days in Canada when another pilot mentored me through my flight training. It feels good to have the privilege to pass along the favor.

Have you ever shied away from doing something that really intrigued you? Sure you have, and so have I. Typically we lacked the confidence needed to propel ourselves into the unfamiliar circumstances involved. Unsure of how or where to begin, or after hitting a snag along the way, we abandon the process and retreat to our comfort zone. That's why everybody needs a mentor. And mentoring is highly rewarding and very fulfilling!

Who are mentors?

Mentors are people just like you who have already "been there and done that." Whether skilled professionals or hobbyists with a special knack, people form a vast resource for mentoring others through the "rookie" stage of any new endeavor. Whether it's achieving a university degree or mastering the art of fly tying, having a mentor to lean on along the way makes your success a probability.

One very common kind of mentor is a parent. Parents mentor their children as they rear them and later become mentors of their children as they experience having children of their own.

Mentoring can also take the form of associations, clubs, advisory boards, newsletters and trade magazines. Government programs attempt to mentor small business owners who seek out one another's advice. And sport and recreation enthusiasts eagerly share tips with others of similar interest. Nearly every endeavor today has enthusiasts, clubs or magazines that mentor newcomers to the field.

Use a mentor

While being a mentor is a rewarding and fulfilling experience, sometimes we all need a mentor ourselves. If you want to be successful in any endeavor, spend time with those who are already successful in it. Nearly everybody loves to share advice, especially in a field they are accomplished in.

When my wife Merrie and I were expecting our first child, we stopped at the home of the late Walter Dickinson in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Our mission was to glean the keys of rearing responsible, balanced and self-assured children, like he and his wife had raised. Without his

mentoring, we would have never stumbled upon the keys they had used so successfully in their family.

Our youngest daughter, Michelle, once encountered a roadblock in learning algebra. Some concept didn't click and for weeks she could advance no further. What a blessing to find Mr. Rudd, a retired math teacher whose garage is a classroom devoted to helping students with math problems! In just a couple of hours Michelle was back up to speed!

The Supreme Mentor

Physical people aren't the only ones we can lean upon. While we all begin life with expectations of sheer happiness, trials become an integral part of the human experience. In the Bible, Job reeled in confusion as his well-manicured life crumbled around him. He could have used some mentoring by someone with wisdom and experience. Instead, devoid of a suitable mentor, he stumbled somewhat in his time of trial. Though Job didn't specifically ask for it, God began to mentor Job, and that cleared up his confusion and brought about his spiritual growth. Oftentimes, our needs require leaning on God and His Word for advice.

Sometimes we have personal trials we can't readily share with others. Some of the most intense aspects of life require more than what humans can help with. For the most important things in life we have a Supreme Mentor, Jesus Christ, who fully understands our situation. The apostle Paul said, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16). Prayer is direct contact with the One who knows our dilemmas best.

What a blessing to have the concern of the God Family focused upon us. The Father even knows the number of hairs on your head right now! (Matthew 10:30) How comforting to know that God is involved in our lives, and that He has given us His Word, the Bible, to mentor us through any circumstance we will encounter. Those God is calling and working with now have an intense focus on them by God. God is there for us every step along the way, and He is totally dependable. "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear'" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Be a mentor!

Just as God is there for us, we as God's children should be mentoring others as they rise to their potential as people and children of God. Whether assisting in health matters, like the physician, Luke, or helping someone cope with the intense experience of mental or physical abuse, as the apostle Paul wrote of, we all can mentor others through those experiences in which we have expertise.

What do you do that others wish they could master? Do your talents in the workplace excel? Do you have a gift at decorating, cooking or crocheting? Perhaps a skill you've developed in a favorite sport or hobby has others wishing they could copy you. Or you've learned the solid principles of success and challenges in your field. Typically we each have several areas in which we are accomplished that others are struggling to master. So when the opportunity arises, be a mentor!

Why Does Evil Exist?

By Bill Bradford

There is a reason for mankind's experiencing evil. The answer to the question "Why evil?" explains how perfection in mankind will come that would not have been there without having to choose between the alternatives of good and evil.



FROM WHERE DID EVIL COME? What is it and where did it come from?

Skeptics ask a valid question of believers: How can a loving God allow evil to exist in His creation? The believer, in turn, asks a valid question of the moral relativist: How can you say something is evil when you deny absolute good or evil, arguing that good and evil can only be defined by what each person thinks?

Philosophers, religious thinkers and criminologists alike have long sought rational explanations to give an answer to these questions.

The Bible explains these mysteries for us and provides a solution for the widespread evil that is so entrenched in our world.

Did God create evil?

The Bible consistently explains evil as rebellion against God and His way of selfless, outflowing love--the way of *give*. Evil is self-absorbed and uncaring of others, the way of *get*.

God's way of life is expressed in His law of love--and evil is the *violation* of that law. Thus, evil is synonymous with sin (1 John 3:4), which is *contrary* to God.

But, some might argue, isn't all evil God's fault? The reasoning goes like this: Since God created everything and evil exists, then God must be the author of evil.

Yet the Bible paints a picture in which God, in the beginning, created a perfect world. It says, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). That included man. How then did evil come into the picture?



The story tells us that a cunning serpent introduced evil into God's perfect creation. But Genesis 3:1 seems to say that God created the serpent, too, so that doesn't really answer the question.

There is a better answer. We have seen that God made everything good, without the presence of evil. Yet, in doing so, He created man with moral freedom--the ability to choose between good and evil. God did not create evil. He created us with free will. That is the framework for the existence of evil.

Free moral choice

But since God is good, why didn't He create man unalterably good? He could have made us without the ability to choose. But that would have defeated His whole reason for creating us in the first place. God made us with free moral choice so we could become like Him and have a relationship with Him.

Here are the options God had when creating. His options first were to create something or create nothing. To do nothing meant that He would continue to be alone. Since He chose to create something, His choice then was to create beings with freedom or without freedom. Without freedom they would never sin. But without freedom they would not ever have the ability to choose their own future, they could not have imagination, they could not love, nor appreciate love when it was shown toward them.

The highest of God's creation would then be as robots or animals, which don't choose right or wrong, love or hate. It is only with free choice that we can attain to the love that God Himself possesses.

When God created man, He was beginning the process of bringing forth children in His image (Genesis 1:26; compare 5:1-3). We cannot force our own children to love us or do what is right. We can teach them these virtues and hope they will choose to follow them in spite of the evil influences they encounter in their lives.



When God embarked on His ambitious plan to create for Himself children who would have to choose to return His love, He also knew the risks. He was aware that they could choose an alternative way of life. He did not create the evil alternative; He simply knew that there was a choice that would exist between good and evil. He also knew that if they weren't created with freedom, they could never choose to return His love. In fact, it is impossible to love without free moral choice!

Yet human beings were not the first created entities to be given such a choice.

When only God existed, there was no evil. Of course, He knew that there was an alternative to His way of life. But He, being perfect and good, chose never to accept that alternative.

God made us with free moral choice so we could become like Him and have a relationship with Him. Yet eventually, long before Adam and even before the earth and heavens were created, God created millions of spirit beings with free moral choice--the angels. His intention was to produce beings who would accept His way and live like him forever. But the sad alternative was always there.

Origin of evil

Ezekiel 28 begins with God addressing the "prince of Tyre," ruler of an ancient city-state along the Lebanese coast. But starting in verse 12, the message shifts to the "king of Tyre," and it quickly becomes apparent that no human being is meant--rather, the subject becomes the spiritual power behind the throne, the primary influence upon the earthly ruler. For this power is specifically called a cherub--an angelic being (verse 14).

God tells him, "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (verse 15). This angel, then, was part of God's perfect creation. Yet because he had freedom to choose, he had the capacity to choose evil. And we are told here that "iniquity" or lawlessness was, at some point, found in him. This was the origin of evil.

Isaiah 14 contains a similar description when God addresses the "king of Babylon." But this message also switches to the spiritual power behind the throne. Starting in verse 12, this entity is called Heylel (Lucifer in Latin), meaning "Light-Bringer"--for at first he was a vessel of the light of God's truth. Yet, as verse 13 shows, he began to imagine evil in his heart.

No one knows how long it took for Lucifer to develop the way of evil in his heart. The philosophy he developed was all about self and what he could get. In essence, Lucifer was the first moral relativist. He denied absolute good and evil as defined by God and chose to define good and evil for himself. Eventually, Lucifer considered how he could be exalted above everyone else and get everything, replacing God as ruler of all creation. Thus, God changed his name to Satan, meaning "Adversary."

God did not create Satan. Rather, God created Lucifer as the "seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezekiel 28:12). But Lucifer developed pride in the beauty that God gave him (verse 17). He corrupted his wisdom by getting caught up in his own self-importance. This was his choice. So Lucifer turned himself into Satan.

Verse 16 says that he became filled with violence within. He ascended into heaven to exalt his throne (Isaiah 14:13). Revelation 12:3-4 speaks of this fallen angel as a dragon who drew a third of the stars (angels, 1:20) with him. Satan was able to infect one third of the created angelic beings to turn against God.

How? Satan is also called the "devil," translated from a word meaning "slanderer." Jesus said of him, "When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

It is impossible to love without free moral choice!

One can only imagine what he told the other angels. He probably expressed some dissatisfaction with the way God did things and implied that someone like himself would be better. He likely explained to the other angels that they could do better for themselves by

adopting the way of competition rather than love. He no doubt aroused suspicion toward God through his criticism. Perhaps they felt they couldn't trust God anymore and proceeded to the fatal step of violence to overthrow Him.

The third of the angels who followed Satan chose to oppose God and adopt Satan's philosophy that promoted self above others. In doing so, they became demons--evil spirits. God did not put the evil in their minds nor did He introduce evil to Lucifer. Lucifer was free to follow God's way of love, or to consider the alternative. God didn't force him to go His way. He permitted Lucifer to develop and finally choose the way of evil.

Satan and his demons were cast out of heaven and fell to earth like lightning (Luke 10:18). The next we see of Satan is his appearance to Eve in the Garden of Eden as the serpent.

Man embraces evil

This brings us to the next question: Why was man exposed to the evil? As earlier mentioned, God was creating His own children through mortal human beings. They had to have free moral choice.

Thus, the issue of evil once again had to be faced--and the sooner the better. God created two significant trees in the Garden of Eden--the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The first symbolized acceptance of God's way. The latter represented a rejection of God's instruction and deciding good and evil for self--which, of course, will always lead to the wrong attitudes and actions based on selfishness, the same way of life Lucifer had followed.

It didn't take long for the devil to present his alternative way of evil to Eve, who in turn influenced her husband. The devil appealed to them by suggesting that God was not telling them the whole story and that they could do much better for themselves by adopting this other way of life. Sadly, Adam and Eve made the fateful choice to follow Satan.

The choice our first parents made is why we see so much suffering, violence, killing and pain in this world. When Lucifer chose to follow the alternative way of get, the end was inevitably violence toward God. Once Adam and Eve chose to reject the way of life God revealed to them and to determine right and wrong on their own, the world was set on the path of serving the self at the expense of other people.

But why would God allow such suffering?

His intent is for His children to choose His way of love forever and never consider turning against Him. To ensure this, they must experience the consequences of choosing wrongly. The ultimate consequence is eternal death, as God will not permit evil to persist in a universe He rules. Thankfully, the death of Jesus Christ redeems us from that fate if we repent.

However, there are more immediate consequences to sin that we must understand. That means a lot of pain and suffering along the way. God created us so we can experience pain. We learn through pain that what we are doing is not good for us.

Yes, the suffering in this world is incalculable. But the suffering we experience now during this age of man's self-determination is far less

His intent is for His

than the consequences there would be if we rebelled as glorified beings in the future Kingdom of God. Furthermore, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" if we remain faithful (Romans 8:18).

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Ultimately God will remove evil altogether. But this requires that every being either decides by free choice to never sin again--or be taken out of the picture forever.

We cannot ever find this level of goodness in other human beings. By coming face to face with Christ's sacrifice for others who are most certainly undeserving, we can begin to be convicted of our own sin. It is this compelling example of love shown toward us by our very Creator God that brings us to the point that we never want to perpetrate any kind of evil on others.

In the end, those in God's family forever will never consider evil as an option. God in His wisdom is permitting evil now in our time to accomplish this grand purpose.

For additional reading, request the FREE booklet [Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#) which covers this subject more completely.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Whatever Lies Ahead in 2002, Christians Need Not Worry

By Melvin Rhodes

THE NEW CENTURY CERTAINLY STARTED WITH A BANG. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, war in Afghanistan and a deepening recession, added to all the problems carried over from the last century, certainly give people cause to worry.

The year 2002 looks set to be a continuation of 2001. Terrorism is not likely to go away, nor is the recession and, even if war in Afghanistan is finally over (after more than two decades of continuing conflict for that sad land), there will no doubt be other wars demanding our attention.

In addition to worries about the world in which we live, there are the more personal problems that we all have to worry about. Worries about health (which worrying only makes worse), about family and friends, about our appearance and our finances.

Yet Christians are told not to worry.

In my New King James Version of the Bible, "Do Not Worry" is the subheading for a passage of Scripture in Matthew's gospel, chapter 6, verses 25-34. This is just one of the many edifying messages that we find in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (verse 25).

These words were spoken almost 2,000 years ago, yet they are as timely as if they had been spoken yesterday.

"Do not worry about your life...." Yes, terrorists will attack again, somewhere, sometime. By its very nature, terrorism strikes when and where we least expect it. And yes, each of us could be a victim. What lesson can we learn from this? The answer is quite simple: We need to be spiritually and physically ready at any moment to "meet our Maker," as the old expression put it.

Jesus goes on to tell us not to worry about "what you will eat or what you will drink...." In a time of steadily rising unemployment, this too causes many to worry. The next verse reassures us on this point. "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Worries "about your body" afflict millions of people in today's world with its constant emphasis on personal appearance. Eating disorders are one of the plagues of our age. The media's constant message that "thin is in" is so repetitive that everybody is affected by it. The result is that most people have a negative view of their own appearance. The key to changing this is to look at ourselves as God looks at us and not to be overly concerned about what

others think.

As Jesus said, when it comes to your body, "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" (verse 27). There's only so much we can do. Drawing closer to God is something we can all do, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (verses 28-30).

Here we learn that our worries reflect a deeper problem--that we lack faith. Again, we are reminded of the need for a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. This is a faithless age. We live in a totally hedonistic society, whose values are all materialistic, purely physical. The solution is clearly spiritual.

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles [unbelievers] seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (verses 31-32).

Then we read one of the greatest promises in the Bible. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (verse 33). It's a conditional promise. We must do our part, seeking first God's Kingdom through prayer and the study of His Word. If we do this, we needn't worry about the physical.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (verse 34). Much of our anxious thought and worry is about what may happen--tomorrow, next week, next month, the new year. There's enough to think about today--why worry about what might be? Most of our worries never come to pass anyway, so why do we worry?

Let's remember in 2002 to focus on seeking God's Kingdom first. If we do this, gradually we will find that our worries will go away. The spiritual will fill the emptiness caused by worry about the physical.