

My book is about my faith journey to Christianity, the struggles I experienced, the misconceptions I embraced, and the truths I learned. It's a book that can help others learn from my journey so they can avoid the mistakes I made.

**When Truth Knocks:
A Journey Through Life's Spiritual Fog**
By Eddie D. Fleming

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*Eternity is too long, heaven is too magnificent, and you are too loved by God
not to want the truth and nothing but the truth.*

WHEN TRUTH KNOCKS

A Journey Through Life's Spiritual Fog



EDDIE D. FLEMING



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Chapter 3:

The Shortcuts to Avoid

I discovered that shortcuts are not the way to go when searching for God. Yet, many people have and continue to try shortcuts; I know I did. Although I was not raised in a religious household, my parents did believe in God. But we were like so many who accepted the existence of God and that Jesus was God's Son. We even occasionally prayed. But our lives were guided, not by the Scriptures, but by moralistic principles.

But then, the truth of God's Word came knocking. It forced me to face an unpleasant truth about a universal problem. I had a sin problem that a spiritual shortcut couldn't fix. I discovered I was living under a cloud of deception while singing the songs of the gospel. I was lost spiritually but thought I was saved eternally.

How could I have been so deceived? It happened because I took a shortcut to God. But instead of God, I ended up with a cultural Christianity, which is both Christless and useless. My wrong turn occurred that night when my friend and her dad took my brother and me to the tent meeting, which I mentioned earlier. Although I didn't realize it as I took my first step toward

The surprising thing about religion is that it inoculates you from God. We neither seek God nor are we open to God when we think we have God.

the front of the tent, I began my spiritual journey, but by the wrong road. However, many years later, I would realize that I had taken a shortcut that led me, not to God, but into religion.

The surprising thing about religion is that it inoculates you from God. We neither seek God nor are we open to God when we think we have God. Religion creates a false connection with God. Could many who claim to have abandoned God or left the Christian faith have only abandoned their faulty connection? Could they have left behind a religious mindset and system that they equated as a relationship with God?

The spiritual shortcut I took, left me lost and deluded. As a young boy, I was suddenly confronted with a universal problem of sin, the wrath of God, and the flames of hell, which were a lot to consider. It happened so quickly it was like a dream. To hook me up with God, a well-meaning evangelist and a good-hearted pastor, combined to make me a professor of faith without enabling me to become a possessor of God.

I don't remember the songs or the sermon that night, but I remember the invitation. It was well crafted. It was compelling. It was clear. It was straightforward. "Heaven or hell, which will it be? Turn or burn; it's your choice. If heaven, raise your hand. If you're serious, stand on your feet. Now come forward." So, we did. My brother and I both went to the front of the tent.

After we reached the front, they took us to a curtained-off section. We were quickly presented with an unfamiliar gospel (we were unchurched), encouraged to decide for Christ, asked to pray a specific prayer (known as the sinner's prayer), and then thoroughly assured, "You're now saved. You've asked

Unfortunately, for me,
nothing happened.
I'm not talking about
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mean, nothing
happened.

Christ into your heart, and He is faithful to come. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. You're a child of God."

Unfortunately for me, nothing happened. I'm not talking about angels singing and fireworks exploding. I mean, nothing

happened. Despite the efforts of a local pastor, I didn't have a desire to go to church, read my Bible, or share the gospel. There were no signs of spiritual fruit and no passion for spiritual things. The only thing I had from that night was the statement, "You're saved, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise." I didn't need God from that moment on because I supposedly had Him. My gospel (not Jesus') was all wrapped up in one thing, a decision. Understand me. It takes a decision. We can't become followers of anything or anyone without deciding to follow. But in Christianity, the decision is only one aspect of salvation.

Salvation is how God opens the gates of heaven for us. It puts us on the pathway to heaven and away from death and hell. A decision to follow Christ is a part of the process known as salvation, but it's not in any way meant to be the all-in-all of salvation. Unfortunately, I had unknowingly embraced hypocrisy. I left that tent meeting living a lie, but it would be several years before I would realize it.

Jesus warns about such shortcuts:

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14)

The narrow gate and the hard way will lead to true peace, inner fulfillment, and eternal life. But according to Jesus, there will be few who find it. Why? Because we are suckers for shortcuts, easy trails, and spiritual roads without tolls (commitment).

In the search for spiritual contentment, inner peace, and a sense of purpose, we must be on guard against the temptation of shortcuts. They promise spiritual fixes, guilt-relief without confession, and forgiveness without repentance, but they do not deliver. So, if you are offered peace with no spiritual substance, a sense of wholeness that's incomplete, a sense of spirituality void of power, and the promise of heaven without salvation, just say no. When we resist the Devil, he will flee from us and take his counterfeit salvation with him.

The all-inclusive, ever-accommodating, don't offend anyone philosophy promoted as the gospel is nothing more than a commercialized shortcut. Those who take it travel far from

In a world of irresponsibility, we must take responsibility for every area of our lives, physical and spiritual.

God and into a world of religion and a lifetime of bondage. The unpleasant truth we must all face is we could be wrong—we could be living under a cloud of deception. We may have taken a shortcut amid all the spiritual fog in this world.

Spiritual Responsibility

In a world of irresponsibility, we must take responsibility for every area of our lives, physical and spiritual. The experts we look to can misinform, mislead, and make life miserable for us. They are human. They make mistakes. Even well-meaning doctors, nurses, ministers, and pastors are not perfect.

For instance, medical workers are experts in physical and mental health, but we must still take responsibility for our health. We cannot leave it totally to our physician or nursing staff. They could be incompetent. They could prescribe the wrong medication. Nurses and doctors can make mistakes.

When I was about 16 or 17 years old, I received a weekly allergy injection. On one particular day, the regular nurse was on vacation. The substitute nurse had worked for this doctor before, so I knew her. But as she was about to inject the serum, I noticed that the dosage was much larger than I'd ever received. Although she's the expert and I'm not, it's my arm and my life, so I spoke up. I said, "I see that my doctor has really upped the amount of serum." She then questioned me about what I meant. My response prompted her to recheck the prescribed dosage. She then thanked me several times for speaking up. She was about to inject me with one cc of a serum instead of one-tenth of a cc. Ten times, the prescribed amount

could have sent me into anaphylaxis shock, possibly resulting in my death. We have to be responsible. We have to be observant. We have to take an active interest in our physical and spiritual health. Therefore, when someone offers us spiritual shortcuts or supposed new truths, search the Scriptures to see “What saith the Lord?”

Furthermore, hoping things will turn out okay is not a plan. It is not taking responsibility. Therefore, one must do more than hope and dream about going to heaven and living eternally in bliss.

Being an idealist is okay, but we must be willing to face reality. Don't fall for the bait used by con people. They offer cell revitalizing vitamins, miracle anti-aging creams, and special potions that can sustain sexual virility and physical longevity, but they can't deliver. Furthermore, eventually, reality comes knocking. Realists understand that no escape tunnels, back door exits, magic wardrobes, or mirrors can take us to a land without death.

The reality of death forces us to open our minds to the validity of spirituality. The certainty of death is why we need to evaluate our beliefs and their foundation. We need to know the truth, not someone's version of it. We need to have confidence that our belief is the right solution to our problem. Does it have the support of a trusted and proven source?

Although I had a belief system early on, it had little substance. Although I was confident I was on my way to heaven, my confidence was based on faulty premises and manufactured promises loosely tied to Scripture passages. Am

I the lone exception? I don't think so. Could it happen to others? Absolutely. Could it be true of you? You decide.

Could this be one reason many Christian teens are dropping out of church? Have they been duped into believing they are Christians, when in fact, they have embraced religiosity? In 2007 Lifeway Research surveyed more than 1,000 adults between the ages of 18-30 who had attended a Protestant church for at least one year during high school. According to the study, 70 percent of young adults ages 23-30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18-22. ”³

Could this also be why, in my 30-plus years as a pastor, I have observed those whose beliefs cannot give them peace and security when faced with death? If we don't anchor our beliefs to a biblical foundation, the winds of life will blow them away when we need them the most, during the storms of life and in times of death.

Misinformation, missing information (spiritual ignorance), and eisegesis, the reading of one's ideas into a biblical text rather than the correct interpretation of the text, create a host of false and unsupported beliefs. Moreover, this ignorance leaves one's beliefs susceptible to the enemy's attacks and one's own internal doubts and fears.

Therefore, we must take responsibility for our spiritual growth and health. It is also why the Bible instructs believers to “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). This growth helps to provide the security and peace needed when death approaches. Furthermore, our children and grandchildren also need to grow

Any shortcut that bypasses in-depth biblical knowledge, is a shortcut to a spiritual twilight zone where beliefs are many, but realities are few.

spiritually so their beliefs and convictions can stand firm when confronted by other religions or supposed contradictions by science. However, this growth doesn't just happen; it requires effort, learning, and time.

Any shortcut that bypasses in-depth biblical knowledge is a shortcut to

a spiritual twilight zone where beliefs are many, but realities are few. Christian beliefs, not anchored to biblical truths, cannot survive in an ever increasingly pluralistic, atheistic, skeptical, post-Christian world. Therefore, I ask. Are your beliefs anchored to the solid rock of biblical truth? If not, they should be.

Unfortunately, it would be many years before I would discover that the shortcut I took provided me with false hope of heaven by false premises and incomplete truths.

When I returned home from that tent meeting, I was twice a child of hell. Sadly, I had falsely believed that I was safe spiritually. Several years later, I began attending a small church, but it would be another two years before realizing my deception. My shortcut to God took me down the road of illusion and into a land of counterfeits.

Just as pain medicine can mask our real problem, a false conversion can mask our actual need for God. A false

conversion allows us to join a church, sing with the best of them, and sleep well at night. However, it doesn't transform us.

Unfortunately, counterfeit salvation is as common as gamblers at a horse race, except there are no winners. All the major religions offer some type of spiritual salvation. But are they simply providing false illusions? Is Christianity the only way, or is it just one of many to heaven, as often claimed? We must ask these questions along the way. And we must never settle for shortcuts to God.

Follow the Directions

Many signs that provide directions and essential information confront us when traveling on the highways. We trust them because of their source, the United States Transportation Department. The same is true for our spiritual journey. We need a source we can trust.

Thankfully, there is a source we can trust. There is a way to avoid deadly shortcuts. We need to look for signs showing how Christianity differs from other religions. We need something

Although we cannot comprehend the Bible without the Holy Spirit, we also cannot understand it without using our brains.

that can help us avoid those fatal shortcuts. The Bible provides the information necessary to avoid the dangerous shortcuts we don't need.

The Bible reveals that Christianity is based on faith, but not blind faith. On the contrary, it's based on a faith that makes logical sense within the framework of God's redeeming plan. But, don't misunderstand me; the Bible is not clear to those not connected to God, for they cannot understand the truths of God without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the Christian faith, and many other spiritual issues will not make sense.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Although we cannot comprehend the Bible without the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand it without using our brains. Becoming a Christian should not cause us to check our brains at the foot of the altar or the door of the church. So, I ask you to open your mind and carefully weigh the information provided in the upcoming chapters. Don't try taking shortcuts by bypassing certain sections.

Regardless of what you believe about Christianity or a particular branch of Christianity, make sure your belief and decisions are based on biblical knowledge. Beware of the dangers of spiritual shortcuts. And be sure to examine the truths of the Bible honestly and openly.

Shortcuts may play a significant role in why people claim Christ as Savior yet deny Him as Lord. It may be why some worship God on Sundays but forget Him on Mondays. Shortcut

believers may claim to love God while harboring hatred and bitterness toward others. They say they believe the Word of God but pick the parts of the Bible they will and will not obey. Shortcuts create enormous problems. Taking spiritual shortcuts results in theological confusion. They bypass fundamental biblical teachings on such things as the depraved nature of humanity, the demands of God's holiness, the essentialness of faithfulness, the lordship of Jesus, and the reality of heaven and hell.

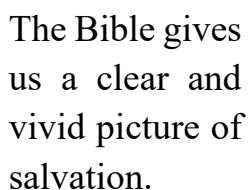
In contrast, the right path to heaven is paved with biblical knowledge. When we view the Bible with an open and honest mind, the Holy Spirit assists us in seeing the truths embedded in it, including the necessity of salvation and the means to it. I realize this position is often viewed as arrogant, narrow-minded, and exclusionary. Such a statement would be guilty of these accusations if it were not true, but it is true. Since it is true, it is not an arrogant conclusion but a truth that we should share for the good and benefit of others.

The allurement of shortcuts is why we must remain vigilant. Therefore, be on guard. Be alert. Be honest with yourself. If our faith is not based solely on God's Word, it has an unstable

If our faith is not based solely on God's Word, it has an unstable foundation that will crumble when the storms of life and the blasts of skepticism come our way.

foundation that will crumble when the storms of life and the blasts of skepticism come our way.

There are no shortcuts to discovering the truth. We have to ask questions. We have to search the Scriptures. We cannot be satisfied with what others say about the Scriptures, regardless of whether they promote or denounce them. We must check them out for ourselves. Why? Well, the Bible is the key to discerning between a road that leads to heaven and one that leads to hell. The Bible gives us a clear and vivid picture of salvation. Although listening to others who share, teach, and preach from the Bible is good, we should confirm their words by the words of Scripture.



The Bible gives us a clear and vivid picture of salvation.

We see why this is important from the biblical account of two men, Paul and Silas. Paul had been hostile to the Christian faith. He had done everything he could to stomp it out. But after being confronted by the resurrected Jesus, Paul obeyed Christ's command. He began preaching and teaching that Christ was the Son of God, the way to God, and the pathway to eternal life.

However, the people in the city of Berea were not content with just hearing his take on it. The Bereans searched the Old Testament to determine if he spoke the truth. They wanted biblical confirmation of what he had told them. They were not willing to take a shortcut to spiritual knowledge.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” (Acts 17:11-12)

After they consulted the Scriptures, the Bereans became believers because they confirmed that Paul and Silas spoke the truth about God, Jesus, and salvation. This kind of confirmation is still needed. We need to examine and measure all spiritual teachings by the Scriptures—the ultimate spiritual yardstick. We need to be like Sergeant Joe Friday of the old television series *Dragnet*, who said that *all we need are the facts, just the facts*. In our case, we need spiritual truths found in the Bible.

According to many, the Bible is unnecessary for spirituality. A Google search is sufficient for most. Consequently, the air is full of unbiblical and unfounded beliefs. Some common beliefs are “Just be sincere about what you believe. That’s what matters” “Christ died for everyone so that everyone will be saved, regardless of what they believe or how they live.”

Many have bought into universalism, believing that all religions are equal and will take everyone to the same place—heaven, but through different avenues. Unfortunately, many have accepted these and other beliefs as true. Sadly many are mistakenly confident about their salvation. Mark Twain said,

“It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

An increasing number of people are wrongly satisfied that there’s nothing from which to be saved. According to Lifeway Research Center, “A majority of Americans (56%) say hell is a real place where some will be punished forever.”⁴

These results mean 44% don’t believe in the existence of hell. Unfortunately, many ministers and churches soft-sell the doctrine of hell or avoid it altogether. It is rarely, if ever, emphasized in most sermons by well-known television ministers. (Just tune them in, and you will see.)

The problem is that Satan has deceived many into believing they must embrace marketing techniques to the point of scrapping objectionable doctrines such as hell. When the guardians of the gospel—pastors and priests—sidestep important doctrinal truths such as hell, sin, and the need for salvation, Satan fills this vacuum with manufactured avenues to heaven.

Shortcuts that navigate around a belief in hell will soon, if not already, avoid a belief in the sinfulness of man, the wrath of God, and the judgment of God. It will eventually bypass the necessity of Christ’s death to deal with our sin problem and the judgment facing us. Shortcuts may save us time, effort, and miles when traveling, but they can be a shortcut to hell in the spiritual realm.

Salvation cannot be based on or shaped by opinion polls or Madison Avenue marketing techniques. Only God can determine it, for only God has the authority to do so. He defines the when, what, why, and how of it. He decides the reason for

it, the changes it produces, the benefits it provides, the pathway to it, and how to have the assurance of it.

Genuine assurance of salvation is vital, but it requires a clear understanding of the who, what, and how of salvation. We must know the who's who of salvation before we can grasp the certainty of it and have confidence in it. We must know who does the saving, who needs saving, and how it is accomplished. We can't obtain this kind of information through shortcuts. We can't find it under a rock, in a dream, or on the internet (apart from the Bible). It must be given to us, unveiled for us, and received by us. God has provided all we need in a book we call the Book of books—the Bible.

Therefore, we need a thorough understanding of what the Bible teaches about this specific, essential, life-changing, soul-saving issue. However, this book is not an all-inclusive study of the doctrine of salvation (Soteriology) or an in-depth understanding of the doctrine of heaven (Ouranology). However, it offers insights for the non-scholarly person who desires a sure salvation by a wonderful Savior who provides eternal life in a glorious place called heaven.

Heaven is too important and eternity is too long to be seduced by the lure of shortcuts that lead to a counterfeit heaven that is no heaven at all. So, we must resist the temptation of shortcuts and guard against embracing counterfeit salvations.

Chapter 8: The Spiritual Benefits

We live in a *what's in it for me* culture. Our concern is for number one. Today's common philosophy is that it is more blessed to receive, and *I want my blessing now*. We view everything from a worldly standpoint. The primary question of the day is, "Can it help me financially, relationally, socially, or vocationally?" Yet, are we any different from Jesus's day? Were the people in the New Testament time just as self-centered and opportunistic? Yes, if the actions of Jesus' disciples are any sign.

In Matthew chapter 19, a wealthy young ruler came to Jesus, asking Him what he needed to inherit eternal life. When Jesus told him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor and follow him, the rich young ruler went away sad, and Peter went to Jesus with a question. Peter, speaking on behalf of himself and the other disciples, wanted to know what they would get from following Him since they had given up everything. Their focus was on getting, not giving, on putting money in their pockets, not leading sinners to the Savior. They were concerned with *what's in it for us?*

Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" 28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have

followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:27-29)

Instead of rebuking Peter for thinking, *what's in it for us?* He encouraged him and the other disciples with promises of positions and power. Also, He promised all of His followers' rewards of a hundredfold and eternal life once they arrive in His new kingdom. We see in this that it's okay to point out the rewards and benefits of heaven. Jesus uses our self-concern to put us on the right road to heaven. He wants us to know that the joys and rewards of heaven are worth the sacrifices and hardships of this life. However, in contrast to a health and wealth gospel, Jesus describes the difficulty of this life. Those who live a Christ-like life will have to travel, as He put it, a narrow road and through a straight gate with no place to lay your head.

However, a hard life should not surprise us. As long as we are down here, we are not home yet. Our good days are ahead of us. Our best life is not now but reserved for us in heaven, where our rewards await us. In the end, it will be worth it all—the old gospel song “When We All Get To Heaven” says it well.

*Sing the wondrous love of Jesus
Sing His mercy and His grace*

Eddie D. Fleming

*In the mansions bright and blessed
He'll prepare for us a place*

*When we all get to heaven
What a day of rejoicing that will be
When we all see Jesus
We'll sing and shout the victory*

*While we walk the pilgrim pathway
Clouds will overspread the sky
But when travelin' days are over
Not a shadow, not a sigh*

*When we all get to heaven
What a day of rejoicing that will be
When we all see Jesus
We'll sing and shout the victory*

*Onward to the prize before us
Soon his beauty we'll behold
Soon the pearly gates will open
We shall tread the streets of gold*

*When we all get to heaven
What a day of rejoicing that will be
When we all see Jesus
We'll sing and shout the victory*

*When we all see Jesus
We'll sing and shout the victory*

In the second stanza, the author writes,

While we walk the pilgrim pathway
Clouds will overspread the sky
But when travelin' days are over
Not a shadow, not a sigh

Whatever the cost, whatever the loss, whatever
the pain, whatever the shame, it will be worth
it all.

As we travel the pilgrim's pathway on earth, we will have clouds, storms, and tragedies that will overshadow our journey, but we have a home prepared for us in heaven. The author of this song understood the difficulties of this life very well. Eliza Edmunds Hewitt wrote this song in 1898. She was a devoted Christian who wanted to make a difference in the lives of children as a teacher. However, according to Robert J. Morgan, an unruly student slammed his slate across her, severely injuring her back. After enduring a heavy cast for six months, she could finally walk. Still, the after-effects of her injury prevented her from returning as a teacher. She then devoted herself to studying the Bible and hymn-writing.⁸

In Romans 8:18, the Bible states, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” So we, too, should consider the sufferings and heartaches of this life not worthy of being compared to the glories of heaven.

Whatever the cost, whatever the loss, whatever the pain, whatever the shame, it will be worth it all. Although some say that the devil is in the details, the joys of salvation are also in the details. Therefore, we need to consider the facts of our salvation. We begin with the benefits.

These heavenly benefits are eye-catching, soul gripping, and eternally satisfying. God designs them to appeal to a lost humanity. He knows what it takes to get our attention because He made us. He knew it would take a burning bush that didn’t burn up for Moses, a storm at sea for Jonah, a talking donkey for Balaam, a dream for Joseph, a crowing rooster for Peter, and nail-scarred hands for Thomas. And to a self-centered world, He promises eternal life and the immeasurable riches of heaven. God appeals to the sinful flesh of humanity to get the sinful flesh out of humanity. The lure of heavenly fortune catches the eye of many, and then the Holy Spirit points them to the pearl of great price—Jesus.

However, the benefits of salvation are not just for our heavenly home but also our journey along the way. Christ lived around thirty-three years on this planet so that He could experience all the hardships and sufferings of this world. He knows our needs, and through our ongoing relationship with Him, He provides all we need physically and spiritually.

God meets our needs through our salvation. Yet, although the word *salvation* is a frequently used word throughout Christianity, many do not understand the benefits associated with it?

Salvation implies someone or something being delivered or saved from something undesirable or dangerous. Biblical salvation includes being delivered from the consequences of sin, the power of sin, and the wrath of God. Those knowledgeable about Christianity know that its teachings stress salvation from hell; however, many do not understand other aspects or benefits of salvation.

The more we know of the benefits of salvation, the more we appreciate the value of salvation. But just what are they? Salvation delivers us from hell, the dominion of sin, and self. So we will first look at what it teaches about being saved from hell.

Saved from Hell

Biblical salvation involves being saved from a literal hell. Although the talk of hell is not politically or culturally well-received these days, it is necessary. The idea of hell, as well as many other spiritual matters, varies from person to person. For many, their concept of God, heaven, hell, and other spiritual issues are often nothing more than the products of their desires and longings. As a result, many reject the reality of hell, relegating it to horror movies and fantasy or a place reserved for ruthless people.

Although this book is about my spiritual journey and heaven as my destination, my understanding of God's salvation and hell's reality comes from the same place—God's infallible Word. If I or anyone

Every sin is a rejection of God's authority over us, therefore, rebellion justifies His wrath and our punishment.

cannot believe all the teachings of God's Word, can we truly trust any of it? Either God has conveyed Himself and His thoughts to us, or He hasn't. If He hasn't, we have no sure direction and no sure hope of eternal life. But if He has, we can be saved, know that we are saved, enjoy being saved, and be sure of both a hell to shun and a heaven to gain.

To the surprise of many, hell is an actual place. How do I know this is true? Because Christ and His Word say so. Although we may deny it or ignore it, hell doesn't cease to exist because we don't like it. Hell is real, but it doesn't have to be a reality for us. Christ has provided the means to avoid it. Hell was initially designed for the angels who rebelled in heaven. "For God did not spare even the angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, in gloomy pits of darkness, where they are being held until the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:4).

Unfortunately, humanity has rebelled against God. Therefore, hell became our destination. The problem many have with hell is that they categorize sins. They view people who live law-abiding lives and treat their family, friends, and neighbors well as not deserving of hell. They see it as a place

reserved for the evil people of the world. They and we fail to realize that all sins, both small and large (small and large as to their impact and consequences), are offspring of the father of all sins, the sin of rebellion. Every sin is a rejection of God's authority over us; therefore, rebellion justifies His wrath and our punishment.

Jude warns us of the consequences of rebellion. He writes, "Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion" (Jude 11).

In Numbers 16:1-23, Korah instigated a rebellion against Moses' leadership. He and 250 other leaders of the nation challenged Moses, but in doing so, they also rebelled against God, who had put Moses in charge. In the end, God opened the earth and swallowed these leaders and all their families. There is no sin more damaging to our relationship with God than that of rebellion. It occurred first in the garden with Adam and Eve and continues to plague all of humanity since that day.

But that punishment doesn't have to take place. There is a way to escape it. Jesus emphasized the need to do whatever it takes to stay out of hell. By use of hyperbole (an exaggeration for effect). He states:

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if

your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ (Mark 9:43-48)

He is not literally saying we should cut off our hand or foot or pluck out our eye. Instead, he says that we should take whatever extreme measures are necessary to avoid hell. Giving total control of one’s life over to Jesus is an extreme measure but a necessary one.

Although all sin is a sin of rebellion, there’s also the sin beneath the sin. When I heard this term used in a sermon by Tim Keller, pastor of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, it stuck with me. What he was getting at is that beneath every sin, there is another sin. Although we might not view some sins as worthy of punishment or judgment, underneath every sin is found the greatest of all sins, the violation of the Great Commandment.

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the greatest, He provided us with a guiding principle for all our actions, which is love:

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as

yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)

When Jesus said on these two commandments depend on all the law and the prophets, He gave us the foundation for all relationships, which is the foundation of love. Therefore, any act or thought that violates the principle of love is a sin that violates the greatest of all commandments, the commandments to love God and others. For instance, if I lie about someone, I sin against God by lying, but I also sin by not loving the person I lied about or lie to. Likewise, if I steal something, I sin by stealing, but I also sin by not loving the one I stole from. James also points this out in his letter.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. (James 2:8-10)

James says that the law of love is the royal or supreme law; thus, any act or thought that violates it is a royal sin. Therefore, any sin condemns us to hell because all sin is rebellion, as well as the breaking of God's royal law, the law of love.

However, because of Christ's love and sacrifice, we have the means to be saved from hell. But it doesn't stop there. God's love and salvation do more than protect us from hell; they also deliver us from sin's controlling power or dominion over us.

Saved from Sin's Power

The fog of American's spirituality prevents many from seeing an important truth. *Christians are saved from sin's power.* But, unfortunately, far too many live much as they did before professing faith in Christ. Studies reveal no discernible difference between the lifestyles of many professing Christians and non-Christians.

Such surveys have shown no discernible difference between the number of Christians and non-Christians who get divorced.

Although some divorces are justified and biblical, many are not. Christians should rarely find themselves faced with a troubled marriage that the grace of God and, with the help of others, cannot be restored. Do we not have a source of wisdom, love, and power non-Christians don't have?

Another sign of a lack of spiritual power and holiness among Christians is cohabitation before marriage. Unfortunately, the sinfulness of cohabitation has been flushed down the toilet by a world that worships sex. All the while, the church is silent.

What is happening? Why is the Bible losing its authority among Christians? How can believers be salt and light in a dark and immoral world when many live contrary to the Bible's teachings? They can't. The Bible is clear about salvation

delivering us from the power of sin. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And to further clarify God’s stand on morality, Peter writes:

When we continue to live like the world, after claiming to receive Jesus as Savior, something is not right.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ (1 Peter 1:14-17)

When we continue to live like the world, after claiming to receive Jesus as Savior, something is not right. As my aunt Irene and aunt Artie used to say, “There’s a skunk in the woodpile.”

A salvation that doesn’t save us from the dominating power of sin gives evidence that there’s a skunk in the woodpile. Something just doesn’t smell right. What’s wrong? What’s the answer?

Deception! Deception occurs among Christians and non-Christians. Deception can and has worked its magic on the minds of many, causing them to see no wrong in an activity that the Bible clearly labels as sinful. Deception can cause us to believe we are saved when we are not. The spiritual fog that

engulfs our churches fills the airwaves and is found in the tweets and blogs of the internet, blinds us to the truth of God's Word. What reality are we blinded to? The people of God have power from God to live a life that honors God.

Can a person be saved yet continue to live a life of sin? I'm sure you've already guessed it; the Bible says no. One of the benefits of salvation is that it delivers us from a life of sin—from sin's domineering power. Does this mean that true Christians will never sin? Of course not. God's salvation doesn't make us perfect, at least not in this world. We live in a sinful world, and the flesh is still with us, but once we receive Christ, we have a power from on high.

Although we have the power, we don't automatically have the knowledge or wisdom to use it. So we are instructed to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Although it is a fact that Christians sin and immature Christians sin more often, it is not true that a follower of Christ can live in a state of consistent and willful sin. A salvation that delivers us from hell can deliver us from sin's power.

Having said this, can a person struggle with a particular sin? Absolutely. But the keyword is *struggle*. If Christ is in us, we can never be comfortable living in ongoing sin. If Christ is in us, we may struggle with sin and be defeated by sin. Still, we will never surrender to sin and most definitely not justify it, accommodate it, and be content with it.

An absence of holiness and a willful persistence in sin shows a lack of Christ. This kind of lifestyle and attitude is typical of an unregenerate state. Such a person cannot confidently or biblically claim to be saved or expect to enter heaven's gates. Any so-called salvation that cannot deliver us from sin's power is a counterfeit. The spiritual fog is thick with this truth. It often blinds us to the reality of sin and the ability of Christ to deliver us from evil. It clouds our minds and weakens our will. It allows us to make excuses and encourages us to reinterpret the Scriptures to accommodate sin and its pleasures.

Amid this fog, a truth needs to be considered. Sometimes the issue is not Christians struggling with sin, which they cannot overcome, but a sinner struggling with Christianity, which is still at arm's length. Satan is a master deceiver. Unfortunately, much of what I see today is a form of Christianity that doesn't meet the criteria of biblical Christianity. Many are embracing a form of *moralistic therapeutic deism*, a term coined by sociologist Christian Smith. This counterfeit Christianity often

Any so-called salvation that doesn't deliver us from sin's power is a counterfeit.

embraces moral principles found in the Bible. Still, it allows a person to be disconnected from God while viewing Him as a 24/7 butler and therapist. However, the one thing this counterfeit doesn't do is confront and condemn sin.

We need to consider two questions in light of Christians who brazenly sin. First, can a Christian

continue in sin? But, of course, the answer is no. Next, can a sinner (one who continues to sin) yet, be saved? And the answer is yes. A sinner can be saved if they realize they are not saved. Suppose we can get past decades of spiritual fog. In that case, we will see clearly that deliverance from sin's controlling power is one benefit of salvation. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it" (Romans 6:1-2)?

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14)

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

Those in Christ may choose to sin, but they do not have to sin. Before we came to Christ, we had no choice. We were under sin's power. But now that we are in Christ, and He is in us, we have been set free from the hold sin had on us. Although we are no longer physically bound by sin, we may be in mental bondage. It's like an elephant raised in a circus. Those of us who have been to a circus are often amazed at how a small metal

We can be over-comers through Christ and His power, but only if we clearly understand what God says about sin, salvation, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

stake driven in the ground can restrain a huge, mighty elephant. Why doesn't the elephant pull the stake out of the soil or break the chain or rope holding him to the stake? Why does he stay in bondage when he doesn't have to? Why doesn't he use the power he has to give him the freedom he desires?

The answer lies in his past. When he was small and weak, the rope or chain and stake were strong enough to hold him. As a baby elephant, he tried many times to break free, but to no avail. Thus, he came to believe he could never break free, so he stopped trying. Now, as an adult, he has the power to be free but stays in physical bondage because he's in mental bondage.

Christians can be free from sin's domineering influence. We can be over-comers through Christ and His power, but only if

we clearly understand what God says about sin, salvation, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Christians must let go of their pre-Christian past. We must transform our thinking. We must allow God's Word to reshape our thoughts and give us the strength we need to live a holy and committed life for God's glory. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

The Bible is clear. Christians have the power to be light to the world and salt to the earth, which is good news for a world filled with addictions, habits, insecurities, codependency, hatred, anger, violence, and sexual bondage. Never has our nation and churches needed more light and salt. The need for a moral and spiritual awakening is right here and right now.

Conservative political action groups may influence the laws of the land and the politicians on the hill, but they will never change the heart of a nation. To reverse the spiritual decline of our country and churches, we need biblically saved Christians, not professing Christians. Only the saved can tap into the power of God.

Therefore, we should expect holiness from those who claim to have a holy Jesus as Lord and Savior. We should expect it because they have received a new heart and new spirit that are sensitive to God's things, submissive to the Word of God, and empowered by the Spirit of God. We should expect it because Christ not only delivers us from sin's dominion, He also delivers us from self.

Delivered From Self

Put two small children in a room together and give each a different toy. Before long, each will want the toy the other has. It's in our genes to be selfish and self-focused. However, it is becoming fashionable among adults in today's society (as long as your selfishness doesn't impede my selfishness). Violating the rights of others and breaking the laws of the land is never right. Furthermore, good motives, just causes, or unfair practices of the past do not justify selfish actions, ignoring the rights of others, and breaking the laws of the land. Two wrongs never make for right, and they never will.

Our nation has become the world's capital of individual freedoms and personal rights. Each man or woman is their king or queen who sets the rules on how they will live and want to be treated.

Biblical salvation, however, delivers us from this mindset. Salvation gives us a new focus and a new direction. The throne that self once ruled from is now seated by the Savior, who is Lord of all. The power and desire to live for others comes from the One who died for others. The saved sacrifices for the good of others but do not demand that others do the same for them. They will not bully and badger people in the name of their so-called just cause, for doing so promotes the very thing they say they are against—bullies and injustice. We must show Christ's love to all people, especially to the neglected and underprivileged, but it will never seek the abuse of the privileged.

No good causes, excuses, or needs can justify putting self or anything else above the Savior. If He is Lord, He comes first

in our lives. His Spirit within us makes it possible for us to live out His Will. It's insanity to think we can have two lords simultaneously--Jesus and self. Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13). We must love all people, regardless of their skin color, political beliefs, or religious affiliations. And we must be a servant to all.

But does this mean Christians will not have their self-serving moments or pity parties? Of course not. Christians are still human. There will be times when our words or actions are flavored with selfishness. But it will not control our lives. We will not live under its power because becoming a Christian is more than embracing a new belief system or turning over a new leaf. It's all about surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus. He becomes our Lord, and we become His subjects. The apostle Paul stresses this to the Christians in Rome. He writes:

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death.²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:20-23)

When Paul says we've been set free from sin, he doesn't mean we are free from sin's presence or sin's influence, but we are free from its control. We are free from it because we have a new master. We have embraced the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Salvation involves letting go of our rights. His Word, not our desires, becomes the authority over our lives. We willingly surrender our freedoms because of our faith in Christ, which is an all-compassing faith. It is not just faith in His saving power

Anything less than lordship salvation (salvation that accepts Christ's lordship over our lives) is not biblical salvation.

but also in His knowledge of what is best for us. We trust His love to want what is best for us and His ability to accomplish it; therefore, we surrender all to Jesus.

Anything less than lordship salvation (salvation that accepts Christ's lordship over our lives) is not biblical salvation. It thus cannot save. Moreover, claiming to receive Christ as Savior but not as Lord disagrees with the Bible's presentation of salvation. The whole idea of salvation is that the Spirit of God has entered us and regenerated us. We become new creatures., creatures of faith. We either experience complete regeneration or no regeneration.

Consequently, His Word has the final say about dating, divorce, and decisions about our body, spouse, children, friends, fellow-workers, employers, country, environment,

church workings, money, etc. What we want and desire can no longer be the driving force in our lives as in times past.

Although we are not perfect and cannot submit ideally to His Lordship, our love for Jesus will be a reality in our lives. His Word will be the apple of our eye and the guidebook for our lives. If it is not, there is something very wrong with our so-called salvation.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:26-27)

True salvation delivers us from ongoing selfishness and self-centeredness. Thus, it has been rightly called radical salvation. It is so extreme that Jesus describes it as being born again (see John 3:5).

The Apostle Paul confirmed the radicalness of it when he wrote: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The old person, the unsaved, lives according to the desires of the flesh. They do it their way, but this is not the way of the new creation. Therefore, if any man or woman is in Christ, they must become new creatures, for the old person is gone. We are now set free to live for God and others. We can now follow the example that Jesus set for us. "For even the Son of Man came

not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

We must become other-minded instead of self-focused, self-centered, and self-serving.

Delivered from Discontentment

It is Christ, not new careers, new jobs, new houses, or new spouses that can provide lasting zest in our life, joy in our hearts, and contentment in our souls.

One benefit of salvation that I realized from personal experience is that it gives us meaning and purpose in life, which, in turn, gives us contentment. Although we are created for a meaningful relationship with God, sin destroyed it.

Thus, we futilely try to fill this void. Careers, sex, drugs, alcohol, fame, achievements, money, etc., may temporarily fill it, but only a restoration of a relationship with God can permanently satisfy it. We are never wholly content in life until our lives are centered on Christ.

Christ, not causes, campaigns, or crusades, gives us a sense of purpose and fulfillment. It is Christ, not new careers, new jobs, new houses, or new spouses, that provide lasting zest in our life, joy in our hearts, and contentment in our souls.

Many biblical verses stress that if we have Christ, we have all that we need:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (Colossians 2:10)

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10)

But haven't other Christians and we experienced times of discontentment, whether in our marriages, jobs, or life in general? The answer is yes. Believers in Christ are still emotional creatures. The difference is that discontent doesn't have to fill our lives, rule our hearts, or determine our decisions. Salvation enables us to have victory, but it does not guarantee it. Victory requires focusing on Christ and letting Him fill us with His presence. The key is His presence; it replaces discontent with contentment, discouragement with encouragement, purposelessness with purpose and meaning.

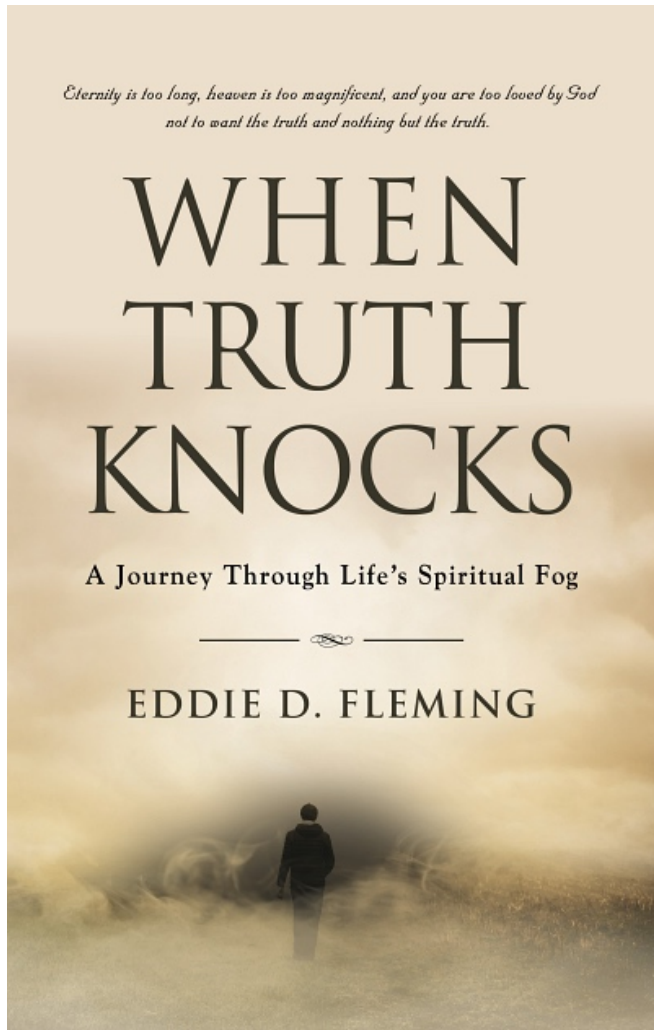
My journey included a stage in my life where I was single, in my late twenties, and without warning, a heavy fog of discontentment descended on me. I watched my older brother

get married, then my younger brother, and then my sister, ten years my junior. I began to wonder, would I ever find someone with which to share my life? Would I ever have children? The discontentment came without warning, and disillusionment and depression grew out of it. Although I had a great job and wonderful parents, life became more unsatisfying. Thankfully, I discovered that discontentment and discouragement were inconsistent with being a child of God. The Bible is clear. Christ is the key to contentment, not worldly possessions, not youth and health, and not even a spouse and family.

I was determined to be more than a conqueror through Christ. Therefore, whenever I became discouraged, depressed, or just filled with melancholy, I'd take a walk down a side road near my home. I would go equipped with selected memorized verses from the Bible and my pet poodle on a leash. As we walked and talked (my poodle just listened), I quoted my Bible verses over and over, sung parts of gospel songs, and took notice of God's presence in the beauty of His creation. My poodle and I would do this for a couple of miles and then head back home.

When you are full of Christ, mentally and emotionally, you are full of His presence, His peace, His contentment, and His joy. One verse that held special significance for me was Matthew 6:33. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

By putting Him first and trusting Him completely, I had the promise of receiving all I needed, not necessarily everything I wanted. But I also discovered that I already had everything I needed by putting Him first, for He is all we need.



My book is about my faith journey to Christianity, the struggles I experienced, the misconceptions I embraced, and the truths I learned. It's a book that can help others learn from my journey so they can avoid the mistakes I made.

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