

The Repentance of Sinners



There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Repentance

Repentance consists in no longer doing the same thing henceforth, while he who takes up his former (bad) deeds, according to the prover, cards wool over a fire and draws water with a sieve.

Hierarch John Chrysostom

Whoever has escaped from a prison will not wish to see it another time. Whoever has been delivered from captivity prays that he will never fall into captivity (that is, repentance consists in not returning to one's former sins).

Thou art ashamed and blushest when it is necessary to tell thy sins (to a priest at confession). It is better to be ashamed to sin than to confess. Consider: If confession is not offered here, then everything will be confessed there before the whole world. Where is there more torment? Where is there more shame? In doing the deed, we are bold and shameless, but when we ought to confess, then we are ashamed and slow. If thou wantest God to grant thee tears of contrition and dispassion, unceasingly bring to mind thy grave.

Venerable Ephraim the Syrian

Whoever offers repentance ought not only to wash his sin with tears, but ought to cover his former transgressions with better deeds, lest the sin be imputed to him.

Hierarch Ambrose of Milan

If the inclination for them (sins) has also been extirpated from our hearts, this serves as proof that they are forgiven us.

St. John Cassian

Reveal not thy thoughts to everyone, but only to them that can save thy soul.

St. Anthony the Great

Reveal not thy conscience to him to whom thy heart is not well disposed.

St. Pimen the Great

On purity of heart

What is not in the heart is not in the thing itself: faith is not faith; love is not love, when it is not in the heart, but it is hypocrisy; humility is not humility, when it appears only outwardly, but has no place in the heart. God requires from us our heart: *My son, give me thine heart* (Proverbs 23-26).

The sun is seen clearly in pure and still water, and its likeness is depicted therein; so also does God, the eternal Sun, appear in a still, blameless and pure soul, and depicts His image therein. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (II Corinthians 7:1), that God -the eternal Sun - will also dwell in us and depict in our soul His holy image.

Hierarch Tychon of Zadonsk

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh (Luke 6:45). That is why the Apostle commands us also: *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering* (Colossians 3:12). Put on, that is, impress these dispositions on thy soul.

Bishop Theophan, the recluse of Vysha

Remove from thy heart pride, which is an abomination before God, acknowledge thy spiritual poverty, turn to God with a heartfelt cry for help against the unclean thoughts that bestorm thy heart and the Allpowerful Lord will grant thee the hand of His gracious help and will free thee from the spiritual defilements cast upon thee by the enemy of our salvation the devil; He will purify thy heart and make it a temple for Himself.

Abba Dorotheus

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me

Psalm 50:1213

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

In this commandment, Jesus Christ prompts us to achieve purity of heart. The heart is the guardian of our spiritual life. It contemplates whatever the eyes cannot see and the mind cannot grasp. Spiritual contemplation is possible only with a heart that is pure. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said: *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness* (Matthew 6:22-23).

The pure heart and its vision of God are lofty concepts. One can only describe. According to the words of the holy, righteous John of Kronstadt, a pure heart is *meek, humble, guileless, simple, trusting, true, unsuspecting, gentle, good, not covetous, not envious, not adulterous*. My Life in Christ, p. 56. According to Venerable John of the Ladder, *Purity is the assimilation of a bodiless nature* (Step 15). That is, the life hidden from the physical eyes - the life of the spiritual world - is revealed to the pure in heart. *He who has made his heart pure*, writes Venerable Simeon the New Theologian in the Philokalia, *will not only come to know the meaning and significance of things secondary and which exist after God, but on having passed through them all, will also see God Himself - in which is the extremity of good*. The pure in heart are people who can clearly see God's real presence, and who can proclaim together with the Psalmist:

The Lord is my light and my savior; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid? ... One thing have I asked of the Lord, this will I seek after: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life... My heart said unto Thee: I will seek the Lord. My face hath sought after Thee; Thy face, O Lord, will I seek (Psalm 26:1, 4, 8).

A pure heart preserves the word of God as the seed sown in Christ's Parable of the Sower:

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

To see God is the highest blessedness. So the pure heart constantly seeks the vision of God; it wants His light in its depth, so strives to live in perfect purity. The Mother of God lived this way. We call the Virgin Mary *Most Pure*; for her ever-virginity, and for her spiritual wholeness. Her heart was pure, her mind was healthy, her soul magnified the Lord, her spirit exulted in God her Savior, and her body was a spiritual temple.

The pure Mother of God inspires saints to preserve their purity of heart. The saints never allow thoughts contrary to God into their hearts. Isaac the Syrian points out purity of heart in the Venerable Sisoës, who renounced worldly desire and thought, and reached an elemental simplicity. He became like a child, but without childishness. Venerable Sisoës even would ask his disciple: *Have I eaten, or have I not eaten?* But as a child to the world, to God he was mature and perfect in purity (Venerable Isaac the Syrian, Ascetical Homilies, p. 142. While reading, you should

recall the words of Christ: *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18:3). Purity of heart is necessary for mystical oneness with God. Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes of this in his Sixth Homily, On the Beatitudes--

The joyful vision of God is offered to the man who has purified the sight of his soul. Thus, the Word (i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ) teaches us, when He says to us that *the kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21). This teaches us that the man who has purified his soul from all passionate impulses will reflect by his inner beauty the likeness of the Divine image... By a good life, wash off the filth that adheres to thy heart, and then shall shine forth thy divinely appearing beauty.

The Apostle Paul wrote of this too, in his pastoral epistles.

Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled (Titus 1:15).

If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (II Timothy 2:21-22).

Abba Pimen struggled for piety and purity of heart. He taught us:

"As long as the pot is on the fire, no fly nor any other animal can get near it, but as soon as it is cold, these creatures get inside. So it is for the monk; as long as he lives in spiritual activities, the enemy cannot find a means of overthrowing him." Sayings of the Desert Fathers, p. 154.

What should we do if we do not have a pure heart? How can we purify it of defilement? First of all, we must pray that the Lord give us spiritual insight, that He give us the Holy Spirit, Who penetrates everything, Who sees everything. Such a prayer is always heard, for the Lord has promised: *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him* (Luke 11:13). A praying heart, filled with contrition, is acceptable to God, for, as it is said in the 50th Psalm: *A heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise* (verse 17). Sincere prayer warms the heart, arouses reverent compunction, and draws to itself the purifying and sanctifying grace of God. Thus the Church teaches us to purify the heart by warm prayer. In the Canon of Preparation for Holy Communion we read: *Teardrops grant me, O Christ, to cleanse my defiled heart* (Third Ode).

Prayer expels evil - that offspring of Satan, the enemy of our salvation - from the heart. We must frequently and reverently say the name of Jesus Christ. The Savior said: *In my name shall they cast out devils* (Mark 16:17). Frequent invocation of this most sweet name with faith and reverence in the so-called *mental* or Jesus Prayer can expel impurities from the heart and fill it with heavenly joy and peace.

In *Way of the Ascetics*, Tito Colliander wrote some inspired lines concerning the Jesus Prayer. His chapter 25 reads:

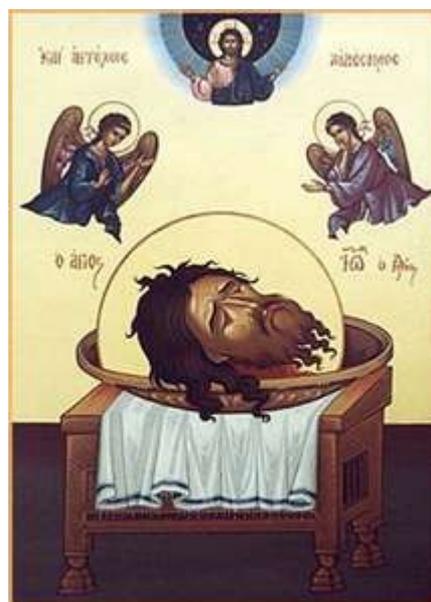
"The saintly Abbot Isaiah, the Egyptian hermit, says of the Jesus Prayer that it is a mirror for the mind and a lantern for the conscience. Someone has also likened it to a constantly sounding, quiet voice in a house: all thieves that sneak in take hasty flight when they hear that someone is awake there. The house is the heart, the thieves, the evil impulses. Prayer is the voice of the one who keeps watch. But the one who keeps watch is no longer I, but Christ."

Spiritual activity embodies Christ in our soul. This involves continual remembrance of the Lord: you hide Him within, in your soul, your heart, your consciousness. *I sleep, but my heart waketh* (Song of Solomon 5:2): I myself sleep, withdraw, but the heart stays steadfast in prayer, that is, in eternal life, in the kingdom of Heaven, in Christ. The tree-roots of my being stand fast in their source.

The means of attaining this is the prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Repeat it aloud, or only in thought, slowly, lingeringly, but with attention, and from a heart freed as much as possible from all that is inappropriate to it. Not only worldly interests are inappropriate, but also such things as every kind of expectation or thought of answer, or inner visions, testings, all kinds of romantic dreams, curious questions and imaginings.

Archpriest Victor Potapov.

Source: <http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/english.htm>



The Preaching of St. John the Baptist.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

John, son of the righteous Zacharias and Elizabeth, lived from his youth in the wilderness and spent there his time in fasting and prayer. His clothing was made of camel's hair, and about loins he wore a leather girdle, and his food was locusts (a

wild plant, not insects) and wild honey.

When John reached thirty years of age, the Lord directed him to go to the valley of the Jordan River and proclaim to all the people that the Saviour of the world would soon appear, and that all should prepare to meet Him with repentance and baptism.

John went to the region of the Jordan and started to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," — that is, the time was drawing near when the long awaited Saviour would appear, Who would summon everyone to His kingdom.

For a long time God had not sent a prophet to the Hebrew people. From the time of the last prophet, Malachi, there had passed four hundred years. Therefore, when they heard of the appearance of the Prophet John and about his marvellous life and teaching, people came from all directions to hear him. Whoever believed his words and repented of their sins, John baptized in the river Jordan, that is, he immersed each one in the water while placing his hands on the head of the baptized. Therefore, John the Forerunner was called the Baptist. In the process, John required of everyone that the repentance be sincere and the correction in oneself be accompanied by good works.

The baptism of John meant that as the body is washed and cleansed by water, thus, the soul of a person who repents and believes in the Saviour is cleansed by Christ of all his sins when he is baptized into the Church.

Among those who came to John were some people who considered themselves righteous, did not wish to repent, and, indeed, were vicious and evil as, for example, were the Pharisees and Sadducees — leaders of the Hebrew people. The Pharisees were proud of their descent from Abraham, praised themselves for fulfilling the Law, and considered themselves worthy to enter the Kingdom of Christ the Messiah. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and in the future life. To these people John said, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" — that is, who told you that you by your own power could escape the anger of God and eternal punishment in the future life? "Bring forth fruits worthy for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves: we have Abraham as our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Remember, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

Hearing these words, the people asked him, "What shall we do then?"

John answered, "He that has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise," — that is, first of all, do good.

Then, publicans, or tax collectors, came and asked, "Master, what shall we do?" The publicans collected taxes for the Romans. The Jews hated the power of the Romans. Besides that, several of the publicans collected more than was proper and oppressed the people. The Jews despised all the publicans and considered them unworthy to enter the approaching Kingdom of Christ. John said to them, "Exact no more than that, which is appointed you."

The soldiers also asked of him, "What shall we do?" It often happened that the

soldiers, dissatisfied with their wages, took property that belonged to other people, treated poor people badly, and accused other people for their own profit. John said to them, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages."

Many then wondered if John was Christ the Saviour, but John explained that he was not the Christ. "I baptize you with water," he said, "but after me One mightier than I is coming," — that is, soon after me will come He for whom you wait — Christ, "the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose;" — that is, I am unworthy to even be His servant to take off His shoes for Him. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire;" — that is, the baptism which He will give will burn up your sins like fire and give you the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The holy Prophet John preached to many others, teaching the people who came to him.

Note: See the Gospels of Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-18; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:15-28.

„The Law of God“ - Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy

Call to Repentance

Written by the Very Rev. John Breck

In the previous column, we stressed the point that God does not “punish” us for our sinfulness. If He allows us to know pain and suffering, it should not be construed as punishment meted out in vengeful anger. Because God in His very essence is Love, any suffering we may know or any penance we may be called to exercise is to be understood as a function of that love. Its purpose is not to exact retribution, to demand from us some penance or payment to compensate for offenses we have committed against the divine righteousness. It is to guide, chasten and purify us, so as to encourage an attitude of repentance that alone enables us to reenter the sphere of God’s holiness. God does not punish us; He does not condemn us. As the scripturally based prayer of absolution declares: “God desires not the death of a sinner, but that the sinner turn from his evil ways and live.”

Yet this leaves us with an unavoidable question. How are we to understand the biblical images of judgment and condemnation that occur in Jesus’ parables and other teachings: images of persons cast into “outer darkness” (Mt 22:13), or into “unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:12; 18:8), or into “Hades/Gehenna” (Lk 10:15; 12:5)? What are we to make of the frequent references, from the Psalms (20:10; 77:31,

LXX) to St Paul (Rom 1:18 *passim*), that speak of divine “wrath,” directed against human sin? Don’t these references oblige us to look at suffering and death as wages of sin, paid out by the God of righteousness, who abhors sin and “hates evildoers” (Ps 5:5)?

To begin a reply, we need to clarify a few terms that easily lead to misunderstanding, particularly the notions of “propitiation” and “wrath.” As we pointed out in the last column, a great deal of confusion arises from the fact that we have adopted a Western notion of “repentance” that sees penance as an obligatory payment we must make in order to assuage God’s wrath and obtain forgiveness of our sin. Under medieval Latin influence, we have confused “propitiation” and “expiation.” The former implies that since we ourselves are sinful by nature, we cannot offer a “reasonable sacrifice” to God that He will find acceptable. Only the divine Son, sinless and holy, constitutes a “satisfactory” offering to the holy and righteous God (Anselm); and God (in His mercy!) accepts the torture and death of His Son as the means by which those who believe in Him achieve “vicarious atonement.” Jesus is thus conceived as *our* sacrificial offering, *our* means of propitiation, in the face of divine judgment.

The inadequacy of that understanding, however, is clear from Scripture itself. The biblical terms *ilasmos* and *ilasterion* should be translated “expiation” rather than “propitiation” (as for example, in 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; Rom 3:25). They signify the work of “atonement” in the sense of reparation for sin by means of God’s self-offering in Christ. It is that divine initiative, that self-offering by God Himself, which elicits from us faith manifested as repentance and good deeds. The work of atonement – achieving redemption and reconciliation between ourselves and God – is wholly God’s: it is not *our* offering to the Father, but *His* gracious offering to us. In His boundless mercy and love, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Our response to divine judgment, in other words, is not to offer propitiation: some payment we make or punishment we suffer in order to purchase forgiveness and salvation. Our response, rather, is to *turn*, to change direction, in an inner movement – inspired and directed by the indwelling Spirit of God – that leads us from “works of the flesh” to “gifts of the Spirit” (Gal 5:16-25), from sin and death to repentance and faith (which are two sides of the same coin).

What then of “divine wrath”? Although the ancient Israelites believed in a God who became angry and vengeful, as well as forgiving and merciful, Jesus and the apostolic writers present God as preeminently the God of love. To St Paul’s mind, in any case, divine wrath is always directed toward non-believers, those who have heard the gospel message and have rejected it. For the apostle, “divine wrath” is a metaphorical expression (an “anthropomorphism”) that describes God’s way of responding to unrepentant sinners: by allowing them “to stew in their own juice.” Like the notion of punishment, divine wrath is to be understood not as God’s direct action against us, but as an expression of His silence, His apparent absence in the life and experience of those who reject Him. While we are in this state in which He has seemingly abandoned us, God allows us to suffer the consequences of our sinful actions,

including our refusal to repent. It is not God who punishes and condemns us; we do it to ourselves (God “gives us up” to the consequences of the sin for which we are wholly responsible, Rom 1:24f). As One whose very nature is Love, God desires that *all* come to repentance, in order that *all* may enjoy the free, unmerited gift of eternal life and eternal joy. The way to that life and that joy, once again, is repentance: a change of “mind” (*meta-noia*), a conversion and radical reorientation of our life from slavery in sin to freedom in the Spirit.

The great spiritual elders of the Church can certainly speak of “the great anger of God the Judge,”¹ and of the spiritual benefits that accrue from “fear of punishment” for our sins. We need to take these indications very seriously, for God does manifest Himself as “angered” by our rebellion; and as St Symeon declares, “Fear of punishment hereafter and the suffering it engenders are beneficial to all who are starting out on the spiritual way.”² The image of divine anger, and the summons to “fear punishment,” however, serve a single purpose: to call us to repentance.

As the Fathers also insist, “When a man abandons his sins and returns to God, his repentance regenerates him and renews him entirely.”³ This renewal restores in us the very image of God: not because we have “become perfect,” but because, by humbly confessing our sins and turning from them – again and again throughout this life, and only by the grace and mercy of the God who loves us beyond all we can hope or expect – we “regain our true splendor, just as the moon after the period of waning clothes itself once more in its full light.”⁴

1. St John of Sinai (+ 649), *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 5:32, (Willits, CA: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1973), p. 108.

2. St Symeon the New Theologian (+ 1022), “Practical and Theological Texts” #65-66, *The Philocalia IV* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 37.

3. St Isaiah the Solitary (4th-5th c.), “Twenty-Seven Texts on Guarding the Intellect” #22, *The Philcalia I* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 26.

4. St John of Karpathos (7th c.?), “One Hundred Texts for the Encouragement of the Monks in India” #4, *The Philocalia I*, p. 299.



And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.



Repentance: St. Mary of Egypt

Commemorated on April 10

St Zosimas (April 4) was a monk at a certain Palestinian monastery on the outskirts of Caesarea. Having dwelt at the monastery since his childhood, he lived there in asceticism until he reached the age of fifty-three. Then he was disturbed by the thought that he had attained perfection, and needed no one to instruct him. "Is there a monk anywhere who can show me some form of asceticism that I have not attained? Is there anyone who has surpassed me in spiritual sobriety and deeds?"

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Zosimas, you have struggled valiantly, as far as this is in the power of man. However, there is no one who is righteous (Rom 3:10). So that you may know how many other ways lead to salvation, leave your native land, like Abraham from the house of his father (Gen 12:1), and go to the monastery by the Jordan."

Abba Zosimas immediately left the monastery, and following the angel, he went to the Jordan monastery and settled in it.

Here he met Elders who were adept in contemplation, and also in their struggles. Never did anyone utter an idle word. Instead, they sang constantly, and prayed all

night long. Abba Zosimas began to imitate the spiritual activity of the holy monks.

Thus much time passed, and the holy Forty Day Fast approached. There was a certain custom at the monastery, which was why God had led St Zosimas there. On the First Sunday of Great Lent the igumen served the Divine Liturgy, everyone received the All-Pure Body and Blood of Christ. Afterwards, they went to the trapeza for a small repast, and then assembled once more in church.

The monks prayed and made prostrations, asking forgiveness one of another. Then they made a prostration before the igumen and asked his blessing for the struggle that lay before them. During the Psalm "The Lord is my Light and my Savior, whom shall I fear? The Lord is defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 26/27:1), they opened the monastery gate and went off into the wilderness.

Each took with him as much food as he needed, and went into the desert. When their food ran out, they ate roots and desert plants. The monks crossed the Jordan and scattered in various directions, so that no one might see how another fasted or how they spent their time.

The monks returned to the monastery on Palm Sunday, each having his own conscience as a witness of his ascetic struggles. It was a rule of the monastery that no one asked how anyone else had toiled in the desert.

Abba Zosimas, according to the custom of the monastery, went deep into the desert hoping to find someone living there who could benefit him.

He walked into the wilderness for twenty days and then, when he sang the Psalms of the Sixth Hour and made the usual prayers. Suddenly, to the right of the hill where he stood, he saw a human form. He was afraid, thinking that it might be a demonic apparition. Then he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, which removed his fear. He turned to the right and saw a form walking southward. The body was black from the blazing sunlight, and the faded short hair was white like a sheep's fleece. Abba Zosimas rejoiced, since he had not seen any living thing for many days.

The desert-dweller saw Zosimas approaching, and attempted to flee from him. Abba Zosimas, forgetting his age and fatigue, quickened his pace. When he was close enough to be heard, he called out, "Why do you flee from me, a sinful old man? Wait for me, for the love of God."

The stranger said to him, "Forgive me, Abba Zosimas, but I cannot turn and show my face to you. I am a woman, and as you see, I am naked. If you would grant the request of a sinful woman, throw me your cloak so I might cover my body, and then I can ask for your blessing."

Then Abba Zosimas was terrified, realizing that she could not have called him by

name unless she possessed spiritual insight.

Covered by the cloak, the ascetic turned to Zosimas: "Why do you want to speak with me, a sinful woman? What did you wish to learn from me, you who have not shrunk from such great labors?"

Abba Zosimas fell to the ground and asked for her blessing. She also bowed down before him, and for a long time they remained on the ground each asking the other to bless. Finally, the woman ascetic said: "Abba Zosimas, you must bless and pray, since you are honored with the grace of the priesthood. For many years you have stood before the holy altar, offering the Holy Gifts to the Lord."

These words frightened St Zosimas even more. With tears he said to her, "O Mother! It is clear that you live with God and are dead to this world. You have called me by name and recognized me as a priest, though you have never seen me before. The grace granted you is apparent, therefore bless me, for the Lord's sake."

Yielding finally to his entreaties, she said, "Blessed is God, Who cares for the salvation of men." Abba Zosimas replied, "Amen." Then they rose to their feet. The woman ascetic again said to the Elder, "Why have you come, Father, to me who am a sinner, bereft of every virtue? Apparently, the grace of the Holy Spirit has brought you to do me a service. But tell me first, Abba, how do the Christians live, how is the Church guided?"

Abba Zosimas answered her, "By your holy prayers God has granted the Church and us all a lasting peace. But fulfill my unworthy request, Mother, and pray for the whole world and for me a sinner, that my wanderings in the desert may not be useless."

The holy ascetic replied, "You, Abba Zosimas, as a priest, ought to pray for me and for all, for you are called to do this. However, since we must be obedient, I will do as you ask.

The saint turned toward the East, and raising her eyes to heaven and stretching out her hands, she began to pray in a whisper. She prayed so softly that Abba Zosimas could not hear her words. After a long time, the Elder looked up and saw her standing in the air more than a foot above the ground. Seeing this, Zosimas threw himself down on the ground, weeping and repeating, "Lord, have mercy!"

Then he was tempted by a thought. He wondered if she might not be a spirit, and if her prayer could be insincere. At that moment she turned around, lifted him from the ground and said, "Why do your thoughts confuse you, Abba Zosimas? I am not an apparition. I am a sinful and unworthy woman, though I am guarded by holy Baptism."

Then she made the Sign of the Cross and said, "May God protect us from the Evil One and his schemes, for fierce is his struggle against us." Seeing and hearing this, the Elder fell at her feet with tears saying, "I beseech you by Christ our God, do not conceal from me who you are and how you came into this desert. Tell me everything, so that the wondrous works of God may be revealed."

She replied, "It distresses me, Father, to speak to you about my shameless life. When you hear my story, you might flee from me, as if from a poisonous snake. But I shall tell you everything, Father, concealing nothing. However, I exhort you, cease not to pray for me a sinner, that I may find mercy on the Day of Judgment.

"I was born in Egypt and when I was twelve years old, I left my parents and went to Alexandria. There I lost my chastity and gave myself to unrestrained and insatiable sensuality. For more than seventeen years I lived like that and I did it all for free. Do not think that I refused the money because I was rich. I lived in poverty and worked at spinning flax. To me, life consisted in the satisfaction of my fleshly lust.

"One summer I saw a crowd of people from Libya and Egypt heading toward the sea. They were on their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. I also wanted to sail with them. Since I had no food or money, I offered my body in payment for my passage. And so I embarked on the ship.

"Now, Father, believe me, I am very amazed, that the sea tolerated my wantonness and fornication, that the earth did not open up its mouth and take me down alive into hell, because I had ensnared so many souls. I think that God was seeking my repentance. He did not desire the death of a sinner, but awaited my conversion.

"So I arrived in Jerusalem and spent all the days before the Feast living the same sort of life, and maybe even worse.

"When the holy Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable Cross of the Lord arrived, I went about as before, looking for young men. At daybreak I saw that everyone was heading to the church, so I went along with the rest. When the hour of the Holy Elevation drew nigh, I was trying to enter into the church with all the people. With great effort I came almost to the doors, and attempted to squeeze inside. Although I stepped up to the threshold, it was as though some force held me back, preventing me from entering. I was brushed aside by the crowd, and found myself standing alone on the porch. I thought that perhaps this happened because of my womanly weakness. I worked my way into the crowd, and again I attempted to elbow people aside. However hard I tried, I could not enter. Just as my feet touched the church threshold, I was stopped. Others entered the church without difficulty, while I alone was not allowed in. This happened three or four times. Finally my strength was exhausted. I went off and stood in a corner of the church portico.

"Then I realized that it was my sins that prevented me from seeing the Life-Creating

Wood. The grace of the Lord then touched my heart. I wept and lamented, and I began to beat my breast. Sighing from the depths of my heart, I saw above me an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. Turning to Her, I prayed: "O Lady Virgin, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word! I know that I am unworthy to look upon your icon. I rightly inspire hatred and disgust before your purity, but I know also that God became Man in order to call sinners to repentance. Help me, O All-Pure One. Let me enter the church. Allow me to behold the Wood upon which the Lord was crucified in the flesh, shedding His Blood for the redemption of sinners, and also for me. Be my witness before Your Son that I will never defile my body again with the impurity of fornication. As soon as I have seen the Cross of your Son, I will renounce the world, and go wherever you lead me."

"After I had spoken, I felt confidence in the compassion of the Mother of God, and left the spot where I had been praying. I joined those entering the church, and no one pushed me back or prevented me from entering. I went on in fear and trembling, and entered the holy place.

"Thus I also saw the Mysteries of God, and how God accepts the penitent. I fell to the holy ground and kissed it. Then I hastened again to stand before the icon of the Mother of God, where I had given my vow. Bending my knees before the Virgin Theotokos, I prayed:

"O Lady, you have not rejected my prayer as unworthy. Glory be to God, Who accepts the repentance of sinners. It is time for me to fulfill my vow, which you witnessed. Therefore, O Lady, guide me on the path of repentance."

"Then I heard a voice from on high: 'If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.'

"I immediately believed that this voice was meant for me, and I cried out to the Mother of God: 'O Lady, do not forsake me!'

"Then I left the church portico and started on my journey. A certain man gave me three coins as I was leaving the church. With them I bought three loaves of bread, and asked the bread merchant the way to the Jordan.

"It was nine o'clock when I saw the Cross. At sunset I reached the church of St John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. After praying in the church, I went down to the Jordan and washed my face and hands in its water. Then in this same temple of St John the Forerunner I received the Life-Creating Mysteries of Christ. Then I ate half of one of my loaves of bread, drank water from the holy Jordan, and slept there that night on the ground. In the morning I found a small boat and crossed the river to the opposite shore. Again I prayed that the Mother of God would lead me where She wished. Then I found myself in this desert."

Abba Zosimas asked her, "How many years have passed since you began to live in the desert?"

"I think," she replied, "it is forty-seven years since I came from the Holy City."

Abba Zosimas again asked, "What food do you find here, Mother?"

And she said, "I had with me two and a half loaves of bread when I crossed the Jordan. Soon they dried out and hardened. Eating a little at a time, I finished them after a few years."

Again Abba Zosimas asked, "Is it possible you have survived for so many years without sickness, and without suffering in any way from such a complete change?"

"Believe me, Abba Zosimas," the woman said, "I spent seventeen years in this wilderness (after she had spent seventeen years in immorality), fighting wild beasts: mad desires and passions. When I began to eat bread, I thought of the meat and fish which I had in abundance in Egypt. I also missed the wine that I loved so much when I was in the world, while here I did not even have water. I suffered from thirst and hunger. I also had a mad desire for lewd songs. I seemed to hear them, disturbing my heart and my hearing. Weeping and striking myself on the breast, I remembered the vow I had made. At last I beheld a radiant Light shining on me from everywhere. After a violent tempest, a lasting calm ensued.

"Abba, how shall I tell you of the thoughts that urged me on to fornication? A fire seemed to burn within me, awakening in me the desire for embraces. Then I would throw myself to the ground and water it with my tears. I seemed to see the Most Holy Virgin before me, and She seemed to threaten me for not keeping my vow. I lay face downward day and night upon the ground, and would not get up until that blessed Light encircled me, dispelling the evil thoughts that troubled me.

"Thus I lived in this wilderness for the first seventeen years. Darkness after darkness, misery after misery stood about me, a sinner. But from that time until now the Mother of God helps me in everything."

Abba Zosimas again inquired, "How is it that you require neither food, nor clothing?"

She answered, "After finishing my bread, I lived on herbs and the things one finds in the desert. The clothes I had when I crossed over the Jordan became torn and fell apart. I suffered both from the summer heat, when the blazing heat fell upon me, and from the winter cold, when I shivered from the frost. Many times I fell down upon the earth, as though dead. I struggled with various afflictions and temptations. But from that time until the present day, the power of God has guarded my sinful soul and humble body. I was fed and clothed by the all-powerful word of God, since man does not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God (Dt

8:3, Mt.4:4, Luke 4:4), and those who have put off the old man (Col 3:9) have no refuge, hiding themselves in the clefts of the rocks (Job 24:8, Heb 11:38). When I remember from what evil and from what sins the Lord delivered me, I have imperishable food for salvation."

When Abba Zosimas heard that the holy ascetic quoted the Holy Scripture from memory, from the Books of Moses and Job and from the Psalms of David, he then asked the woman, "Mother, have you read the Psalms and other books?"

She smiled at hearing this question, and answered, "Believe me, I have seen no human face but yours from the time that I crossed over the Jordan. I never learned from books. I have never heard anyone read or sing from them. Perhaps the Word of God, which is alive and acting, teaches man knowledge by itself (Col 3:16, 1 Thess 2:13). This is the end of my story. As I asked when I began, I beg you for the sake of the Incarnate Word of God, holy Abba, pray for me, a sinner.

"Furthermore, I beg you, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, tell no one what you have heard from me, until God takes me from this earth. Next year, during Great Lent, do not cross the Jordan, as is the custom of your monastery."

Again Abba Zosimas was amazed, that the practice of his monastery was known to the holy woman ascetic, although he had not said anything to her about this.

"Remain at the monastery," the woman continued. "Even if you try to leave the monastery, you will not be able to do so. On Great and Holy Thursday, the day of the Lord's Last Supper, place the Life-Creating Body and Blood of Christ our God in a holy vessel, and bring it to me. Await me on this side of the Jordan, at the edge of the desert, so that I may receive the Holy Mysteries. And say to Abba John, the igumen of your community, 'Look to yourself and your brothers (1 Tim 4:16), for there is much that needs correction. Do not say this to him now, but when the Lord shall indicate."

Asking for his prayers, the woman turned and vanished into the depths of the desert.

For a whole year Elder Zosimas remained silent, not daring to reveal to anyone what he had seen, and he prayed that the Lord would grant him to see the holy ascetic once more.

When the first week of Great Lent came again, St Zosimas was obliged to remain at the monastery because of sickness. Then he remembered the woman's prophetic words that he would not be able to leave the monastery. After several days went by, St Zosimas was healed of his infirmity, but he remained at the monastery until Holy Week.

On Holy Thursday, Abba Zosimas did what he had been ordered to do. He placed some of the Body and Blood of Christ into a chalice, and some food in a small basket.

Then he left the monastery and went to the Jordan and waited for the ascetic. The saint seemed tardy, and Abba Zosimas prayed that God would permit him to see the holy woman.

Finally, he saw her standing on the far side of the river. Rejoicing, St Zosimas got up and glorified God. Then he wondered how she could cross the Jordan without a boat. She made the Sign of the Cross over the water, then she walked on the water and crossed the Jordan. Abba Zosimas saw her in the moonlight, walking toward him. When the Elder wanted to make prostration before her, she forbade him, crying out, "What are you doing, Abba? You are a priest and you carry the Holy Mysteries of God."

Reaching the shore, she said to Abba Zosimas, "Bless me, Father." He answered her with trembling, astonished at what he had seen. "Truly God did not lie when he promised that those who purify themselves will be like Him. Glory to You, O Christ our God, for showing me through your holy servant, how far I am from perfection."

The woman asked him to recite both the Creed and the "Our Father." When the prayers were finished, she partook of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Then she raised her hands to the heavens and said, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen Your salvation."

The saint turned to the Elder and said, "Please, Abba, fulfill another request. Go now to your monastery, and in a year's time come to the place where we first time spoke."

He said, "If only it were possible for me to follow you and always see your holy face!"

She replied, "For the Lord's sake, pray for me and remember my wretchedness."

Again she made the Sign of the Cross over the Jordan, and walked over the water as before, and disappeared into the desert. Zosimas returned to the monastery with joy and terror, reproaching himself because he had not asked the saint's name. He hoped to do so the following year.

A year passed, and Abba Zosimas went into the desert. He reached the place where he first saw the holy woman ascetic. She lay dead, with arms folded on her bosom, and her face was turned to the east. Abba Zosimas washed her feet with his tears and kissed them, not daring to touch anything else. For a long while he wept over her and sang the customary Psalms, and said the funeral prayers. He began to wonder whether the saint would want him to bury her or not. Hardly had he thought this, when he saw something written on the ground near her head: "Abba Zosimas, bury on this spot the body of humble Mary. Return to dust what is dust. Pray to the Lord for me. I reposed on the first day of April, on the very night of the saving Passion of Christ, after partaking of the Mystical Supper."

Reading this note, Abba Zosimas was glad to learn her name. He then realized that St Mary, after receiving the Holy Mysteries from his hand, was transported instantaneously to the place where she died, though it had taken him twenty days to travel that distance.

Glorifying God, Abba Zosimas said to himself, "It is time to do what she asks. But how can I dig a grave, with nothing in my hands?" Then he saw a small piece of wood left by some traveler. He picked it up and began to dig. The ground was hard and dry, and he could not dig it. Looking up, Abba Zosimas saw an enormous lion standing by the saint's body and licking her feet. Fear gripped the Elder, but he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, believing that he would remain unharmed through the prayers of the holy woman ascetic. Then the lion came close to the Elder, showing its friendliness with every movement. Abba Zosimas commanded the lion to dig the grave, in order to bury St Mary's body. At his words, the lion dug a hole deep enough to bury the body. Then each went his own way. The lion went into the desert, and Abba Zosimas returned to the monastery, blessing and praising Christ our God. Arriving at the monastery, Abba Zosimas related to the monks and the igumen, what he had seen and heard from St Mary. All were astonished, hearing about the miracles of God. They always remembered St Mary with faith and love on the day of her repose.

Abba John, the igumen of the monastery, heeded the words of St Mary, and with the help of God corrected the things that were wrong at the monastery. Abba Zosimas lived a God-pleasing life at the monastery, reaching nearly a hundred years of age. There he finished his temporal life, and passed into life eternal.

The monks passed on the life of St Mary of Egypt by word of mouth without writing it down.

"I however," says St Sophronius of Jerusalem (March 11), "wrote down the Life of St Mary of Egypt as I heard it from the holy Fathers. I have recorded everything, putting the truth above all else."

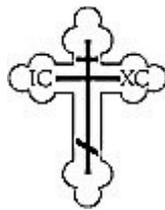
"May God, Who works great miracles and bestows gifts on all who turn to Him in faith, reward those who hear or read this account, and those who copy it. May he grant them a blessed portion together with St Mary of Egypt and with all the saints who have pleased God by their pious thoughts and works. Let us give glory to God, the Eternal King, that we may find mercy on the Day of Judgment through our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, honor, majesty and worship together with the Unoriginate Father, and the Most Holy and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."



Troparion (Tone 8) & Kotakion (Tone 3)

The image of God was truly preserved in you, mother,
For you took up the Cross and followed Christ.
By so doing, you taught us to disregard the flesh,
For it passes away, but to care instead for the soul,
Since it is immortal.

Having been a sinful woman,
You became through repentance a Bride of Christ.
Having attained angelic life,
You defeated demons with the weapon of the Cross.
Therefore, most glorious Mary, You are a Bride of the
Kingdom!
Therefore your spirit, Holy Mother Mary, Rejoices with the
angels!

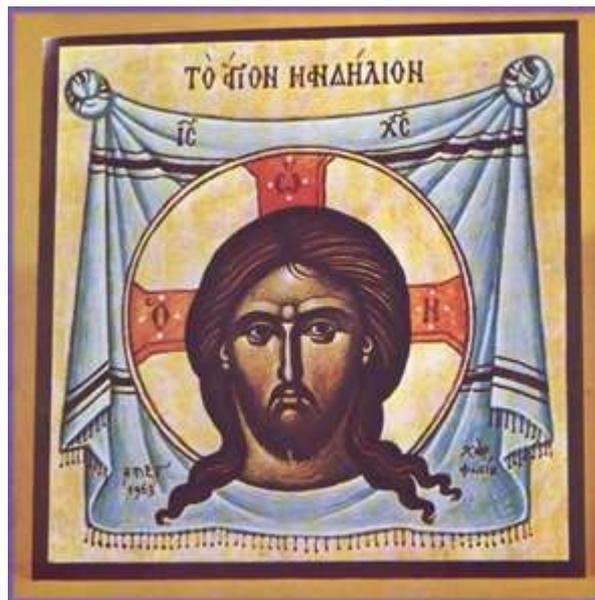


The Repentance of the people of Nineveh

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh

was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day' journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

Jonah 3



**Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him,
If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know
the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
They answered him,
We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou,
Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them,
Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.
And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If
the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**

John 8: 31-36

The Repentance of Sean Richard Sellers (a former Satanist)

Sean Richard Sellers (May 18, 1969 – February 5, 1999) was an American murderer, one of 22 persons in the United States since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976 to be executed for a crime committed while under the age of 18. He was also the only person during this period to be executed for a crime committed under the age of 17. His case drew worldwide attention due to his age as well as his jailhouse conversion to Christianity and his claim that demonic possession made him innocent of his crimes...

Crimes

On September 8, 1985, 16-year-old Sean Sellers killed Robert Bower, a convenience store clerk in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Sellers later admitted on his website that he killed Bower because the man had refused to sell him beer and because he wanted to see "what it felt like". He surprised the Circle K convenience store clerk while he was drinking coffee, then pursued the wounded man across the store and shot him again (killing him).

On March 5, 1986, Sellers killed his mother, Vonda Bellofatto, and his stepfather, Lee Bellofatto, while they were asleep in the bedroom of their Oklahoma City home. Sellers tried to disguise his guilt by arranging the crime scene to look as if an intruder had committed the killings.

Avowal of Satanism at trial

At his trial, Sellers claimed he was a practicing Satanist at the time of the murders and that demonic possession made him murder his victims. In later documents, he claimed to have read *The Satanic Bible* by Anton Lavey "hundreds of times" between the ages of 15 and 16, when the crimes were committed, and in a "Confession" letter written from prison, he reflected on this period of his life: "I got very involved in Satanism. I truly thought it was an honest way to live, and the rituals of it would enable me to control my life." His attorneys also argued Sellers was addicted to the game "Dungeons & Dragons", although Sellers would later write that the game had no part in his crimes and that "using my past as a common example of the effects of the game is either irrational or fanatical."

The jury refused to consider either claim, and Sellers was found guilty of multiple homicides and sentenced to death in 1986. At the time, Oklahoma law did not give juries the option of giving a life sentence without the possibility of parole (that choice became available in 1987). One juror later said that the jury felt Sellers would be paroled in 7 to 14 years, and this prison term was not lengthy enough. So the jury opted for the death penalty. Other jurors denied this was part of the deliberations.

Religious conversion to Christianity

Sellers became a Christian while in prison. His friends started a website on his behalf, and he campaigned for clemency based on his religious conversion, age and involvement in Satanism. While on death row, Sellers made numerous appearances in the mass media, appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and on a notorious segment of *Geraldo* about Satanism. He also appeared in documentaries about Satanism and serial killers for *48 Hours*, MSNBC and the A&E Network. Sellers married in prison on February 14, 1995, but the marriage was annulled in 1997.

Sellers' step-siblings refused to believe that his conversion to Christianity was a sincere one. Of his many surviving family members, only his step-grandfather believed his conversion to be sincere. Prison officials also refused to believe he had converted, except for the prison chaplain.

Source: https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Sean_Sellers

SEAN SELLER'S OPEN LETTER TO SATANISTS

I was 15 years old when I became a Satanist. Today I'm 29. 15 was a lifetime ago. My concept of Satan and God back then was so different from what it is now. At 15 we really do think we know so much, but lock a man in a box for a few years alone, let him get to know himself, let him grow and look again at the world, and what he sees is a world very, very different from the one he perceived at 15.

You know, I had *The Satanic Bible* practically memorized when I was 16. I'd read that book easily a hundred times. But I didn't understand why Anton LaVey wrote some of the things he did. I didn't really comprehend Anton's ideology, his image of Satan or the devil. That also took years.

Back then I saw Satan as a friend to humanity. But that was based on my concept of God, so I guess there is where I need to start. I knew God was the Creator, but the image I had of Him was like some adult. Some authority figure supreme. What did adults do? They made me obey and serve them. They made me clean the house, mow the lawn, fix their drinks, and it was always when they said so, no matter what I was doing at the moment. I'd be watching T.V. in my room, and my dad would holler at me. I'd come to the living room and he'd be sitting in his recliner with his feet up, an empty cup in his hand. "Fix me another drink," he'd say, handing me the glass. He worked all day, so when he got home I served him. I was just a kid after all. What did it matter if I had been at school all day and had football practice and done homework. What did it matter if I was missing some "stupid movie." Of course when I obeyed I was praised. When I did my chores I was given money. That was authority to me.

That was God to me.

God had His rules. And boy were there lots of them! He demanded you to do things His way, how He wanted, when He wanted, never mind what you wanted. If you obeyed, He'd reward you. Heaven. If you disobeyed, He'd punish you. Hell. There was no freedom there.

And because I saw God like that, Satan grew to become a liberator from that arbitrary authority. Evil represented freedom. If I did what I wanted, that was evil. Well. . .evil felt good. Everything God required was stifling, oppressing, and full of rules. If I got mad and wanted to cuss what was so wrong about that? If someone hit me what was so wrong about hitting him back? If I wanted to have sex what was wrong about it? What was wrong was that God said it was wrong. That was it. That was the only thing that made it wrong. Well. . .to hell with God then! Who cared about His stupid rules? Satanism said not only were God's rules arbitrary, they were designed to keep us frustrated and controlled. It was natural to want sex, and to get angry, and to defend ourselves, and natural meant right.

So Satan became a liberator. Satan was a being who had rebelled against God's tyranny, and been cast out of Heaven for it. But he must have had something going because a third of the angels had sided with him against God. They saw the truth. There was a better way to live. A more natural way. The way the animals did. With no arbitrary rules. No "sin". Just freedom. That's what made me a Satanist. I knew I was evil, but my concept of evil was freedom. It was just a word. What people called "evil" felt good. It satisfied me. If I had no money and saw something at the mall I wanted, stealing it satisfied my desire for it. I never set out to hurt anyone. I never embraced Satanism as an excuse, a permission slip, to prey upon others. I embraced it because it made me feel free.

It took me years to fully understand the flaw of that philosophy. It took me even longer to fully understand who and what Satan really is. He went through several incarnations before I saw it clearly too. I guess the most startling realization I had was when I really studied what the Bible said about Satan, Lucifer, and his fall from Heaven and discovered what the church teaches is NOT necessarily so. I wrote an entire study on it breaking it down, (The Doctrine of Lucifer) but the short of it is the whole myth of Satan as an archangel called Lucifer, who led a rebellion against God with a third of the angels, and became known as Satan, is just that. A myth. It's a fourth century church doctrine that came from an Ugaritic myth about the North star trying to take the place of the sun in the sky. A thousand years, and a man named John Milton, a poet, made that story so popular it became a deeply ingrained part of the Christian dogma. The truth is however, Satan was never called "Lucifer" and never led the choir in Heaven. The Satan of the Bible is very different from the Satan of church dogma. But I'll get to that in a minute. It's impossible to understand Satan until we understand God. Our image of the one is always greatly determined by our image of the other. In prison I found out

who God really was, who He is, and that too took some time. I had seen God as an arbitrary rule maker. He made His rules the same way my parents did. The reason

was, "because I said so!" But that was a false image of God. The way Anton LaVey saw God also affected his view of Satan.

Any disciple of the First Church of Satan knows Anton's biography. He was a police crime photographer and saw all the violent and evil deeds done by humanity. He saw the unfairness of life, and decided God wasn't real. That was a big surprise to me when I realized it. Anton LaVey was actually an atheist. Anton did NOT believe in a Creator God. To him, God was a figment of the imagination and psyche, and the myth of God was perpetuated by the Church. To Anton, the Church was Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church was a world power for a thousand years, and its religion, the evil and emptiness of it, he saw it for what it really was, and he concluded that GOD was just an ingenious myth, a part of a scheme to control people. Any natural desire a person had was labeled as "sinful." Because it was a natural desire no one would be able to control it, so they would always be in "sin", and the only way to be forgiven for that "sin" was to go to the Church and do what the priest told you. With the consequences of eternal damnation or the reward of eternal life, even kings would bow to the Church. It was all just a scheme. There was no "God."

So Anton LaVey turned to the opposite ideal. He made what the Church called Satan the liberator of that scheme. But to Anton, Satan was NOT a real being. If there was no real God then there was no real Satan. To him, "Satan" was the force that causes "sinful" desires. The so-called dark part of our psyche. Satan was represented in every culture by that darkness. Anton called this force a hundred different names, Abaddon, Belial, Baalzebub, from the Bible, the names of gods Israel was not supposed to worship. Lillith, Dracula, the names of vampires from ancient folklore and fiction. Satan was always represented by all these things because Satan was a base part of humanity itself. WE were Satan.

Satanism to Anton LaVey was the celebration of that part of ourselves. His rituals were parodies of Catholic rituals. His philosophy was to embrace that "darkness" within ourselves since it led to pleasure and pleasure was the real aim of life- after life there was nothing. No heaven, no hell, just the grave. We cease to exist.

I never saw any of that while I was a Satanist. I never fully understood Anton LaVey's philosophy until I was in my 20's. Anton's error was to see religion as God. He saw the lie of religion and the unfairness of life and decided there was no God. I saw the misused authority of my parents and decided THAT was how God was. So often that's our first grave error in our search for truth. We perceive life through the narrow experiences of our tiny portion of the world and draw our conclusions about the whole universe from that. It's normal, but it's also disastrous.

The fact is nearly everyone forces God to fit into his own perception. Even Christians serve a God they perceive rather than the GOD who truly is. They limit Him according to those special needs of their own psyche. It's actually hard not to do that, but every time we do, it has consequences. Seeing God for who He truly is takes effort, and always has one inevitable result that MANY people cannot accept: Our understanding will always fall short. We will always look toward God and eventually say "why" or "I don't understand this," about SOMETHING. That often drives people

to come up with their own conclusions, their own philosophies, religions, etc. We demand the right to know God with assurance, in every area, but the very fact that He is God precludes that it simply CANNOT be. A glass of water is not capable of holding the ocean. That

limitation is hard on our egos.

It's so much easier to create our own gods; gods that are fully knowable. Those are the gods of atheism, occultism, religion and sometimes even Christianity. Then of course there are those prejudices that we demand of our gods. Women who take offense at a "male" God and so create for themselves a female or neuter god. There we have all the racial gods, the black gods, white gods, and cultural gods, the Spanish gods, African gods, Indian gods, etc. All of them called GOD. And yet none of them are truly Him. Some may be tiny glimpses of Him. Maybe His big toe or little finger, but nothing more. Others are not even that. They're only delusions from our prejudices.

Getting past all that to see the true GOD, the real creator of the universe took me years. Understanding why the Bible refers to Him as it does is a good place to start. We can't relate to the Creator as He is. He's too big. How can an ant relate to a person? How can a grain of sand relate to a desktop computer? The Bible calls God "Father" not because He's male, but because of the relationship of a father to a child. God is as much female as He is male, and neither. (The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, appearing in the very first chapter of Genesis is female.) To get even close to defining God as He fully is we have to take every role a person plays in our society and add that to God's title: Father, Mother, friend, king, lord, boss, brother, sister, judge, lawyer, jury, teacher, executioner, savior, etc-etc.

No single image can contain Him. He will fill it up and overflow it until it bursts apart. But realizing THAT very thing about Him is the first step toward seeing Him for who He really is. That one thing alone cuts through much of the prejudiced images. Unfortunately today society seems to have gone the other direction. Any image of God is accepted as God. However you choose to worship God is okay.

No. It's not.

Because those images are NOT God. They're empty cups. And this is the basis of everything the Bible calls sin. My gosh this took me years to understand, wading through all the nonsense that so much of "Christianity" is today. **There is a reason for all of God's commands. ONE reason for them all. A very simple one. They are all a matter of LIFE and DEATH.**

We've all seen how a cotton candy machine can take sugar and food coloring and spin it into a big fluffy mound. We stick our tongues to it and it dissolves back into sugar. Imagine a machine that could do that with air. It could take air and spin it into a big fluffy mound, all colored and textured. We pick up that textured air, touch it, taste it, eat it, and it seems filling, but in our stomachs it just dissolves right back into air. If that was all we ate, we'd starve to death. We could go on eating and eating, seemingly filling ourselves up, but be starving day by day until eventually we wither

up and die.

In life there are things that are the spiritual equivalent of textured air. No matter how much we consume them, they leave us spiritually starving because they're emptiness disguised as substance. Those things lead slowly to death. Spiritually, mentally AND physically. Anything that leads to death, that is emptiness disguised as substance, God calls SIN. Those are the things He forbids. Not because He's a tyrant as I thought He was, but because He wants us to LIVE.

Worshiping an idol is sinful because it's NOT God. It's an empty cup. It may feel like something to us, but it's not. It will leave us destitute inside.

Of course religions have their own lists of "SIN". Religions take personal prejudices and label them as sins. Things like dancing, playing cards, certain kinds of music, oral sex, have all been labeled SINFUL by some Christian religions. They're not. God never declared them so. People did. Mistaking the two, either way, and it ends up badly. Religion stifles, oppresses, and leads to death. Sin empties, poisons and leads to death. God is NOT against us. His commands are to guide us toward the things that

produce life, health, happiness, joy, growth, because God loves us. That's the TRUTH of who He is. I've watched closely and I believe most people who turn from God do so for one of two basic reasons.

#1 They mistake some aspect of religion as God- like Anton LaVey did. Or

#2 They are unable to overcome their need to understand what can not BE understood.

I honestly don't think it's easy to turn from God if we see Him as He really is. Every Satanist I've ever encountered has fallen into one of those 2 categories. They either have a warped, distorted perception of God, based on what they were taught by some idiot, or they don't believe in the goodness or even the existence of God because of the injustice of the world. The first is a problem of perception. The second is a problem of pride. Both are hard to get past.

The only way to get past those false perceptions is to have a heart that sincerely wants TRUTH. God has to be sought after. Anyone who will settle for, and hang on to their empty idol of perception will never find the truth of God as GOD. Doesn't it make SENSE however that the true creator of the Universe is far beyond that simple, contrived IMAGE of Him? I mean, if someone told you a monkey painted the Sistine Chapel wouldn't you look at those paintings and realize that's a lie? The so called "God" that Satanism describes, that so many religions describe, is very shallow, simplistic, and downright convenient to their own set of beliefs. Doesn't it make sense that God has to be more than that? Only an honest desire to challenge those beliefs and perceptions and seek out that MORE will result in finding the true GOD.

The problem of pride is often even harder. When we look at the world and say "God can't exist because this thing right here isn't right." Or we say, "God isn't just or good because this part of life is totally unfair." What we're actually doing is declaring

ourselves equal to God. We declare that the world, and God Himself, MUST fall into the parameters of our own understanding or it simply is not so. We declare, "God can't be good unless I can understand that goodness. It has to fit MY definitions." That's pride. To a wino a "good" God is one who provides him with a free bottle of booze everyday and grants him no hangovers. No matter who we are, our own ideas of good and evil, right and wrong, are skewed to our own personal tastes and perceptions. To demand those of God is megalomaniacal. Imagine a 4 year old child declaring you are BAD because you make her eat food instead of candy, and you won't let her watch Friday the 13th. That's the same thing we do when we judge God because we don't understand the world. Only letting go of that PRIDE and acknowledging our tiny size

compared to God's will overcome that, and too often that's the one thing prideful people will never do.

If we CAN get past those two things though, we can find the true God. A God of power, but compassion; of justice, but love; of fierceness, but mercy. He's the Creator of the Universe who's greatest desire is that His creation, His children, know strength, and goodness, peace, love, warmth, joy, health and growth. That we are not left alone. Not abandoned. Not misunderstood. And because there is nothing bigger than God, the greatest thing God can offer to His creation is Himself. True heaven is the presence of God. True Hell is the absence of God. That may sound superficial, but God is love, light, and warmth. To be without Him is to be in bleakness, darkness, and cold. When we see that truth, when we see who God really is, then we see who Satan really is too.

Satan is NOT the opposite of God. That's the most fundamental error in theology.

Satan is not darkness, while God is light. Darkness is simply the absence of light.

Satan is less than that. Satan is the obstacle between humanity and God.

Take a flashlight, shine its light on a wall, take your hand and cover the end of the flashlight. The light is God. The darkness is the absence of God. The hand is Satan. The hand does not destroy the light, it simply keeps us from seeing it. The light still shines, it's just hidden or distorted from our view. Satan is a being that desires to block us from God and everything Godly. He's the enemy of Humanity. To be cut off from love, light, and warmth results in death. Satan is the bringer of all kinds of death- spiritually, mentally, and physically. He is the deceiver and the tempter, and the accuser.

In the Bible, Satan is simply a created being with no name. He is only called by what he does. He accuses us of our sins before God. He's called the Accuser or Adversary. In Hebrew ha Shatan- Satan. The Enemy. He whispers in our ear to do that which leads to death, then accuses us before God for what we have done wrong. He tempts us to do everything God forbids in order to destroy us. That's the true nature of Satan. He's not an enemy of God. He's an enemy of life.

The problem is humanity is flawed. We have within us an impulse to do evil, to do the very things we know will destroy us. Like smoking. We know intellectually that

smoking leads to lung cancer, and yet it's a billion dollar industry because we still do it. That is OUR nature. It's a part of our free will. In order to be able to choose between life and death we have to have an impulse or desire that pulls us toward each one. Set two pies before a child, one apple, one cherry. If the child hates cherries, there's no choice. He will pick apple every time. If he likes both though, then there's conflict. Sometimes he will choose apple, sometimes cherry. Now what if he's allergic to cherries but still loves

them? They'll make him sick. Which should he choose? Apple. But which will he choose? If people will face hangovers again and again for the pleasure of getting drunk, a child will face vomiting for the pleasure of cherries. That's human nature. We will do that which is evil because there is a pleasure in evil that appeals to us as much as the pleasure of good does. Even though evil kills us.

That's the only true lure of Satanism. When we get past the lies, the deceptions, the false perceptions of God, all that remains is the pleasure of evil. It's the high a junkie feels with a needle in his arm. It's the satisfaction a thief feels from taking what is another's. It's the ecstasy of the kill, the fulfillment of greed, the thrill of domination, and it always ends in pain and death, whether ours or another's.

To be a Satanist is not to be liberated. It is to be bonded to death. The freedom it offers is an illusion. And this is something I know every Satanist knows, because I was there. In the dark and quiet, all alone, without the buzz of alcohol or drugs, or the rhythm of music to drown out the sounds, there is an empty echo inside us. A vacancy. A feeling of loss and cold and turmoil and hunger. That emptiness gnaws and hurts worse than anything else in life; we take up knives to carve our skin just to escape it, or run into the arms of a lover to smother it, but it doesn't go away. It grows. It is death at work, emptiness causing decay. **No matter how much we feed it SIN, it will never fill up.**

Eventually it will consume us, and destroy us.

The only thing that can fill that emptiness is God. The true God. Finding Him takes effort and courage. It requires that you hate the darkness enough to wrench the hand from the flashlight. That is something only you can do. But you CAN do it.

You really can.

It takes great effort, but the result is life, true life, in all its abundance and diversity. The life that only God can produce, because He is the only source of it.

I speak as one who has traveled the roads, who has seen the land far and wide. My most heartfelt prayer is that you see this signpost, and from it, find your way home. Choose God. Choose life.

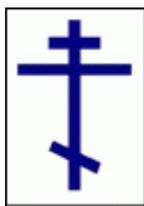
Sean Sellers



St. Dimas, the good thief



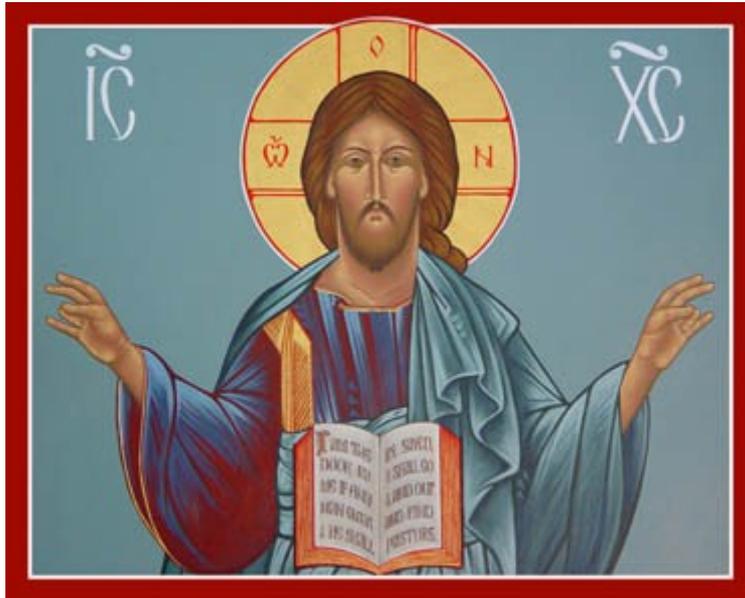
And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.



The Repentance of King Manasseh

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God. Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in

the high places, yet unto the LORD their God only. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. His prayer also, and how God was intreated of him, and all his sin, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers. So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead. Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; And humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house. But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.



And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.

And let him that heareth say, Come.

And let him that is athirst come.

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.