

Save Yourself Some Pain

Becoming a Christian is the most incredible event that will ever take place in your life. You have found peace with your Creator. *You have found everlasting life!* Be assured--God will never leave you nor forsake you. He has brought you this far and He will complete the wonderful work He has begun in you. God knows your every thought, your every care and your deepest concerns.

Let's now look at some of those possible concerns. First, and of primary concern -- do you have "assurance" of your salvation? The Bible says to "make your calling and election *sure*" (2 Peter 1:10, italics added), so, let's go through a short "checklist" to make sure that you are truly saved:

1. Are you aware that God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:16, KJV), and that he died for the sins of the world?
2. Did you come to the Savior because you had sinned?
3. Did you "repent" and put your faith in Jesus?
4. Are you convinced that He suffered and died on the Cross and that He rose again on the third day?

God acquits us from the Courtroom of Eternal Justice on the *grounds* that Jesus Christ paid our fine. We are "justified" (made right with God) by His suffering death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's seal of approval of the fact that His precious blood was sufficient to pay the fine.

Think of it this way... You have violated the law and face a \$50,000 fine. You tell the judge that you are truly sorry for your crime, but he answers, "So you should be -- you have broken the law! *Now, can you pay this fine?*" He can only acquit you if the fine is paid. If someone else pays your fine, then he can let you go, but he must have "grounds" on which to release you.

The reason we need a substitute (a savior) to pay our moral "fine," is because we have broken God's Law. To see *how much* we have transgressed this Law (the Ten Commandments), we will go through some of them – Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever stolen something? Have you ever lusted after another person? If you answered "Yes" to these questions, you admit that you are a lying, thieving, adulterer at heart, *and you have to face God on Judgment Day!* If you have used His name in vain, then you are guilty of "blasphemy" -- you've substituted God's holy Name for a curse word. Perhaps you've hated someone, then the Bible says that you are a murderer. You have violated God's holy Law, and you're in BIG trouble. On Judgment Day, you will be found guilty and end up in Hell. That's *why* you need the Savior. Merely being sorry for your sins, or confessing them to God won't help you. You must turn from sin (repent), and your faith must be in Jesus Christ alone. He is the only "grounds" for God to grant mercy towards you. If you're not sure of your salvation, make Psalm 51 your own prayer.

Let's now look at some more important principles that can save you a great deal of pain...

1. Feeding on the Word -- DAILY Nutrition

A healthy baby has a healthy appetite. If you have truly been "born" of the Spirit of God, you will have a healthy appetite. The Bible says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby," (1 Peter 2:2). Feed yourself every day without fail. Job said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food," (Job 23:12). The more you eat, the quicker you will grow, and the less bruising you will have. Speed up the process and save yourself some pain -- vow to read God's Word every day, without fail. Say to yourself, "No Bible, no breakfast. No read, no feed." Be like Job, and put your Bible before your belly. If you do that, God promises that you will be like a fruitful, strong and healthy tree (see Psalm 1). Each day, find somewhere quiet, and thoroughly soak your soul in the Word of God.

There may be times when you read through its pages with great enthusiasm, and there may be other times when it seems dry and even boring. But food profits your body whether you enjoy it or not. As a child, you no doubt ate desserts with great enthusiasm. Perhaps vegetables weren't so exciting. If you were a normal child, you probably had to be encouraged to eat them at first. Then, as you matured in life you were taught to discipline yourself to eat vegetables. This is because they would physically benefit you, even though they may not have at the time, brought pleasure to your taste buds.

2. Faith -- Elevators Can Let You Down

When a young man once looked at me and said, "I find it hard to believe some of the things in the Bible," I smiled and asked, "What's your name?" When he said, "Paul," I casually answered, "I don't believe you." He looked at me questioningly. I repeated, "What's your name?" Again he said, "Paul," and again I answered, "I don't believe you." Then I asked, "Where do you live?" When he told me, I said, "I don't believe that either." You should have seen his reaction. He was angry. I said, "You look a little upset. Do you know why? You're upset because I didn't believe what you told me. If you tell me that your name is Paul, and I say, 'I don't believe you,' it means that I think you are a liar. You are trying to deceive me by telling me your name is Paul, when it's not." Then I told him that if he, a mere man, felt insulted by my lack of faith in his word, how much more does he insult Almighty God by refusing to believe His Word. In doing so, he was saying that God isn't worth trusting -- that He is a liar and a deceiver. The Bible says, "He who does not believe God has made Him a liar," (1 John 5:10). It also says, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. . ." (Hebrews 3:12). Martin Luther said, "What greater insult . . . can there be to God, than not to believe His promises."

I have heard people say, "But I just find it hard to have faith in God," not realizing the implications of their words. These are the same people who often believe the weather forecast, believe the newspapers, and trust their lives to a pilot they have never seen whenever they fly in a plane. We exercise faith every day. We trust our car's brakes. We trust our history books, our medical books, and we trust elevators. Yet elevators can let us down. History books can be wrong. Planes can crash. How much more then should we trust the sure and true promises of Almighty God. He will never let us down . . . if we trust Him.

I have often heard cynics say, "The Bible is full of mistakes." It is. The first mistake was when man rejected God, and the Scriptures show men and women making the same tragic mistake again and again. It's also full of what seem to be contradictions. For example, the Scriptures tell us "with God, nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). We are told that there is nothing Almighty God can't do. Yet we are also told that it is "impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). So there is something God cannot do! There's an obvious "mistake" in the Bible. The answer to this dilemma is to be found in the lowly worm.

Do you know that it would be impossible for me to eat worms, although I have seen it done. I once saw a man on TV butter his toast, then pour on a can of live, fat, wriggling, blood-filled worms. He carefully took a knife and fork, cut into his moving meal, and ate it. It made me feel sick. It was disgusting. The thought of chewing cold, live worms is so repulsive, so distasteful, I can candidly say it would be impossible for me to eat them, even though I have seen it done. It is so abhorrent, I draw on the strength of the word "impossible" to substantiate my claim.

Lying, deception, bearing false witness, etc., is so repulsive to God, so disgusting to Him, so against His holy character, that the Scriptures draw on the strength of the word "impossible" to substantiate the claim. He cannot, could not, and would not lie.

That means that in a world where we are continually let down, we can totally rely on, trust in, and count on His promises. They are sure, certain, indisputable, true, trustworthy, reliable, faithful, unfailing, dependable, steadfast, and an anchor for the soul. In other words, you can truly believe them, and because of that, you can throw yourself blindfolded and without reserve, into His mighty hands. He will never, ever, let you down. Do you believe that?

3. Evangelism -- Our Most Sobering Task

It was late in December, 1996. A large family gathered in Los Angeles for the joyous occasion of wrapping Christmas presents. It was a big family because it was the product of two marriages. There were so many gathered that night, five of the children slept in the garage. It was a converted structure, kept warm during the cold night by an electric heater which sat by the door.

During the early hours of the morning, the heater suddenly burst into flames, blocking the doorway. In seconds the room became a blazing inferno. The frantic 911 call revealed the unspeakable terror of the moment. One of the children could be heard screaming, "I'm on fire!" The distraught father vainly rushed into the flames to try and save his beloved children. He received burns to 50% of his body. Tragically, all five of the children burned to death. They died because steel bars on the windows of the garage thwarted their escape. There was only one door, and that was stopped by the flames.

You are back in time. It's minutes before the heater burst into flames. You peer through the darkness at the peaceful sight of five sleeping youngsters. You know that at any moment the room is going to erupt into an inferno and burn the flesh of horrified children. Can you in good conscience walk away? No! You must awaken them, and warn them to run from that death trap!

The world sleeps peacefully in the darkness of ignorance. There is only one Door by which they may escape death. The steel bars of sin prevent their salvation, and at the same time call for the flames of Eternal Justice. What a fearful thing Judgment Day will be! The fires of the wrath of Almighty God will burn for eternity. The Church has been entrusted with the task of awakening them before it's too late. We cannot turn our backs and walk away in complacency. Think of how the father ran into the flames. His love knew no bounds, and our devotion to the sober task that God has given us will be in direct proportion to our love for the lost. There are only a few who run headlong into the flames to warn them to flee (Luke 10:2). Please be one of them. We really have no choice. The Apostle Paul said, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

It was the "Prince of Preachers," Charles Spurgeon, who said the words, "Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that." A Christian cannot be apathetic about the salvation of the world. The love of God in him will motivate him to seek and save that which is lost.

You probably have a limited amount of time after your conversion to impact your unsaved friends and family with the Gospel. After the initial shock of your conversion, they will put you in a neat little ribbon-tied box, and keep you at arm's length. So it's important that you take advantage of the short time you have while you still have their ears.

Here's some advice that will save you a great deal of grief. As a new Christian, a friend of mine did almost irreparable damage by acting like a wild bull in a crystal showroom. He bullied his mom, his dad, and many of his friends into making a "decision for Christ". He was sincere, zealous, loving, kind, and stupid. He didn't understand that salvation doesn't come through making a "decision," but through repentance, and repentance is God-given (see 2 Timothy 2:25). The Bible teaches that no one can come to the Son unless God "draws" him. If you are able to get a decision but they have no conviction of sin, you will almost certainly end up with a still-born on your hands.

In his "zeal without knowledge" he actually inoculated the very ones he was so desperately trying to reach. There is nothing more important to you than the salvation of your loved ones, and you don't want to blow it. If you do, you may find that you don't have a second chance. Fervently pray for them, thanking God for their salvation. Let them see your faith. Let them feel your kindness, your genuine love, and your gentleness. Buy gifts for no reason. Do chores when you are not asked to. Go the extra mile. Put yourself in their position. You know that you have found everlasting life. Death has lost its sting! Your joy is unspeakable -- but as far as they are concerned, you have been brain-washed. You have become part of a weird sect. So your loving actions will speak more loudly than ten thousand eloquent sermons.

It is because of these thoughts that you should hold back from verbal confrontation until you have knowledge that will guide your zeal. Pray for wisdom and for a sensitivity to God's timing. You may have only one shot, so make it count. Keep your cool. If you don't, you may end up with a lifetime of regret. Believe me. It is better to hear a loved one or a close friend say, "Tell me about your faith in Jesus Christ," rather than you saying, "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

It is important to realize that we should share our faith with others whenever we can. The Bible says that there are only two times we should do this -- "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). The Apostle Paul pleaded for prayer for his own personal witness. He said, ". . . that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak," (Ephesians 6:19-20).

Remember that you have the sobering responsibility of speaking to other peoples' loved ones. Many times when you open your mouth for the Gospel, you may be the answer to the earnest prayer of another Christian. Perhaps he

has cried out to God that He would use a faithful witness to speak to his beloved mom or dad, and you are that answer to prayer. You are that true and faithful witness that God wants to use.

Never lose sight of the world and all its pains. Keep the fate of the ungodly before your eyes. Too many of us settle down on a padded pew and become introverted. Our world becomes a monastery without walls. Our friends are confined solely to those within the Church, when Jesus was the "friend of sinners." So take the time to deliberately befriend them for the sake of their salvation. Remember that each and every person who dies in their sins has an appointment with the Judge of the Universe. Hell opens wide its terrible jaws. There is no more sobering task than to be entrusted with the Gospel of Salvation -- working with God for the eternal well-being of dying humanity.

4. Prayer -- "Wait For A Minute."

It has been well said that God always answers prayer. Sometimes He says, "Yes." sometimes He says, "NO." Sometimes He says, "Wait for a minute," and a day to the Lord is a thousand years to us (2 Peter 3:8). That means that a ten year wait for us, is 14 minutes and 24 seconds to God, so ask in faith, but rest in peace-filled patience.

Surveys show that more than 90% of America prays daily. No doubt they pray for health, wealth, happiness, etc. They also pray when grandma gets sick, and when grandma doesn't get better (or dies), many end up disillusioned, and some end up bitter. This is because they don't understand what the Bible says about prayer. It teaches that sin will stop God even hearing your prayer (Psalm 66:18). It teaches, among other things, that if we pray with doubt, we will not get an answer (James 1:6-7).

Here's how to be heard....

1. Pray with faith (*Hebrews 11:6*).
2. Pray with clean hands and a pure heart (*Psalms 24:3-4*).
3. Pray genuine heart-felt prayers, rather than vain repetitions (*Matthew 6:7*).
4. Make sure that you are praying to the God revealed in the Holy Scriptures (*Exodus 20:3-6*).

How do you "pray with faith?" If someone says to you, "You're a man of great faith in God," they may think that they are paying you a compliment. But they aren't -- the compliment is to God. For example if I said to you, "I'm a man of great faith in my doctor," it's actually the doctor I'm complimenting. If I have great faith in him, it means that I see him as being a man of integrity, a man of great ability -- that he is trustworthy. I give "glory" to the man through my faith in him. The Bible says that Abraham "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." (Romans 4:20-21). Abraham was a man of great faith in God. Remember, that is not a compliment to Abraham. He merely caught a glimpse of God's incredible ability, His impeccable integrity, and His wonderful faithfulness to keep every promise He makes. His faith gave "glory" to a faithful God.

As far as God is concerned, if you belong to Jesus, you are a VIP. You can boldly come before the throne of Grace (Hebrews 4:16). You have access to the king, because you are the son or daughter of the king. When you were a child, did you have to grovel to get your needs met by your mom or dad? I hope not.

So, when you pray, don't say, "Oh God, I hope you will supply my needs." Instead say something like, "Father, thank you that you keep every promise You make. Your Word says that you will supply all my needs according to Your riches in glory, by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). Therefore, I thank you that you will do this thing for my family. I ask this in the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen"

It was the great missionary, Hudson Taylor, who said, "The prayer power has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see Divine power wrought in the place of weakness, failure, and disappointment, let us answer God's standing challenge, 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things of which thou knowest not of.'"

How do you get "clean hands and a pure heart?" Simply by confessing your sins to God, through Jesus Christ. His blood cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:7-9). When you confess them to God through Jesus, God will not only forgive your every sin, He promises to forget that sin (Hebrew 8:12). He will even justify you, on the grounds of the

sacrifice of the Savior. That means He will count it as though you have never sinned in the first place. He will make you pure in His sight -- sinless. He will even "purge" your conscience, so that you will no longer have that sense of guilt that you sinned in the first place. That's what I mean "to be justified by faith." That's why you need to soak yourself in Holy Scripture -- to read the letters to the churches and see the wonderful things that God has done for us through the Cross of Calvary. If you don't bother to read the will, you won't have any idea of what has been left for you.

How do you pray "genuine heart-felt prayers?" Simply by keeping yourself in the love of God. If the love of God is in you, you will never pray hypocritical, or selfish prayers. In fact, you won't have to pray selfish prayers, if you have a heart of love. When your prayer-life is pleasing to God, the Bible says that He will reward you openly (Matthew 6:6).

How do you know that you are praying to "the God revealed in Holy Scripture?" Study the Word. Don't accept the image of God portrayed by the world, even though it appeals to the natural mind. A loving, kind fatherly-figure, with no sense of justice or truth appeals to guilty sinners. Look to the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai. Gaze at Jesus on the cross of Calvary -- hanging in unspeakable agony because of the Justice of a holy God. Such thoughts tend to banish idolatry.

5. Warfare -- Praise The Lord and Pass the Ammunition

When you became a Christian, you stepped right into the heat of an age-old battle. You have a three-fold enemy-- the world, the flesh, and the devil. Before you became a Christian, you floated down stream with the other dead fish. But now, God has put His life within you, and you will find yourself swimming against a three-fold current. Let's look at these three resistant enemies.

First, the world. When the Bible speaks of the "world" in this context, it is referring to the sinful, rebellious, world system. This is the world that loves the darkness and hates the light (John 3:20), governed by the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4) (-- the "prince power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). The Bible says the Christian has escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. "Lust" is unlawful desire, and is the life's blood of the world --whether it be the lust for sexual sin, for power, for money, for material things. Lust is a monster that will never be gratified, so don't feed it. It will grow bigger and bigger, until it weighs heavy upon your back, and will be the death of you -- see James 1:15.

There is nothing wrong with sex, power, money, or material things, but when these become predominant in God's sight, the Bible calls this "inordinate affection" (Colossians 3:5). We are told, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (1 John 2:15, James 4:4).

The second enemy is the devil. As we have seen, he is known as the "god of this world." He was your spiritual father before you joined the family of God (John 8:44, Ephesians 2:2. Jesus called the devil a thief, who came to kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10).

The way to overcome him and his demons is to make sure you are outfitted with the spiritual armor of God listed in Ephesians 6:10-20. Become intimately familiar with it. Sleep in it. Never take it off. Bind the two-edged sword to your hand so that you never lose its grip. The reason for this brings us to the third enemy.

The third enemy is what the Bible calls the "flesh." This is your sinful nature. The domain for the battle, is your mind.

If you have a mind to, you will be attracted to the world and all its sin. The mind is the data-processing control panel for the eyes and the ears. It is the center of your appetites. All sin begins in the "heart" (Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 15:19). We think before we sin. This happens because we don't think before we sin. The Bible warns that lust brings forth sin, and sin when it's conceived brings forth death. Every day we have life, we have a choice. To sin or not to sin -- that is the question. The answer to the question of sin, is the fear of God. If you don't fear God, you will sin to your sinful heart's delight.

Did you know that God kills people? He killed a man because he didn't like what he did sexually (Genesis 38:10). He killed a husband and wife because they told just one lie (Acts 5:1-11). Knowledge of God's goodness – His righteous judgments against evil, should put the fear of God in us, and help us not to indulge in sin.

If we know that the eye of the Lord is in every place beholding the evil and the good, and that He will bring every work to judgment, we will live accordingly. Such weighty thoughts are valuable, for "by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil" (Proverbs 16:6). Jesus said,

"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:4-5).

6. Fellowship -- Flutter by Butterfly

Pray about where you should fellowship. Make sure the place you are going to call your church home calls sin what it is -- sin. Do they believe the promises of God? Are they loving? Does the pastor treat his wife with respect? Is he a man of the Word? Does he have a humble heart, and a gentle spirit? Listen closely to his teaching. It should glorify God, magnify Jesus, and edify the believer. One evidence that you have been truly saved is that you will have a love for other Christians (1 John 3:14). You will want to fellowship with them. The old saying that "birds of a feather flock together" is true of Christians. You gather together for the breaking of bread (communion), for teaching from the Word, and for fellowship. You share the same inspirations, illuminations, inclinations, temptations, aspirations, motivations, and perspirations -- you are working together for the same thing, for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is why you attend church -- not because you have to, but because you want to.

Don't become a "spiritual butterfly." Send your roots down. If you are moving from church to church, how will your pastor know what type of food you are digesting? The Bible says that your shepherd will have to give an account to Him that has entrusted you to him (Hebrews 13:17), so make yourself known to your pastor. Pray for him regularly. Pray also for his wife, his family, and the elders. Being a pastor is no easy task. Most people don't realize how many hours it takes to gather a fresh sermon each week. They don't appreciate the time spent in prayer and in the study of the Word. If the pastor makes the same joke twice, or shares something he has shared before, remember, he's human. So give him a great deal of grace, and double honor. Never murmur about him. If you don't like something he has said, pray about it, then leave the issue with God. If that doesn't satisfy you, leave the church, rather than divide it through murmuring and complaining.

A woman once spread some hot gossip about a local pastor. What he had supposedly done became common knowledge around town. Then she found that what she had heard wasn't true. She gallantly went to the pastor, and asked for his forgiveness. The pastor forgave her, but then told her to take a pillow full of tiny feathers to a corner of the town, and in high winds, shake the feather out. Then he told her to try and pick up every feather. He explained that the damage had already been done. She had destroyed his good reputation, and trying to repair the damage was like trying to pick up feathers in high winds.

The Bible says that there is life and death in the power of the tongue. We can kill or make something alive with our words. The Scriptures also reveal that God hates those who cause division among the brethren (Proverbs 6:16). Pray with the psalmist, "Set a guard O Lord, over my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

Remember the old saying, "He that gossips to you, will gossip about you."

7. Thanksgiving -- Do the Right Thing

For the Christian, every day should be Thanksgiving Day. We should even be thankful in the midst of problems. The Apostle Paul said, "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 7:4). He knew that God was working all things together for his good, even though he was going through trials (Romans 8:28).

Problems will come your way. God will see to it personally that you grow as a Christian. He will allow the storms, to send your roots deep into the soil of His Word. We pray more in the midst of problems, but it's been well said that you will see more from your knees, than you will on your tip toes.

A man once watched a butterfly struggling to get out of its cocoon. In an effort to help it, he took a razor blade, and carefully slit the edge of the cocoon. The butterfly escaped from its problem . . . and immediately died.

It is God's way to have the butterfly struggle. It is the struggle that causes its tiny heart to beat fast, and send the life's blood into its wings.

Trials have their purpose. They make us struggle -- they bring us to our knees. They are the cocoon in which we often find ourselves. It is there that the life's blood of faith in God helps us spread our wings.

Faith and thanksgiving are close friends. If you have faith in God, you will be thankful because you know His loving hand is upon you, even though you are in a lion's den. That will give you a deep sense of joy, and joy is the barometer of the depth of faith you have in God. Let me give you an example. Imagine if I said I would give you one million dollars if you sent me an email. Of course, you don't believe that I would do that. But imagine if you did. Imagine if you had knowledge of more than 1,000 people who had sent me an email, and every one received their million dollars -- no strings attached. More than that. You had actually called me, and I had assured you personally that I would keep my word. If you believed me, wouldn't you have joy? If you didn't believe me -- no joy. The amount of joy you have would be a barometer as to how much you believed my promise.

We have so much to be thankful for. God has given us "exceeding great and precious promises" that are "more to be desired than gold." Do yourself a big favor -- believe those promises, thank God continually for them, and "let your joy be full."

An old farmer once had an ungodly relative visit him. After the farmer had bowed his head and thanked God for the food they were about to eat, the relative rudely said, "What did you do that for? There's no God. We live in an age of enlightenment." The old farmer smiled and said, "There is one on the farm who doesn't thank God before he eats." The relative sat up and said, "Who is this enlightened one?" To which the farmer quietly replied, "My pig."

8. Water Baptism -- Sprinkle or Immerse?

The Bible Says , "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . ." (Acts 2:38). There is therefore no question as to whether or not you should be baptized. The questions are how, when, and by whom?

It would also seem clear from scripture that those who were baptized, were fully immersed in water. Here's one reason why:

"And John was also baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there..." (John 3:23).

If John was merely sprinkling believers, he would have only needed a cup full of water.

The Philippian jailer and his family were baptized at midnight, as soon as they believed. So what are *you* waiting for?

Who should baptize you? It is clear from Scripture that other believers had the privilege, but check with your pastor, he may want the honor himself.

9. Giving to God

It was once said that the wallet is the "last frontier"-- that it's the last thing that comes to God in surrender. But it should be the first, along with our surrendered heart. Jesus spoke much about money. He said that we cannot serve God and mammon (see Matthew 6:24). The word "mammon" was the common Aramaic word for riches and it signifies "that which is to be trusted." In other words, either money is our source of joy, our sense of security, the supplier of our needs -- or God is.

When you give, make sure you do so with a cheerful heart. Our giving should be a systematic and purposeful giving to the church where we fellowship (see 2 Corinthians 9:7). It should be in response to need (see Acts 11:27-29). It

should be sacrificial (see Galatians 2:10), and should be done in secret with a humble heart (see Matthew 6:1-4). It is a key to spiritual fruit (see Luke 16:10-11).

10. Troubleshooting Cults, Atheists, Skeptics

If you know the Lord, nothing will shake your faith. It is true that the man with an experience is not at the mercy of a man with an argument. Take for example a little boy who is looking at a heater. His father warns him that it's hot. The child says, "O.K. I believe it's hot." At that point, he has an intellectual belief that the heater is hot. When his Dad leaves the room, he says, "I wonder if it really is hot?" He then reaches out his little hand and grabs the heater bar with his fingers. The second his flesh burns he stops believing the heater is hot. He now knows it's hot! He has moved out of the realm of "faith" into the realm of "experience."

In comes a heater expert and says, "Son, I have a B.A. in the study of heat. The heater is definitely not hot. I can prove it to you." The child would probably say, "Mr. Expert, I don't care how many B.A.'s you have. I know that heater is hot -- I touched it! I'm not in the realm of belief; I'm in the realm of experience. Goodbye."

If you have touched the heater bar of God's love and forgiveness, if the Holy Spirit has "born witness" that you are a child of God (Romans 8:16), if you have received the Gospel with "power, the Holy Ghost and much assurance" (1 Thessalonians 1:5), you will never be shaken by a skeptic.

When cults tell you that you must acknowledge God's name to be saved, that you must worship on a certain day that you must be baptized by an elder of their church, don't panic. Merely go back to the Instruction Manual. The Bible has all the answers, and searching them out, will make you grow.

If you feel intimidated by atheists -- if you think they are "intellectuals," read the book, *God Doesn't Believe in Atheists*. It will show you that they are the opposite. It will also instruct you on how you can prove God's existence, and also prove that the "atheist" doesn't exist.

Finally, the way to prevent sporting injury and pain, is to keep yourself fit. Exercise. The Apostle Paul kept fit through exercise. He said, "Herein do I exercise myself, to always have a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). Do the same. Listen to the voice of conscience. It's your friend, not your enemy. Remember the words of Solomon:

"Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil". (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Keep the Day of Judgment before your eyes. On that Day, you will be glad for the cultivations of a tender conscience.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope the principles expounded have been helpful, and that any knowledge you have gained from it, will someday save you some pain.