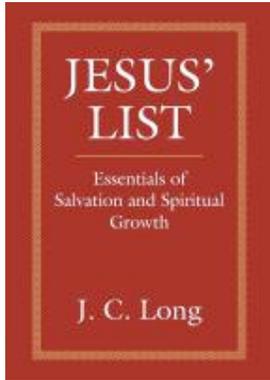


JESUS' LIST

Essentials of
Salvation and Spiritual
Growth

J. C. Long



Jesus' List, a "new" name for "The Book of Life," is the only listing of "saved" persons. Jesus (as Savior) established a new God-man covenant: free forgiveness for sin. A "second coming" will see Jesus return as the JUDGE of mankind. False teachers make the processes of salvation and spiritual growth difficult to understand and practice. Jesus' List teaches minimums for said processes: Faith (for salvation) and Love (for spiritual growth -- overcoming childish emotions).

Jesus' List

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and
Spiritual Growth

J.C. Long

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I IN HIS IMAGE

(There) are those that rebel against the light.

~ Job 24:3

To be human is to always be less than God – “Creator-creature” relationship, don’t you know? The record indicates that we are created “in his image” (Genesis 1:26). That doesn’t at all suggest equality with the Creator. To have been created perfect would make us equal to Him. Adam and Eve demonstrated man’s imbedded imperfection when they wrongly exercised their Creator-given prerogative of choice. They chose to turn their back upon the Creator-creature relationship designed by God -- by caving to the seductions of the *devil*; who slyly, falsely promised them that they could be equal to Him. Don’t we know that when the devil makes outrageously “attractive” promises he has no intention nor capacity to fulfill – we should *beware*? Sometimes those attractive but hollow promises come at us from unexpected directions, but always through *somebody* the devil is either temporarily using or *owns* outright.

The devil’s modus operandi showcases the element of surprise – he is the master of catching us off guard. That’s why God’s revelations to us include warnings to be vigilant. Satan **will** “rear his ugly head” to every one of us – but not when we’re fully armed, poised and ready to meet the

challenge (Ephesians 6:10ff and I Thessalonians 5:8). Unless: we learn to foresee and recognize those surprise appearances -- when his presence is manifested in people he owns -- and mentally practice Spirit-led counterattacks until they become spontaneous. The true model for learning to launch effective counterattacks upon the devil, of course, is Jesus. The way he handled the devil during his “temptation in the wilderness” is especially instructive -- (Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4).

We with imperfection burdened, *want* to be perfect. That’s fine, provided we “wait upon the Lord”, relying upon his total, undeserved forgiveness. However; Satan, Adam, and Eve thought they had found some sort of shortcut to perfection. God’s gift of freedom-of-will enables us to choose whom to follow. One *can* choose to follow Satan and try to be sufficient unto self – as if any human could ever be complete without the Father.

But our Father reaches out to us, desiring to draw *every one of us* to himself. Therefore, it is quite natural for us to have a deep feeling of incompleteness -- an emptiness and a longing, not to be *equal* to Him, but to be *united/reunited* with him and *fulfilled* through him. Typically, one is not aware of this until he begins to find himself unfulfilled after trying to satisfy his inner emptiness with creations (i.e. “money, power, stuff/things”) rather than with the Creator. I call this the “IT FACTOR”. The devil shows us tempting illusions of how we might become forever satisfied with some “thing”. For shocking relevant insights, ask the Holy

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Spirit to guide you through a study of Jesus' satanic temptation (referenced above).

We should be readily capable of identifying persons who plot and scheme to rule the world (or factions thereof, even small factions) -- and who USE "innocent bystanders" as expendable assets in attempting to realize their IT. Hitler's IT was to conquer, dominate, and rule the World. It is highly likely that Mao Tse Tung had that same IT planted in his evil heart. Some gangsters merely want to rule Sicily, Chicago or New York. For them, "That's it!" However; a vast majority of humans try to make themselves "content" by focusing attention and effort upon realizing some much lesser IT.

For instance; what if, upon first seeing a Ferrari sports car, you think, "This is it! I've gotta have a Ferrari. That would make my life complete". So, by hook or crook you "find" several hundred thousand dollars and you buy the Ferrari (maybe the devil drops lots of cash into your lap – it happens). Then, you discover that it is going to cost you thousands of dollars every time you have the thing serviced!

Wake up! "I'm not sure this thing can really make me happy."

So then you discover a classic car that is beautiful, impressive and affordable. That "IT" also fails to make you "happy", so you look for another and another and another "IT". Hopefully, you won't have to find out the "hard" way (like Jay Leno) that collecting hundreds of nearly perfect classic cars can't do IT either. Thus, we have the capacity to be fooled into believing that some *material thing* might be IT

– or perhaps that some *endeavor* (such as secular philanthropy) is it. Some “good” persons fall for this *after* they acquire “got-it-made” riches. The pocket change they give to charities seems like a lot to us regular folks; but Jesus says that the poor widow’s two mites (half a penny) are more (Matthew 12:42-43 and Luke 21:2-3).

After too many of the devil’s decoy IT’s have left one empty, one should begin to discover his own personal pathway to acknowledging and engaging his all-important sixth sense – and finally embark upon the pathway to genuine, forever wholeness. Christians know this as “being one with God” – a concept of “perfection” gained by-way-of agonizingly wonderful growing pains experienced *during* what might be left of one’s life in the flesh.

Perfectionist tendencies seem to be an observable human behavior that point to human craving gone awry. In accord with my admittedly limited knowledge of Judaism, Jews must try to achieve perfection by way of perfect obedience to The Law (known as “The Book of Moses” – the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible). This, of course, proves to be much more than a daunting task. Although we Christians believe we gain perfection by way of free and undeserved forgiveness; many of us, at some place and to some degree along life’s continuum, dally with the ancient mind-set of human perfection by way of perfect obedience to a long list of “dos and don’ts”. In reality, I see no evidence that we humans even have the capacity “*to rid our soul of one dark blot*” (from Billy Graham’s favored invitation hymn, “Just as

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I Am”, Charlotte Elliott) – although we **do** try. Think: “Clothes make the man”, body building, facelifts, tummy-tucks, “wrinkle erasers”, “Botox”, perfume, lipstick, powder, paint; and every perfectionist affectation known to man. Just for drill, analyze this saying: “Diamonds are forever” (a manmade saying that any thinker can readily recognize as B. S.).

Please consider the following illustration of the point. I once watched in disbelief as an acquaintance pitched a shade canopy. He first refused every offer of help, and then carefully gauged the sun and its pathway across our field. Then he drove the first stake, and connected a corner rope. Consulting a printed list of dimensions; from the first stake he marked the position for the first corner pole with a hand driven stake. From the first pole position, he measured the diagonal, and drove a stake marker for the center pole, the opposite corner pole, and the second corner stake and rope. He then duplicated his effort for the other two poles, stakes, and corner ropes. He then checked every measurement several times, moving the stakes a fraction of an inch each time. Then he meticulously rolled out the canvas into position, taking great care to remove each blade of grass. Finally, he rather ceremoniously raised and placed each corner pole in turn, and then the center pole.

After tweaking everything again, he gazed approvingly at his handiwork -- as I gazed incredulously at him. It seems to me that to harbor a mindset like his is to plant a minefield

directly in one's pathway -- and then try to negotiate that minefield, blindfolded and unaided, safely to the far side.

I've been accused from time to time of being tinged with perfectionism myself; but, in truth, I openly admit that I've never been able to thoroughly clean up my personal, literal and mental "junk rooms" (which I try to hide from others, of course. I too, have an ego). My own *junk rooms* continually remind me of who and what I really am. Mankind might be able to create a perfect person, place ("Utopia") or thing -- *in our minds, on paper or via "the arts"*; but that will be the only way he, she or it will ever actually exist. Can't a true artist look back upon his creations -- and point out the flaws?

While Moses tarried on Mount Sinai, communing with God on behalf of his people; Aaron, who had been left in charge of the Israelite horde, gave in to his emotionally overcharged "congregation" (people of little understanding) -- who could not settle and agree, even upon what they wanted. Aaron tried to create with his own hands a perfect thing worthy of worship -- that he hoped would have a calming effect upon his charges. Thus we have the infamous "golden calf".

By the way (speaking of the here and now); doesn't it seem wrong for a gifted, called, trained, ordained spiritual leader to give his sophomore charges what their childish emotions clamor for in corporate worship -- in lieu of what the Holy Spirit reveals to him as the (perhaps unpopular) real thing?

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As the Israelites gave themselves over to emotionality around their dumb golden calf, “corrupting themselves” (Exodus 32:7d) – (glance at the fabulously lustful lifestyles of today’s rich and famous); Moses’ second-in-command, Joshua, remarked that the noise of their revelry sounded like “a noise of war in the camp” (32:17b). Incidentally, I find Aaron’s explanation to Moses for the golden calf amusing, even comical: “*I threw a bunch of gold into the fire – and out came this calf!*” (32:24, paraphrased)

I once had an acquaintance who labored day-and-night, month-after-month (at great expense) on his personal *airplane*. Finally, he declared that the object of his affection was “damn near perfect”. I myself owned a 1940 Ford Deluxe Coupe for some 20+ years -- in which I invested time, money, blood, sweat and tears. I also cussed a lot while working on it; especially when a wrench slipped and I busted my knuckles. I finally realized that my “40” was, to an alarming degree, my own *personal idol*. And that’s why I agonizingly sold it -- and painfully watched as the new owner drove her away.

Do you have a personal idol that you can identify? Please don’t misunderstand me; I believe that *things* are okay, and that it’s okay for those things to be *real nice* – as long as we always keep God first and foremost in our hearts, minds, and activities. That’s not always easy to do, what with the devil tempting us incessantly.

Back to my point: Please do not allow any sincere but sincerely wrong person to convince you that, for instance; the

King James Version of the Bible, the Pope, or any other human, or *anything touched-tainted* by humans, is perfect. Since God is, by definition, the only one who is perfect; it naturally follows that if any other entity were indeed perfect – he, she or it would be God! According to my limited understanding, anyone who believes that any person other than God, or any place or thing on earth is perfect – is practicing idolatry. Of course, check this out to your own satisfaction through the Teacher.

One who actually desires to *see*; i.e., “None is so blind as he who *does not want to be bothered by seeing*”, might observe that down through the ages – from those who recorded Old Testament Scripture to Jesus’ original Disciples/New Testament writers -- to today: humans have not been able to *stop themselves* from *placing constructions* upon the pure, unvarnished Truth that believers find epitomized in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Did his disciples (everyone involved in voicing and/or recording the original Scriptures, both Old and New) place constructions upon the essential Gospel? My answer is also a question. Were they human?

Therefore; the record of God reaching out to embrace and lead his children has been skewed with an inescapable mingle of imperfection (*embellishment*, do you think?). And of course you and I do the same thing today. For instance, think Christian “*denominations*”. Every one of us is “guilty” of being imperfect! Everything that issues from the

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brain/thoughts/beliefs and activity of every human being is, and always will be, to some degree, *imperfect*.

Once one comes to grips with the truth about human imperfection, he can begin to see the aforementioned *constructions* for what they really are. But, do those constructions generated through man's imperfect understanding in any measure actually change the true Gospel? No, not at all – they simply constitute manmade smokescreens and obstacles through which it becomes more difficult to discern the essential truths of God. We literally make it more difficult for ourselves. I will always appreciate Walt Kelly's wise and wonderful *Pogo* 'Possum, who often warned us: "***We has met the enemy, and he is us***". Do you ever wonder ***who*** would ***want*** it to be more difficult for us to discern the essential Gospel? Please: Think about who might be muddying the water of our understanding!

Some of the persons who fiercely believe all that ***stuff*** are routinely called "fundamentalists and/or "conservatives". In actuality, they aren't any more fundamentalists/conservatives than Potiphar's pet peacock. I am a true fundamentalist/conservative: ***I believe that when one strays away from the foundational truths of God to embrace manmade doctrines taught by sincere but sincerely wrong "teachers"; he is necessarily wading around in deep do-do.***

Thus says the Lord: "*Those who worship me by teaching the precepts of men as doctrines -- are just wasting their time and effort. They are worshipping me in vain*" (Matthew 15:9, paraphrased).

The Lord will reveal to any believer who questions (makes up his own mind after examining the facts with the Teacher) that much of today's man-wanted, man-made "worship" is no more than an awful noise, as of insufferable, clanging, cymbals (I Corinthians 13).

Often "what we want" in our worship experiences amounts to a poor substitute for actually communing with God – indwelling Holy Spirit to Great Spirit Father-God. I hope that we parents/grandparents who *give our precious little ones everything they want* will someday wake up and realize: Hey! Our Father-God does not give us everything we want – so have we been doing harm to our children?

Thus says the Lord: "One who desires to find the real IT for his life will worship me ***the way I say*** – not the way he wants! My way is "***in spirit and in truth***" (from John 4:23-24). He also says, "Be ***still*** and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). It seems that God might have some difficulty getting through to someone who is vibrating all over the place clamoring after *excitement* in worship. God's approval is all that really matters; but it conjures up a bad feeling inside me when I hear folks talking about being "so excited" about worship. Seems to me the Church would benefit if more church folks would just settle down and actually draw close to God.

William Faulkner, in reference to his struggles in dealing with the imperfections of mankind superimposed upon the foundational truths of God, says:

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[We] *must teach ourselves that the basest of all things is to be afraid* [to speak openly about revealed truth] ... [We must] *leave no room in [our] workshop for anything but the old verities and truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.*

~ From his speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize. Stockholm, 12/ 10/1950

I once had a Geology professor who, in one memorable lecture, attempted to point out some of the “mistakes, inconsistencies, and imperfections” he found in the Bible. I (a true *sophomore*) actually called him down in that arena classroom. I never will forget it. Once he acknowledged my raised hand; I said, “*The essential **message** from God to mankind contained in the Bible is without any flaw of any kind. The way humans apprehended it and recorded it is demonstrably flawed*”. That insight had to come from God, because the devil does not want us to know that!

Concerning one of those Biblical inconsistencies the Professor alluded to; I’ve often wondered why only one of the four Gospel accounts indicates that one of the two thieves crucified with Jesus repents and is “saved”. Luke 23:39-43 gives us the well-known “thief on the cross”, who confesses belief in the Lord and is saved, i.e. “*Today you will be with me in paradise*”.

Matthew (27:44) and Mark (15:32) clearly state that *both* of the robbers crucified with him “reviled him”. Doesn’t that seem to be a contradiction? John (19:18) simply mentions

that two others were crucified with him. No mention of a “deathbed confession”. Can any of my readers bring light to this Biblical “inconsistency”? If so, then I might have a few other questions for you to help clear up.

By the way, there is an excellent book, Gospel Parallels (which I think is still in print) that lays out the four Gospel accounts, side-by-side, on each page – a very useful aid to making comparisons.

Who wants us to believe that the constructions with which we burden the Gospel are true? Who wants us to vehemently believe that matters peripheral to the essential Gospel are so all-fired important? (Pun intended). Who would want us to become fighting mad at anybody who brings these “fringe” beliefs into question? Guess who!

The devil instigates every church fight – including the ones I’ve been party to. I used to tell my congregation: If the Lord is in this place, it’s because someone **brought** Him here – someone who has the Holy Spirit residing in his heart. And if (when) the devil is in evidence in the church, it’s because someone brought him in. The devil can’t get into a church by floating in through cracks in the wall on particles of dust. Some wrong-hearted person has to bring him in.

Speaking of peripheral, religious beliefs; tell me: Exactly how, when and where does Jesus teach “tee-totaling”? How about “full immersion baptism” as necessary for salvation? One can become a Christian without being dunked; but can’t join most Southern Baptist Churches without being dunked. How about men-only deacons? What can we do with little-ole

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Phoebe? (Romans 16:1). These are just a few fringe beliefs Baptists often enjoy fighting about.

Yeah! John the Baptist himself established the Southern Baptist Convention! You don't believe it? You want to fight about it?

Did Jesus and/or his disciples (Peter?) actually do site preparation for the Roman Catholic hierarchy – the “Pope”, “Cardinals” and all? Do you believe the popular (but silly) notion that Peter is the “Rock” upon which the Church is founded? Is he indeed? Then mark that church as certain to rot, crumble, and utterly fall! Personally, I'm convinced that the Lord Jesus Christ is the “Rock” upon which the Church is founded.

“On Christ the Solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.” (Edward Mote, #406 in your '91 Baptist Hymnal).

I wonder if I could get an *Amen* to that?

Picture Jesus in his plain, soiled, sweaty, hand woven robe; and dusty, dirty feet – or, better still; picture him naked, ripped, bruised black and blue, bleeding, caked with blood, sweat, tears, spit, and dirt – **nailed** to a crude wooden cross. Picture Him in the evil hands of his false accusers -- dying at the hands of self-absorbed, shallow religionists. That's right, religionists – priests, scribes and Pharisees. Without them agitating, stirring up emotional strife, and demanding that Jesus die, there would not have been a crucifixion in the first place. The Romans, who found “no fault in him”, only carried out their demands (political correctness of the religious type).

So; picture the real Jesus (the only correct object of our worshipful admiration) next to the “Holy Father” in his well-guarded, immaculate, luxurious regalia. If the Pope “saves” you, you are in danger of hell’s fire!

Am I missing something here, or has mankind “discovered” a personage to *idolize* who is, at least externally – not like Jesus? One would think that underneath the splendid trappings of the Pope, the Cardinals (Protestant bluejays, jackdaws and tweety birds) – “*a basket full of birds*” (Jeremiah 5:27) -- one would only find poor, naked, soiled, flawed human beings – who, hopefully, are depending on forgiveness -- just like all the rest of us. [*Cornelius fell at the feet of Peter and worshipped him. Peter said, “Stand up, I am only a man.”-Acts 10:26*]. Paul and Barnabas tore their clothing when the people of Lystra tried to worship them. They said, “*We are only men.*” (Acts 14:14-15). Remember the first commandment?

When and where does Jesus ordain a Christian hierarchy? What exactly goes into the making of a “saint”? Is a person “elevated to sainthood” according to a judgment of THE JUDGE – or is sainthood determined politically by consensus of one’s peers? Who decides whether a person is “most reverent”, “right reverent” or “somewhat-reverent-sometimes”? I might go along with God having ordained all ministers as “ought to be reverent”, because that’s where every one of us actually is. I search in vain for exceptions. At times in my own life I might even have rightly been called irreverent. So – what?

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A lady with Roman Catholic upbringing was attending a Protestant church. She told a deacon, “My friend tried unsuccessfully for months to sell her house. She buried a statue of Saint Jude in her yard, and the house sold the next week!” The deacon answered, “She would have done just as much good to bury a dead possum.” Should we learn to discern the difference between faith and superstition?

There are many things about religions that I do not understand. Religion generates *problems!* And, Faith solves those problems. I don't agree with many religious beliefs, but I'm 100% sure of this: **Anybody, anywhere, anytime** (Jew, Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal or convict); **who looks up to Jesus and sees in Him the Christ-Savior – and who bares his heart and soul before Him, and asks Him to come in – is a Christian.** That is a recorded core fact about the salvation process when Jesus interacted with persons as He walked upon the earth. And it is now. He saves “*Whomever He wills*” (Romans 9:18). Only when **He** “exalts” a person is that person actually exalted. In my estimation, those “exalted by man” are nothing special (Matthew 23, Luke 14 and 18). God is not about to authorize any bunch of flawed religionists, in any wise, to alter that fact. Check it out for yourself: “***There is no respect of persons with God.***” (Rom 2:11, Eph 6:9, Col 3:25, James 2:1, I Peter 1:17).

Once upon a time a “fundamentalist” church (which housed a School) asked the Public School to send a psychologist to test one of their students. The weather was bitter-cold, so the lady psychologist arrived at the church

office wearing *pants*. The officials refused to admit her. She had to go home, don a skirt, and return in order to test their student. An official from that same church once “caught” a Sunday school teacher wearing his hair “long”. That lieutenant called the teacher in, propped his feet up on his desk, and smugly confronted him, asking, “Do you want to keep that teaching job you have?” The teacher’s response is not suitable to print here.

The constructions that church *owner* attached to the Gospel was a manmade list of don’ts: Women don’t wear pants, men don’t wear long hair, go to picture shows, smoke, drink, chew, mow their lawn or buy bread on Sunday – and they don’t cotton to people who do!

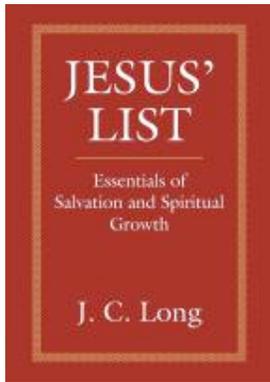
Here’s another puzzler: A preacher from another *denomination* once criticized a printed sermon of mine because I used the word, *gosh*. He said it was a “muted oath”, whatever that might be. What about: *golly*, *gee*, *gee whiz*, *jumpin’ Jehosaphat*, or *by jingo*? How about *by George*, *My goodness*, *Good gracious* or *My land*? My word!, *My*, *my*! *Good golly*, *Miss Molly*!

Wouldn’t there be hundreds of “muted oaths” Christians utter innocently every day? Of course, we could stop, confess, and get forgiveness every time we catch ourselves uttering a muted oath.

Are there too many self-appointed, painfully idealistic preachers “out there” who take *themselves* too seriously (It’s impossible to take Jesus too seriously) -- and make a career of picking the mosquito eyebrows out of the grits? Jesus says:

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“You blind guides! You fastidiously strain a gnat out of your milk – and then turn right around -- and swallow a whole camel!” (Matthew 23:24, paraphrased).



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