

How Do I Start With Christ?

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“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door,
I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”
(Rv:3:20)

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INTRODUCTION

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD. AMEN

There is a question which runs through the mind of all those who want to walk the spiritual path. This question is:

How do I start?

Many attempted, ignorantly, to start in the middle of the way but they stumbled; others attempted to start at the pinnacle, but they failed. So we need to know where to start? And how to start? And this is what we will clarify in this book by the Grace of God.

The spiritual path commences through 3 dimensions, after which, an upright life resumes with God. These 3 dimensions are:

- 1) Correcting my view (my perception) of God
- 2) Correcting my personal position with God
- 3) Correcting my walk in a life with God.

We ask the Lord to give us the correct and good start with Him - May He make this book a blessing to all who read it, through the prayers of the saints and the intercession of the pure St. Mary, and the prayers of his holiness, Pope Shenouda III. Amen.

THE FIRST DIMENSION

CORRECTING MY VIEW OF GOD

Firstly: God's feelings towards me.

Secondly: God's aim of creating me.

Thirdly: God's position despite of my sin.

THE CORRECT VIEW

For any person to take the first step in the spiritual path, it is necessary to pause momentarily to constitute correct concepts and to have the true knowledge of God. Thoughts, and the blurry vision of God, hinder the beginning and complicate the path. Therefore, it is essential to have the correct view and a clear understanding of God in regards to:

- ❖ The Divine feelings toward us
- ❖ His glorious aim of creating us
- ❖ His loving position despite of our sin

This is what we will deal with in this chapter, by God's grace.

FIRSTLY **GOD'S FEELINGS TOWARDS ME**

Before all things we must know God's eternal feelings, and His everlasting thoughts towards humanity, for this is essential in knowing the true attitude of God towards us. King Solomon revealed to us a glorious truth in the Book of Proverbs, when the Lord said on his tongue, "And my delight was with the sons of men" (Prov. 8:31). This is the Holy emotion of God towards mankind, delighting in them, or as was mentioned in a different translation, "My exceeding joy is with the sons of men".

In fact, these kind of emotions are the natural state of God's supreme love and Holy nature, so when St. John wanted to describe the nature of God, he said, "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4:8). It is through this divine love, the wonderful love, that He created us, as St. Gregory the theologian says in the Liturgy, "You have created me as the lover of mankind". It is also through this love that He created us in the greatest image, and there is none greater than His own image, as is evident from Scripture, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness..... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him'" (Gen 1:26-27).

The exceedingly great image of God is righteousness and true holiness, as St. Paul said, "Man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). From everlasting, before the foundation of the world, those have been the feelings of God toward mankind, and this fact St. Paul made clear by saying,

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in Love” (Eph. 1:4).

My dear friend, do you now know what are the thoughts of God and His eternal feelings towards you? They are emotions of sincere love, holy delight and true rejoicing with you.

‘O my God, I do not at all deserve this... how great is Your supreme love by which You have loved me freely’” (Hos. 14:4)

SECONDLY

GOD’S AIM OF CREATING ME

After we have discovered God’s feelings toward us, it is necessary to also know His aim of creating us and the goal of our existence. The Holy Bible reveals to us this aim with all clarity, by pointing out one major aim which is in the mind of God from eternity past; this aim is that He created us so that we may be His sons; St. Paul says, “Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5). That is, that God intended, before creating us, for us to be His children; and on this glorious aim compounds several essential results, some of which are:

(a) To become members of His family

This fact was highlighted by St. Paul when he said, “You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the Saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). So when God planned for us to be His children, He intended that we be members of His household.

(b) That we may have an unwavering relationship and perfect fellowship with Him

This is also another result of this sonship which is having a living fellowship with Him as a Father, and so we call Him by this glorious title “Father”! St. Paul clarifies this privilege which stems from sonship by saying, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father ’ (Gal. 4:6). The meaning of ‘Abba, Father’ is ‘O Father, our Father’ and this is how our Lord taught us to address God when He Said, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven” (Mtt. 6:9).

(c) To be conformed to the image of His Son

Since God has created us to be His sons, He has planned that we be conformed to the image of His Son, as St. Paul said, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). That we may resemble Him in His life, His mannerism, His deeds, His dealings, etc.

This is the superior aim of God in creating us, and on which is based many results and privileges. This is essential for us to know also, in order to begin correctly and have the right vision of the spiritual path.

THIRDLY

GOD’S POSITION DESPITE OF MY SIN

In order to correct my view of God, it is important also to know God’s attitude and position towards me despite of my sin. In order to know this it is essential to know:

- a) What sin really is?
- b) The result of sin
- c) The cure of sin

(A) WHAT SIN REALLY IS?

Sin in reality is separation from God. We have discovered that God created us to be His children which are united to Him, and that we may say, “But it is good for me to draw near to God” (Ps. 73:28). But what actually happened was the opposite, and we became separated from God and each one went his own way, in his own view, in his own will, and it was said regarding us by Isaiah the prophet, “And we all like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way...” (Isa. 53:6).

Meditate on this analogy; the Holy Scriptures symbolise the separated souls to sheep who have strayed from their shepherd, and have gone away privately to eat the grass of the fields. So also is the lost soul which has separated from God and from His saintly flock due to his entanglements of survival, or his over-involvement at work. This person may think that he is not a sinner because he does not commit evil or iniquity, but from God’s point of view, such a soul is lost and separated from God. What was the sin of the prodigal son (Luke 15)? Was it not that he forsook his father’s house and went to a far country? What was the sin of Adam and Eve? Was

it not that they forsook the Lord to become independent in their knowledge of good and evil?

My dear friend, examine yourself now with a sincere conscience. Ask yourself the following questions in the light of this truth:

- Are you in a state of separation from God?
- Do you depend on your own thoughts?
- Do you say in your heart to God, “Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of your ways” (Job 21:14)?

B) THE RESULT OF SIN

St. James says, “Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”. (Js. 1:15) St. Paul says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). This is what the Word of God clarifies, that the result of sin is death - separation from God means the separation from the source of life, and this only means death. Those who are separated from God are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) despite of being alive in the flesh. The Lord said, “You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1). In regard to the end of those who are dead in trespasses and sins, it is exceedingly bitter as recorded in the Holy Bible about those who have chosen such a destiny, which is “everlasting punishment” (Mtt. 25:46). St. John the beloved described what is involved in this everlasting torment by saying, “And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night” (Rev. 14:11). St. Peter also added, “To whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever” (2 Pet. 2:17). As for the Lord Jesus, He said, “The fire that shall never be quenched - where their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched” (Mk. 9:43-44). St. John also said, “The lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8). St. Augustine also described the fires of Hades by saying, “Earthly fire in comparison to hell, is like fire in a coloured portrait compared to real fire”.

One of the things which portrays the meaning of hell, even though on a much smaller scale, is what happened to a king called ‘Zeynon’. This king went into a coma, while others thought he died and buried him in a tomb. When he awoke from his coma, he cried out, “Open for me ... have mercy on me ...” but there was no-one who heard or opened, so the king went into a state of mental wildness inside this tight and dark tomb. He stayed in the tomb screaming, wailing, feeling catastrophobic and despairing of life for a long time. Some time later, someone heard his screaming and opened the tomb, where he was found in a condition of shock. It was found also that he had eaten the flesh from his arm due to his extreme despair, sorrow and terror. If this was the condition of a person found enclosed in a tomb, how much more terrible would be the condition of one who is cast out into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mtt. 13:42)?

Yes.... This is the bitter fruit of sin, and its sure outcome. But is God, who is full of love for mankind, unable to save? Will He leave His creation to suffer from the

pangs of hell and the unrest of conscience? Will not God move out in His love to find a solution for man's problem? Will He not provide a remedy for this situation and for sin which has separated mankind from His tender love?

Yes, the Lord has risen and provided the solution and healing, and this is what we will discover in the plan of God.

C) THE CURE OF SIN

We have previously discussed the issue of sin's dual effect, one of which is separation from God and the other being death, which results from that separation.

(I) The Remedy of Sin's Death

The remedy of death, which comes as a result of sin, entails the removal of that death and the salvation of mankind from it. But the removal of the sentence of death could not be brought about by a verbal cancellation of that sentence, because, "God is a just judge" (Ps. 7:11), so the penalty must be paid.

So, how will it be that the penalty must be paid, yet mankind be granted an acquittal?

Here is manifested the wisdom of God in finding a solution, to save man from the death penalty and fulfil the justice of God by paying the penalty. This solution and remedy is 'Redemption', that is, that someone may die **instead** of man to propitiate for him. This is what the Lord made clear in the Law of Moses by saying, "If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the Commandments of the Lord ... he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish ... so the priest shall make atonement for him ... and it shall be forgiven him", (Lev. 5:17-18). In fact, this Law was symbolic to the redemption of the New Testament, and a preparation for the atonement of Christ; so it was that this ram was a symbol of the Lamb of God to whom John the Baptist witnessed saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

In the fullness of time, the Lord Jesus came and died on the cross instead of me and you, and atoned for our sins, and thus revealed His eternal love toward us with which He loved us before the foundations of the world. This St. Paul makes clear by saying, "But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Thus, it was fulfilled what the Lord spoke of old, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death" (Hos. 13:14). This solution cost Him that He would come in the likeness of the body of sin, that is, to take a body like ours, in order to die in our stead so that we may be saved from the penalty of death, and life be given to us. He took what is ours (the body of death) and gave us what is His (the Spirit of Life).

I recall a true story, which happened in a jail in upper Cairo, Egypt, where a particular criminal was sentenced to death. The story began when a man, on an autumn night, was surprised by the storming into his house by his first born son who had a blood-stained shirt, and in his hand was a bloody knife.

The father quickly comprehended that his son had committed murder, and so quickly removed his own shirt and exchanged it with his son. In a very short while the police surrounded the house and arrested the person who had the blood-stained shirt (the father). He was totally quiet during his trial and was therefore sentenced to death. Before his execution, he asked to speak to his son and, upon his son's arrival, the father whispered, "I will die instead of you my son, so that you may live instead of me".

This story is but a small comparison to what Jesus did with us and for us; coming in the likeness of our flesh, dying instead of us and gave us gracefully to live. This is what St. Paul wrote, saying "That He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). Also, "Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:15).

The remedy, which God has made for the result of sin, is redemption. We should also know another dimension, which is:

(II) The Remedy of Separation

We have seen together that the Lord of Glory has solved the death which results from sin by dying for us; redemption. However, we must also know how the Lord solved the separation between mankind and Himself, and man's straying from Him, and the enmity between mankind and Himself. That is, how will the original relationship with God be restored?

The Lord solved this problem in extreme wisdom, despite of the fact that we are the ones who choose a different path, but He, in the wisdom of His love, took the initiative and came to us. Through His cross, He had drawn us near, as St. Peter said, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). And so it was in this way that God reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ; St. Paul writes, "That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them", (II Cor. 5:19). Regarding this point, Pope Shenouda III says, ["Reconciliation of humanity with God is the reason for the incarnation ... and the aim to redeem also; so it is that the blood of Jesus is the price of this reconciliation. Regarding this, St. Paul says, "Having made peace through the blood of His cross", (Col. 1:20). Ponder the cost of your reconciliation, and the exceeding

value of your soul to God; we have been reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). Christ reconciled us to the Father, and removed all enmity and He still remains the only mediating bridge].

There is a story of an insubordinate son, who sinned against his father, and the son separated himself from his family. As a result, his mother became very ill due to her emotional torment due to her love for her son, and her deep respect for her husband; and finally she became sick unto death. However, when she was on her deathbed, her son came for a final farewell. As he stood beside her bed sobbing with regret, his father was also standing on the other side of the bed. The mother reached for the hand of her husband and son, and united both their hands on her bosom - when they had been reconciled through the mother, she finally breathed her last.

Perhaps this story is a shadow of what the Lord Jesus Christ did, by reconciling heaven and earth on the cross by saying, "Father, forgive them.... He breathed his last" (Lk. 23:34, 46). In this way the Lord healed our sin and all its consequences through the death of Jesus on the Cross.

This is the first dimension in the spiritual life, which is, correcting my view of God: in knowing His **eternal feelings** towards us in His great love and delighting and rejoicing in us. Also, by knowing **His aim** of our creation, through His great love, which is to make us **His children** and members of His family. Finally, we realise **His position** toward us despite of our sin, in that He took the initiative and redeemed us by His blood, and thus demonstrated His eternal love, and reconciled us to Himself by the death of His Son.

This is the loving position of God toward us, but what is our position towards Him?

SUMMARY

The first step in beginning with Christ is ‘to correct my view of God’ regarding:

1. THE FEELINGS OF GOD TOWARDS MANKIND

God loves mankind, as King Solomon said, “Any My delight was with the sons of men” (Prov. 8:31)

2. GOD’S AIM OF CREATING MANKIND

God’s aim of our creation is that we may become His children, as St. Paul said, “Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself...” (Eph. 1:5)

3. GOD’S POSITION DESPITE OF OUR SIN

Even though we strayed and became separated from God (Isa. 53:6), and this resulted in certain death (Rom. 6:23), but God acted in excellent love, in that He came and died on the Cross instead of us; as St. Paul said, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8)

By this, He reconciled us to Himself, (II Cor. 5:19) and brought us near Him that we may have a holy fellowship with Him.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

What is the first dimension in starting a life with Christ?

Answer -----

FIRSTLY: GOD’S FEELINGS TOWARD MANKIND

1. What are God’s feelings towards mankind?

Answer -----

2. What did King Solomon mean by saying “God’s delight is with the sons of men”?

Answer -----

3. What is the effect of this truth (God’s Love) on you?

Answer -----

SECONDLY: GOD’S AIM OF CREATING MANKIND

1. What is God’s aim of creating mankind?

Answer -----

2. What did St. Paul mean by saying, “Having predestined us to adoption”?

Answer -----

3. What is the effect of this on you?

Answer -----

THIRDLY: GOD’S POSITION IN REGARDS TO SIN

1. What is God’s position from sin?

Answer -----

2. What is the meaning of reconciliation?

Answer -----

THE SECOND DIMENSION

CORRECTING MY POSITION WITH GOD

Firstly: Accepting God's initiative

Secondly: Offering my repentance to God

Thirdly: Faith in the response of God

Fourthly: Overcoming hindrances to God

Fifthly: Directing the invitation

DECIDING MY POSITION

We have discovered in the first dimension that, in order to begin the spiritual path with Christ, it is essential that we have the correct view of God with regard to His divine feelings toward us, His glorious aim from creating us and His position from us despite of the fact that we are sinners.

We saw together that God has loved us from eternity past and that His delight is with the sons of men, and that He created us to be His children and members of His household and family. When we separated ourselves from Him and strayed from the way and fell under the sentence of death, He demonstrated His love toward us by coming to our earth and was crucified for our sake, offering us love and reconciliation.

Since we have become sure of these things, it is essential to make a firm decision confirming our position. This we do by:

- ◆ Accepting God's initiative
- ◆ Offering repentance to God
- ◆ Faith in the response of God
- ◆ Overcoming hindrances to God.

This is the second dimension, which we will discuss, in the following pages.

Firstly

Accepting God's Initiative

The Lord Jesus, in addition to His general initiative by coming to earth and His death instead of us, *offers a personal invitation to each one of us*. He says:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20).

(a) The Extent of His Initiative

By this initiative, we are sure of some very important facts:

(I) That He is very near to us

By saying “I stand at the door”, this surely means the door of the heart, thus overcoming the distance between us and Him. So, we need to imagine that it is a hard thing for us to meet the Lord, or that it is impossible to approach Him since He is in Heaven..... - No, my friend, “Do not say in your heart, ‘who will ascend into Heaven?’ That is, to bring Christ down from above” (Rom. 10:6) That is, to bring Christ down to meet Him. It is not difficult for He has come down and is now at the door of the heart, knocking. The Shulamite (symbolic of the human soul) has testified to this truth by saying, “The voice of my beloved! Behold, He comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills Behold, He stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice” (Song 2:8-9). Yes, He stands beside us, behind the wall of materialism, He is looking through the windows of the senses and gazing through the lattice of the imagination and thoughts. Can you see Him?

This is a fact regarding His initiatives, and the second fact is:

(II) The Desire of His Heart is to Dwell within Us

He says, “... I will come in to him and dine with him ...”. He knocks at the door of the heart with His gentle voice, saying, “Open for me, My sister, My love, for My head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night” (Song 5:2). How many times did the Lord Jesus knock on your heart? How many times were His knocks both sweet and light, coming in the form of earthly blessings, health and success?

Have you recognised these light knocks or has He been constrained by you to use heavy and fearful knocks, which come in the form of tribulations, illnesses, problems and hardships that you have faced?

A world champion wrestler tells his story which occurred in the 1950's. He was an Egyptian who met with a priest who spoke to him about his eternal life, the importance of fellowship with God and his acceptance of Christ. The conversation ended in the wrestler's total refusal to this invitation by saying to the priest, “I do not need Jesus; I am healthy, have a high position, a bright future; besides, I have my wrestling and do not want my life to be busy with anything else, especially now that I am preparing for a world title”.

This champion wrestler then travelled to Europe for the championships. The night before his world title match, while sitting in the visitor's room in his hotel, he was stung by a small mosquito on the neck. After one hour, swelling appeared in a strange manner, extending right across his neck. He was immediately transferred to hospital where he was admitted. He therefore lost the world championship title.

When the wrestler returned home, the priest went to pray for him and to reinvite him to Jesus, clarifying that what had happened was a way of knocking from the Lord out of love and compassion for his soul, but all this only produced more refusal and rebellion. When he recovered, he went hunting in the western desert with one of his friends. During the hunt his car hurled off a cliff and into a rocky valley and was destroyed. His friend's skull was shattered, but he suffered a broken and lacerated arm. He bled from his arm exceedingly and the nerves in his arm also suffered major damage which caused him to scream from the pain. He then remembered his conversation with the priest regarding the Lord's hard knocks and fell to his knees weeping and asking God to come into his life. Despite of the pain, he picked himself up when he saw the light of a flame from a distance and he made his way to a tent where certain Arabs were. He collapsed unconscious before the tent. Upon regaining consciousness, he found himself in a hospital where the Arabs had taken him. When he had fully recovered, he returned to his own city and became an active member of the Church.

This is only one of many stories which speak of the hard knocks on the heart from the Lord when men do not respond to His loving soft calls. However, this is not necessarily the case with every human - but the sure thing is that the Lord knocks on the hearts and that His arm is behind all the circumstances which shape and direct our lives. *The Lord takes every opportunity to knock on the door of our hearts.*

The Lord has waited a long time at the door. His head is covered with dew and His locks with the drops of the night. Will you open for Him?

(III) He is awaiting Your Invitation

He says, "I stand ... knocking ... If anyone opens the door, I will come in to him". He is standing at the door knocking, waiting for us to hear His knocking, to invite Him to enter and begin a fellowship with us.

The different responses to His knocking, from those who do not open, may be categorised as follows:

- ◆ Those who do not hear His knocking
- ◆ Those who hear and do not open
- ◆ Those who hear and desire, yet do not invite Him in.

I wish that you would examine yourself and see which category you belong to!

(B) RESPONSES TO HIS INITIATIVE

(I) Those who do not hear His knocking

These often hear not His voice due to a particular reason, carelessness or lack of discernment of His voice.

a- Carelessness: Many people do not care about hearing the voice of Christ due to their overwhelming involvement in wickedness and sin and in the lusts of the flesh - so their hearts have hardened and they cannot hear the Lord knocking. Regarding such people, the Lord Jesus said, “For the hearts of these people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing and their eyes have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them”(Mtt. 13:15). St. Paul also said, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, back-biters, haters of God, violent, proud boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgement of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:28-32).

It is due to this heavy involvement in wickedness and lust that such people do not hear the Lord’s knocks on their hearts - Another reason for not hearing His knocks is:

b- not discerning His voice. There are some who cannot discern the voice of the Lord in His knocking; so if they succeed they attribute the good to their intelligence, or their good fortune. If they go through trials or dangers, they would attribute this to their misfortune or to the envy of others. They do not realise the gentle knockings of the Lord, nor His strong knockings, and therefore lose the opportunity of receiving the Lord. St. John the Baptist said of such, “There stands one among you whom you do not know (Jn. 1:27). This is He of whom St. John the Apostle said, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (Jn. 1:10-11). But those who are sober-minded can hear His voice and know Him. “My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me” (Jn. 10:27) This is one kind of people who can’t discern His voice nor His knocking due to indifference or lack of discernment. Another kinds of people are:

(II) Those Who Hear but do not Open

These hear often the voice of the Lord in sermons they attend, or books they read, or incidents which they go through, and they know that His voice is directed to them, but they do not open their hearts for Him to enter. This is due to their other involvements in life, carelessness, or their contentment with performing religious duties without Christ entering their hearts.

a- Being Busy: Many do not open their hearts to receive Christ due to their extreme involvements in things pertaining to this life; work, business, responsibilities of the home, education, vocational ambitions, or with making money and storing

riches etc. The Lord of Glory mentioned a parable clarifying this by saying, “Then He said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent His servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready’. But they all, with one accord, began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused’. And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused’. Still another said, ‘I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come’” (Luke 14:16-20). All are busy, this one in his field, the other in his oxen and yet another in his marriage. They heard the invitation of the Lord but they did not accept it due to their involvements and therefore excused themselves. There are many people who excuse themselves from accepting the Lord’s invitation and responding to His calls due to their busy life and others who excuse themselves due to another reason:

b- Procrastination: When some hear the knocking of the Lord, they do not open their hearts but delay it to a more convenient time, and perhaps that time does not arrive.

St. Paul stood before Felix the Governor and spoke of faith in Christ, and while he was talking about righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come, Felix was afraid but, instead of opening his heart to receive Christ, he excused himself from hearing further and said, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you” (Acts 24:25). Did he ever have a convenient time afterwards? Did he call for or invite the apostle? In fact, there is absolutely no indication of this!

St. Augustine was a victim of this vicious whirlwind; except that he took decisive action with himself by the grace of God and said, “Until when will I say tomorrow, tomorrow, and not say ‘now’? Why not make this very minute the end of my desperate state”? When he said this, he opened his heart to the Lord and the snare of the devil was broken and his soul delivered.

Will you open your heart immediately to hear the knocking of Christ? Or will you say, ‘tomorrow, tomorrow’? Delaying is one of the reasons for a person not to open his/her heart to the Lord; and another reason is:

c- Neglect and Laziness: In the Song of Solomon there is an illustration of this, where the Shullamite, (ie. bride, symbolic of the human soul), says, “I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my Beloved! He knocks saying, ‘Open for Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My perfect one; for My head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night’. ‘I have taken off my robe. How can I put it on again? I have washed my feet. How can I defile them? But my Beloved had turned away and was gone’” (Song 5:2-6). How many souls are like the Shullamite, hearing the knockings of the Lord but, due to neglect, laziness and lack of seriousness in life, deny themselves the opportunity and do not open for the Beloved? There are others who, despite of hearing the knockings of the Lord, do not open due to:

d- Contentment with Religious Duties: As the Lord knocks on the heart to enter personally, these people are content to perform some statutes and religious duties, supposing that this is what is required. Even though these duties are truly required, yet they are never a substitute for receiving the Lord Christ in the heart, but they're the fruit and illustration of His presence inside me. The Lord warned of this kind of worship by saying, "Therefore the Lord said: In as much as these people draw near to me with their mouths and honour me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the commandment of men... Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord, and their works are in the dark; they say, 'Who sees us'? and, 'Who knows us?'" (Isa. 29:13-15).

The problem with this group of people is that they lack a loving relationship between them and the Lord Jesus to reign over their hearts, stemming from receiving the Lord in their hearts. Their spiritual life is characterised by rigidity, routines, heavy and burdensome practices that are carried out by coercion, without natural life, because Christ is not within them to activate the wheel of life by the power of His warming love.

His Holiness, Pope Shenouda III, explained the difference between the life of contentment via religious practices, and the opening of the heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and returning to God with all my heart, saying: "What is meant by returning to God? Briefly, it is the forming of a true and hearty relationship with Him. I say relationship and not just a facade, or religious duties Some think that returning to God means a program for prayer, fasting and spiritual practices, spiritual readings, attending meetings and prostrations ... All of these are good and well, but does it contain a hearty relationship with God or not? Is there love for God or not? Without this relationship, and without this love, you have not yet returned to God - despite of your prayers, fastings, reading or prostrations ... but by a relationship with God and with love, these means become powerful and fruitful ... the heart first, out of which these means will be produced."

Therefore, it is essential to open the heart first, and not to be content by spiritual practices as a substitute for the entrance and presence of the Lord in the heart.

We have seen two kinds of people who do not hear the knocks, and those who hear but do not open. We are left with one more group, which is:

(III) Those who desire but do not ask Him to come in

These do so for the following reasons:

a- Ignorance: They desire for Christ to enter their heart, but they do not ask Him for that. In fact, the Lord wants us to ask Him, and to ask Him so that He may answer us. If we do not ask specifically, He will not respond, thus He said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find ... for everyone who asks receives..." (Mtt. 7:7-8). When His disciples did not ask Him of anything, He rebuked them, saying, "Until now you have asked nothing in My Name. Ask, and you will receive, that

your joy may be full” (Jn. 16:24). When blind Bartimarus cried out saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mk. 10:47), the Lord Jesus answered and said to him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” The blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, that I may receive my sight” (Mk. 10:48-52). From the incident we see that the Lord Jesus led the blind man to request for himself, and to specify his supplication.

In regard to entering the heart, the Lord awaits an honest and specific request of, “Please Lord, enter my heart” in order to answer the request. This is in regard to those who are ignorant. There is also another reason which makes some, even though their hearts are open, do not invite the Lord to enter:

b- Incorrect Humility: Due to an incorrect understanding of humility, they refrain from asking the Lord to enter into their hearts due to unworthiness. In fact, we do not refrain from receiving grace due to feelings of unworthiness, or else how do we, who are unworthy, approach and partake of the Communion of the body and blood of the Lord? It is great to feel unworthy, but despite of this we must ask the Lord to condescend to enter our hearts which are not befitting of His Majesty. He who consents to be born in a manger will not refuse to enter the heart of man whom He has created, and make him a holy temple, as St. Paul said, “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ ” (2 Cor. 6:16). Therefore, we should never allow incorrect humility to stop us from asking the Lord to enter our hearts.

We have seen together, beloved brethren, that to correct our position in relation to the Lord, we must accept His loving initiative.

He knocks at the door of our hearts desiring to enter. Therefore, we should open wide our hearts for Him to enter, and invite Him to personally enter, so that we may have fellowship with His Person and not just follow His teaching.

This is the meaning of accepting Christ - it is like the acceptance of a lady upon receiving a proposal for marriage. If the person proposing enters her heart, that is, she loves him and has consented to spend her life with him; she will declare this acceptance; as St. Paul said, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2).

Do you accept Christ and will you invite Him to enter your heart?

Friend, Know that the Lord Jesus will never force Himself into a heart that has not invited Him. He stood once weeping as He looked on Jerusalem, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mtt. 23:37). If the desire and will are absent in the person, it is not possible for Christ to enter.

It is written of the artist who painted the Lord Jesus' picture knocking on a door, that after completing the painting he showed it to another artist friend for a second opinion. After scrutinising it, his artist friend liked it, but noticed that the door had no handle, so he drew his friend's attention to this. The painter of the picture responded that he did not forget to draw a door handle, but proposed not to include it, to illustrate the spiritual meaning - that is, the door knob is only on the inside of the door, so that if the person hears the knocking of Christ, and wishes to receive Him, then the person may open for Him.

Have you heard Christ knocking on your heart?

- **Do you will to open to Him?**
- **Do you accept His initiative?**
- **Will you invite Him to enter?**

This, my friend, is the first step in correcting your position in regard to God.

SUMMARY

- The 2nd dimension of beginning with Christ is "correcting my position with God".
- The first step in correcting my position is **ACCEPTING CHRIST'S INITIATIVE**.

1. EXTENT OF HIS INITIATIVE

(a) General Initiative: Redemption; "But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

(b) Personal Initiative: These are knockings on the heart. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). He:

(I) Is very near to us

(II) Desires to enter into our lives

(III) Is awaiting our invitation

2. RESPONSES TO HIS INITIATIVE

(a) Some do not hear His knocking due to:

(I) Carelessness

(II) Not discerning His voice

- (b) Some hear, but do not open, due to:
- (I) Being busy**
 - (II) Delaying**
 - (III) Neglect and laziness**
 - (IV) Contentment with religious duties**
- (c) Some desire, but do not ask Him to come in, due to:
- (I) Ignorance**
 - (II) Incorrect humility, that is, due to unworthiness**

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the second dimension in beginning with Christ?

Answer-----

2. What is the first step under this dimension?

Answer-----

3. What are the general and personal initiatives of Christ?

Answer-----

4. What are the different responses of people to Christ's initiative?

Answer-----

5. What are the reasons for some who do not hear Christ knocking?

Answer-----

6. What are the reasons for some refusing to open to Him?

Answer-----

7. What are the reasons that some do not invite Him, even though they desire to do so?

Answer-----

8. What is your personal position with regards to Christ's initiative?

I do not hear His knocks

I have not invited Him

I have not opened my heart to Him

I invite Him now

I have invited Him and He is now in my heart

Secondly

Offering My Repentance to God

The second step in correcting my position with God is offering sincere repentance.

1. The Meaning of Repentance:

(a) Repentance is returning to God:

Repentance does not just mean regret over sins committed, or a will to forsake sin, but repentance - before all else - in its essential meaning, is to return to God.

His Holiness, Pope Shenouds III wrote on this saying, “As long as sin is separation from God, then repentance is the return to God”.

The Holy Bible has, in many instances, synonymously used the word ‘return’ with the word ‘repentance’. Our teacher, St. Peter the Apostle, speaks of returning to God after we have strayed as sheep and have gone our own ways, (Isa. 53:6) saying, “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

On the day of Pentecost, he pointed the way to those willing to accept Christ, saying: “Return and be converted that your sins may be blotted out...” (Acts 3:19). Here, also, he elucidates the concept of repentance, which is returning. This is exactly what St. Paul mentioned is his saying: “But declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).

The Lord Jesus told of the parable of the prodigal son, clarifying that repentance means returning to God. He said, “... and not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want ... but when he came to himself, he said ... I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you ...’ and he arose and came to his father” (Lk. 15:11-20).

(b) To Return to God Means:

The will to form a loving relationship with God, and not just a will, but to begin to form that relationship. This is what the divine Scriptures have made clear by saying, “O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips’”(Hos.14:1-2).

Returning is always accompanied by speaking to God, and offering a contrite spirit, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Ps. 51:17). A relationship does not mean external spiritual duties, but a true connection and a sincere fellowship.

(c) In Repentance, there is an Awakening of Conscience:

The truth is that the person who lives in sin has a ‘dead conscience’, or, according to the words of the Bible, a “seared conscience”. That is, suppressing their conscience with a hot iron until it becomes dead (1 Tim. 4:2). But when the person hears Christ knocking on his heart, his conscience awakens and arises from the dead, as the Lord said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (Jn. 5:25).

When the conscience comes to life, it is affected by the conviction of the Holy Spirit in regards to sin, and so the person repents:

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, ‘men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent...’” (Acts 2:37-38).

(d) In Repentance, there is Confession of Sin:

If repentance is returning to God, then it is essential that returning be accompanied with confession. When the prodigal son thought of returning to his father, he immediately thought of the wording of his confession; the Bible records this saying: “I will arise and return to my father, and say to him; ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son, treat me as one of your hired workers’” (Lk. 15:18-19). When he came to his father, he carried out his plan and confessed his sin, that is, the sin of leaving and separating from his father.

So also is the case with any person who is willing to return to God; it is imperative that he/she acknowledges their sin, admit their forfeiting of God, and declare their return to God.

2. THE STEPS OF REPENTANCE:

We have clarified that repentance means returning; and we shall see that this restitution is carried out in several connected steps:

(a) Returning to One's Self

The person in their straying from God is actually a foreigner to him/herself, and when he/she sobers from sin, a returning to one's self takes place. This is the first step of repentance, as came to pass with the prodigal son: "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger' (Lk. 15:17).

Have you returned to yourself, my friend?

(b) Returning to God

When the person returns to self and discovers the wretched condition of him/herself, his/her sure destruction if they persist in that way, and remembering the goodness of God his/her Father; they take the second step which is returning to God's Fatherly Heart, as was the case with the prodigal son who returned to his father, saying, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Lk. 15:21). Therefore, the Bible says: "...and a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

Do you want to return now to God?

(c) Returning to Church

When the person returns to him/herself, to God, it is indispensable to take the third step, which is returning to the Church, the House of God, to confess his/her sins before the stewards of the mysteries of God, as occurred with the Apostles: "And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of these who practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all" (Acts 19:18-19).

It is through this that they are added to the Church, as the Bible states: "And the Lord added to the Church daily, those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

3. THE RESULTS OF REPENTANCE:

(a) Remission of Sins:

When we return to God, acknowledging and confessing our sins, He forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. This is what St. John the Apostle

confirmed: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn.1:9). Our teacher, David the Prophet, said, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’. And You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5).

Isaiah the Prophet also clarifies this by saying, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7).

To correct my position with God, it is first essential to obtain remission of my sins, and that through my return to God, acknowledging my transgression; then He would accept my repentance, wipe out my iniquity, cleanse me from guilt, and thus my position would be blameless, as St. Paul said, “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight” (Col. 1:21-22).

And when we return to the Church acknowledging and confessing our sins, we receive absolution and remission through the merits of the Blood of Jesus, via the mouth of the Stewards of God’s Sacraments, to whom God bestowed authority, saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20:23).

4. THE TIME OF REPENTANCE:

REPENTANCE BEGINS NOW:

Perhaps the thought of going to Church at the nearest opportunity to begin repentance crosses your mind. The Church truly is the hospital for the repentants; but repentance begins now, and is established and settled in Church. At least now you can return to yourself and begin the return to God, and to put your feet on the path, the path of returning; “I will arise and go to my Father...” (Lk. 15:18)

Thus St. Paul says, “In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of Salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time, behold today is the day of Salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

Church history is brimful with saints who began the path of repentance in the very place where God dealt with them, and through diverse means, such as reading a book, an accident, a visit from one of God’s servants, then they completed their repentance in Church. Some of these were St. Augustine:

St. Augustine recalls his repentance and correcting his position with God, when he heard God’s voice in a garden. (It was a garden near our house, which we treated as our very own, so I entered it and there I was wrathful with my soul, for not surrendering it to you O Lord until now ... what did I require? What did I require except the will ... then I sat on the ground under a fig tree, and

opened the canal of my tear ducts ... saying: 'Until when will I continue to say tomorrow, tomorrow, and not say now?'... Then I heard a voice from a neighbour's house, as of a child's voice singing: 'take and read'. So I restrained my tears and considered this to be a voice from heaven directing me to read the first passage to meet my eyes when I would open the Bible ... so I opened the Bible and read the following: "And do this, knowing the time, that NOW it is high time to awake out of sleep let us walk properly as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness But put on the Lord Jesus Christ ..." (Rom 13:11-14). So, as soon as I had read these majestic words, a radiance from the Sun of Peace shone upon me, and destroyed the darkness and deception which held me in bondage....)

After this he went to Church and presented himself to the Bishop, and was baptised by him.

St. Baesa:

After the departure of her parents (in Menouf, Egypt, in the 4th century) her house was converted to a brothel. St. John the Short visited her, and she repented through him in the very house of sin. She departed from that house with St. John the Short; and as they walked through the wilderness, the day darkened and he went alone to pray. To his astonishment, he realised that she had died; and as he prayed for the Lord to reveal to him this woman's destiny, he heard a voice saying: "Her repentance was accepted as soon as she offered it..." God is willing to accept the repentance of any person, at any place or at any time. It is their duty to go to the Church in the nearest chance to complete their repentance (that is, to receive absolution and forgiveness by Christ's Blood from the confessional father's mouth).

If the Spirit of the Lord has moved your heart now to repent, do not waste the opportunity, but start now.

That was the concept of repentance and its presentation to God, and returning to Him as a primary element of correcting my position from God. Now we shall look at another element which is faith that God will receive my supplication, accept my repentance - and this we will deliberate in the subsequent discussion:

SUMMARY

The second step in correcting my position from God is:

"OFFERING MY REPENTANCE"

1. The Meaning of Repentance:

(a) Repentance is returning to God (Acts 3:19)

(b) Returning to God means the forming of a loving relationship with Him (Hos. 14:1).

(c) In repentance is an awakening of the conscience (Acts 2:37).

(d) In repentance there is confession of sin (Lk. 15:18).

2. The Steps of Repentance:

(a) Returning to one's self (Lk. 15:17).

(b) Returning to God (Acts 11:21).

(c) Returning to the Church (Acts 2:47).

3. The Result of Repentance:

(a) Remission of sins (Acts 13:9).

4. The Time of Repentance:

(a) Now (2 Cor. 6:2).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the Meaning of Repentance?

Answer:

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

2. What are the Steps of Repentance?

Answer:

- a)

3. What is the grace acquired by the sinner when he/she repents?

Answer:

4. When should a sinner repent?

Answer:

5. What is your personal position with regards to repentance?

.....

Thirdly

Faith in God's Response:

The third step in correcting my position with God is my faith in:

(I) His Response in Forgiving My Sins

The life of sin began through losing trust in God's word; this is what the serpent focussed on in his deluding of our mother, Eve. He actually succeeded in destroying this fundamental principle, which is the foundation of all the spiritual building, by saying: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat from every tree of the garden', and when Eve responded, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Gen. 3:1-3). The serpent then replied speedily with its final blow, "You will not die". (Gen. 3:4)

So Eve lost balance, swaying to the bounds of descent, and fell into the whirlwind of doubt and lack of trust in the Lord's words!!

From here we derive the importance of the restoration of trust in God's faithful word; as He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mtt. 24:35). However, the new Eve, the virgin St. Mary, followed the correct path of faith by trusting the Lord's word. For this, she was acknowledged as 'Blessed' by Elizabeth when she said of St. Mary, "Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45). The Holy Bible affirms to us the necessity of faith and trust to all those who want to live with the Lord, as it is written: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). St. Paul also taught us, saying: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder (responds and recompenses) of those who diligently seek Him". (Heb. 11:6) Whoever desires to please God must believe and trust that He exists, that is, in His essential, factual and real presence, and also present in the heart of the one calling on His Name, because He responds to prayer. Therefore, it is indispensable that we ask in faith (trust) in His word, because He will assuredly respond, as St. James declared: "... Let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (Jms. 1:5-7).

(II) His Response to my Invitation and Entering my Heart

Thus, when we ask of the Lord Jesus to enter our hearts, it is fundamental that we trust in His response and His entrance, because it was He who promised, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and dine with him and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). If we have heard His knocking, opened our hearts to Him, and invited Him to enter, we must trust that He will accomplish what He has promised, and will enter as He said.

When we trust in this, we will realise His dwelling in our hearts by faith; the very thing which St. Paul warrants by saying, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17). Therefore, this is not impossible, or difficult, as St. Paul said: “But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach), that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth, confession is made to salvation” (Rom. 10:6-10). St. Paul is meaning to remove from the minds the difficulty of receiving Christ, and he is clarifying that for this to take place, we are not required to ascend to heaven, or descend to Hades, but to have faith in the heart, that is, a heartily trust in the love of Jesus and His redemptive work, and in the certitude of His entrance into my heart. And when the heart believes, the tongue will speak: “I believed and therefore I spoke” (Ps. 116:10), and “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Mtt. 12:34). Thus St. Paul said: “For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to Salvation” (Rom. 10:10).

We have accepted **Christ on the sacramental level** in the sacrament of baptism, and confessed (or was confessed on our behalf) by the acknowledgment of faith, as follows:

[“I confess to you my God Christ, and acknowledge all Your saving laws, and Your life giving service, and all Your works bestowing life ... I believe ... I believe ... I believe”] It is then left that we accept this now on **the level of personal faith**, by the heart believing that Christ has entered, and the mouth to acknowledge according to faith. This, St. Paul also stated, saying: “But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke’, we also believe and therefore speak” (2 Cor. 4:13).

The Church has taught us to utter this supplication, and ask the Lord saying: “Come and dwell within us...” (Prayer of the 3rd hour, Agbia).

Do you trust that if you invite Him, He will enter your heart, and dwell in you by faith?

Oh, what a glorious fact!!!!

Oh, what a privilege that surpasses all understanding!!!!

That was the 3rd step in correcting my position with God, and it concerns my position of faith. There remains a final step in correcting my position, which is overcoming the obstacles on my path to God.

Fourthly

Overcoming the Obstacles

On My Path to God

The person may perhaps come across some obstacles, problems, or questions, which may flounder his faith, and impede his desiring will to ask Christ to come into his heart. He may say:

(I) My Sins are Numerous and Excruciating

The person may think that his sins are too many, and that God will not forgive him and will not accept to enter into his heart.

Actually, I don't want to belittle the woefulness of sin; as the Bible rightly says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jms. 2:10). But, I want to ask the following: If you think in the abovementioned manner, do you really want to repent? Do you want to accept the Lord in your life? If you truly desire, God has absolutely no objection to forgiving all your sins; for it was He who said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mtt. 9:13).

Despite of all the sins, He is ready to forgive, as He said, "Come now and let us reason together", says the Lord; "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Scarlet is a bright red colour inclining towards orange, while crimson is a deep purplish red as of blood. God is therefore expressing that, despite the terribleness of sin, and its corrupt extent, that He is ready to forgive, and thus the heart would be bright as the snow and as wool.

- Do you not remember, my friend, the woman who Was caught in The act of adultery? How He accepted and forgave her, saying: “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more” (Jn. 8:10-11).
- And the sinful woman who stood behind Him weeping, and washing His feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hair of her head; did He not say to her: “Your sins are forgiven ... your faith has saved you, go in peace” (Lk. 7:48, 50).
- Have you forgotten what happened with the tax collector who entered the temple, and was not able to lift his face to heaven from the shame of sin, but bowed his head, saying: “God be merciful to me, a sinner... and went down to his house justified...” (Lk. 18:13-14)
- Do you not recall the right thief who spent all his life in corruption, to the point of being sentenced to crucifixion; and cried out while crucified: “Remember me O Lord when You come into Your Kingdom”. What did the Lord Jesus reply to his cry? Did He not say, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:42-43).

Do you not remember all of this?

Let it be known, beloved brother, that the Lord does not hesitate to enter the heart of a human, notwithstanding the extent of his/her sin, as long as the person desires to repent, accept the Lord; for it was Christ who said: “Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick” (Lk. 5:32). This obstacle must not hinder us from receiving Christ.

Some may also say:

(II) After Restitution, I will Receive Christ

The person may think that he must remove all wickedness, change all his ways in order to become worthy and deserving of receiving Christ. The fact is, no human can restore himself by his own power, as the Lord Jesus said: “For without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

St. Paul recalls a bitter experience in regards to this, clarifying that, no matter how adamant the person is to restore his life, he will always be faced with deep-seated failure; as he said: “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do that I do not practice, but what I hate, that I do... But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform

what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do, but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

(Rom. 7:15-24)

St. Paul reassures us, after this bitter experience, that the person must first receive Christ, then, and only then, will Christ bestow him with power to overcome and restore his life, and will be able to say: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). The person may also utter: "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). St. Paul clarifies this by stating: "For it is God who works in you" (Phil. 2:13).

Thus, the excuse of first reforming my life then receiving Christ is a satanic scheme, which the devil has devised to hinder my acceptance of Christ who will carry out the restitution of my being and life. A reformed life takes place after receiving Christ and not before then.

Others may excuse themselves from receiving Christ, by saying:

(III) After I Study all of the Bible

At first, this excuse sounds reasonable and acceptable, but studying the whole Bible will not take a short time, and perhaps the zealousness of the person will abate before concluding the study. Above all of this, the person will by no means have a grasp on the entire Bible, therefore it is better to receive Christ in his heart first, and who will enlighten him to understand the Bible, and its application to his life, so that he may benefit from it.

Thus, not grasping the whole Bible must not delay the person from receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

(IV) I cannot bear the Requirements of Life with God

The person may imagine life with God to be difficult, and its requirements beyond bearing. The truth is, it will be that way if we look at it from the weak human perspective. Thus, St. Paul said: "For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:14-24) In these words, we find the acknowledgment of the weakness of humanity with regards to fulfilling the requirements of the spiritual life.

But, if the person depends on God's ability, he can say with St. Paul: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". (Phil. 4:13) Thus, it is expedient that

we rely not on our insufficient capabilities, but on the adequate power of God; for it was He who said: "Without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Hence, this hindrance which has been implanted by the enemy is removed from our path.

But the person may doubt, and question:

(V) Is it really that Easy?

Presuming that the Lord's entrance into the heart is an arduous task, requiring first asceticism and strenuous struggles.

The fact is that God's word is very clear and dependable on the matter. The word has clarified the Lord's readiness to enter the heart upon opening to Him; as He said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My Voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). If receiving Christ required numerous conditions before taking place, the word would have doubtless mentioned all those conditions first. Therefore, do not doubt the easiness by which you may receive Christ; for this is His Will, and this is the way He appointed for it to take place.

Another objection may be provoked in our minds, which says:

(VI) I Fear Falling After Accepting Christ

Truly, the person, after receiving Christ, is vulnerable and may fall. The Holy Bible says: "The righteous man may fall seven times and arise" (Prov. 24:16). But if he confesses his sins and remorse over them, the Lord will forgive him, because it is written: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in His way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Ps. 37:23-24). It is for this reason that the Lord has instituted the Sacrament of Confession in the Church, and the Sacrament of the Eucharist - in order to be forgiven and stand fast in Him.

These are some of the problems or objections which arise in the mind of any person, or in your mind, so as to disallow you of taking a firm decision to receive the person of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ; an acceptance on the basis of a dynamic faith.

These and other objections which are put before us by Satan, must be overcome if we will to correct our position with God.

The true position is: Receiving the Lord in the heart.

Fifthly

Directing the Invitation

Let me now ask you in love:

- Do you want to correct your position with God?
- Do you want Jesus to enter your heart?
- Is it possible for you to direct to Him an honest, concise and precise invitation, asking Him to enter into your heart?
- Do you trust that He will accept and respond to your prayer and enter immediately?
- What are the words that you will direct to Him?
- Will it be similar to the following:
 - * My Lord Jesus Christ, You who loved me from eternity past and created me to be a son to God.
 - * You who came from heaven for my sake, was crucified to redeem me from the death of sin.
 - * You who now stand at the door of my heart knocking, desiring to enter.
 - * I open my heart to you, and will that you enter my life, and to forgive my iniquities, and that I may be in fellowship with you all my days.
 - * Come, O Lord, and dwell within me.
 - * I believe in the trustworthiness of Your promises, that
Whoever opens for you, to him you enter and dwell... Amen]

SUMMARY

The second dimension in starting with Christ is orrecting my position with God.

1. Accepting God's Initiative:

- a) He is standing at the heart's door, knocking by His love, desiring to enter (Rev. 3:20).
- b) He waits for us to open for Him, and to invite Him to enter. (However, some do not hear His knocks due to carelessness, others hear but refuse to open due to many reasons including being busy, procrastination or contentment with religious duties. Others want to, but do not ask Him to enter).

2. Offering My Repentance to God:

- a) Repentance is returning to God and the forming of a relationship and fellowship with Him: "Repent and be converted" (Acts 3:19)
- b) In repentance, there is confession of sin, returning to one's self, returning to God, and returning to Church.
- c) The result of our repentance is the remission of our sins by the merits of the blood of Christ (Acts 3:19).
- d) God accepts the repentance of every person as soon as they repent (2 Cor. 6:2).

3. Faith in God's Responses:

- a) He responds to my supplications for remission, and blots out all my transgressions.
- b) He responds to my request for Him to enter my heart, and so He actually comes and dwells (Eph. 3:17).

4. Overcoming the Obstacles on My Path to God:

Many objections arise and confront me to disallow me from receiving Christ; such as: The abundance of sins, the difficulty of the way; fear from falling ... but the person who is earnest in his will, must overcome all these obstacles and objections.

5. Directing the Invitation to God:

Nothing remains for the person who wants to begin with God, except directing an invitation to Him, saying: "Graciously come and dwell within me", and trusting that He will answer and enter into his heart. "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him..."(Rev. 3:20)

Review QUESTIONS

1. What is the second dimension in starting with Christ?

Answer: -----

2. How does correcting my position with God take place?

Answer(s): a) -----

b) -----

c) -----

d) -----

3. What is the initiative of Christ?

Answer: -----

4. What is your position or reaction with regard to His initiative?

Answer: -----

5. What is the meaning of Repentance?

Answer: -----

6. What are the results of Repentance?

Answer: -----

7. What is your position in regards to Repentance?

Answer: -----

8. What does Faith mean?

Answer: -----

9. What is God's response to those who invite Him to enter their hearts?

Answer: -----

10. What are the obstacles, which hinder your personal acceptance of Christ?

Answer: -----

11. What are you required doing for Christ to enter into your heart?

Answer: -----

12. Where is Christ now in your life?

Answer: -----

THE THIRD DIMENSION

CORRECTING MY WALK IN A LIFE WITH GOD

FIRSTLY: My fellowship with Him

SECONDLY: Standing firm in Him

THIRDLY: Following Him

FOURTHLY: My discipleship to a spiritual guide

We have dealt with two dimensions on the way of beginning with God:

- **The First Dimension:**

Correcting my view of God; and coming to a certainty in regards to:

1. God loves feelings towards us since eternity past.
2. His exceedingly elevated aim of creating us to be His sons.
3. His noble position in regards to our sins, thus redeeming us by His Cross.

- **The Second Dimension:**

Correcting my position with God; and we have demonstrated the essentiality of:

1. Accepting God's initiative who stands at the door of our hearts.
2. Offering our repentance to Him, and our return to Him.
3. Our trusting faith in His response to enter our hearts.
4. Overcoming the obstacles which hinder our acceptance of Him.
5. Directing the invitation to Him to enter.

There remains that we clarify the third dimension of how to begin with God; so let us press on in the following pages:

WHO has the right to walk with God?

When we converse on walking with God, it is fundamental that we are aware of a rudiment point before all else, that is: "Who has the right to walk along the spiritual path?"

The Holy Bible clarifies this with acute precision, that no one can go along that path except "the sons of God", the redeemed, as Isaiah the Prophet said: "A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it ... but the redeemed shall walk there" (Isa. 35:8-9). If anyone is not a "son of God", he cannot walk down this path and he is not able to be led by the Spirit of God, because, as the Apostle said: "But as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are Sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

Many who do not live with God on the basis of sonship, and have not entered into the spiritual realm, have been made manifest, and have stumbled, back-slidden, and perished; such as Judas Iscariot. Of such, St. Paul wrote: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18); thus the Lord Jesus said: "And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever" (Jn. 8:35). Therefore, you must ask yourself if you deal with God from the sonship perspective or not! And, if you want to be certain if you are God's son or not, ask yourself whether you have received Christ into your heart or not; because as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become Children of God, even to those who believe in His name (Jn. 1:12).

If you have accepted Him by faith, you are His son, and this privilege has been made indisputable, which you have received in baptism. And if you are His son,

then you are entitled to walk with Him, as St. Paul clarified, saying: “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Col. 2:6). Consequently, let us indicate the following signs of the sons of God who walk with their Father:

- ❖ Fellowship with Him
- ❖ Standing firm in Him
- ❖ Following His footsteps
- ❖ Discipleship to a spiritual guide

FIRSTLY

MY FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

It is without doubt that the person must, as a son of God, develop a relationship and fellowship with his Father, and to hear His father's voice, as well as also speak to this Father.

The believer hears the voice of the Lord through reading the Holy Bible, and converses with God via prayer.

How is he able to hear God's voice in the Bible?

And how is he able to speak to God in prayer?

This, we will clarify in the following:

(A) HEARING GOD'S VOICE IN THE BIBLE

(I) Read a small section (ranging from 5 to 10 verses) from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, as a starting point; and the following day read another section from the place where you left the readings last, and so on every day.

(II) It is preferable that you read in the morning of every day.

(III) Before you read, lift a simple supplication to the Lord, that He may give you to hear His voice through what you are about to read.

(IV) Read this section several times (2 or 3 times) until one particular verse stands out, through which God is pointing to you.

(V) Note that the Lord will speak to you through that verse regarding one of the following subjects:

* A Sin: A specific sins that He wants you to confess or to avoid.

* A Commandment: A commandment that God bids you to do.

* A Privilege: A privilege that has become yours through Jesus Christ, that you may thank the Lord for it.

* A Promise: A promise carrying a special blessing, that you may pray to obtain it.

* A Characteristic: One of the Lord's characteristics that you may give Him glory, exalt Him, and praise Him for it.

*An example: A good example from one of the Bible characters that you may follow and imitate.

(VI) Attempt to live your day with what the Lord has said to you in mind. That you may remember Him throughout the day (as much as possible), and that you may pray for the issue that He pointed out, and to walk according to His leading.

(B) SPEAKING TO GOD IN PRAYER:

It is best to speak with the Lord on those issues, which He initiated with you during the Bible reading. Hence, if the Lord spoke to you about a:

- * Sin: Confess it, ask forgiveness and ask Him to bestow upon you the strength required to avoid it.
- * Commandment: Ask for assistance that you may be able to carry it out, and to fulfil its requirements.
- * Privilege: Thank God for it.
- Promise: Ask that it may be fulfilled in your life, and to annihilate all that hinders from your life.
- Characteristic: Praise Him, exalt Him, and glorify Him for it.
- Good Example: Ask the Lord for help, that He may strengthen you that you may live as that person lived.
- You may also share with God all the affairs of your life, and converse with Him about all your personal circumstances in detail; if they're spiritual issues, financial issues, physical issues, problematic circumstances; whether they be small or grand issues. God is your Father, therefore speak to Him in all simplicity because He loves you, and loves to listen to you.

Conversing with God is not constrained to your morning time or time at evening with Him, but you may also speak to Him during the day or night, while you are on the way, or on public transport, or at work, or at school, or at university, or at home, or in any place and at any time. Henceforth will your relationship and fellowship with God develop, as a major foundation stone in your holy walk with God?

SECONDLY

STANDING FIRM IN HIM

The new path for the believer requires a steadfastness in the Lord with a firm heart (Acts 11:13), so that the faith will not be swayed. The believer will often be bombarded with intense and fierce wars, which Satan has inaugurated to subdue the believer's determination, and to cause him to return to the Land of Sin, by utilising various weapons such as doubts, fears, lusts, despair etc... "Because your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8-9). But God is a good Father (Lk, 6:36) who will not leave you because you are His Son; as He said: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). He cares for you, satisfies your needs, fights for you, and will crush Satan under your feet (Rom. 16:20).

He has ordained for us manifold means of grace, through which we can abide and stand firm in Him and He in us; such as, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the gift of the Holy Spirit; as He has also ordained the means of being washed from our sins, through the Sacrament of Repentance, via the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

On top of all of these are also His abundant promises, which are true and faithful, giving strength to the weak, and bestowing vigour to the faint hearted.

Thus, by His abundant and manifold privileges, we are granted the capacity to lead a steadfast life in Him.

THIRDLY

FOLLOWING HIM

The believer, in his spiritual path, grows in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). He follows the Lord's footsteps, because He has left for us an example that we may walk in His footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21) and become His disciples (Lk. 9:23); that we may become like our Master, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...." (Rom. 8:29) So the believer would walk as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6) in sacrificial love, meekness and lowliness of heart, in holiness, in victory over temptations, in circumspection and kindness, in wisdom.... Etc.

The secret behind this Christ-likeness is continuous feeding on, and adoration of the excellence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the consecration of my heart for Him, to do His will, to glorify His Name, and to lawfully struggle under the guidance of an experienced spiritual counsellor.

FOURTHLY

MY DISCIPLESHIP

TO A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

The spiritual path requires the guidance of those who have preceded us in this holy walk. Especially that the problems which confront the new believer are abundant, and his experience of the ways of the spiritual life is dim; thus he needs to ask, understand, learn, practice and follow the steps of a spiritual guide, in whom Christ lives; hence, St. Paul said to Timothy, his disciple: “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance” (2 Tim. 3:10). For this reason, it is essential for the new believer to have an experienced spiritual guide, who may wisely lead him; while it is necessary for the believer to submit and to obey him, as St. Paul said:

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive; for they watch out for your souls as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

The apostles recognised the importance of discipleship, so they discipled the believers in every city in which they had preached, as the Holy Bible records of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas: “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra ...” (Acts 14:21). The fact is that what the apostles did was obedience to the Lord Jesus’ Commandment: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...” (Mtt. 28:19). If you desire to walk the spiritual path without straying, search for an experienced spiritual guide in whose leadership you trust, and submit to him and heed his directions “and lean not on your own

SUMMARY

CORRECTING MY WALK IN A LIFE WITH GOD:

1. Who has the right to walk with God?

(a) The redeemed sons:

(b) The sons are those who have received Him (Jn. 1:12)

2. Fellowship with God:

(a) Hearing the Lord's voice in the Holy Bible

(b) Speaking to the Lord as a Father, in prayer

3. Standing firm in Him:

(a) The secret of steadfastness is dealing with Him as a tender Father (Lk. 6:36)

(b) The ways of steadfastness include the means of grace and the Eucharist (Jn. 6:56)

4. Growing in Him:

(a) By following His footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21)

(b) The secret of growth is feeding on and adoring the person of Christ (Ps. 45:2)

5. Discipleship to a Spiritual Guide:

(a) To lead and guide him according to God's Commandment (Mtt. 28:19)

(b) Must obey and submit to Him (Heb. 13:17)

(c) Should follow His manner of life, faith and doctrine (2 Tim. 3:10)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the 3rd dimension in beginning with Christ?

Answer: -----

2. Who has the right to walk with God?

Answer: -----

3. What are the fundamentals of fellowship with God?

Answer: (a) -----

(b) -----

4. What does it mean to stand firm in the Lord?

Answer: -----

5. How do I stand firm in the Lord?

Answer: -----

6. What is the secret of standing firm in the Lord?

Answer: -----

7. What is the concept of spiritual growth?

Answer: -----

8. What is the secret of spiritual growth?

Answer: -----

9. What is your personal position in regards to the following: (a) Fellowship with God?

Answer: -----

(b) Standing firm in God?

Answer: -----

(c) Spiritual growth in God?

Answer: -----

DISCUSSIONAL BIBLE STUDY ON

HOW DO I

BEGIN WITH CHRIST?

When you have answered the following questions, you will acquire great benefit, as the elements are clarified before your eyes and you will see God's plan clearly. The questions are direct, and their answers are simple, not requiring wearisomeness. Refer to the Biblical references, and extract the verses, and they will enlighten you with the answers:

1. What are God's feelings towards people?

Proverb8:31 _____

Answer: -----

2 what is God's aim from creating mankind?

Ephesians1:5 _____

Answer: -----

3. What was the position of people in regards to God?

Isaiah53:6 _____

Answer: -----

4. What are the Wages of Sin?

Romans6:23 _____

Answer: -----

5. What is God's position regarding our sin?

Romans 5:8 _____

Answer: -----

6. What is Christ's personal initiative?

Revelations3:20 _____

Answer: -----

7. What should the repentant do?

(a) Acts3:19 _____

Answer: -----

(b) Romans10:10 _____

Answer: -----

8. Write one phrase inviting Christ to enter.

Answer: -----

9. Where does Christ dwell after being invited?

Eplesians3:17 _____

Answer: -----

10. What becomes of those who receive Him?

John 1:12 _____

Answer: -----

11. In the light of this, what is the position of Christ in your life?

Answer: -----

12. What is your position after receiving Christ?

Answer: -----

CONCLUSION

We have offered to you in this book, how to begin with the Lord Jesus Christ, a spiritual life and a holy walk.

And you have seen, my beloved brethren, the extent of God's everlasting love for us, and His design for us to be His children, and His plan for the salvation of our souls to restore us to our original rank.

Then we saw that life with the Lord is a daily fellowship through His word and prayer. We have also come to know that this life must be firm, and grow until it reaches the fullness of the measure of Christ.

I pray that you have obtained the blessing, which this book aims at, in Jesus Christ.

I ask the Lord to use this book as a blessing for many

AMEN