

Dialogues with Perceptus and Friends

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Dialogue I

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

NOVITIA: Perceptus, I always appreciate your openness to me both to write or call, and even dialogue when together; for though the Spirit of almighty God could reveal truth to me separately, on my own, from the Bible, and directly by revelation— and most often this does occur since knowing my freedom from the approval of man, which bondage abounds in many, both non-Christian and Christian— I find joy in the marriage of truth and beauty as you express it, like some rich music or art, that both excels as such, but also breathes the nature of God through you as you pour out your soul for those coming to you with questions. I see really, that what you open up to me, confirms the seed first revealed to me directly by the Spirit and the Scriptures, but this seed is built up by you as another wise master-builder who gives glory to the one Lord Jesus Christ.

PERCEPTUS: My dear Novitia, those of the new birth are all branches of the one vine, as our Lord Jesus Christ tells us; yet many wander around in the bramble bushes of practicality and how to achieve a better means of money-making, marriage, sport, or other good thing, which God has created, but which things never of themselves can free us. He means us to be stewards of these things, but not worshipers of what can subtly take over after the first love of many a Christian, as if by success in such enterprises, we can judge the worthiness or holiness of a Christian, when in fact God looks only at the heart and not apparent success in a world so deceived by appearances.

NOVITIA: My dear Perceptus, you always cut to the root and draw me out without unnecessary laboring in useless words and other distracting obsessions about ideas and behavior in those who irritate us with their many roads to vanity. Plainly now, here is my upset: I read in Matthew 13 this morning the parable of the wheat and the tares, and it frightened me; for do we not all at one moment or another, entertain the secret, chilling fear that we might have lived in faith of the wheat, only to find ourselves banished as tares?

PERCEPTUS: Yes, those seriously seeking to know God and His holiness do go through these doubts at some point, and God intends them; for what faith can we truly have and know if it is not built on doubt that gets swallowed up? In our early futility of thinking, we supposed that life should be without challenge or assault, as if we should only enjoy uncontested bliss, falsely imagining that a veteran Christian reaches a place free from the negative battering of the enemy and the groaning and travailing of this mortal world. Such a one wishes the devil away, undermines the deadliness of sin, and seeks a universal oneness in which all is positive, making suffering merely an illusion to quit believing in. See, though, how even the secular world thrives on great books and films in which a good hero defeats a sinister evil. The glory of the tale comes from the depths into which the hero must reach within the self to defeat and swallow up the menace of the wicked opponent. So why should we be surprised if the Bible also sets forth the tale of a hero and savior whose extreme agony leads to the defeat of a deadly opponent?

NOVITIA: You are right about this: I myself have been tempted many times to wish for a world like you describe, with all its glory, but without battles and opposition, the very things that God means to make our faith stronger. But tell me, who are the tares, not that I truly fear being one anymore; for God has settled into my heart a certainty of His calling and keeping of me, and my faith fully desires this and

presses upon Him to do just that. Nonetheless, I find myself disturbed that tares do exist and that some will suffer the punishment of eternal separation from God.

PERCEPTUS: My dear Novitia, if you did not feel pangs and anguish over the eternal separation of some from God, then you would be a stone or a senseless animal, driven entirely by your own lust— unconcerned about the well being of any but yourself. But since the Spirit of God is a lamp in you and a light and guide to your thinking— the very will of your will in your union with Him through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord— you can do no other than suffer at these thoughts which you bring up; for God Himself is longsuffering and endures infinitely beyond what we can imagine, revealing to us only so much as we can take as we move from faith to faith in the security of His keeping.

NOVITIA: You have relieved my mind somewhat already; for these agonies I feel do not seem commensurate with the peace that some other Christians suppose that I should have, as if one should, when finding the Holy Grail, so to speak, enter into the kind of rest free from burden over others. Tell me more, though, how it is that tares can exist and why God allows them, and why they so closely resemble the wheat, that we must not try ourselves to distinguish them, but leave that task to the angels as commissioned by God at the time of His gathering.

PERCEPTUS: You will read, Novitia, in Matthew 13 that the wheat and tares, though they so closely resemble each other, nonetheless could hardly be more different as God sees them: for the wheat grows in the light and warmth of the sun to produce a rich harvest that satisfies the hunger of man, whereas the tares absorb the same light and warmth only to result in something useless, ending up in a furnace. The key to this lies in two things: first, the tares are sons of the evil or wicked one, which can only mean the devil, so that we gain understanding that an evil person is not evil by constitution,

as in the image of God. But when the a person' sfaith does not seek God, it reverts to the dominion of God' s enemy. All save Christ are born this way because of Adam' s sin, for God created mankind as containers of His glory and not as independent beings.

NOVITIA: Now I see more clearly the necessity of Christ' s virgin birth, for He would otherwise have only been born as one more son of fallen Adam, under the dominion of the evil one and needing himself deliverance from the bondage every son of Adam is born into. This is a harsh doctrine Perceptus, and I would not believe it except that Scripture so plainly teaches it in Ephesians 2, Romans 5, and countless other passages that I overlooked in my past humanistic thinking.

PERCEPTUS: That is right, Novitia; you have discerned well, and I would discourse at length here to give a full apologetic for the lost as sons of the devil except that I know that you have researched these scriptures and that such is not your question today, for you more have asked why God endures tares and what these tares are. I said earlier that the key to understanding Matthew 13 lies in two things, one being that the tares are sons of the devil, and not only those born as such, for we all are born as such, excepting our Lord Jesus Christ: but the tares in this passage are those who choose to remain eternally as such, for they will not come to the light and love of God and abide therein as their home and delight, both now and forever. Implied also in your question is why God determined a plan including a feature so monstrous to the natural mind and a feature even anguishing to the divine mind.

NOVITIA: Yes, Perceptus, this is my question, and I do not know that you can fully answer it, for who can know the depths of God?

PERCEPTUS: Ah, Novitia, you show wisdom here by not trying to figure out that which God does not give us to know. Many

wreck themselves by remaining with reason as their tool of discovery, only to twist their minds in endless agonies that they cannot resolve, which further can lead them to destruction when not able to resolve the suffering of life. They then posit endings for the world or eternity not offered in Scripture. They do this to escape the difficulty of what they cannot understand. First, they do not let their minds move into a condition of zero or nothingness, whereby one knows only as God gives to know; second, they rush foolishly to rescue what people from what God Himself does not rescue them from— namely choice.

NOVITIA: I have had many bad experiences Perceptus with those who emphasize choice: those who do often seem the most miserable of God' s creatures, which is especially incongruous since they profess themselves Christians and yet have no peace or rest in their lives. They swim constantly in a turmoil of thinking that they should do better, yet not believing that they ever will, yet trying furiously all the more— hoping for eternal rest only when Christ returns at the end of the world or when they die and their souls go to Him during the interim before the resurrection of the body.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, many who emphasize choice do live in a miserable state of mind, and many of these are God' s precious children, whom He did in no way consign to live in this misery. They live in this misery because they confuse the issue of choice with their own works, as if they can be like Christ. This is a whole separate treatise— one I cannot undertake now or even abridge, nor do I think you wish me to today— but let me simply say what you already know from the insight given you by God, that these mistake faith and works. They know enough not to trust for their place in heaven based on works, but when it comes to living the Christian life, they do still confuse faith and works. They do not understand yet that choice means only receptivity to God' s life, meaning that they can relax that God abides in them as Christians, and therefore, He undertakes the willing

and working, as Paul tells us in Philippians. Choice means faith, and faith means receptivity, implying that one does not resist the inflow of God's nature into our beings, since He resides there from our having invited Him in to save us in the first place. Succinctly put, these who labor over choice in the frustrating way that you bring up do not yet know that God created man for one purpose— to live in, through, by, and as.

NOVITIA: I fully agree with you, Perceptus, but some might find a snag in a saying of the great missionary statesman, Norman Grubb, who said of faith, "What you take, takes you." This by no means sounds as passive as your statement that choice means faith and faith means not resisting, but merely abiding in the indwelling Christ.

PERCEPTUS: Well said Novitia! Many false suppose the great missionary statesman Norman Grubb to have minimized choice, when nothing could more completely miss his meaning. Norman responded to the spirits of his hearers, and knowing their deception, that they labor in their own works, as if choice could deliver them and lead them to do as Christ does, he taught as Christ and all the apostles rightly did, that faith is receptivity and simple abiding without our own efforts. Yet Norman rightly knew that life consists in taking, for such is the nature of desire— to take! One cannot receive without taking. One who does not resist God, takes God. His image in us, passionate like as He is, finds itself made for only one thing— to take! But as you know, this is not the taking of self-for-self, but the taking that embraces God, who is by nature, self-giving love.

NOVITIA: Thank you Perceptus, and I know that you could in ecstasy discourse for hours on the nature of God as love, but I too must go here soon, and you have not yet gotten to the second part of your answer on the wheat and the tares, the first part being that they are sons of the devil. What is that second part that you have not yet spoken of?

PERCEPTUS: I will let you go here shortly, but let me tell you, as I know you wish me to, this second aspect. I mentioned that both wheat and tares absorb the same light and warmth of the sun but produce results that could not be more diametric. You will remember that in Hebrews, God calls Himself a consuming fire. Yet to the redeemed, we have come unto Mount Zion and a myriad of angels, as we learn later in that most startling book of edification for those persevering in their faith. How is it that some can come unto Mount Zion and a host of angels and a cloud of witnesses, while others shrink back in fear and darkness at the thunder and terrible bodings of God?

NOVITIA: This is indeed my question!

PERCEPTUS: Notice first, Novitia, that in the wilderness, God dealt with His people by the law, such that they could not enter the Holy Place of His glory, where the ark and the Shekinah abode. They saw many manifestations of God, in the pillar and the cloud, in many miracles, and in provision and protection. But in their consciousness, they lived in the fear and darkness of threat and separation from God, except for a few like Caleb and Joshua. See, though, that Moses in no way lived as those under the law. God talked face to face with Moses, and when others drew back in fear and darkness at the mountain, Moses enjoyed intimate fellowship and face-to-face conversation with God on the mountain. Clearly, Moses pictured the new man in Christ, face to face with the glory of God.

NOVITIA: I read the Scriptures with such dullness for years, Perceptus, that the different experience of Moses never struck me as anything but arbitrary and as something not meant for me.

PERCEPTUS: Novitia, we have all read the Scriptures like that, but thankfully, we do not have to continue reading them with such dullness. Our tribulations and temptations can drive us

to a life of glory in God's presence such as Moses experienced and like the experiences of those in the New Testament believing the better promises. And herein is the second part that I have been leading up to but have not discoursed on yet. The mystery is this: the same light and warmth of the sun soften some while hardening others, and the only difference is not in the nature of the fire but in how we relate to the fire. The same fire burns for all, both wheat and tare, yet with different effects according to the receptivity of the plant.

NOVITIA: How can one fire be two different things to two different groups?

PERCEPTUS: For one group, God's fire is love and light and harmony. Others, however, reject God's fire as abhorrent—not at all blessing, healing, and life itself. Even natural fire is the same. Fire can light our stoves, heat our homes, cook our food, illuminate our nights, and power our technologies. Yet it has danger: even the simpleton comes to know that putting one's hand into the flame causes a burn. With the sun in the sky, one learns to respect the power and danger of the sun if not related to properly; for otherwise, serious burn results. Spiritually, many do what they would not do with natural fire: they use the knowledge of God in a harmful way, producing an evil result.

NOVITIA: So we experience the fire accordingly as we relate to it; in fact, it is friend to us, but one can make himself a foe to it through freedom of choice. This is a strange and dangerous mystery, this freedom of choice and fixed nature of fire as love.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, it is; for God is light and love and means Himself as only that to us. Yet He will not force us, for what kind of love results from forcing? God, in His omniscience, knows what we in freedom will embrace as our eternal destiny, yet He does not create us in any way so as to

minimize our full consciousness of the way we use our freedom. Many theologians tangle themselves endlessly trying to solve this mystery, with many elaborate schemes, which I myself used to study and argue about. But I abandoned those pursuits because the issue of my life so quickly turned as an adult to the formidable temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. God made me to simply know that I would take and be taken by something or someone.

NOVITIA: You speak admirably here, Perceptus, for many labor over schemes which I' m not certain that we can know; but I do know that the devil brings to us various lusts, which if given into, will lead to such insanity and destructiveness of life that the mind could not possibly even care any longer for elaborate schemes, when the real need is freedom to live with the treasures of faith, love, and a clear conscience, which really themselves are the fruit of Christ, for Paul says in Colossians that Christ is our life.

PERCEPTUS: I sense a spark of true union fellowship here with you, Novitia, which I often enjoy; for as many questions as you ask, still, our living fellowship in Christ Himself is what binds us to Him and to each other. We live in that one flame of fire, which to the tares is a furnace of fire and torment, but which to us, comes to us through the Cross, being God' s very nature from eternity, and which can never change, since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, as Hebrews says. To us, the Cross is the nature of God, and therefore, what in His mind freely necessitated His sacrifice of Himself in Christ' s incarnation, to save us. Yet for others, this same Cross is a horror and torment; for sadly, some, like Lucifer, desire to be God themselves instead of joined to God in a union— whereby God lives in them, and walks in them, and is their very life. In fact, among the tares, they do not even originate the blasphemy of wanting to be God, but go along with the devil in this lie, all the while, thinking that they can be free of bondage to the devil, which bondage God

does in no way allow to those who reject him.

NOVITIA: You have spoken well of this mystery, how that one fire can be to one a furnace of everlasting torment and to another such that "the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," as Matthew quotes from our Lord for us. Perceptus, I cannot say that I understand this mystery of how one thing can be diametric to others so that God's light and love bring eternal joy and ecstasy to some and a furnace of torment eternally to others. I do thank God that He made provision for me with this same Cross which is His very nature, by sending His precious Son, the eternal Christ, the second member of the Trinity, to live— then die for me, coming in the same flesh which makes me a man and equally constituted Him a man, though excepting sin, as we mentioned afore in our conversation. I thank Him abundantly also for the freedom to escape that fiery furnace and enter into His joy through His death, burial, and resurrection, which according to Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20 are my very own death, burial, and resurrection as well, such that in His death as me, God freed me from being a son of the devil, put Satan out of me, and joined me to Himself eternally in a union with Christ through the new birth. I praise God forever for this!

PERCEPTUS: Novitia, you have spoken so well here and in such an edifying way that I think we can part for the moment with the joy of God in our hearts and in the fellowship with each other in Him. So I bid you good day until we fellowship again.

Dialogue II

The Nature and Meaning of the New Birth

Sylvester: Perceptus, I note that since your last conversation, Christmas has come, and the New Year is even tomorrow, which numerous friends will celebrate tonight with festivities, consisting of good food and beverage, while perhaps even watching the famous ball drop in Times Square, New York, where once, hundreds of years ago, the moon might have hung luminous over the forest, in a quiet Manhattan, formerly possessed by Native Americans, who would gladly give back the pittance received as payment from the Dutch in 1626, for what now is one of the world's pinnacle cities.

Novitia: This cannot but put into my mind the loftiness of and high habitation with which we regard the mighty cities of the world in their opulence and progress, supposedly promising to build through the millennia a final kingdom of the rights of man, evolved out of trial, error, and compromise— out of the bloodshed of wars too many to record in one place, from which we learn, along with the science of randomness, that no human, owing up to the cosmic chance that produced us, rightfully may claim superiority to some other race or gender, since we all proceed from a big bang and microscopic life, followed by much selected development, up to erect posture and clever thinking, even creating the chief glory of man— politics.

PERCEPTUS: I see that the Christmas season and imminent New Year have not left you two jaded, such that you fail to end the year with a plethora of barbs inviting my laughter and leaving me wondering if you mean me really to join in, though I think that you have some other end in mind other than the banter you set forth here on New Year's Eve.

NOVITIA: Perceptus, you cut through the overgrowth of my

mind and perceive that though the arguments of the day disturb me, and that though we as citizens of heaven in a fallen world must take some action to speak against ungodliness, yet we must not obsess on issues pertaining only to the present world, a world Scripture plainly tells us is set upon its course by the god of this world, the spirit now at work in the children of wrath, of which we ourselves once were before our glorious savior condescended to die on a lowly Cross to redeem us out of darkness and into the His glorious domain of light.

PERCEPTUS: Now you begin to speak that which quickens my spirit; for out of the entangling disputes of the day, one is still left with the need to find rest, and the passion of disputes that the world feeds upon never bring contentment to us when we engage from a merely temporal point of view: for though God is the Lord of this earth, He is not visibly Lord yet except to the eye of faith that continues in faith, looking for the day when the invisible will become visible, not only to the inner eye, but to the outer eye as well. In the meantime, though all humans partake of the same flesh and emotion, only two spiritual origins define us at root, and these origins could not more diametrically oppose each other, as you well know my good friend.

NOVITIA: I see that we tease our way toward what I wish you to talk about, Perceptus. In my senatorial years, I find that though Wisdom refreshes me in body and spirit, the fatigue of worldly dialogue, impassioned by the adversary, so tires me, that to experience rest, I must live in the refreshing but invisible springs of heavenly water within me, the very ones that for years as a warring, young Christian, lay hidden under the crust of my constant battles for moral causes, taken on to make this world into the kingdom of light.

NOVITIA: I have heard Perceptus say that the problem is a

misunderstanding of what it means to be born again. Many Christians use the phrase "born again" to denote that one is a Christian, a new creature, when in fact, the Christian life to such is no more than the prospective New Year: a year which in all likelihood will entail more of what the previous year entailed, only compacted and compressed into new advances in technology, without correlating advances in heavenly wisdom. Succinctly put, next year will be the same as this one; for did not the writer of Ecclesiastes say that there is nothing new under the sun, and he probably wrote almost a millennium before our blessed Lord and savior. So why is it that so many Christians, calling themselves "born again," will not be much different this next year except that they imagine that by trying harder to imitate Christ, they might find a hitherto unknown door of success? Likely, they will drown in the same miserable sin-consciousness as always, wherein one piously says, "I'm a sinner" or "God, forgive me of my many sins," or "Just think what could happen if our church tried harder to obey God, thus bringing the fire of revival?"

PERCEPTUS: I agree— many that the Christian life is like the little choo- choo train that thought it could, or that the Christian life operates akin to what one sees on television or the media, where in an interview, a seven-foot-tall center on a basketball team says, "You can do anything you set your mind to," when intuitively, the listener knows that most people will never dunk a basketball, much less block the shot of the player being interviewed.

Novitia: But isn't the point not that everyone can dunk a basketball or block the shot of a seven-foot-tall rarity, but rather that each of us can set some goal exceedingly beyond our present capabilities, yet one reachable with perseverance and determination?

PERCEPTUS: Thank you for so well playing the foil here, Novitia, for I know you too well to think that you espouse the

argument you just mention; for who by trying to be like Christ can ever be like Him? If that were possible, then one could keep the law of God, rivaling God for purity and perfection, whereas, those not too far deceived, discern the error of imitation theories regarding the Christian life.

NOVITIA: You stagger me, Perceptus, for this statement of yours, without dispute, implies that many Christians, though speaking of being "born again," still try to put new wine into an old skin. They know that one can never be perfect, yet one must do something with the Lord's immutable command, "Be thou perfect," and so there remains nothing to do but to try, though the goal is impossible. But what servant wants to blatantly say to the Master, "You require an absurd thing, knowing that I cannot be perfect, while you yet command me to be perfect, leaving me always to try endlessly to my frustration at having to attempt the impossible, which heaven and earth know is ludicrous, though the devil evidently is deceived that a created being can be perfect"?

PERCEPTUS: You rightly introduce what to the natural or carnal mind is the most baffling and frustrating dilemma known: what motivates one to continue striving for what becomes increasingly evident to the honest heart is impossible? One must either begin to redefine the expectations of the law, or one must reason that God is satisfied with mere effort and ugly strain; or one must posit that God looks with approval on progress. However, He does none of the above, but He does mean that we be perfect, and in our efforts to be perfect, discover our inability, such that we resist no further the meaning of life, so long hidden as a mystery in Scripture, but which mystery has been revealed since the days of Paul the apostle.

NOVITIA: This excites me to hear, for the seed of what you speak already grows and flourishes in me since I first saw

what "born again" means, which strikingly differs from the ordinary Christian conception that "born again" means merely having been converted. If one is born again, this new birth implies a new self, born into a new world, operating in a new way: the new person, in the new world, operating by a new principle, lives with a clarity and ease that escapes the person not born again. From our previous conversations, sadly not recorded, lacking an amanuensis, I know that you take the new birth not to be conception of the divine seed with the human, and not to be development in the womb, and not to be entrance into the birth canal, but instead, you recognize the new birth as the entrance into the new world— where one sees the kingdom of God.

PERCEPTUS: We are dancing now, in celebration and eternal union of what always has been in God, but is now manifest to the saints. You truly note that there is conception, and this is where the human spirit and God's spirit, because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, unite as one spirit in a union, in which each spirit retains its properties, while combining with the other in a new form. God intended this all along, even before the Fall in Eden, for He created us to be powerless that He might eternally be the power in us, the two working as one, in which each does its part, expressed in one form, seen as a glorious man, made in the image of God. In the womb, all is there and so not to be aborted, but the fetus is nowhere ready for expulsion into the world, without a time of careful development, leading up to the moment when the baby will enter into a world outside the mother. In one sense, the baby has lived in the world, but it has only lived in it as united to the mother's protection and sustenance, feeding off the mother and growing in the mother until the time of separation into a new relationship with the mother in which eye meets eye, and the cry of one meets the cry of the other, and in which each smiles upon the other, and the union is not weaker than it was in the womb, but stronger than ever

for the division into two visible entities.

NOVITIA: Your words go into my innermost parts and come forth with the power and glorious energy of the Logos Himself in this miracle which you describe, namely the bringing forth from God of a new creation, made in His image, designed for union with Him forever, in which we never outgrow the awe of the first miracle of birth, even while we go from faith to faith in greater and more revealed understanding of who we are and of the One who birthed us from that divine womb. I think many miss the radical import of the question Nicodemus posed to our Lord, for Nicodemus discerned that no one can morph into a divine son by effort; and Nicodemus certainly stood qualified to know this, having lived as a master of a law that he could not keep, leading him to desire a new birth, while wondering if such could really be available, making his question to our Lord a tentative hope: on the one hand desiring something too incredulous to imagine, but on the other hand, knowing that apart from a miracle, nothing would ever change in his efforts to keep the law and discover the self the he innately knew that God must somehow mean.

PERCEPTUS: This is where the doctrine of the new birth far exceeds the ordinary evangelical definition of Christian conversion. The proof comes from the simple observation of how we as Christians proceed to live our lives after the initial glow and manifestations often attending conversion. For some, no anointing or manifestations of the Spirit become apparent, and that person lives by faith that God must have done what He said that He would do, namely, come into the heart of one inviting Him in, enabling one to say, "God has saved me, for I take it that He did what He said He would do if I invited Him into my heart." For others, various manifestations occur, heavenly anointings, whereby the new convert walks in miraculous ease, and with manifestations of the Spirit that seem like they will go on effortlessly forever.

Those with experience know that these manifestations fade, and that faith entails belief in the face of contrary appearances and against the harshness of the world, wherein God tests us to make of us the good seed, and not the seed which the birds steal, which the sun blasts, or which the thorns of this world's cares suffocates. We cannot sustain ourselves through these times except that we come to know the new birth, which is exceedingly more than what we have noted as conception or even entering the birth canal. Sadly, what happens is that one mistakes conception for the new birth, and in so doing, falls back under deception, which leaves the defining of the new birth as merely a new desire in the same old sinner. Does it not stand to reason that a new person would have new desires, and a new heart beating with those desires, as well as an understanding of how to fulfill those desires? Why is it then that many Christians, of which we ourselves were once numbered, mistakenly devise the hideous scheme whereby they are a new creature and an old creature, but mostly an old creature that must try to be like a new creature? You can see, Novitia, that this scattered and unreasonable thinking almost tilts my playing field even to consider for a few seconds.

NOVITIA: I think it good Perceptus that you wobble under that old way of thinking, for this shows me that you live so acclimated to the new world and yourself as a new creature in it, that even a drop of the old world in your consciousness as a possibility causes you the beginning of disorientation.

PERCEPTUS: I can take but the slightest pull in that direction to feel myself distracted, and I use these pulls to refresh myself in His keeping grace and the knowledge that I would wildly rush into them on my own if He weren't keeping me. I thank Him too, that He is keeping me, for I live a simple life of powerlessness, as we mentioned earlier, such that I acknowledge that powerlessness is not merely the province

and condition needed by a percentage of the population that we call addicts; for even before the Fall of man, God created Adam and Eve powerless and intended that mankind live eternally as powerless, in union with Him, so that His power would ever manifest itself as glory in our weakness.

NOVITIA: Most do think that only some are addicts and that as such, only addicts need to admit powerlessness and yield to God, whereas, as you set forth eloquently, God created Adam and Eve powerless even before the Fall: for what can be more powerless than a branch to its vine, or a cup to what it contains, or a temple to its God, or a body to its head? God did not create us one way, and then after the Fall, intend us another way. No, He created us before the Fall to be powerless, and the Fall did not in any way change our constitution and means of operation as humans, indwelled by the Spirit of God to manifest the being of God in human forms; but rather the Fall enabled the devil to deceive us about the very purpose and plan that God intended, with or without the Fall. The Fall did not change what a human is or how a human operates by faith or how we walk in the glory of God by Christ in us: the Fall meant only that God would need to pay the supreme sacrifice of Himself in human form to redeem us out of the kingdom of darkness and bondage to Satan, into the new birth by which we walk as new creatures doing the will of God by the faith of Christ in us, who does all the very things that He commands, which seems gross and despicable in concept to far too many Christians.

PERCEPTUS: Since you have begun to develop this, please go ahead and speak in detail about this offense that we both encounter regularly, as the grief of our hearts and the bitterness that drives us daily into the deeper regions of that simple, wooden Cross upon which our Lord died, but which is also the Cross which holds— in His burial, and resurrection, and ascension— the very mystery of the Gospel which heals

us continually by the leaves of the tree of life that the Revelator, John, writes of: and is not the tree of life necessarily the Cross, seen in its heavenly light, and no longer only as the tree upon which our Lord was executed by the determined will of God, which was an accursed tree, but now known for what it is— the tree of life in its ascended glory, from which we eat and drink and find all our sustenance in the heavenly realm?

NOVITIA: How fitting that as we talk, only a few hours away from the new year, 2006, that we should venture upon these matters and talk about what became new 2000 years ago, that was always new in the mind of God, even before creation: for Christ is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. This is newness indeed, that we continually experience new life from our new birth, and that we enjoy ourselves in God, as the new creation that He made us to be, birthed out of His Son, in the Divine Womb of all being, from which we spring forth, as expressions by faith of His majesty, in a world where we live by constant wonder and marvel at everything which He is and does, but which mystery never turns old because of the timeless sense of miracle that comes with the new birth.

PERCEPTUS: You leave me reeling in glory, like the mountains in their halo of clouds and mist, though with my feet on terra firma, such that I know myself as a glory-indwelled man, even in this miserable world, still mortal from sin. But of the new birth, how is it that we know it? Tell me, Novitia; let me hear it from your lips so that I can find edification in hearing it from one other than myself; for so few know it that I am refreshed when hearing it spoken from another who has come far enough to recognize the new birth as more than conversion.

NOVITIA: You, far better than I, can delineate this with life-

giving force, but I will honor your request since I only stand here in the first place through your labors of love that I might for myself hear the Spirit of God and know from Him what others have said, but which cannot be known except in the way that the apostle John means when he says, "Ye need not that any man teach you." So here is my discourse on the new birth. Until we cease striving to be like Christ and trying to keep His commands— which really amounts still to living under law, and under the confusion and enslavement to sin that Paul details for us in Romans 7 (from his own former efforts to live as a Christian)— we cannot know the new birth because we are still trying to do of ourselves what only God can do, namely keep His own law, or command, or word of any kind. Years ago, Bill Bright, founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ said, "Only Christ can live the Christian life." How profound in implication such a short sentence is and how full of mystery it is, much as the neglected verses, "Christ in you the hope of glory," or "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me." Until we see what these verses mean, we will still try to do what only God can do in us, thinking that we can be like Christ, when in fact Christ must be Himself in us, and we walk in this by faith. I myself failed so utterly in trying to live the Christian life that I ended up trembling to read the Bible, since I would fall upon the damnation passages and enter into such despair that I feared that if one can lose his salvation that I had surely lost it.

PERCEPTUS: And this was a vital time for you, though no one ever wishes to go through such a time.

NOVITIA: Thank you for this affirmation, and I know that you can only make it, having yourself gone through a dark night of the soul, in which you too lost yourself to find your true self. The pressures that drive us to let go of ourselves must be so great that we know that all our previous measures failed in

such completeness that reverting to them is tantamount to conscious choice to re-erect the very thing that proved us sinners in the first place, as Paul says in his buildup to Galatians 2:20. I know that you spoke of a time during which you had no Bible, yourself also tormented by the damnation passages, though you had memorized vast portions of the New Testament and attended all the best training through the years. I remember well your testimony of how you said to God, "I cannot bear to read the Bible; I have Scriptures stored inside me, and if You by Your Spirit illumine them, I accept that, but I cannot sit and analyze one more passage of Scripture in the manner of the past, a manner that disintegrated my mind into confusion and depression." I too have my own experience similar in essence to this, which marked a willingness to let go and not resist the inflow of the Spirit of God. I had so tired of myself that I only wanted to look at God and hear God and see God, not caring about self anymore. Unprepared for what would follow, I suddenly reappeared as a Novitia that I had never seen or known: the terrifying passages in Hebrews 9 and 10 turned into comfort as I saw that God cannot and will not add to what His Son did on the Cross in His death, burial, and resurrection. Instantly I knew that God had not restored me to a place from which I had fallen, but I knew instead that He had caused me to be born again as a new person, and my consciousness was involuntarily that of a babe. Never had I known such a consciousness, and rather than feel frustrated at the consciousness of a tiny child, I reveled in this as perfect.

PERCEPTUS: This is holy ground, Novitia, for you speak of the divine creation of you as a new being in Christ, which is more than conception, but is the seeing of the kingdom of God, which Jesus told Nicodemus that those born again would see.

NOVITIA: Yes, all of this was so wonderful that I could not doubt it, and I knew that the voice of the Holy Spirit had

witnessed to me, "You have just been born again," which confused me for a short season while I considered that I might have never been a Christian before this time. However, I shortly came to understand that I had been saved but not born again, since I had not, for all my various experiences with the Lord through the years, seen the kingdom of God or known such a self as I now knew myself to be— one not of my own making or even of my own expectation: for this self, this new Novitia, appeared unexpectedly as I was content to merely look away from myself to Christ— a new way of life I had resigned myself to for good. God knew, however, even though I didn't yet, that He cannot and will not throw away the self that He created, but that we must consciously part with the self as we knew it before, the deceived self, the self that thinks that it can obey God and keep His commandments: we must throw this self to the wind for good in order to enter into Christ; and in losing ourselves to love only Him, and know only Him, and glory only in Him— finding Him irresistible— we find that we reappear, but known now to ourselves as different from any self that we ever formerly knew. Bill Bower emphasized this very thing years ago in a talk in which he said, "Bill Bower reappeared in a magnified way," which line I loved and reveled in, though I could not at the time apprehend it for myself. Also, the glory of this new self is that we do not create it, we do not sustain it, and we do not guide it, but we only follow the wind of His Spirit, knowing ourselves led and empowered and walking in perfection, a concept that maddens those Christians still living under law, for they think that I say that I am perfect, when I mean only that as I walk by faith in the Perfect One, that I live in perfection and manifest perfection.

PERCEPTUS: This does madden and infuriate many Christians for the reasons that you note, for in that they do not yet know what abiding is, they try to abide, which means that they try by their own works to continually attach themselves to the

vine in order to gain approval and confirmation. This trying is their madness and frustration, as Sylvia Pearce once said to me, "Trying is your problem," to which I replied, "How do I stop trying?" to which she answered, "Try until you cannot try anymore." Those still trying, hear with an "I" which is to themselves independent, and so they see others the same way and cannot imagine a self that lets go without fear to be led and empowered by the life of God Himself, such that one can and does walk in faith free and kept, even while experiencing all the usual wild fluctuations of emotion and mental doubt, the assaults of ungodly thoughts, and the missiles of the devil— all of which the devil uses to tempt us toward the deception that these external things are our identity. Therefore, theoreticians, in an effort to honestly acknowledge the possibility of sin in a Christian and the actuality of sin in Christians who do not abide, set forth the monstrous concept of a Christian having two natures, which in effect leaves the believer living in the consciousness of what Paul calls the old man, instead of in the consciousness of the new man, the born again man.

NOVITIA: Perceptus, I would find edification in hearing you discourse more on the new birth regarding what you say about those Christians who arrive in the birth canal but remain there in terror of shooting out into the new world as new born babes.

PERCEPTUS: This is a profound subject, and basically many Christians remain in the birth canal because they glimpse the new world and retreat in shock and fear, for who does not know the trauma of a new born even in the natural world, how that the midwife or doctor pulls out the newborn, slaps it so that the lungs take in air, and the newborn now must use faculties entirely unknown by operation before this dramatic and painful entry into a new world? A longing continues for the comfort and sustenance of the womb, where the mother

is the all, with the child in fetal suspension, living effortlessly in balance and dependency, but not in the way that comes about after entering the same world that the mother herself lives in. Briefly, Novitia, this is the trauma that looms to the mind of the Christian, who though saved, resists the new birth, until all means of trying to keep God' s law fails to the extent that the womb turns into a place of no return, and the would be "born again" person can say, "I don' t know what the future holds, but I know what I can never return to." Then faith can begin in a new sense, in which we live by the Spirit of God leading and keeping us, and we by faith turn our doubts and fears in expectation that God is keeping us and doing great conquests with us, even if the greatest conquest at first is just living a simple life, not needing to be any more than a simple human indwelt by God.

NOVITIA: I know there is much more that you can say on this, but you so eloquently and concisely state the glory of our new birth, and how it is that it comes about, and how it is that some refuse it until their utter wearing down, that I cannot, with the New year rapidly approaching– the year of 2006 of our Lord– do more than amen what you say and commend you and myself and all other Christians to what is truly new– the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in us, not as some small occupant tucked away in a closet of a big human self which still has to keep God' s laws, but as what the missionary statesman Norman Grubb so aptly called "a total Christ in a total human!"

PERCEPTUS: Thus, I too, bid you a wonderful new year of more glory in going from faith to faith as the new creatures that we are! Happy New Year, and may we see this year many enter into the new birth that the Bible speaks of and which we earnestly have explicated here.

Dialogue III
The Second Half of Romans 5

NOVITIA: I see Perceptus that I guessed correctly that we would find you out here walking.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, and I see that you have Sylvester with you, and from the look of intensity on his face and yours, you both have some matter to discuss.

SYLVESTER: Novitia and I began earlier, at his house, to discuss Romans 5, which I have been reading, as well as what the great Watchman Nee says about Romans 5 in *The Normal Christian Life*, and I see that one must take what the Apostle Paul says by faith, for it certainly makes no sense that Adam's sin caused all to be sinners from birth merely because of his one sin; in fact, when I last talked to Toleritus about this, he scorned the notion, saying that he agrees instead with the English philosopher, John Locke, who claimed that we are born like a white sheet, subsequently ourselves to fill in that sheet for good or for evil, which notion appeals more to the flesh but which endangers sound reading of the Bible.

NOVITIA: I agree, for if one assumes natural reason— which philosophers have debated over for years regarding what and how much one can know according to our human faculties, apart from revelation— to be the arbiter and judge of matters divine, as if revelation must conform to ourselves as the starting point, then we might as well be god ourselves, for we make God account to what we construct as reasonable; whereas, according to revelation, we act foolishly to trust ourselves to reason about the divine, and we do well to heed the words of Scripture which tell us that we need our minds transformed and renewed so that we think with a mind not our own, but with the divine mind, namely the mind of Christ,

as Paul plainly tells us in Corinthians.

SYLVESTER: Some cosmonauts went into space years ago only to report that they did not see God, thus strengthening the skepticism of those who expect a spiritual God to prove Himself by manifesting through a visible means instead of to the eye of faith, which eye takes faith itself as substance and evidence, which to do quickens us as spiritual beings who walk by faith and not by sight, knowing the real world by the eyes of the heart, opening to see what Jesus meant when He said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

NOVITIA: For the sake of argument, though, Sylvester, one might say that physical manifestation is important, since the Bible does say that God became a man, and the Apostle John writes that he saw and touched the "Word of life," therefore meaning that we do not completely scorn physical manifestation, noting that if the disciples lied about the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead, then the Christian faith gets reduced not only to a belief founded upon a lie, but faith gets assigned completely to a realm of what never manifests and is totally apart from and opposed to mixing with the tangible world of our human experience.

SYLVESTER: This is the difficult aspect of faith, for without Christ coming into actual human flesh, dying, and rising again, we would be left to wish ourselves either out of these bodies, as hindrances to spiritual development, or able to completely accept them as the whole point without worrying about unseen matters. The dilemma is precisely what you say— that the Bible confronts us to walk by faith and not by sight, while at the same time telling us of a physical resurrection of Christ, which is set forth as a historical record to believe, according to the testimony of eyewitnesses of Christ after He rose from the dead.

NOVITIA: Yet as we know, a historical Christ saves no one, for as Jacob Boehme and William Law point out, a Christ not in you is no Christ at all and leaves one merely with mental assent about the facts of the Gospel, without the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is the power that quickens one's mortal members so that the Christian does indeed love with God's love, and does indeed escape the lusts of the flesh and live in victory over sin.

SYLVESTER: I love that you cite these great, mystical lights of the past, which many largely relegate to impractical speculation about matters not pertaining to being a better Christian. These mystical lights are the very ones speaking of the transformation of the inner man according to the living power of God through the Cross of Christ, which transformation leaves the worshiper centrally concerned not primarily with outer, good pursuits, but consumed passionately with the question, "How may Christ be totally formed in me so that by faith I may express His indwelling nature, thereby fulfilling Psalm 1 and guaranteeing the kind of success that God really looks at rather than what looks successful to the aspiring Christian. What appears successful leaves one empty and void of the fire of God Himself, burning in us with joy impossible to mere outer conformity to the law.

PERCEPTUS: I am enjoying this conversation but wish us to make our way back to Romans 5 where we began: what does it mean that when Adam sinned we sinned, and why does Paul employ such a difficult writing style in the last half of Romans 5 instead of giving a brief, newspaper-type account of what happened, for not only the content, but his style put off many readers, and how unfortunate it is, when not only what one says but how one says it appear as obstacles to belief?

NOVITIA: You are a rascal, Perceptus, for I have heard you say many times how much you enjoy the knotty, parallel style of Romans 5, with all of its delicate nuance and development, such that one reads Romans 5 endlessly, marveling as I do when I look in a science textbook at a picture of a DNA chain.

PERCEPTUS: I wouldn't change the text of Romans 5 for anything, and I love as well what Watchman Nee says, that just as Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek, being in Abraham's loins when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (thus, according to Hebrews, proving the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood to Aaron's priesthood), in the same way, we sinned when Adam sinned, being in his loins when he fell to the tempter in the garden.

SYLVESTER: I have also heard you talk about a Bible study in which you made Paul's point in Romans 5 by lining up the students along the wall, designating the first of them as Adam and the last of them as Moses, noting that God gave the original command not to eat of the tree only to Adam, telling Adam that he would die in the day that he ate of the tree, which made death the punishment for but one sin, meaning for but the transgression of one particular law, which law only Adam himself broke. Yet, with all the Bible study participants lined up against a wall, you point out that all of them between Adam and Moses died even though they did not transgress the particular commandment that Adam did. One must account, therefore, for the death of all between Adam and Moses, since those between Adam and Moses received the consequences of death that God prescribed only for the breaking of one particular commandment.

NOVITIA: That's right, Sylvester, Perceptus does this exercise to show that all died between Adam and Moses for only one reason— that when Adam sinned, all who would ever be born of Adam sinned when Adam sinned. This makes the human

race one corporate body headed by the father of a race, which in the Fall, means that the whole human race as one body fell when Adam fell. We learn too from Ephesians 2 and other Scriptures that Adam became a vessel indwelled by the spirit of error, namely Satan, who became mankind's indweller in light of Adam's disobedience; for God created mankind as vessels and temples to contain Him, and a vessel and temple cannot remain empty when the glory of God leaves. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, so a vessel abhors emptiness, and furthermore, nothing in human flesh, fallen or un-fallen, could shield a human being from the invasion of the devil once the glory of God had departed it.

SYLVESTER: I have also heard Perceptus say that the devil must hide himself in fallen man so as not to be discovered as the indweller, lest the fallen human cry out in terror at the obvious extremity and cry out for deliverance. Instead, the devil coaches the fallen human to think of himself as merely an independent human self who can do one's own good or evil, whereas the truth is that as a vessel, the human can only express the spirit in its members, and the human has no nature of his own as we think of nature in a moral sense— of being the good or the evil.

PERCEPTUS: Since you both discourse so well on this subject, let me bring up the objection regularly heard when one argues that mankind has no human nature good or evil: how can God hold man accountable if man is only a vessel?

NOVITIA: This is great fun for you prompt us to sharpen our thinking, which we do when we have to express truth in conversation, in teaching, or in writing. We live in ignorance until the light of the Holy Spirit reveals to us who and what we are, namely vessels that the devil has duped into the lie that we are just ourselves and do our own good or evil— the more refined but false version of which, for the Christian, means

doing with the help of God as one tries to be like Christ. I can hardly spit that notion out— trying to be like Christ— now that I know that such pious nonsense is only the holy-sounding version of the same old lie of independent self. But back to your question, we discover that our choice is not the choice to do but to receive, and so our accountability has nothing to do with our own works as being what we choose to do, but instead, our accountability has only to do with whom we receive.

SYLVESTER: But couldn't this receiving also sound like a work, leaving one to try and strain to surrender, to receive, thus tiring the person as much as any works ever did?

NOVITIA: Surely, all is works until we stop working and become to ourselves simple souls that live with receptive ease in the same way that a branch does not hold the vine, but the vine holds its branch, so that no more do we live as if we must daily or hourly lift ourselves as dead-weight branches and attach ourselves to the vine, hold ourselves to the vine, and remain there by our own sweat. Instead we live by faith and know ourselves, if Christians, as already attached to the vine, held by the vine, and nourished abundantly by the vine so that the vine expresses its own attributes by us as derivative beings— that would dry up immediately if separated from the vine. Simply put, we are the vine in our branch forms, though we never say, "I am the vine," as one means when one in delusion thinks that he or she is God. No, as one of the hidden mystical voices of our day says, "This truth is not commutative: Christ becomes us; we do not become Christ."

SYLVESTER: So when Adam fell, we as one lump, one body of humanity fell into the disastrous condition of being indwelt by the devil without even knowing it, making us far away and satanically forgetful of our origins wherein we were powerless,

made wonderfully so, only to contain deity and not to be deity. For God to win us back, He had to give the law, not because He thought that we could keep it, but because we in deception thought that we could and so needed the immutability of God's divine nature encoded for us into specific laws for a purpose that we did not anticipate. We thought that we could keep the law, but God knew that we would only look for a savior when convinced that we had broken His law, rendering us unable to atone for any transgression of it. As Paul says at the end of Romans 5, God gave the law so that transgressions would abound, which is a shock and disillusionment to us when we still consider ourselves as anything but vessels to contain and express God, who alone is love; but that point is subject for a whole other conversation and another day, to see what the Bible means when it says, "God is love."

PERCEPTUS: What then do you say about the new birth, since we were obviously, as Romans 5 tells us, born into an old birth as an old man and not even able to see the kingdom of God?

NOVITIA: Romans 5 prepares us for the new birth by signaling that we need a new birth, for somehow we must get entirely out of the old Adam and find ourselves born again into the last Adam, namely Christ. And Christ Himself could not have come into this world by birth through the first Adam, for then Christ would have been born already a sinner in need Himself of salvation: therefore, Romans 8 says that Christ was born in the likeness of sinful flesh, implying that He was virgin born, so as not to derive from the first Adam and partake of indwelling sin.

PERCEPTUS: Excellent, Novitia, for the new birth means actual birth into the last Adam, which puts us into His kingdom so that we can see it, knowing that we no longer derive our

identity from our former dysfunctional families, for is not a dysfunctional family just another way of saying that the spirit of error that entered Adam, entered us all, and therefore, we can only perpetuate the nature of our indweller, leaving us dysfunctional. But I sometimes hate that term dysfunctional, for it implies once again something not true– not because the notion holds no truth, but because it does not cut to the origins of dysfunction, leaving those still deceived to endlessly rehearse the dysfunctions of their families and themselves, instead of realizing in simplicity that a fallen Adam, indwelled by the spirit of error, can only perpetuate the same thing over and over again, since no one can reform or improve the self: ONE MUST BE BORN AGAIN! We must get taken out of the old Adam and know ourselves birthed into the new Adam, and this takes place by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ– which is why Romans 6 follows Romans 5, for Romans 6 is the gateway of the new birth, and the Cross is the instrument by which we get birthed into the last Adam, so as to know ourselves once again as vessels containing a treasure, and temples indwelled by the Holy Spirit.

SYLVESTER: How beautifully, the flow through Romans builds each stage of our salvation from justification by faith and forgiveness of sins to the next stage, which is sin as the root. Uh oh, I see that I' m already late for an appointment. I look forward to our next conversation when we can see how exactly Romans 6 fits in with Romans 5.

NOVITIA: I' m riding with you Sylvester; thank you Perceptus for this peeling away to see under the surface of Romans 5, which you prompted us to, happily to sharpen our skills at teaching these truths under the guiding anointing of God' s good, Holy Spirit.

Dialogue IV

What About the Charismatics?

BILL: Gloria, there' s Perceptus coming through the door of the Good Earth Restaurant, slipping in for some Good Earth tea perhaps, since I know him to love it, having introduced him to it years ago when he would visit me, and we would walk the streets of the village, talking about the Lord while dropping into various confectionaries, coffee shops, and movie houses along the way. During this time he loved to hear me say, " Put the heat on God," but this was only music to his ears not yet affirmed in his heart as a melody from his own instrument. However, I played the Holy Spirit' s music by my instrument since it comforted him in the labors of his mind, giving him temporary ease, as well as the hope that someday he would know how to fashion notes, different in personality, but of the same Spirit.

GLORIA: Perceptus, I see that you are aglow with the Spirit, though one cannot go by feelings, as we know; and the suffering soul as easily walks in the Spirit, to shine forth His glory, in tribulation as well as in prosperity; but I do see that today you float into the restaurant on light feet, appearing to have no burden of the moment.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, I have been under labors so heavy that formerly these labors would have dragged me into the pit of unbelief, not knowing how to shield myself from the missiles of the wicked one, who we know never ceases, during this present evil age, to do only the very work that God means him to do, thereby earning the label, " God' s convenient agent," from our older brother Norman, now with the Lord. Not knowing this, one can only slump, then fall, into divers depressions and self consumption, unable to walk quietly through these battles with assured keeping by the One who is

the quiet sea and fountain of purpose, under all adversity. But I see Bill here and so defer to his wisdom, especially since I see that you all are already engaged in lively discussion yourselves; and I see Bill that you have with you not only Mariana and Gloria, but Studentius as well, who has recently enrolled in a very strict college of the Bible, well known for its deep tradition in academics and the history of the faith since the time of the early church fathers.

BILL: Yes, Studentious has been telling us about some of his classes and the rigors of them, as well as the daily chapel services and piles of homework that he takes home, finding out immediately that the college is not a continual stream of anointed experience in which the raptures we enjoy supersede learning routine faithfulness in matters of perseverance. I tell him that I prefer the Holy Spirit and a glass of Good Earth tea to some of the academic chores that he has undertaken, but God keeps us fresh by His Spirit no matter what we do, when we know that the heat is on Him, and so He is the doer in us.

STUDENTIUS: Thank you Bill, for I would hope that one could as well, in the design of God, obtain a degree in theology as well as one could obtain a degree in the arts as you have done. I will say that the college already commends itself to me as quite different from the meetings we are accustomed to together— where one might speak in tongues, be slain in the Spirit, experience healing, or come into some other supernatural manifestation as the Holy Spirit leads. I enrolled knowing that the college is not one to tolerate enthusiasts, and certain of the faculty even hold in disrepute the charismatic movement because of its emotionalism and apparent disorder or scandal at times, though what church or Bible school has not been devastated at some time by scandal? But the more pointed assertion against the charismatic movement from certain faculty members is based

upon the argument that now we have the completed canon of Scripture and so do not need the revelatory ejaculations of insight or prophecy that the early church needed to help guide it during a time when the words and works of Jesus were communicated by word of mouth and letters from the apostles circulated from time to time, leaving the early church without the Scripture we know as the New Testament.

MARIANA: If I didn' t know you and love you, Studentius, you would put me to sleep with such long discourse, but I remember the story of Eutychus in the book of Acts, who fell down dead out of the window during a long night of discourse by the Apostle Paul, who had mercy on him, not pronouncing him dead with scorn to say, " Eutychus, you deserve such an ending for your unbelief in not staying awake through the night when I am speaking the mysteries of our common faith." No, rather, the apostle kindly brought Eutychus back to life again by the power of God' s merciful Spirit. I too might fall asleep and fall down dead at some of the lengthy discourse among you whom I love, but I fear to risk leaving my corpse to your anointing to restore, and so I stay awake with a sip of tea and flashes of the Spirit as you talk.

STUDENTIUS: Thank you, I only seek to combine the best of anointing with the best of academics, so that I " Study to show thyself approved," not falling again under the deception of the law that begins to deny the spontaneity of the Spirit. I hope never to scorn the truth found in the charismatic movement and the simplicity of walking in the Spirit with or without good feelings. I do not call this a balance, for balance talk usually means a departure into law, which then quickly turns into forms of religion, which Bill so aptly calls " the religious spirit"— the spirit from the pit, for is not the angry tongue of the religious spirit, holy as it may sound, no more than what James calls the tongue set on fire by hell?

BILL: Studentius, I' m glad you don' t talk about balance, a word that irks me too, and I find great pleasure in tweaking the religious spirit when I come across it, for if I didn' t laugh and tweak it, I would find myself oppressively weighed down at talk which sounds holy and God-loving, but which is no more than independent- self, trying to be like Christ– which means the dull and gloomy weight of the law coming at us again.

MARIANA: I would like to tell a story. I hope that this story will help Studentius when the devil tempts him to love his theology books more than the Lord Himself. My brother and I were at odds for many years growing up, and as I look back, I now see how dysfunctional our family was, though at that time, plain teachers of the Bible would have simply called the problem sin. This was before the present time of enlightenment in which experts come up with names for things to make them into diseases and other psychological maladies, needing the cure of many books and much unearthing or catharsis through “talking about things,” which all too much is just an excuse to complain about what the Holy Spirit can easily forgive and heal in light of Christ' s sacrifice on the Cross.

GLORIA: I love it when you tell this story; it always refreshes me and causes me to praise the Lord for the miracles of forgiveness and the simplicity of walking in the Spirit, no matter what our state of technical learning concerning the deep truths of our faith.

STUDENTIUS: I too would like to hear the story.

PERCEPTUS: I have nowhere to be, having no appointment over my shoulder other than to sit here and enjoy this unfolding time of fellowship.

MARIANA: I know that Bill wants to hear it again, so here is my story. Nothing had resolved constant conflict with my brother, and in fact we lived geographically far apart as well as in two conflicting worlds; but on a summer visit home, he came at the very time that the Holy Spirit had been moving with wonderful anointing among a fellowship I was in, such that we went often to a small, empty chapel, open to the public to worship, during which time, we spoke in tongues, praised the Lord, and read out of the big Bible on a stand there under a soft light. I invited my brother to come with us one afternoon, which he did, and I perceived by his looks and comments that he considered us wild enthusiasts, which ordinarily would have put him off, but having no love interest at the time, and bored with his life, he watched with curiosity while we enjoyed the Lord and each other. Of his own resolve he went the next two days on his own, taking his Bible, to sit and meditate in the chapel, and the second night, while reading John 14, he read of the many mansions in God's house and the sure word of Jesus, "If it were not so I would have told you," at which moment he knew the certainty of God's promise and began to reel like one drunken, though the heavenly language did not immediately come upon him, but only later as I myself spontaneously began to pour out praise in an unknown language, at which time he commenced as a geyser.

GLORIA: This must have been a blessed time of joy for you.

MARIANA: It was, and caused me to forget the hurts of our conflicts, taking my mind away from grievances I ordinarily would have agitated over until my mind festered.

PERCEPTUS: Some would argue that your experience was spurious, even demonic, not to mention psychologically aberrant, and that conflicts cannot be resolved without detailing them by word and event, identifying all feelings,

labeling those feelings, and applying specific mantras to analyze and resolve them.

MARIANA: Perceptus, you are naughty, for I know that you think such arguments foolish, as well as hindrances to the simple work of God, wherein we look at most of the touted remedies as no more than rehashing the flesh, as if somehow we, or our families, could have done such and such better by morals or resolutions— which only entrench the flesh further in the deception that one who could have done better can even now do better, which is really just more of “ trying to be like Christ,” perpetuating the shame by rebuilding what God means entirely to destroy— namely the delusion of the devil that we as humans can prevent or repair dysfunction, despite the fact that the Bible plainly tells us that we were born in sin and can only sin apart from the keeping of the Spirit.

BILL: No sleeping here I see!

GLORIA: Tell what happened to your brother a few years after this, Mariana.

MARIANA: I’ m getting to that, but thanks, Gloria. His experience in the Spirit turned him into a different person, delighting in God’ s word, so much so that when he returned to work, his associates did not recognize him as the same one who went on vacation; for they commented that instead of swearing and pursuing all manner of carnality with utmost zeal, he was now loathe to run after the same things, favoring instead witnessing his faith and cheering others in hope that they too would come to the Lord. He seemed fairly to dance down the walkway to his work, with lightness of Spirit gracing any who talked with him.

PERCEPTUS: We know that such initial times of anointing drop away for seasons, so that the Lord may test our fidelity to

faith apart from feeling, with an end that we learn to keep a steady course even when not floating just above the ground. So what happened to your brother when the dry times set in?

MARIANA: His anointing did recede for a season as you well discern, and he turned to a lady love, smitten with romance, which he later regretted as a diversion, smacking himself hard as if he should have done better, to which laments, a friend of his often said, "You couldn't have done any better," leaving him infuriated as if his friend meant that he was destined to lapse into carnality after his initial glow in the Spirit. However, she only meant that one cannot keep himself, and all resolutions that one makes not to sin, only lead in fact to sin, as Paul says in Galatians 2, that if we rebuild what we have destroyed, namely the law, that we only prove ourselves sinners all over again! But to continue, in my brother's remorse, he grasped onto formal Bible training as the remedy, ensconcing himself in mental apprehension of the truth to attain perfection by every Christian remedy known, and these remedies many other Christians heartily recommended to him, but not with his deluded hope of attaining perfection: for do not most Christians espouse these remedies with unflagging zeal, while at the same time they know that they dare not ever claim any perfection or having arrived, since these claims stir up hatred from fellow Christians?

BILL: Mariana, you are on a roll now!

GLORIA: Okay, so what happened to your brother in all his resolutions to perfect himself by formulas?

MARIANA: He fell into cycles of ever deepening depression and began to scorn the simplicity of the Spirit that he began with when he read John 14 in the chapel, and the Holy Spirit opened his eyes. Simply put, having begun in the Spirit, he

began to walk in the flesh, though his walking in the flesh was not the aspiration of sensual carnality he ran after in his former years: instead, it was the carnality of condemnation, meaning that he now believed in holy flesh instead of unholy flesh. Though unrecognized by him as deception, holy flesh is still flesh, and what does God care for holy flesh any more than unholy flesh, since His point always is the Spirit in us and not what we think that we do in our own supposed power?

STUDENTIUS: I' m a bit worried that I too might fall into this deadly trap at Bible school, since studies lend themselves to discipline, and discipline lends itself to routines, and routines lend themselves to formulas, and formulas lend themselves to law, and law lends itself to deception, and deception makes for misery, and alas, I would not be miserable!

GLORIA: How can we help Studentius avoid the deception of holy flesh that Mariana' s brother fell into, seeing that we love Studentius, and he obviously desires to remain free of bondage, while free to engage his mind in the deep truths of our faith? At one time I would have suggested that we take turns calling him or that he call us at designated times to check in and give account of himself, but never have I known that to work for long, since people most often make a tedious thing of that as if God made humans to be shepherds instead of operating out of the mind of the one Shepherd.

BILL: Yes, I' m not much one for checking in, and I find the religious spirit quickly takes over when leaders don' t know that they are meant only to be the Shepherd in their forms.

PERCEPTUS: Studentius might find the answer to his fears in the rest of Mariana' s story, which I' m hoping has a happy resolution, or do I discern amiss?

MARIANA: No, you discern correctly, though the happy resolution took much time, and not only wore out my brother, but fatigued many around him who labored with him in faith—hoping that any moment he might enter into simplicity and leave behind his depression and mental analysis of everything apart from the Spirit—mental analysis that he mistakenly took as the Spirit, when in fact it was the tedious, dead operation of trying to make mental assent work when only the Spirit of truth itself produces a life of freedom. Not to engage you with every detail of his long, depressing decline, I will sum this up by saying that all that he feared came upon him, but then all that he longed for took him over when he could not try any longer to live the Christian life.

STUDENTIUS: How does this help me, for I want intensely to avoid years of descent into increased labors, leading nowhere but to my exhaustion? Am I doomed, at school, to fall into petrification that makes one hardened without the spontaneity of the Spirit?

PERCEPTUS: Everyone must face the law and what Paul meant when he wrote the Galatians, “Who has bewitched you?” meaning that they had begun in so much joy that they would have torn out their eyes and given them to Paul had he needed them, since he was God’s agent in giving them a new set of eyes to behold all things by the Spirit. Spies, hating their liberty, constantly, tried to bring them into subjection to rules, which had never justified the Jews, and so could not possibly justify anyone else. I have to say that God means this pressure to confront us, and it does, since the agent that brings the pressure is not legalistic people, but the devil himself. He operates in those who think that through their own minds, instead of the mind of Christ, they can will and do any good thing or avoid evil. So, Studentius, you will always face this pressure, and we ourselves do now, daily, and our rescue is that we recognize the pressure as false and

from the devil, resisting not by our own power, for we are powerless, but by saying to God, "I will fall into this if You don't keep me." But as you know, Studentius, I do not stop there; for it is not enough to know that God can do a thing in us: faith means that we thank Him that He is doing what we know that He can do. So faith says, "God, you are keeping me," which is to say that the vine is holding the branch, not the branch holding the vine.

STUDENTIUS: I had hoped, Perceptus, that maturity would mean a freedom from such pressures, a walk in which we continually experience God's anointing and therefore engage study or any other pursuit in constant ecstasy, free of the attacks of the devil.

GLORIA: I have remained fairly quiet this afternoon, not by forced attempts, but in ease of following the discussion here; and I am a simple soul, not given to books or long sermons—only joining in as often as I do because the Spirit comes through in our discussions, and I get flashes of insight, not laboring over things that I do not understand, though I do not scorn or hold disregard for any of you as you know. I do not find myself bothered that Studentius goes off to the college of theology because it will only serve him as a mirror, as does everything in life. Life is subjective, as Perceptus quotes Kierkegaard, meaning that all that we are is in us and not without us; people and circumstances only reveal what we already walk in or what God calls us next to walk in—freeing us from seeing others or even ourselves as the problem. If Studentius knows that he is kept, he will have no problem discerning God's will about whether to stay or leave a school, since we all go and leave people and things according to the wind of the Spirit, counting nothing as guaranteed except that God is at work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure as Paul says in Philippians.

STUDENTIUS: I do know that He keeps me, since the law has already battered me and been a depressing part of my Christian experience, but I do confess some nervousness about school, yet not the kind that would keep me from academics at this time. But Mariana, did your brother come to know the keeping power of God?

MARIANA: I am glad to say that he did, for at the end of his trying, he could try no more, and therefore lay lifeless on the mat, unable to move except God as moved him; and when he saw that God did move him, he marveled that he did not have to any longer move himself, or will himself, or do himself, but that the Spirit does all of this in the person who no longer lives by law or expects anything from the law but a curse.

GLORIA: I do find that some who claim to live like this indulge themselves or others in the most outrageous sins of the flesh that even a non-Christian would scorn as a contradiction to the fruit of the Spirit. These in their hearts know what sin is, but by not calling carnality what it is, they never get past their flesh to discern the difference between flesh and Spirit, ending up in the terrible predicament of calling flesh Spirit and Spirit flesh, leaving themselves in bondage of the very kind that led them in the first place to seek deliverance—back in a time when they thought one could actually find deliverance from sin.

BILL: Holy flesh and unholy flesh are both still flesh, one being the religious spirit that looks for safety in the law and formula Christianity, and the other claiming as Spirit what is still flesh, as is obvious to any one willing to tell the emperor that he has no clothes on.

PERCEPTUS: What good then is the charismatic experience or anointing of the Spirit if one must go into dry times and frequent adversities to learn to walk by faith?

BILL: Perceptus, you do have a strange idea about teaching, since you now ask more questions and give fewer answers than in former times when you gave more answers, without so many questions. Mariana, how would you answer Perceptus?

MARIANA: We do not despise beginning in the Spirit, and it is wrong when one is tempted to sin, to fall back upon law as a supposed safeguard, thinking that formula Christianity can deliver us from our problems. It is also wrong to scorn our early, enthusiastic days, when the Holy Spirit anointed us with heavenly experiences, for even the first touch of the Spirit, and the first taste of the gifts of the Spirit, take us into the realm where God does all and we glorify Him, seeing nothing as impossible to Him, and dropping our complaints in order to worship Him and enjoy Him in ourselves and others. We enter, childlike, into a kingdom where no dysfunction exists, and where Adam is no longer our father but God is, and where conflict dissolves in the Cross, and where no one continues to endlessly dig up what the flesh has done as if the flesh could have done any differently apart from the Spirit. The beginning days of walking in the Spirit– the sweetness of His gifts and anointing– are a fresh beginning to continue in and not depart from, as if the mere words of Scripture, or self resolution, or a body of believers following certain patterns, or any other created thing, can replace the Lord Himself as the One by whom we live each second, finding Him as life.

BILL: I find that those who do not despise the anointing of the Spirit, not falling back into the religious spirit, listen more to who we are in Christ: though not Spirit-taught yet about who they are, they nonetheless recognize the touch of the Spirit and hear with the ear of the Spirit, though they do not yet know how to articulate what they hear according to the letters

of Paul or his expositors.

STUDENTIUS: I have much hope from all of our conversation, for I truly do know that the Lord keeps me, and He will give me anointed experiences as He means, and He will guide me and keep me in my dry times and in the times when I am beset with affliction; and if the atmosphere of the school turns overly oppressive to me, and He is not keeping me there, then I will know that it is time to leave, without having to lose my serenity and blame others for this loss.

GLORIA: I see at this a spontaneous rising from the table by us all, and the glasses of tea are mostly empty, so until we meet again, I bless each of you in the name of Christ.

Dialogue V

What it Means to be Dead to Sin

SYLVESTER: I see Novitia that we are all aglow from this time of fellowship and conversation, enjoying the setting of your home, and we have yet to get to the matter of the Scriptural assertion that we died to sin.

NOVITIA: I am glad that you could come over, and hopefully when Perceptus arrives, we can talk about what Romans 6 means when it says that we are dead to sin, for Scripture says this, but rarely does one hear it taught: to the contrary, most Christians seem very alive to themselves to sin, hardly daring to think that they are dead to sin for fear of hypocrisy and the scorn of others at such an outrageous proposition. In the meantime, Sylvia, what do you say?

SYLVIA: You know that I love talking about this and never tire of it, and won't until the earth is filled with an army of

soldiers giving full exposition of what "dead to sin" means; and though I go over it countless times, with nods of assent from some who have heard of their union with Christ for years, I find myself perplexed that so few internalize the Scripture foundations well enough to teach them, though they will tell you eloquently of their problems for hours, and being a mother, I listen, but with longing heart that they would get to the point of seeing that they died in Christ's body on the Cross and rose again in newness of life.

GLORIA: Didn't Dan Stone give a talk years ago called Dead, not Divorced, in which he made this point, and doesn't that tape still circulate today?

SYLVESTER: Yes, and I think that one can still acquire this tape, and Norman Grubb also continually pointed out the truths of Romans 6-8 in his many talks and in his writings, though many are loathe to read them, thinking one who does will turn into a follower of jargon and various idioms of truth which amount to mere formulas and overemphasis on matters not so practical, when one should instead focus on trying to be like Christ and doing good deeds for the needy. The Bible does commend remembering the poor, and the apostles agreed in Galatians to also remember the poor. However, they did not mean to help the physically needy, but fail to apprehend what it means that Christ lives in us. But I see that Perceptus has slipped in and caught up with our conversation.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, it is good to help the poor, though it is not good when giving only makes the giver feel good about giving, while still not knowing what solidly establishes a person in fullness of joy. If Christ is not the giver of the gifts we give, how do they help more than leaving the soul in pride, though the needy receive much needed goods, for which I do thank the Lord. Focusing on a social gospel, at the

expense of Scriptural teaching that we were crucified with Christ, results in one still trying to please God with works of charity while rebelling at His plain news that Christians are dead to sin.

PRISCILLA: I thank you all for inviting me here today, and you especially, Novitia, for hosting us. I hesitated to come, having heard strange things about you all and what you say, as if the teachings you present are esoteric and tangential to the Bible– if not downright convoluted and contrary to its plain sense: for some known to have been among you go about calling their anger or jealousy or lust God, as if now all their responses and appetites have become divine so as to issue forth spontaneously without error, and they scowl as if one is in trouble for questioning someone who fornicates, wishing the fornicator to acknowledge such as sin. So I do not want to learn that I am God and that my responses epitomize all the Bible says is not God. Therefore, with some trembling I came today and wouldn't have except that my desperation drives me, and I do observe that you live with enough sanity to call things plainly what they are as the Bible pronounces them.

SYLVIA: Priscilla, thank you for your honesty, and perhaps we could start with Paul's assertion at the end of Romans 5 that God gave us the law so that sin would abound, meaning that He never expected us to keep the law or thought that we could. We are the ones who lived in the deception that we could keep God's law, so He had to give us an apt instrument, the Law, to prove to any willing to consider a thing what it is, that broken law is sin against God and our fellow man.

PRISCILLA: This is encouraging to hear, for though I do not like to think of sin, I must admit that I have not succeeded in keeping God's law, but rather have if anything seemed to myself more sinful than ever at the same time that I make

every effort to keep myself from sin.

SYLVIA: The law has done in you exactly what God intends for law to do in our lives when we take it upon ourselves to live by it, so you are exactly where God means you to be in your discovery, but at the same time you do not have to remain in this state of increasing despair over your sins: the verses in Romans 5 tell us that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.

PERCEPTUS: So Priscilla may continue sinning and enjoy that grace abounding.

NOVITIA: Perceptus, you are so full of mischief; even this moment, Priscilla has a look of horror at your words, and I feel compelled to rush in to rescue her from her dismay, though doubtless you will chide me for not allowing your wry humor to enjoy its moment of shock.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, Priscilla, you may relax because no sooner does Paul say that where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more; but he asks if we should continue in sin that grace may abound, after which he issues a resounding "God forbid!" and so we amen him, seeing that we have died to sin. Paul asks his readers if perhaps they do not know that they have died to sin, for such is essential to know if one would stop sinning. Would one? For when I was a youth, I merely wanted enough salvation to get me into heaven, but not enough to curb the carnality which I so loved and found energy and pleasure in— for a season of course— until the time when energy turned to depression, and pleasure turned to guilt and torment.

PRISCILLA; How can it be that one is dead to sin since I feel so very much alive to it and can still commit sins? If one were dead to sin, I would think that such a person would not even

be able to commit a sin.

PERCEPTUS: You raise two very good points, since truly our feelings will never indicate that we are dead to sin, and second, who but a fool would argue that a person cannot commit a sin? Therefore, "dead to sin" has to mean something apart from our feelings and something apart from the possibility of committing a sin. "Dead to sin" means that we died to sin's indwelling and therefore also to sin's control.

PRISCILLA: How can I be dead when I feel so alive to myself. I have not been aware at any time of a death like what you allude to. Do you mean that I die on a daily basis to my lusts and do not carry them out?

PERCEPTUS: Ah, Priscilla, you are a dear: you just have been saying that what you just described is what you find yourself unable to do, finding yourself more alive to sin than dead to it.

PRISCILLA: What then do you mean?

SYLVIA: Look, Priscilla, where Paul says in Romans 6 that we were baptized into Christ's death, and therefore into His burial and resurrection, so as to walk in newness of life.

PRISCILLA: I was baptized when I made my profession of faith in Christ as my personal savior; is this what you mean?

PERCEPTUS: I fail to see one drop of water in Romans 6: the baptism Paul speaks of is baptism into the body of Christ, not into a body of water, though I do not scorn water baptism as some think. I merely do not see that water changes anything unless it is living water.

SYLVIA: I see this subject makes you a bit chippy, Perceptus,

and indeed I agree with you that water is not the point because Paul means us not to think of water in Romans 6 but the body of our Lord on the Cross as he hung there; and it is Paul who reports to us not the outer details of Christ's crucifixion, in the manner of the Gospels, but Paul opens up to us, by revelation, the inner meaning of Christ's body hanging on the Cross.

PRISCILLA: I never heard of an inner meaning of Christ's body hanging on the Cross, and I have gone to Sunday School all my life up to this present time of attending the university for my nursing degree.

SYLVIA: Well, I don't think this is the time to discuss why one hears or does not hear about the inner meaning of Christ's death on the Cross, so let's talk about what the inner meaning is and what it has to do with us.

PERCEPTUS: I agree, Sylvia, many a headache, not remedied by aspirin, has beset me by entangling myself in arguments over the scarcity of teaching on Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20. I will say that when I went to college almost forty years ago, that I sat on the planetarium steps one sunny afternoon, reading in a paperback New Testament, and I read Romans 6 and Galatians 2, for what reasons I know not, except that I saw that those Scriptures pronounced that I had died with Christ, to which I thought, "How can I have died with Christ 2000 years ago when I was not even born until 1949 and am very much alive in the present and not dead in the past. Mentally I knew to affirm the veracity of Scripture, and so I relegated this meaning, whatever it might be, to something metaphorical or symbolic.

SYLVIA: If we look at time, then we will be defeated in understanding this mystery, and in fact, I don't know that we ever understand as much as we agree with the facts of God's

Paul makes the clarifying statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that Christ was made sin, giving us a link to Romans 6:10 so that we can see that Christ became who we were as lost people.

PERCEPTUS: Priscilla, in Dialogue III, we discussed the second half of Romans 5, which Novitia put into writing and which you may read later if you wish, and I bring it up here to say that when Adam sinned, we sinned, and so we were born into sin. But what does that mean to us until we see that God's plan for us, even if there had been no fall, was that He created us as vessels to contain Him, temples to be indwelt by Him, branches to express Him the vine, and the body to express Him as head, whereby we see that we have never been one minute on this earth as initiators, but have been every minute receivers of an indwelling spirit. So when the serpent approached Eve, his ploy was to put their minds into doubt about God's plain intent for them as containers, for if one knows that God's plan is that we only contain and receive, how can one then suppose to be like God?

SYLVIA: Corollary to this is that Adam and Eve were to live abiding in the glory of God and not in a self-glory, which does not exist anyway, meaning that they were to find all of their life in the being of God and not at all in their own beings; for as Jacob Boehme says, we are the iron and God is the fire, so that the fire heats up the iron to make it glow in its fabulous colors of fire and light. What folly to suppose that we are the fire when in fact we are the iron to receive the fire, but in such a way that it looks like us without being us, giving us the experience of His life as the other-than, which we delight in when we know our purpose as sons of God.

SYLVESTER: This explains why after their fall, Adam and Eve sensed their nakedness, for the glory of God had departed from being their covering, the Shekinah departing from them, leaving them in a sin consciousness of needy self and without

their former glorious shield, which is the only protection against the devil and his accusations. So they were left to fend for themselves against a devil who now saw empty vessels, a departed glory, and nothing to prevent his entering these vessels to make them his slaves to do his will, which will they had to do. Fortunately, God did not consign them to eternity apart from Him but gave them the promise that the woman would bear a seed who would bruise the serpent's heel, meaning that redemption would follow in history. Faith in that promise meant a faith that could be reckoned as righteousness, not because of faith itself— as if faith has no object— but faith, with God as the object, though His plan of redemption lay veiled as a mystery not to be revealed until the Law had done its purposed work on the elect nation.

PRISCILLA: I see that you all have taken off here, but I find this positively exciting since I revel in the anointing obviously present, though I do not grasp yet the details of the things you say. I do, however, get that God made us to be containers, and you say that when the glory of God left the containers, namely Adam and Eve, then the devil stepped right into them to take over and indwell them. I feel revulsion at this and a shock that I cannot explain at the very time that I discern the anointing of the Holy Spirit over what you say. So I revel in the Spirit and wait quietly to see how God will open my eyes to what you say so as not to faint dead out in horror at such a proposition as that of the devil having taken over Adam and Eve in their fall.

PERCEPTUS: Do you remember the story in the Gospel where a demon left a man, and the man cleaned his house and set it in order, supposing that he was now fine and exempt from further trouble?

PRISCILLA: Yes, I do remember that story.

PERCEPTUS: Well, the man had no occupant greater than the demons, so seven demons came back, making that man's state worse by far than his previous demonic condition. I tell this story not to alarm a Christian, for Scripture says that once Christ indwells us, that our inner citadel is secure, and the devil cannot again usurp us as God's sons except to trouble us in our members if we do not present our members to God as instruments of righteousness, which Paul exhorts us to do in the latter part of Romans 6. I only tell this story to show that no mere man can resist the workings of the enemy, and if a house is not occupied by God, then the devil will occupy it; and if one's members are not employed as instruments of the Spirit, the devil will gladly take what he can and employ them even though he cannot own the house again. This is true however much one prides himself on being his own man or woman.

PRISCILLA: Why then does not every non-Christian tremble in complete terror to be indwelled and controlled by the devil as his slave, and why does not Romans 6 plainly tell us that sin is the devil and the devil is Mr. Sin, if such is the case?

PERCEPTUS: God in-breathed the writing of the Scriptures so that they would not be a systematic theology, and so that certain truths would sit in plain view in this or that book of the New Testament, leaving the urgent reader, the one seeking to match Scripture with Scripture, the task of desiring the Holy Spirit to make plain what is plain to God but hidden in part by the non-systematic presentation of the New Testament books. So you will see in Ephesians 2 or in Timothy or in John's first letter, the obvious link that Satan is Mr. Sin, and therefore Romans 6 can only mean that, if we take all the Scripture as inspired, which it is. But also, another matter lies at hand to see, namely that the devil does not want us to know the truth as we have given exposition here, for it serves his purpose more to hide in a person than to

plainly manifest himself, though he does do that in those taken over by the occult. If a man or woman thinks, "I am my own person; I do what I please— no one tells me what do for I am my own boss," that person lies in the lap of the evil one without knowing it, since independent self is the lie of the devil and the wrathful fire of the devil' sbeing since he broke himself off from God in an attempt to usurp God and be God.

SYLVIA: Having established these points solidly as you have, Perceptus, let me add that, going back to Romans 5 and 6, we are ready to show from Scripture that once Satan had indwelled the vessel, a full salvation would mean that God would have to redeem the vessel in order to dwell in it as He originally planned. To do that, a last Adam would have to be born, the Son of God and also the Son of man, born of a virgin, so that He could do what the first Adam failed to do, namely stand in righteousness by faith and reunite mankind to the glory which he lost in the fall— which very thing He did in His death, burial, and resurrection, though in this present age, Christ in you is the hope of glory, meaning in part that the glory is hidden inside of us and not yet manifest to the world outwardly as well as inwardly. We walk by faith and not by sight. But to continue on this vital point, in order to redeem us, Christ had to stand as the last Adam, free from sin, and therefore born of a virgin, so as not to be born of the fallen, first Adam; and He had to walk by faith, abiding in His Father, so as to remain free from sin so that He would qualify as our savior, being both God and sinless man, a perfect sacrifice on the Cross.

NOVITIA: Yes, so when the Bible says that He was made to be sin and that He died unto sin, it means that Christ became who we were as lost vessels, indwelled by the devil. Christ did not sin, but He became sin in that He became who we were, and God put us into Him on the Cross, so that we see that Christ became who we were, the fallen Adam, and God put us

into Christ on the Cross so that we would unite in His death, dying in Him and going into the grave in Him so that we are indeed DEAD, and therefore dead to sin, since “dead to sin” means that the old operator is out, even though we did not know that the devil had indwelt us.

PRISCILLA: I would think this would be a horrendously unpopular doctrine.

PERCEPTUS: It is, and none but those willing to accept vesselhood accept it, for the offense is so remarkable in that one dies to the lie that he ever had any control over his life. And herein is the genius of the Holy Spirit in Romans 6 because there we read that we were slaves to sin, and now we are slaves to righteousness, meaning that we have always been slaves to a master— never having been a master. And this, Priscilla is the greatest offense of the Gospel, that we are not and never have been our own bosses.

SYLVIA: This liberates us to know, for we stop trying to be what we are not and never can be, the contents of the vessel. Further, it allows us to see that the good in us is not we but Christ; and equally the evil in us was never we but the devil, and such is the case now, for in the non-Christian, the devil remains as the boss in the citadel of the unsaved person’s spirit; but in the Christian, the devil may not own the person again but may only enslave and walk about in the Christian’s members, when that Christian tries to live the Christian life as if he or she is independent.

PERCEPTUS: “Dead to sin” then means not that we do not feel the weight of sin against us, for the world still lies in the lap of the devil in this present evil age; and “dead to sin” does not mean that we do not experience temptation, for God means the devil to tempt us as an opportunity to settle us into faith in His keeping; and “dead to sin” does not mean

that one cannot commit a sin, for surely such is possible though in no way necessary to the one who knows what our crucifixion with Christ means. I do not argue this, however, with those insisting that we sin all the time or sometime, because, as John tells us in his first letter, we have sinned, and we have propitiation with God if we do sin, but John goes on to write how we may live without sinning, and Paul calls this walking in the Spirit, saying that when we walk in the Spirit, we will not do the deeds of the flesh. But I see that Mimi is expecting us at her house, and we must leave, so as not to disappoint her, and she doubtless would like to hear the continuation of our dialogue. And so off we go to Mimi's where we will continue what it means to be dead to sin.

Dialogue VI

Talking about Romans 6 at Mimi's

MIMI: Come in won't you, I've been waiting for you all to get here, not that you're late God is always on time anyway. I'm only sorry I couldn't get over to Novitia's house for the discussion there, but I knew that Angelica would call, who has been in the hospital after a suicide attempt, and she has wanted to hear more of the healing words of how it is that we died in Christ and are not who we thought we were formerly, according to how we looked and felt to ourselves, or according to how we thought others thought and felt about us. Instead, as we look into the great mystery of being born again, we find ourselves as new creatures, not at all those that we formerly knew as ourselves, thank God, but as those who have risen from the dead. But here I am ahead of myself, since before one can know that he has risen from the dead, first in spirit, later in body at the consummation of the world, one must first know that he has been crucified with Christ. The wish to kill oneself, therefore, is temptation toward a

satanic replication of the one death that Christ already died as us, therefore meaning that, in plain words, we died when He died, for our death and His are one and the same according to the Scriptures, and to refuse that, ignorantly or willfully, leaves one with no recourse but the death that Satan offers.

PERCEPTUS: My, I am almost breathless and feel as if I must sit here in wonder over what you have said, for though I know this and have taught it repeatedly for years, this blast of revelation from you so refreshes me that I would almost think I had not ever known what you say to so enjoy it now. Who can add to this, though I will not put that old curse upon you of having spoken the "final word," which has doomed many who ponder too much their own words and the weight of them and testimony of those who one day might proclaim someone an oracle and the next day pronounce that very same one the organ of the devil.

SYLVIA: I agree; one surely doesn't want the old curse of being the "final word," and hello Mimi, how special to be in your home again where, at eighty-one, though infirmed, you charge forth in spirit as the evangelist that you have always been since you became a Christian at age twenty-seven. Immediately, you began to seek everything of God that came your way to know, longing as the years progressed to discover if there was an answer to the distressing condemnation that beset you that you learned is a sin consciousness, which even the most moral Christian cannot deny having, since a sin consciousness is not the result of evil deeds but the result of a continuing sense of separation from God, not that this originates from God's side, but we mistakenly do not perceive the completeness of His work in Christ that did away with separation, leaving one with a separated consciousness always trying to get closer to God. People attempt this through various formulas of devotion, Bible reading, prayer,

and other such formulas as you know. But before we go into that, meet our new friend Priscilla, who has been with us at Novitia's, asking good questions and seeing that her own recent desperation has been God's means to open to her a new door of opportunity to see what Christ accomplished for us in his DBR, as Lucian calls it, meaning the death, burial, and resurrection.

MIMI: Priscilla, I'm so glad you came, and please know that you're always welcomed at our house, and we have a Bible study here every Tuesday night at 6:00. I'd love for you to come. Meet my husband Billy.

BILLY: Glad to know you, Priscilla.

PRISCILLA: Thank you; I've heard so much about you both, and so even though I feared what new things I might hear in conversation with Novitia and his friends, I somehow knew from hearing about you and Billy that you could never mean me any harm, and your reputation in the community is one of love, charity, and hospitality, such that even one who would be your enemy would fear to do so lest he be as guilty as one who despises his own mother who loves him.

PERCEPTUS: Mimi, we had quite a time at Novitia's discussing what dead to sin means, and to summarize briefly the ground we covered, we discussed how it was that Christ was made sin and died to sin, God baptizing us into Him, not by water, but by God making Christ who we were as lost people— those into whom the enemy penetrated to indwell by the Fall in the garden, such that all born of Adam partake of Adam's fall, meaning that though we did not know it, the spirit of error so got into us that we were slaves of the devil abiding in us until Christ put him out of us on the Cross. Therefore we unite with Him in His burial and resurrection, which we have not talked

much about yet, needing to soak ourselves first in all the great mystery of what it means to be crucified with Christ: for until one knows that he is dead, how can he know what it means to be alive, for many think they are alive, when in fact they are not, mistaking their physical and emotional selves for being alive, when the Bibles says that being alive means spirit.

PRISCILLA: I' d like to ask a question, for though I am drawn to what you say– that we are dead in Christ– yet I find myself very much alive; and I see in Romans 6 where Paul commands us not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies; and he further instructs us to stop presenting our bodily members to sin: so though I know that you said “ dead to sin” does not mean the elimination of choice or the possibility of sin; and you said also that our feelings tell us one thing, while God' s word tells us another; I see that there is something we must do to make all of this work– namely we must present our members to God and not to sin. Therefore, I feel like I have free choice, and I' m back to where I' ve already been, in that I must choose to yield my members to God and not to sin and Satan.

PERCEPTUS: Choice can be difficult to talk about, for a word may connote one thing to one and something else to another, so that a person bound up in works may take the word choice as one more ball and chain, not to be dispensed with for fear of turning into an automaton, yet stressful to affirm because of the exhaustion and independence the word seems to reek of: thus to one person, choice is sweet and connotes freedom, whereas to another, choice defines our personhood, but in such a way to always suggest the need for utmost human exertion to try and say and do the works of Christ.

SYLVESTER: That exertion is the means by which God wears us down so that we lose energy to live, wishing ourselves

dead if we cannot attain our ends by our means, when God means for us to attain His ends by His means, which means the end of ourselves as we formerly beheld them, but the beginning of ourselves as He sees us.

PERCEPTUS: Sylvester, I think you have the wit of Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet, minus his impulsive and rash disposition.

SYLVESTER: I once was as Mercutio, but thankfully did not perish by the sword of an enemy, though I deserved to many times; yet I have perished by the sword of another enemy, appearing as my own laborious disposition and insistence on doing good or avoiding evil, not knowing yet that even I am not the real enemy of myself, but the enemy is the one who fell from being a glorious moon in the heavens of the celestial courts, to being an imitation sun, giving wrathful heat without gentle light, such that to worship the false sun makes for burns of the worst kind. Tell us though, Perceptus, the things you usually offer about what choice means.

PERCEPTUS: Choice rightly seen means nothing more than our capacity to receive— which is to say faith— and faith does not mean mere mental assent but the glorious inflow into our beings of the life of God without resistance on our part. This makes life in the Spirit an ease indescribable— far from being work— for when we rest in God, He works in us; but when we try to work on our own, we find no rest. So I prefer the kind of choice which means that I already have— that I already see who Christ is and what He did on the Cross— that I already am attached to the vine, the vine holding me and not I holding the vine (as Ron Block says in his song: “ I’ m not holding onto Jesus, He’ s holding on to me”).

MIMI: Recently in my delirium, anesthesia still pervading my organs, I could make little sense of the utterances of family members surrounding my bed here, and Tandy tells me that

to comfort me she played Ron' s CD and that song, and that later, I recited his famous line you just quoted, though I don' t remember doing so.

NOVITIA: Isn' t it true, that even when we are ill, or when our mental functions get impaired by medicines or infirmities, that our spirits are always the same and receive easily the things of the Spirit since they are not truths needing the brain to know– though bless our brains, God uses them as long as they last to express to the world what is really not of the brain but is instead the reflection of the mind of Christ? But since we are sentient beings here today, possessing our faculties, Perceptus, what more do you say about choice?

PERCEPTUS: It is Satan' s lie that we are heavy branches, lying upon the ground every day like so much dead weight, and that to abide we must lift ourselves up and hold ourselves against the tree, hoping to get it to remain. This would make abiding to be the result of our work and not His, and this falls short of faith that in simplicity receives what He did.

SYLVIA: We haven' t yet answered Priscilla, though, about what presenting our members means, though we have established that it is not by works or strain– being by faith. How can we do that, however, without first noting Paul' s use of the word reckon, for he says that we are to reckon, i.e. consider ourselves dead to sin. So before we get to presenting our members, we better make sure that we know that we are dead. But how can we know that we are dead– dead to sin– that God indeed booted out the enemy from our inner citadel and replaced the snake with His glorious self? First we need to see that “ dead to sin” means that the old master is out, and the new master is in because when Jesus became us on the Cross and died as us, the spirit of error had to go out of His body in His death, since a spirit needs a body to live in, and a dead body no longer serves the devil as

a house of sin to live in.

NOVITIA: Well said, Sylvia, and next let's look at the dead body in the grave: it is dead to sin, but it is dead to everything else too, not able to live or do anything good or evil, being the corpse that it is.

TANDY: I get excited here, for though I learned years ago that I am dead, I wasn't fully satisfied with that, seeming inert to myself and unable to really let go and whoop it up in life, for how does a corpse whoop it up in life without seeming to oneself a fantasma out of a ghost movie or horror spectacle? The dead belong in their graves, and so I stayed there for years, though pondering what life was supposed to be like—knowing nothing else to do but get on as myself, raising my two children and enjoying the things of life given by God to enjoy, though such is an oddity and not reconcilable to one who is only dead. Yet I say still today that I had to know that I was dead before I could know the power of the resurrection.

SYLVIA: Tandy, you've hardly talked, but when you do, wow—look out!

PRISCILLA: Okay, I'm willing to look at reckoning or considering, but how does one do that? You see, I keep asking how to do things, and since I am in school training to be a nurse, you hope I'm sure that if you come to me with a physical problem, that I know what to do.

PERCEPTUS: What Sylvia means by reckoning is that we take the facts of Scripture as our facts by agreeing with them even though we do not comprehend all the mysteries behind these facts. Mimi, you know yourself how many times Norman told the story of his early missionary days when his sense of love wore off, and he wondered how he would continue to love the people that he had left everything for to go serve as a

missionary for Christ.

MIMI: That's right, countless times we've heard him tell the same old stories, but how we loved them and him. Two stories come to mind. The first is the time that he asked God to give him more love, only to hear back from the Holy Spirit, "Shut up," which curt reply to his prayer shocked him but silenced him as well, since he petitioned God from a place of need and not supply—therefore the beggar not being the chooser. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit did not leave Norman sitting in silence for long but brought to mind the verse, "God is love," which flashed on a light in Norman's spirit to see that God does not give love or dispense love in packets, but God Himself is the love and therefore love can only be Himself, leaving us no place to think that we have a love in or of ourselves that we love with. Simply said, the only one who loves is God, and so we never love except that He is the lover by us.

PERCEPTUS: Mimi, I remember my days as a twenty-year-old coming to your house and our fellowship in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and my courtship of Tandy, and our early married years when the glow of newly wed life abated and the stresses of job and the world pressed in with their routine, methodical madness. Then you began to give me books and tapes by Norman, which I thought philosophical madness and abstract impracticality, for I still had myself, so I thought, as the doer of what I must do, and the avoider of what I must avoid. So such a story about Norman struck me as airy and as words up in a cloud, not realizing the seat and agony that brought a struggling missionary to his knees to hear and receive the word of God that we have no love of our own, and God will not dispense love to us as if a product. But please, I think I know the next story too, so tell it.

MIMI: Norman told of the time when he saw what Galatians

2:20 and Romans 6 say, but he did not apprehend it or see a change in his life, being tempted therefore, to see these verses as beyond his reach or experience and therefore verses to dismiss, in search of other remedy. But his wife, Pauline, there in the tents of the Congo with him, affirmed that he had seen what he had seen and needed to cement it into a word of faith. Norman took a sheet of paper, drew a tombstone, and wrote, "Here lies Norman Grubb, crucified with Christ." He did not waver from that, though the witness of the Spirit did not come to him until some time later.

PRISCILLA: What do you mean by the witness of the Spirit?

MIMI: When we reckon on a thing, God will probably lead us to affirm that thing by faith without the sense of anointing that we so much desire, leaving us without the living sense of the Holy Spirit saying back to our spirits what He has asked us to say; and who likes to say a thing told to us by God without that miraculous ring of the Spirit's voice coming right back to us, for do not the sheep hear the shepherd? Yes they do, but what will we do when we do not yet hear the voice of the shepherd speaking the rhema word back to our spirits? Well, we go on in naked faith. Norman used to say about the witness of the Spirit, "Keep off the grass," meaning, "Don't try to make it happen."

PRISCILLA: How did Norman get the witness of the Spirit?

MIMI: Stress continued to pile up in the mission, and Norman had a personal visit with Jesse Penn Lewis, the famous female Bible teacher and conference speaker. As they talked, and she did not allow Norman to look outside of himself for the problem or the solution, the Spirit lit up to him the truths he had so long taken by faith and walked in according to the light he knew.

PRISCILLA: How can I know that same anointing of God's word in me? I earnestly desire it!

SYLVIA: First, you must reckon, which does not mean a labor on your part as if you do something meritorious on your own. Reckoning means by faith, and you have faith as you simply agree with God that you are crucified with Christ and therefore dead. The only labor is the labor of faith, which is the stress we feel in receiving, since we start out unaccustomed to receiving—being more accustomed to our business and formulas and doing, which things amount to a dung heap. Receiving gets easier as you walk in faith because you come to know receiving as your natural mode in the spirit, which it is, for God made us that way—to receive, and only through the Fall and Satan's deception did we get the false notion, from the devil, that we must be about our own business and ask God to help us establish ourselves as good Christians. What a lying heap of ruins all that is, when faith is so simple and easy, though when we first enter into the exercise of faith, it seems laborious because we find it such a strain to stop resisting: we are not accustomed to stillness and quiet wherein we hear the voice of God and receive easily from Him without effort.

PRISCILLA: I think I will draw my own facsimile of my death in Christ and put into word conformable to my present understanding the fact that when Christ died I died to sin. I hope the witness of the Spirit will not tarry, but even if it does, I long to know myself as dead, and I sense that taking myself as already dead will be the remedy for actually wishing to be dead, as Mimi described of her friend Angelica, who attempted suicide and now calls Mimi to hear and establish that she does not need to die physically, killing herself, for she already died in Christ 2000 years ago, needing not to replicate in demonic fashion, by the power of the devil, what Christ has already done by the power of the eternal Spirit.

PERCEPTUS: I see our time is up for now, and next time we can get into Priscilla's question about presenting our members now that she has taken it by faith that she is dead. Tandy, are you going to call in our pizza order?

TANDY: Yes, how many pizzas do we need. Is everybody staying?

MIMI: I hope everybody will stay and join in around the table. Perceptus, bring in some extra chairs, and Billy, would you find out what everybody would like to drink and get that ready. My, this has been wonderful. Priscilla, don't forget that we also have the Tuesday night Bible study every week here at 6:00.

PRISCILLA: Well, Mimi, I see that you feed me spiritually and physically, and I might not want to go home, except that I do have some homework later. But for now, I'm excited to be your guest.

Dialogue VII Talking about Faith

MIMI: I'm glad you all could come to the Bible study, and Priscilla, it's good to see you again. Sylvia, how glad I am that you are still with us for this visit, and tell Scott that we miss him, wishing he too could be here with us, as I know he wishes, and hopefully he will join you on your next trip here.

PRISCILLA: Thank you Mimi and Sylvia. I was reading in my Bible last night and in Treasures of Darkness, and keeping in

my mind the things we discussed the other day, I worried that I might not be able to do my homework, but considering the import of all this, and my recent desperation, needing to find an answer that will interpret to me the confusion of my mind and the turmoil I have lived in recently, I decided to forego worrying about homework— assured that the God who put me in school will get me through school. So I decided to meditate as I say, and within minutes, the flash of revelation came to me that I am dead to sin, and I have reveled in this all the night, even in my dreams and throughout the day today, and not only this, but I found renewed powers of concentration so that I did still accomplish my homework with ease of mind and progressed through the day with joy in my heart.

SYLVIA: Priscilla, how wonderful that I am still here visiting and get to hear you share this grace, which I never tire of, and you make my day, though so many things have made my day already, and what is it to God or man that a multiplicity of things make my day, for everything comes from one?

PERCEPTUS: This is a good riddle, and you remain a riddle, and delight in that I think, often saying that you never know from minute to minute how God will express Himself by you. So one moment you might smile and another grimace, or another fall asleep on one toiling overlong with words or formulas by which some attempt to predict the winds of the Spirit.

SYLVIA: Yes, and even now another wind blows through for I see Noel, who was with us the other day here at Mimi' s, who said nothing, but he spoke to me privately afterward, wanting to know more about how one may reckon the self dead to sin, and so we went over the rudiments of faith, for " dead to sin" is the object, and faith is that in us which apprehends the object, since faith must have an object and be only some vague vapor in the mind. Perceptus, I have often heard you

quote Bill Bright, who said that putting faith in faith is like casting the anchor inside the ship— an absurdity.

Mimi: Sylvia, I would love it if you would tell us the substance of your conversation with Noel about faith.

SYLVIA: How witty of you Mimi, for as we know, Hebrews 11 says that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

PERCEPTUS: I knew you both to be those of great substance, so this explains it.

SYLVIA: Well— now to relate what I shared with Noel, we have established that there must be two things: an object and faith to apprehend the object; and the object we talked about last time is “dead to sin,” though such is not an object like a table or a chair, but nonetheless an object worthy of faith, for it communicates to us a greater object, the Cross, and not yet an empty Cross, but first a Cross upon which Jesus died, and we in Him. Then He is buried and we in Him. Thus we died to sin— He being made sin indwelt humanity and dying in order to cut us off from sin, meaning Mr. Sin.

PERCEPTUS: So, given this object, what is the operation of faith that makes this truth of Scripture real to us?

SYLVIA: Though I hate to break things down into grocery lists, nonetheless I see no better way to talk about faith than by four insights about how faith works, though if one wants to make them three or five, what quarrel have I with that as long as the essentials get expressed? First, an object must be available for faith to make the object real to us. Some believe in fairy tales or myths that can communicate truth on a certain level, though the tale or myth has no anchor in history like the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, Paul

exclaims that our faith is worthless if Jesus did not really rise from the dead, and we might as well eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Though a historical Jesus cannot save a person if Jesus remains only historical to a seeker, none can have a Jesus in them if no Jesus actually rose from the dead and appeared to the women and the disciples as the Gospel accounts tell us.

NOEL: Yes, Sylvia made it plain that “dead to sin” is available because Christ died as us to sin, according to Paul’s revelatory insight about our union with Christ in His death and burial. This expelled the enemy from our bodies, since a spirit must have a body to manifest in, meaning in short this: Satan is out of us and Christ is in us, and as such the devil is no longer our master. Therefore, we are dead to sin as Romans 6 says.

SYLVIA: Very well said, so we go now to the second aspect of faith, which is that we desire what is available, for if one does not desire what is available, how will one take it, except that one might argue that we don’t desire bad tasting medicine when we get sick, to which I agree but also argue in response that the desire to get well supersedes the undesirability of the medicine, meaning that in truth, we do desire the medicine—we simply do not desire the bad taste. Jesus did not desire the Cross in the sense of wishing His hands and feet to have nails violently pounded into them; He did not desire the Cross in the sense that He wished His opponents to scorn Him and mock His death; He did not desire the Cross in the sense that He wished to gasp for air and heave in dryness and torture, experiencing the forsaking by God as His body took all our sin into it and crushed Him in mortal agony and spiritual desolation: yet He did desire to save us, to redeem us, to make us a company of sons and brothers, joined to Him as a glorious family, manifesting the great love of the trinity in wishing to manifest mercy through the shed blood of God’s

own Son that buys us back out of our demonic slavery– all of which means that He operated from His nature and Spirit rather than from the abhorrence and revulsion at the thought of a cruel, physical death attended by scorn and unbelief from His enemies.

PERCEPTUS: I think you have brought down the dove again with these words.

SYLVIA: Now we get to the third aspect of faith– the taking, for what we take, takes us– as our mentor said endlessly. Nothing ever takes us without our having taken it, so that those who think that the world was saved at the Cross apart from individuals receiving the good news err, in that they dispense with the clear Bible word about taking, as if people just automatically are a thing that they do not even choose to be. This would make everyone a Christian, for does not Paul say in 2 Corinthians 5 that in Adam all die and that God reconciled Himself to the world by Christ? Yet to remain on this level, not acknowledging the rest of what Paul says, makes everyone already a Christian whether one chooses to be that or not, and does not Paul equally say, “ Be ye reconciled” ?

NOEL: One might argue though that as a Christian, I really am dead to sin even if I do not know it yet, so why is does it not follow that everyone in the world is already a Christian even if he or she does not know it? If I, choosing to be a Christian, am dead to sin though I do not yet know it or choose it, then why is not everyone a Christian even if he or she rejects Christ, wishing not to be a Christian?

SYLVIA: The difficulty you propose falls away immediately when we consider that to take Christ as savior means that we take everything that He is and does for us, even though we may not know the completeness of His work during the time

of our false, independent struggles to be like Christ. We took Christ and therefore took far more than we knew; but to not take Him at all means the rejection of His identity as the Son of God and the rejection of the Scripture's plain statements of why He had to die both for us and as us. Clearly the Bible says that not all receive the reconciliation, and therefore, there are sheep and goats, and therefore, those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life get cast into eternal perdition, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, though God would have all saved if all would be saved— but not all are, and to argue one point of Scripture, namely that when Adam died all died, to mean that all are Christians whether they know it or not, preposterously drains all meaning out of the clear warnings of Scripture that a man may lose his soul for eternity

PERCEPTUS: Well said, Sylvia, and if this is not true, one need not take Christ; He is already taken without the taking, which is to say that I'm operating from the energy of the food I have not eaten, as if a piece of pizza may sit on the plate rejected, and yet that same piece of pizza may supply me the energy needed to sustain activity over the next hours of work. We may as well all stare at food that we never eat, swim in water that we never dive into, or find affection in a hug by spurning the arms of a friend, or get well in our sickness by leaving the medicine in its bottle. Life becomes nonsensical and we imagine that we experience the opportunities of life without the taking of them.

SYLVIA: We can never get away from taking, for God made us to take, which means to receive, though taking has the more aggressive sense of desire.

PERCEPTUS: I love talking about these things, but we know that Mimi wishes us to proceed with the aspects of faith that we began with, and so we have mentioned three: an object of

faith must be available; we must desire it, else noting prompts us to move toward what we desire.

MIMI: Yes, I' d like to hear this all the way through, and since this is a Tuesday night, some have to leave soon, and I want them to hear the rest of the discussion about faith.

SYLVIA: What we take, takes us. There will be a labor of faith along the way, for God does not always give us such quick witness of the Spirit as Priscilla testified to, for ordinarily the labor of faith means that walk without sight or sense of anointing, holding nonetheless to what we have taken as being available, desirable, and what we have taken— trusting that God, in His way and time, communicates back to us Spirit-to-spirit what he communicated by revelatory word that we believed and stood upon.

PERCEPTUS: What better note could we end on, and Sylvia, we wish you a safe trip back to Louisville, and give our love to Scott. We hope to see you soon to enjoy this same fellowship with your beloved friends there.

Dialogue VIII

Presenting Our Members to Righteousness

PERCEPTUS: Sylvia, how good to be at your house to explore further the great truths of Romans 6, and how good to see friends and family here, where I have been welcome these past twenty-seven years since 1979, the time I came up for a conference in my work, only to find a conference for my spirit that has continued through the years as our families have lived and died together as the old saying goes.

SYLVIA: Perceptus, you know how I love these times and looking together into God' s word about who we are and our Scriptural foundations, especially since many know the general surface of our identity in Christ but not the underlying revelation that backs it up– meaning specifically Christ' s work on the Cross that enabled us to be born again as new creatures with Christ in us so that we are no longer vessels of Satan, meaning the old man, which old man we didn' t know for years, since we probed no deeper than the forgiveness of our sins in our earliest Christian days before having to dig more deeply in our agonies over ourselves when we found no satisfaction in only the thought of going to heaven when we die without a victory here now.

PERCEPTUS: When last we talked, being with Priscilla and friends at Mimi' s we discussed at length the body death of Christ wherein He died as us, died to sin once, and was raised giving us newness of life; and if there is no newness of life, what kind of resurrection is that, which leaves us only forgiven as you say, but does not create a new being, now born of God, that can live free from sin; for in fact, just the other day, I heard you say, in discussing a temptation– wherein sin pulled you, as it pulls us all– “ This body is not available for sin,” which I found powerful to my hearing, since a common response among Christians is to say, “ We sin every day,” implying that however the dam is fixed after its breach, the leak continues and more likely a flood at that, which is a lamentable tone in Christians always mourning their failures.

SYLVIA: Yes, this body is not available for sin, and for good reason, since it' s a body now inhabited by the Lord, and He keeps it, and I wish it that way, but Perceptus, what do you say about the lusts of Romans 6:13: are they the lusts of the body or the lusts of sin, for the verse reads, “ Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” You see that one might assign the pronoun

it either to the body or to sin, and the difference is great, for if the body be a seat of lust— evil in its own constitution— then we must go on hating the body as a sinful instrument, whereas if the lusts are the lusts of sin, and sin lays claim to the body through unbelief, then by walking in faith, a new quickening may occur in a mortal body, whereby we see those lusts dispelled and the body made a fit instrument of the Holy Spirit to do His work in our members instead of the enemy doing his work in our members.

PERCEPTUS: Of course you know already what I will say, and if I did not, you would reprove me, and justly so; the pronoun it in verse 12 should be assigned to the antecedent lust and not to the body, since lust originates in the spirit realm with the being of Satan, and his nature, and the body has no lust of its own apart from the lusting of the spirit of error, but the body possesses appetites, which under the control of the Holy Spirit, become rightly used and instruments to express the life of God in this present world, though as we know, our bodies in the future state will be manifested as glorious bodies, for Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that the body is sown a natural body but raised a spiritual body, and as we know this spiritual body already indwells the Christian now, though not manifest, for it lies as an undergarment beneath our heavier flesh, waiting the day of final glorification, at which time, we who believe will go about the new earth in a garb so fantastic that we will not associate it with the comparatively crude instrument we now call our body.

SYLVIA: I know this is not the place to get started on the new body, so I will save that until the time appointed, but as you probably remember, when I first began to hint of these things to you in 1997, you looked at me curiously as if I had entered a realm of science fiction and not the Gospel, but the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures have since convicted you; but I leave that for now to ask you what verse 13 means that we yield

our members to righteousness and not sin, a command of Paul, and does it not indeed sound like a bit of law to many after a glorious beginning to who we are?

PERCEPTUS: I see you are asking the questions for the moment, and I shall turn the table on you in a bit, but for now I accept the question, since I see that the anointing of the Spirit brings fresh life into the verses. Even though we have read them so many times and do not feel the need for our eyes to be opened in a basic sense, how open our eyes are and ready for each flash of glory and insight into these wonderful truths. Our old missionary mentor, Norman Grubb, repeatedly said, "What you take, takes you," so here we see Paul's way of saying this— that yielding means we take the righteousness of the life of God Himself, and then He takes us. Yielding is not a work that we do in the sense thought of by most, implying great exertion by an unwilling person to be something undesired and unattainable; it simply means the end of resistance on our part to anything but Christ in us, and that combination— Christ and the vessel, we the vessels of course— is the simplicity of life and the only life possible or offered to us. We may experience this flow continually despite the contrary pull of our emotions, the appearance of the world of five senses, and the ongoing lies of the devil that such is not so and cannot be. It is ours to rest.

SYLVIA: Yes, and I see that the verse says that we yield as those alive from the dead, meaning that we do not see ourselves any longer as independent selves having to try to be like Christ; for then to yield oneself to God would not really mean yielding to God but trying to be like Him, and I fear that is the idea that all too many subscribe to, trying to replicate in the human self what only God can be. The new man, risen in Christ, is the man with the Holy Spirit inside, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and quickens us, so this new man, a Christ-I man, is not the old man, and can

therefore yield to God since it is not a work but the life of God in the believer to will and do, bringing about the yielding.

PERCEPTUS: Okay, so now I ask you a question, where does choice come in, since you know that is a favorite word of those laboring under works and a hated word by some others who would rather there be no choice but only the spontaneous being of who we are as if God makes one to be who he is and makes one to live as who he is apart from choice.

SYLVIA: Choice is no more and no less, than faith itself, and to argue against choice is to argue against faith, and to argue against faith is to argue against God and make Him a liar about the way He constituted us to operate, for faith is our means of operation, meaning that everyone places faith in something, for who can even perform the simple functions of everyday, physical life without availability of resources, the desire for them, and the taking of them? Sin is no more and no less, than resisting the life of God—resisting the flow of God's love toward us, and if this be not an action of the creature, then how can a creature be accountable to God? All the deterministic thinking in all of the books in the world cannot contradict this.

PERCEPTUS: Another aspect of this is that the new man, joined spirit-to-Spirit in union with the Holy Spirit, takes his own members and yields them—the point that Paul makes when he exhorts us to do this as “those that are alive from the dead.” The yielding should present no problem to those alive from the dead.

SYLVIA: Notice too that he says that we are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness, and I have seen the word translated also as weapons. Further, an instrument brings to mind a tool. So the idea is that the Holy Spirit

quickens us to do the very thing we are commanded to do, so that no one, seeing himself as a new man, need protest that he is unable to yield, since the yielding is not from the old man but from the new man with Christ as the energy to yield.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, and in verse 14 he says that sin shall not have dominion over us since we are not under law but grace, and how different, and even irreconcilable these two are, so that there can be no mixture as some falsely suppose, since law implies something that the self must try to do to keep the law, which is still true even postulating God's help. Grace means that Christ is the One who wills and performs in us. Remember too that Paul and James say that to break one law is to break them all, and to break any law puts us back under the curse, for the one who does the law must do it all, and who can do it all but the One whose nature is the law. But Christ is the end of the law, meaning the personification of it, for law is but the description of His nature.

SYLVIA: As Saint Augustine once said, "Command what Thou wilt: give what Thou commandest," showing his insight into the matter of living the Christian life, and Saint Augustine would have known, since his life had not been one of goodness before his conversion, but exactly the opposite, as ours was too, and everyone's is, though by appearance this may not seem so.

PERCEPTUS: See too, that in verse 16, Paul says that one is a servant of the one he obeys, clearly enunciating that though bought and indwelt by Christ, if a Christian yields his members to sin, sin will express itself in those very members, even though Christ is still in the inner man. The Scripture here acts like the Scripture always does: the order of things is inner transformation and outer movement of the members according to the transformation, for what logic prevails in being one thing but living as another?

SYLVIA: Thankfully, Paul says that the Romans had obeyed from the heart the doctrine they had delivered unto them, and what a dirty little word we have in doctrine, for some think that to mention doctrine betrays knowing righteousness as a person, or betrays making the person of God the point, as if a doctrine must only be information and not a living description of God's person. But in truth, many study doctrine only knowing mental assent and not the life of the Spirit, about whom the doctrine is written, but this does not make doctrine a disgraceful word in my vocabulary.

PERCEPTUS: And what could be more delightful and restful than a doctrine that does not make us machines but instead recognizes that we operate the noble faculty of cognizance in recognizing that love is available, but only as the person of God. If we desire that love, we need only not resist it. Yielding is not an effort we make that has its own righteousness but the very receiving. God constantly blows upon us with His will and His urge to yield, which then we only go along with, disdaining a knot of resistance fueled by the enemy.

SYLVIA: I like how Paul says in verse 18, "being then made free from sin." One might ask, "Are we made free from sin by the yielding of the previous verses or does Paul mean that since Christ set us free in His body death, we are free to yield?" Perceptus, I'll give you a pause and answer my own question: Christ freed us from sin in the work that He and He alone did by crucifying us in Himself, as Paul says in Galatians 2: 20, "I am crucified with Christ," so we could never have freed ourselves from sin, and to suppose that we could, based on a false interpretation of the last half of Romans 6, only puts Paul in contradiction with himself, as if he says that Christ freed us but we must free ourselves, when he only means that since Christ freed us from sin by dying to it as us, so that sin no longer is our indwelling master, we certainly

find it reasonable to yield to our freedom and walk in it with our members as well as our minds.

PERCEPTUS: From what you say, I see that Paul only writes a divine common sense, saying that from God' s perspective, we have no limitation upon us now confining us to sin or predisposing us to sin if we see rightly, but we can only know this if we " look above the line," as Dan Stone so often said for the world of appearances will not tell us these great truths of who Christ is and what He did, and what life we live by Him in us; no, the world, the flesh, and the devil mirror the opposite of everything God says, and Paul calls this an " infirmity of your flesh" in 6:19, for he knows that some do not know what he has been speaking of, and some know but with very little experience— considering as real only what they see with their physical eyes, feel burning in their members, or churning in their mental processes. But let a person once see the infinite gulf between flesh and spirit, so that the sword of the Spirit has divided them asunder, then that person knows how to walk easily in the Spirit and not according to the flesh. Infirmity turns into opportunity, no matter how the hounding devil cries out to us that flesh urges are irresistible.

SYLVIA: This is where I like to bring in the two minds, neither of which is ours. Most believe they have a human mind with two natures or some such scattered interpretation in which the human mind is still seen as the originator and arbiter, which is not true, for the Bible says that the only two minds available to us are the mind of the devil and the mind of God, the former being self-for-self, and the latter being self-for-others, and the latter being the one power of the universe; for the fact of two minds does not mean that they are parallel or equal, but merely that two spirit minds seek to control our minds and bodies— one rightfully and the other in usurpation of God' s declared will that He is the one person in the universe, making all other creatures derivative and intended

to contain and express Him, though as we know first Lucifer, then the angels, and then we by the serpent's instigation, rebelled as if there could be a plan of God to include the creature as God— God forbid! We once thought that our minds originated the good thoughts and the bad thoughts and that we are responsible to manage and control our minds so that we lean to the one and avoid the other, making our minds the chief point, when the truth is that our minds are only brain cells created in wondrous array and pattern in these cranial globes, and they mediate the functions of the physical body and interpret the evidence of the outer universe according to what is outer. But these minds can in no way penetrate into the inner world of spirit, where the devil and God live, in which realm we also live in spirit, though hidden to us in our first blindness until the light of God reveals to us that God is spirit and we must worship Him in spirit and truth. Much deception continues in a person if he or she thinks that one may study a pile of books, however learned the books, and reason up the ladder into the realm of God, which is glorious beyond ability to express in finite words. For as verse 19 says, our call is unto holiness, and not a holiness outside of us but a holiness inside of us, which is His holiness and that which saturates, bathes, and fills our members, when we have yielded them, making us the very temples of the Holy Spirit, an unspeakable privilege leading us to cry "Holy, holy, holy" ourselves as we look unto the One who wondrously lives in us and energizes our members now in faith by His great glory.

PERCEPTUS: I am dumbfounded as you have gone on here, not laboriously but in a rapture that we live in when we have eyes to see it, despite the infirmity of our flesh, for Paul's point to the Romans and to us fellow citizens, who hopefully lend him our ears, is that our call is more glorious than we can imagine, but covered over by appearance in earthly flesh that is still subject to mortality and the attacks of the enemy,

which make us tempted to think to ourselves that we are not new creatures in Christ but old creatures with new longings that cannot be fulfilled until the day we die from this body and go to heaven.

SYLVIA: I see a pun in Paul also, for he says that when we were the servants of sin we were free from righteousness, when we weren't free at all, but in the worst slavery, yet this point is clear for he means that when we were servants of sin, we were free from righteousness, implying that we couldn't do any righteousness, and isn't this the deception of the enemy— that we can do righteousness? We cannot do righteousness, but the lie tells us that we can, and if one thinks one can, that person keeps trying, not giving up hope of attaining what only God is and must be in and as us.

PERCEPTUS: Norman has an interesting passage in his book *Who Am I?* called "Have We Two Natures?" in which he talks about center and circumference, saying that the non-Christian is at center owned by the devil, and this does not change even though a slave can slip away and try good deeds: the sin master is still the owner. Similarly, one owned and indwelt by Christ can slip off into the enemy's range and offer his members to the enemy for a time, but this does not change the inner center of the believer. I haven't captured the genius of Norman's own words but think I have his thought here, and it's always fun to go back and enjoy his unique expression of these truths. The point is that we once, as the old man, could not do good, for Satan was our owner, and the self is only a vessel and cannot do good or evil on its own anyway. The lie is to think that we can do good on our own, or evil for that matter, since a slave does the will of his master; but the point is that we never entered the possibility of doing good or escaping sin until Christ crucified us on the Cross with Him, putting the old master out, so that now He is the risen One in us to do His will.

SYLVIA: I see too that Paul asks them, tartly but graciously, in so many words, "What good was all that life which you lived before anyway, what was the fruit, and you know yourselves how you see all that now as shame and the road to death." My paraphrase is not Paul's exact words but captures the spirit of what he says, and he does not mean, by the way, as you know, Perceptus, the kind of shame that formerly drove us and which we were always trying to figure out ourselves and get rid of; for do not the bookshelves in stores offer many books attempting to define shame and to tell us how to eliminate it as if we even can; and the further folly of much of this is that the shame is seen as a human quality or merely psychological phenomena, instead of what shame in the negative sense really is— nothing but the condemnation and accusation of the devil against us which he deceived us into internalizing as if we had our own shame. Shame in this sense is not even our property, but the self-accusing, self-loathing nature of the devil by which he hates himself for not being able to be what he ought to be, which he once was, before his fall, only by the glory of God that covered him and kept him from being naked; for nakedness is our shame when we have it, and our nakedness is not a thing that we can cover on our own but nakedness is a condition demonstrating that the glory of God has departed, and that is our true shame and no other.

PERCEPTUS: I love this what you say, Sylvia, for if we think that shame is a derivative or component of ourselves, then we endlessly try to manipulate ourselves to eliminate it so that we can produce our own glory, when God will give His glory to no one else, and He intends His glory to be the covering to our nakedness so that we are no longer naked. The lack of a glory covering is shame, and we do not see a glory covering on our bodies now, but we know Christ in us the hope of glory, and we know glory as we embrace our

suffering in this world; and we know that the glory now in us will some day be a manifested glory, including the glory of our new bodies, which inside us now await that day of revealing. What then is true shame– the shame without condemnation or accusation? Why it is a holy shame, wrought by conviction of the Holy Spirit and one which brings light and liberty, a repentance without regret as Paul calls it, leading us into the grief which honors Christ and marvels in wrenching awareness that the depths of our separation from Him through our rebellion and spiritual adultery nailed Him to the Cross– the same Cross that swallowed our worst up in His body made sin, giving us back His sweet love and tender mercy whereby we are saved from our sins and saved from sin by His life, which Paul calls fruit unto holiness and everlasting life in verse 22.

SYLVIA: How sublime, and I too am raptured at all of this, marveling at all the holy implication and insight of Paul, even as he sounds such practical notes by ending this part of his discourse by asserting that “the wages of sin is death” so that we know not to expect any different wages from sin no matter how good sin looks, for sin can look very good, appealing often to pride in the self for trying to do good or for good deeds done to help others, which deeds still come from the pride of the devil and not the Spirit of love, which is God. So whether a thing be blatant evil or the clever disguise of pride in the outer garb of doing a good work, the root is the same and yields the same wages, be not mistaken about that.

PERCEPTUS: I see also that the gift of God is eternal life, which does not mean an infinity of years, though in the sense of time, we think that way; but eternal life is a life itself and the nature of the One who is life. We receive eternal life when we receive the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and see that eternal life is through Him but not apart from Him, for He cannot be separated from His own life, which is Himself.

SYLVIA: I see by the clock that we must go out the door to visit our friends. But Perceptus, this has been marvelous, and I know that you wish Priscilla to hear all of this, and surely she will.

Dialogue IX
Romans 7 and Trying

PERCEPTUS: It's relaxing to be here drinking tea with you all again in this pleasant setting, though a pleasant setting ceases to be pleasant to the one always in an inner hell, and certainly we know what that means, don't we?

NOVITIA: Assuredly I do, Perceptus, as does Sylvester here, but our new friend Eric has been questioning us closely on the manner of our lives since he himself struggles daily with trying. Therefore, he suspects that perhaps we let ourselves off too easily by not paying attention to the rigors of trying to be like Christ and inventorying our daily sins, praying such prayers as, "Father, forgive us of our many sins." When I told Eric that I didn't know of a specific sin to confess yesterday, he thought that I must be joking or in some absurd denial to deflect the need for confession of sin, since he is sure that we all carry with us the constant dead weight of sinful thoughts and feelings, resulting from this miserable, present life in the flesh, destined to remain with us until the peaceful lying down in our coffins, where at last we will find rest from our present condition of sinfulness.

SYLVESTER: Yes, and I felt the sting of Eric's assertions, though he does protest to love us and suddenly cannot hear enough of what we say about not living in a sin consciousness.

ERIC: I hope, Perceptus, that you will grace me without scorn for differing with them or at least questioning how such a wild proposition as they set forth can be, especially since I have never heard of any such thing in my years as a Christian and doubt from my study of church history, those enthusiasts who

claim a final perfection now in the flesh, when they so apparently say and do outrageous things that no Christian rightly dividing the word should claim as perfection in one's life.

PERCEPTUS: Be assured of our utmost patience, brother, not because we possess such a quality in ourselves, for we too at one time lived in the impatience fueled by the enemy and could not abide either ourselves or others— often wondering why anyone would become a Christian, only to enter into such self examination and pain of conscience that follows when one has found oneself irresistibly drawn to the Lord, yet frustratingly unable to comply with the commands of Scripture. Having come to an end of ourselves, as we understood ourselves, which was not to understand ourselves at all we discovered, we entered into the divine life of the Spirit, in which the Holy Spirit undertakes to produce all the manifold fruit that the Scripture commands, so that we do not toil of ourselves to make ourselves holy any more than we would toil to create an orange: for just as we cannot create one molecule, we cannot create the life of God that God requires of us, and this is our error, perpetrated hiddenly by the devil, that no sooner do we express gratitude for a savior for our sins, than we try to demonstrate to God how grateful we are by living for Him, when if we could ever have done that, why would we have needed a savior in the first place?

ERIC: Much of what you say flies by me faster than I can reach out to secure it, but I do sustain from your words a breeze that attracts me, frightening and dangerous as it sounds, for I do fear that to let go, as if Christ in me would take over, as Novitia and Sylvester have been discoursing about, would leave me instead in the grip of my temptations and send me out into bondage that I fear to be deadly or delusional.

NOVITIA: We too shared those fears once, for we start life thinking that if we do not resist evil, then surely evil will overtake us, and so we drive onward with relentless resolution to fend off the waves of besetting sins that entreat us, though once we welcomed them and did not even know or care anything about sin, since we, as Paul says in Romans 7, were alive once without the law.

ERIC: Yes, you have much hit on it, for in my careless youth, I wanted to go to heaven and not hell, and so when I heard the preaching of the Gospel, I took it by faith that I had sinned and therefore needed a savior, but I did not so much care what those sins might have been or whether I still committed them, for I wanted my way in this life, with the promise of joy in the life to come– or as the cliché goes, the best of both worlds. But as the years waxed on into adulthood, this careless life of mine began to distress me, and an unknown weight of darkness and lethargy began to slow my steps and drain the pleasure out of the very things that formerly had kept me entertained and unmindful of any peril that might attend in the living of life now, which is in short to say– life turned slowly into a mounting hell on earth.

SYLVESTER: Tell me, Eric, how did you then reckon to continue living with this ever more burdensome weight of yourself and deadness of things once a pleasure?

ERIC: I did not know what to do and so opened my Bible, praying for guidance that I might read some passage giving me comfort or direction, since I began to know a hunger for something other than the routines and busyness of life. I found that I could not stay busy enough to drown out the cry of desperation under those things the world purports to satisfy us. My eye landed in 1 Corinthians, and I found my attention fastened on the verses in Chapter 2 promising that those wishing to know God can only do so by His own Spirit;

yet my glimpse of this was fleeting, leaving me with a desire to study the Bible to know how to live. But as I have studied, I see that my life in no way has corresponded to my awakened sense of what the Bible describes as the Christian life, and when I read the commandments in either testament, I find myself unable to do them, only failing more with each effort, despite my newly kindled love for God and desire to be right in how I live.

PERCEPTUS: You can see, by the Spirit's light, the general guidance that all will unfold only from the Holy Spirit, but you move from there as we all have, back under law, as Paul chided the Galatians for doing after their excellent beginning in the Spirit. Tell me, do you know that you are crucified with Christ and so, dead to sin as Galatians 2:20 says and Romans 6 explains?

ERIC: I cannot say that I have the witness of the Spirit yet, though I do agree with Novita and Sylvester in their worthy explication of the Scriptures that show how God created us as vessels to contain Him, how in the Fall, the spirit of error got into us when our first parents abandoned their covering of glory, and how Jesus had to be made sin and die to it as us, to expel the false indweller in His death, so that He might come into us in the resurrection; and I professed by faith that this is true, though to myself the dead weight of myself still clings to me, and daily I agonize over constant failure in trying to be the Christian that the Bible commands me to be.

PERCEPTUS: Well, you have made a good statement of faith, and truly, without a basis that we are dead to sin, it is hard to see how any can succeed in knowing equally that we are dead to law, as Romans 7 says, for the power of sin is in the law, and as you observed, it was only in your awakened spiritual hunger to obey God that you found the law, which you formerly ignored, impossible to keep in your own doing, or

even with the “help of the Lord,” though I gag over that latter phrase, since it still holds on to a big “I” managing things with some help from God, which is an absurdity, for the Scripture calls us temples of the Holy Spirit: and when did a temple ever become the god it houses? Who worships the temple along with the god in it? And though true it is that we are branches of the vine, Christ being the vine, we must learn the analogy of the temple first so that we do not confuse ourselves with God and try to be like either Him or His only begotten Son.

NOVITIA: I think that Eric sees the proof in Scripture that he is dead to sin, but he cannot reason why he still seems the same to himself as ever since waking up to the commands of Scripture, in fact looking worse to himself more than ever—appearing to himself not dead to sin at the very same time that Scripture has convinced him that he is dead to sin. Thus, he cannot solve the incongruity of his experience with the assertions of Scripture that he took by faith recently when we talked to him.

PERCEPTUS: What a marvelous riddle truth is until we see it, and I seem the same to myself in regard to thoughts and feelings, these not having changed in the years since I entered into a life of walking in the Spirit, but know as reality the keeping life of the Holy Spirit as my air and water, wherein I walk according to the life of the Spirit at the very time when thoughts and feelings trouble me as they always did, now with the difference that I know that these soulish reactions do not mean that I must either speak or act according to them, but I need only be still and act according to the voice of the Spirit in me, the inheritance of which is promised to any who wish to know and live in it.

ERIC: You make this sound so easy, and I covet that but recoil at the idea that the soul maintains its gruesome

properties, drawn by various lusts and troubled with evil thoughts. These should vacate and not return, leaving us to a walk with lightness, apart from our past afflictions of soul.

SYLVESTER: I don' t know where you deduce this, for the Bible promises us temptations and trials abundantly, and a present enemy attacking us, so how do you propose that one will have only peaceful thoughts and uplifting feelings in light of the Bible' s plain word on this, though why do I ask you this, when I know so well myself that my expectations were the same, reading the verses I commend to you now but thinking that surely they meant a life free from suffering.

ERIC: I suppose I expected an abatement of soul affliction, though you said last time when we talked that the abatement is not in the soul, but the comfort is in the consciousness of the Spirit, which takes our minds off of what we think or feel, putting us into the mind-set of the Spirit at the very time we feel least disposed to think on God instead of ourselves. But try as I might to do this, my mind falls back onto myself and my bodily lusts and mental obsessions, leaving me in a knot of confusion and frustrated will– willing to be one way but finding myself contrary to what I wish.

PERCEPTUS: This reminds me of the years that I studied Romans 6 and 7 continuously, so much so that those pages in my Bible turned brown, and the pages wore thinner from shuffling them in perplexity or wonder as the insight of the moment stirred me– up one day from a revelation and down another day when temptation tested that insight, and appalled that the testing would come in such forms as it did, revealing the surprise manifest in the unseasoned, no matter how many times those Scriptures might be read. In the main, I lived by moments of inspiration, while most of the time I fussed over not being able to say by faith that I both will and do what God commands.

SYLVESTER: This is our experience when we still see ourselves under law and not under grace, and I too suffered the necessary woes of Romans 7 agony until my trying days ended.

ERIC: When will mine ever end?

PERCEPTUS: I remember Sylvia once saying to me years ago, "Perceptus, your problem is trying," to which I replied, "How can I stop trying?" only to have her reply, "You have to try until you can't." This left me gloomy, though what other answer can one offer, for we do indeed try until we can't, and then if worn out, we no longer resist the gentle voice and wind of the Spirit, always there, but unheeded by us before in our fearful efforts. What mystery freedom is and the why of trying— and why some try more years than others or strain harder, and why some complain a host of decades over their turmoil but never seem stirred to discover the source of their pain.

ERIC: I must say I find slim comfort in your words, though doubtless I will remember them, for they do bear witness even though I cannot get myself to stop trying, and why is that?

NOVITIA: As you said earlier, you fear that if you let go and do not try, that lust will pull you immediately over into sin, causing you great humiliation, though the humiliation we fear is nothing more than pride that we might be found wrong or in sin, as if we could have done something to prevent it and appear as fools for not preventing it: for what a fool we seem to ourselves when we let go, plunge into some folly, and hear from a scorning fellow believer, "What did you expect if you let go of your determination and diligence, thinking God would rescue you? Why didn't you give yourself more to the

Bible and prayer?" Yet our fear is right on one level, for if we just let go and nothing more, sin will take over in our members, but the pride we ignorantly hold onto that we can hold ourselves up against sin is equally sinful, for it is this very independent thinking that underpins all of sin and keeps us looking to ourselves as if we are good for our efforts.

SYLVESTER: Yes, this excites me much now since I see, for I recognize that the devil's lie of independence can mask itself in one's supposed goodness as well as in blatant sin, for the noble sounding "I would never do that" which we easily say when not knowing the depths of what we are capable of, is as ugly to God as the sin splashed all over in word or deed that one falls into— both being forms of bondage to wickedness, since slavery to sin can look upright or decadent, one having the smell of pride and judgment, the other appearing grosser to the Pharisees, though little do Pharisees realize that sinners feel equally repelled by them. The Scripture concludes us all under sin, calling us open tombs, as well as the poison of adders, but who believes that— until law has done its work in us?

ERIC: I fear that the law is beginning to do its work in me, for my casual lack of concern over sin in my carefree years has given way to horror.

PERCEPTUS: This is good, though if the horror be over yourself and that you cannot do what you will, the horror may as easily stem from pride as humility.

ERIC: How can I discern the difference?

SYLVESTER: When horror over sin is only horror over our inability to do what we ought, then we still think that we should be able to obey the commandments, so we see ourselves as those who should and can be like Christ if we try

hard enough, causing our horror not to be over sin but over our wounded pride at what we cannot do. But when our horror moves our eyes to what Christ endured on the Cross for us, and how great that love is, and how He does not condemn us, and how wondrous it is that He brought us out of our desperate estate of rebellion and self-centeredness, then we marvel to behold Him and who He is, and what He did for us, and now does in us, rather than anything about ourselves. When we expect nothing of ourselves, we have begun to open the door offered to us to see into His grace—how it is that He does everything for us: He forgives us by His blood, He comes to abide in us to be the very life that He commands, and He consumes our passion in His own being, having convinced us that He is our life. As long as the sting of condemnation is there in us, we still listen to the devil and his lie that we could and should do better, all the while that he hides from us God's wondrous truth that He created us to be vessels to contain God and branches to bear His fruit. We find ourselves when we have delivered ourselves over to the powerlessness state that He created us to know before the Fall, after the Fall, and for all eternity; for powerlessness is not the province of a group called addicts but rather the very essence of what it means to be human and a creature, for all heaven knows that all but God must contain and express God or fall into the deception Lucifer fell into and then used to seduce many of the angels and our first parents as well. I say all of heaven knows this: it is earth that does not, and the devil makes it his concerted purpose to veil this truth from us, lest we see our powerlessness and turn it to the glory of God, accepting our estate as creatures and glorying in our emptiness that He might continually fill it and make it the seat of His glory.

NOVITIA: Marvelously said, Sylvester, and thankfully, God makes even the condemnation we take to work toward His end, for it drives us into hellish states that lead us ever closer

to cry, "Who will deliver me?" and none cries this until the law has so accused us or convicted us that we know that we cannot deliver ourselves but must be rescued by the life of another. This does not mean that we should take condemnation, for Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, but we cannot help but take in condemnation, its source the devil, until we are finished with the law and see that when we died to sin we also died to law, as Paul tells us in Romans 7.

ERIC: I have some Christian friends who never seem to take condemnation, as I once didn't, but this is not because they have seen the work of the law and moved to a higher state of faith: rather, they live as I once did, alive, so they think, without the law, and seemingly delighting in grace, but a grace not much grace, since to them sin is not much sin; and so though I envy their happy sense of themselves as they go from day to day in enjoyment of this or that, scorning the anguish of soul I now live in, I fear to live as they do, not wanting the wrath of God to overtake me so that I later sorrow over ignorance turned wilful, just to enjoy some pleasure now while cutting short what God works in me as I see myself altogether wretched in His presence.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, there are those still in their foolish ways, as we were before the law came to do its work, and the law must do its work if we are to be any good to ourselves, God, or others, but we need not linger in condemnation if we have eyes to see now, though I do not press you to what you cannot yet receive. I do, though, urge upon you the great truths of what it means to be dead to the law, which we have not looked into in detail here as Paul does in Romans 7. But I see that we must go now, and I look forward to a fellowship next time in which we can look at those truths, equally important as the truth of Romans 6 that we are dead to sin; for if we do not know that we are dead to law, then we cannot

experience being dead to sin either, since sin only gets its power by the law. But we will look at that next time. Adieu!

Dialogue X
Valentine' s Day
More on the New Birth

PERCEPTUS: Odd as it might seem, Valentine' s Day throws my mind to reflection upon the new birth, for it was twelve years ago, without my earthly valentine, living celibate in a boarding house, that the Lord unexpectedly spoke to me a curious word, which I did not understand, but received with all the healing power that quietly came with it, and this word was, "You are a virgin again," at which I wondered: for how can a man, having been married almost twenty-five years, be a virgin again, and why would he want to; for in fact, my desire had been contrary to any idea of virginity, in that having been separated from my earthly spouse for almost three years at that time, my goal had been to reunite with my earthly bride and consummate again in the flesh our union, which we pledged our vows to those many years before. But now, living separately, I had seen by faith that I would not die if not united in the flesh with my earthly wife or for that matter any woman, not to despise the institution of marriage or the marriage bed; for I had dangerously thought this very thing—that I would die without the completeness from the male-female dream that is the subject both of every fantasy and lover' s leap in movies, books, and songs, stretching to every lore of all humanity since the fall in Eden, since we long for completeness that we think can come only this way, not imagining a wholeness in God where male and female as we

know them on earth cease to be our fulfillment, but our fulfillment is in the heavenly realm that heals and completes us even now on earth in this disjointed body that awaits the glorious body of the resurrection, which body will be like the angels, even the image of God itself, wherein we are not neuter but opposites united and thus sexually perfect in the image of God.

NOVITIA: This is indeed a rare subject you introduce, Perceptus, and many would think you mad, or at least esoteric such as to be rendered impractical— a dreamer of things not having to do with the common man, making truth a mystery so ethereal and unlike life as we know it on earth, that you could not sell a nail to a carpenter if he be without one and needing to build a house that day. Yet I know you to be a simple man, not making truth complex— childlike in your faith.

PERCEPTUS: Thank you, Novitia, for not relegating me to some non-relevant niche saved for a few quack doctors, and if you will bear with me long enough here, I will show you how that which looks remote and unlikely, is really the purest thread of our common humanity and at the same time our link with the heavenly realm; for God made us to be what to the outer eye is incongruous, namely the uniting of the most everyday-life of man with the deepest mysteries of God.

NOVITIA: One might think, Perceptus, that you deny future prophetic events and make all of life now, as if nothing is to come.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, I know that this discourse triggers the harangue of those still bound in externals, making the present flesh level of life the point, as if it is more than a covering for a life of heaven or hell in us as the bard, Jacob Boehme so well says, and you know as I do, that we long, as

Paul says, for our glorious clothing of immortality to match our inner sense of immortality, which we gain in Christ; but I am not talking here about complicated matters, but the simple life of a child in God's kingdom when that child comes home to what the new birth offers us, which is a new virginity, which I have not delineated yet. I find myself perplexed as to how to do this yet find myself urged by a pressing to do that very thing; and so I proceed, seeming to falter perhaps, but set on speaking about that pure and holy word given to me, "You are a virgin again": for this word pertains not only to me but to any who would enter into the new birth; and the first thing we must understand is that the new birth does not relate only to the washing away of sins by Jesus' blood, holy and unspeakable as that is, but the new birth relates to procreation, whereby one loses a sin consciousness and enters into the family of God, birthed by a new seed, Christ Himself, who creates us anew as something that we were not, making us not a reformed self, but new selves, though appearing to the world yet in these same bodies and souls. This new birth completes us inside and gives us back again what we lost in the Fall, for in the Fall we lost our virginity.

NOVITIA: Perceptus, you allude several times now to this virginity but do not say yet what it is, so dear brother, what is it, though I think I have some idea.

PERCEPTUS: Let me back up and sound practical for a moment: we grow up with a dream that we will mate and find our meaning, so even in childhood we discover infatuations with the opposite sex, strong in us even before genital maturity: and this is because imprinted in us is the dream of uniting to another to complete ourselves, for spiritually we already know on an unconscious level that we are incomplete and need a conjunction of ourselves to another to enter into completeness. Little do we know that the source of this unrest, which we cannot identify for many years, comes from

the Fall in Eden where Adam left his first love, as John states the issue in the Ephesian letter in Revelation, plainly declaring that all else by faithfulness and industry, if it be apart from the flush of our first love, leaves one correct, but not a lover of God and knowing of His supreme passion for us. We see that in the garden Adam left his first love and willfully sinned so that he could hold on to Eve, already fallen, setting the tone for all our misery because Adam longed for Eve as his completion instead of God, making Eve his god, supposing that to couple with her in the flesh would give him the oneness that he sought.

NOVITIA: This astounds me, not because I haven't heard you say these things, and not because I do not believe them, but because they are so astounding as to cause me to marvel each time in the hearing, as clarity emerges, making the issue quite simple: our first parents lived in a union with God so complete that they did not even need a sexual union outside of the one they had with God to know their wholeness. This was a perpetual state of being before the Fall, in that the opposites were united in us and therefore, Adam did not need to seek a coupling as if that coupling were not already a permanent oneness, which is the true virginity: for a virgin in the kingdom of God need never have intercourse with another, for the virgin is male and female joined as one in an eternal union, in which each on this present earth, whether man or woman, may know a completeness beyond the false fantasy of thinking that in human marriage one finds completeness. But some might say, Perceptus, that you debunk marriage and make sex in the earthly marriage bed an unclean or unholy thing, or at least inferior so as to be despised.

PERCEPTUS: In no way do I debunk marriage or the sanctity of the earthly marriage bed; I only debunk the false expectations we have of it by seeking our fulfillment in it that

can only be found in our union with God, wherein He reveals to us our new virginity, not depending on the coupling of male and female as one flesh in this present world. Only when I saw these things I describe to you did I find the answer for my earthly marriage, for until I saw these things, I lived in perpetual anger– unfulfilled– putting expectations upon my precious earthly wife that only God can meet. She finally separated from me for a season because my anger and depression grew deeper, and what had been overbearing and angry rage for years, flew up into a dangerous onset of violence, which she sought relief from. In our separation, I had to decide if I would turn to fornication to find relief, but I dreaded the wrath of God upon adultery and rightly so; and that fear of wrath was my keeping at that time, though underneath, a tiny ember of desire for divine love and fulfillment wanted to burst into fire and its companion, light, but I strove in rebellion to find another way to fulfil myself, so I turned to a fantasy life of self-sex, which I only found more depressing, and I knew that I had never had self respect because of my inability to break this pattern, even in my better years as a Christian. But see, Novitia, the lie under all of this, for most of us look at the details of sex and how we can fulfill ourselves, and so we dwell on rules and limits and how far we can go, when in fact, all of this is only one huge lie, in that nothing of the realm we seek can fulfill us at all or give us the completeness, wholeness, and respect that we long for. Therefore, no fantasy life of any kind of male and female on this present earth, can complete us or cause us to know our lost virginity that God wishes to restore to us.

NOVITIA: I know that you do not mean to imply a state of being that is neuter or an abstinence as if one only lives in the “not” of something instead of the meaning of a thing, so though I see you labor with this, please continue to say what this virginity is and how one may enter into it.

PERCEPTUS: First, let me say that I did not even know that it existed. I did not know of a virginity, much less the apprehending of it; I merely knew the complete destruction that came from this fantasy life of self-sex, and I wished for restoration in my earthly marriage to the marriage bed, where I imagined that I would find my wholeness, though the wholeness had always eluded me before. But we foolishly keep trying the same thing over and over again, supposing that the magic will strike and stay, and all will be well. In my desperation, I was willing finally to live a life free of all sex, which takes the supernatural life of God to bring about; but in my desperation and willingness, I let go of sex as something needed for life and well being, not sure what life might look like or feel like in that, but certain that sinful ways lead always and only to certain death, and fearing that, I chanced to live in complete abstinence. Soon after, the Lord, said to me in the still, small voice, "You are a virgin again," which word I pondered for years before the mystery started to come clear in the revelations shared with me by a friend. Before the further understanding came, I lived in simplicity. A supernatural sense of healing came into me and a sense of wholeness and completeness that I had never known before. The Lord also gave me the words, "Christ plus nothing" as my motto in life, and this has served me well many times when wanting to make a thing into God.

NOVITIA: I dearly love all this, but can you say more about the virginity, for though not frustrated, I find that this perplexes people to hear about, and they seek more detail.

PERCEPTUS: Though I will share some detail here, Novitia, I do not find it profitable to speak too much detail with those not willing yet to let go of the fantasy of man and woman on this earth mating to find inner completion. Those still of that persuasion take the truths of the new virginity and desecrate them, bringing shame to what is pure and holy and not to be

entered into lightly. The doorway to any revelation is death on the natural level, that the supernatural may spring forth, and then we find the dilemma of explicating in natural words what is supernatural, which brings us back to the new birth. Only in the new birth can we know the virginity revealed by God, for no such virginity exists in the natural world, and even though a man or woman may remain in a virgin state before marriage, which is a rare case though commanded by God, the true virginity is not in us apart from the new birth; and the new birth means that God has done all that He will ever do regarding our justification and sanctification, as Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 tell us, which chapters caused scales to fall from my spiritual eyes. And as Paul says in Galatians, the promise made by God to Abraham was to Abraham' s seed, not to his seeds, meaning only one seed, which is Christ Himself; and Christ then as the seed begets us by a new birth so that we know what it means in Romans 5 that we are saved by His life. The walk of faith becomes easy, even in suffering, and we no longer confuse the pain of a thing with the ease of walking in the Spirit through it, and this is our glory.

NOVITIA: By now, I surely sound like a phone that won' t stop ringing, but what has this to do with the Lord saying, " You are a virgin again" ?

PERCEPTUS: It has everything to do with it since we enter into a completeness that is sexual in a heavenly way and not an earthly way, for instead of going outside of ourselves to mate with an " other than" as men and women do in this present age, seeking to become one flesh but unable to find satisfaction because of the ever-present sense of separation, such that they do not know a permanent oneness, the new birth makes us a new creation in a permanent state of opposites united, wherein one never goes outside of the true self for completion, and loneliness is no more, and

relationships as spoken of by people of the world turn to dust and emptiness, so that we do not even seek them but seek only fellowship with others in what already is a completion in us, so that whole people fellowship with whole people, intensifying the light already fully satisfying. Simply put, to be a virgin is to know loneliness banished and sexual coupling within as the present spiritual nature of the new man in Christ.

NOVITIA; How does this affect our earthly marriages then?

PERCEPTUS: It gives a marvelous aspect to them when we see them not as completing ourselves but instead as mirroring the divine marriage already in us. Look at nature, where the male and female exist in trees, in the union of vine and branch, and in the lack of an obvious male or obvious female, but instead, as with much of nature, the unified sexuality within the one of a given plant or flower, so that even in this fallen world, we see a hint of how all the redeemed in their final completion will know a marriage within themselves, which is the marriage within the Godhead, which marriage gets reproduced in us. Thus Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as a simple flower, and in the kingdom of God, we will be arrayed as such, and know ourselves in that way already in spirit now if we receive it.

NOVITIA: What about those in this life that never marry or those that find tribulation in marriage though they walk in God' s Spirit?

PERCEPTUS: If they will follow the way of God, they will know the divine marriage within themselves, and though their outer bodily members be drawn by attraction or lust, their inner state of oneness is a virginity satisfying in itself since they do not live by the mere appetites of the body, a body passing away, but they live by the Spirit of God, where all opposites

are united, and where no opposite is out of balance or disordered, and where male and female live joined in a holy oneness that satisfies us even now if we have eyes to see it, so that we do not live by burning in the lusts of the outer man but by the refreshing of living water in the inner man.

NOVITIA: What then is the simplicity that you mentioned earlier, for these truths seem deep and beyond the pale of everyday life, and so few find them practical or useful.

PERCEPTUS: This is the sadness that I feel, for these very things enable us to accept ourselves as simple people, for what is simpler than oneness inside, and what is more everyday than to live on the earth and recognize it for what it is and what it isn't and can never be? What is simpler than wholeness, not divided any longer by a constant sin consciousness, so that without that former constant drag, we can now lift our heads and not complicate life by always trying to reason meaning into what of itself has no meaning: we can stop trying to put together the fragmentation of the Fall by earthly means and stop trying to reason our way to everything, and stop trying to unite with man and nature on our own, apart from the Cross, for the Cross unifies everything in a heavenly way, giving us back simplicity as a gift to enjoy without running about in the frenzy of so many who search for this or that answer, feeling, or experience—when all along, the one and only Cross of Christ is our one remedy, in which all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge abound, so that we seek one person and one thing, Christ and His Cross, in which are given to us all things without our efforts except the labor of faith, which in the end turns into no labor at all but an ever-widening stream of glory, and with this, Novitia, I must go for now but thank you for being the lightning rod to this burden of expression.

Dialogue XI
We are Vessels

SYLVESTER: This sunny, February day, one of many we've had, which is unusual in an ordinarily gray month, leads me to think on the wonders of creation as we walk along, even with the bare trees, for the many branches shoot up like filaments against a perfect blue sky, and the breeze, unseasonably warm, hearkens of spring already, though I know we have some cold and gusty days left; but the twittering of a few birds even now, and the cheer of being outdoors, turns my heart to the awe of this world, even in its fallen condition, so how can we imagine a paradise before our terrible Fall in Eden or a paradise such as our savior promised to the thief on the Cross— who believed as his inheritance that very day, though the thief had lived a life of sin, and he certainly could do no works to reverse it in his dying moments, but found grace to receive the one champion of forgiveness, Christ our Lord, whose death made an atonement for not only the thief but all of us as well who receive Him: for John writes that as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, and what a marvel it is to be born again and enter into a son-ship divinely wrought and not naturally conceived, though even the son-ship of this world— the birth of one from the womb of an earthly mother— is still a marvel of God's creation that the devil cannot duplicate but only steal from as the thief that he is behind all thieves.

NOVITIA: How you stir my heart too with your rapture and bring to my mind the fact of the whole world groaning and travailing in pain together until now, awaiting the manifestation of the sons of God, as Paul writes of in Romans 8; and how we do long for it since our time here is but a vapor and a fleeting shadow, and no sooner do we achieve

anything than we forfeit the sight of it to death, a death that preys on our members even from our rosy cheeked first moments from the womb, when dandled and nursed by our mothers; for even with the hopes and dreams of our parents, and our striving from early age on to excel and establish a place among mankind, perhaps advancing our era of history by some new discovery or invention, some genius of science or philosophy, yet we depart so quickly that we can only be bitter unless we know the truth spoken by Jesus that he who believes in Him will never die but only slip from this perishing body into the arms of eternity with our heavenly Father, which certainty comforts us but leaves us yet for a time in the suffering of this world.

PERCEPTUS: This is gusty indeed but true, and were we not of the new creation, we would fall into depression or live rampantly for pleasure as a distraction from what is certain for all, all that is other than the one generation that will go to meet the returning Lord in the clouds at the time of His bodily return. In the meantime, we do well to consider what this flesh is that we live in and how we think on it according to Scripture, so that we do not either over-value it or under-value it, but see it as the Bible tells us that God sees it. You have established already the fact of our physical mortality, and so we do well to know this and advance this fact to ourselves and others as reason not to see this earth as our home; for the Bible calls us pilgrims and strangers, and therefore, though we look for a new heaven and a new earth in the succeeding age, we do not expect science to come up with a remedy for our mortality, since only the resurrection power of Jesus Christ can do that, and He has promised that after our determined time of living by faith and not by sight in these perishing bodies, He will endow us with bodies that conform to the new birth in Spirit already established and at work in us. For now, we live in the groaning world as Christ-indwelled rescuers, by His Spirit, to offer hope to others, even

as Jesus did on the Cross to the dying thief, that people willing to hear would not therefore, spend the rest of their days in either despair or pleasure seeking, but get about their Father's business of building up the family of sons that Jesus guaranteed by His death and resurrection.

SYLVESTER: So we have this first fact established that God gives us as a light of witness, the beauty of nature, even amid the groaning of unpredictable nature and mortality, leading us to glorify the maker of the world and our maker; so that we do not see the universe as a random, dark accident, but as a shadow of a fallen paradise— a pointer to the hope of restoration by the revelation of God as our creator and willing Father if we but receive His way back through Christ. God even means the harshness and uncertainty of the fallen world as the goad and summons to the prudent, those who would like to find their way back if invited, and invited they are, for a sacrifice such as Christ's assures us that God invites us with all the willingness possible.

NOVITIA: Many, though, receive Christ and then settle into life as if the Christian life with this realistic view of what this world is according to Romans 8 but then see their flesh as a very nature, an evil one, always contradicting and opposing their newly born nature, so that they cannot do the things that they will do as Christians; and in fact, one would think that with two natures, and one of them the new nature, one would experience victory at least half of the time, but alas, these who posit the flesh as an old nature and an evil burden of the self, seem more mired up in defeat most of the time rather than walking in consistent victory.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, this view of the Christian is so entrenched that one would think it the epitome of orthodoxy to think of the self as having two natures— one evil flesh and the other the spiritual self that wills to obey God— so that to challenge

it endangers anyone disagreeing with this long-held view as a heretic or fanatic of some kind. If one wants to hear snarls and have to dodge the jagged teeth of angry jaws, one need only argue in the slightest that no one— Christian or non-Christian— has two natures and that a human cannot possess even one nature, for God created us with no nature.

SYLVESTER: I know what you mean, Perceptus, but you should explain, since I always like to hear again this wonder of having no nature.

PERCEPTUS: To grasp this simple truth, one need only the spirit of simplicity before the Lord and a heart open and willing to hear of a very simple plan that God had when He created us: He created us to contain and express Himself, which is simple indeed, since then He would be the operator, and we the ones operated; and He gives us plainly this design in 2 Corinthians 4:7 when the Bible calls us earthen vessels to contain a treasure, in order that we will know that power is not of ourselves but of the Lord who indwells us. Now what is a vessel but a cup or container, for example? Think about a cup; it exists to hold and serve what it contains, meaning that God created us to hold and serve Him and not to imagine a cup that can be the liquid it contains, for what nonsense would it be to offer a thirsty person an empty cup as if the cup were the point? The recipient might fling the cup back at the server as being one dispossessed of sense and go elsewhere to find a cup with the proper drink in it. The folly of our first parents, and ours as well by inheritance until we receive both Christ and His wisdom, was to believe that they could be God, when in fact, only God is God, and He created us to contain Him as simply as a cup is fashioned by a potter to hold a drink; and just as a cup is not its drink, so a man is not His God, but the devil so succeeded in precipitating the Fall, that we lost our minds to sin and began to think possible what God plainly sees as ridiculous and subversive to His

plan.

NOVITIA: One would think this point easily assimilated and the race could get on in harmony with God and mankind, but the fiercest fight has ensued since the Fall, and nothing is more difficult to erase as the supposed absolute truth than that a human can be like God is, which folly persists not only among the non-Christians but the Christians as well, for though the Christians know that they need a savior for their sins and that Christ Jesus, crucified and resurrected is the sole atonement for their sins, according to the Scriptures, even the Christians do not in the main recognize what God intended as the paradigm for being human, which is evidenced by the persistent effort of Christians to be like Christ, despite their failure at it.

SYLVESTER: Yes, and they hold to Romans 7 as proof that this is meant to be, claiming that Paul himself lived in such a morbid mentality, offering his present tense monologue of Romans 7 as proof that Paul never gained the victory over his flesh, when the contrary is as plain as the moon in the sky on a clear night to any who will read further to see that after he cries out for deliverance, acknowledging his powerlessness, he discovers his vessel-hood, living thereafter by the power of the Spirit and not by his own efforts.

PERCEPTUS: You mention a vital point, for Paul only uses the present tense for vividness of effect, knowing as well, the present tense deception still active in many of his readers; and so he writes this way, not because he never discovered deliverance, but because knowing that his readers may not have, he recreates the drama, drawing them into it, in hopes that they too will cry out the same way that he did, learning then the fact that God created us to live by his power and not our own, exposing self-effort as a legacy of deception, easily replaced when we see that God is not interested in what we

do but only in what He does in us.

NOVITIA: This would seem obvious, but the enemy has so blinded us that apart from the removal of a veil, no one can see the plan of God, and we cannot ourselves remove the veil and don't even know that it exists until our own failures disturb us enough that we cry out for relief from the burden of self.

SYLVESTER: My, I had not looked at my watch, and I see I must hurry to an appointment, but when we resume, we must talk more about God's plan for us as humans, to contain and express Him, and why it is that we got deceived into thinking that we can be anything else but what God made us.

PERCEPTUS: Adieu, and we will resume.

NOVITIA: I too must go, so let us resume again tomorrow.

Dialogue XII We are Temples

NOVITIA: How good to be conversing again about those things most dear to our hearts and minds, for eternity hangs about us, and in fact, Hebrews tells us that we have already come unto Mount Zion, which is the heavenly Jerusalem, with the angels and saints there, not to mention the Lord Himself, whom we desire to see with outer eyes as well as inner eyes, though we wait patiently for the time when what is now hidden will appear in every way with all splendor to heaven and hell, to the joy of every creature worshiping the one true God, and to the dismay of those who hope that our faith is no more than a fairy tale made up for weak minds needing a

fantasy to survive in a cold world of logic based on what is random and temporal.

PERCEPTUS: Well said, Novitia, and as I remember, we discoursed last time about the fact that God created us as vessels to contain and express Him— meaning that we are not independent selves purposed to imitate him. To try and be like God or Christ means taking upon the self a task never intended by the Creator, who designed us only to revel in Him as the one who indwells us and provides every ounce of love that gets expressed, which is why I so often tell the missionary story of Norman Grubb, who found not long after his arrival on the mission field that he had a deficiency of love, whereupon he asked God to give him more love, only to find himself rebuffed by the Holy Spirit who said, “Shut up!,” a seemingly harsh word for such a humble request. Yet Norman obeyed in faith, shortly to hear the sequay word of the Spirit, “God is love,” which brought Norman the revelaton that love is not something that God dispenses to us in packets, but love is God Himself loving in us.

SYLVESTER: I never tire of this thought, especially since the opposing thought, that we are independent and must try to be like Christ, now vexes me and wearies me as much as it once prompted me in false hope of holiness attained by my own efforts.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, for the standard view of many is that the Christian has two natures, one evil and one good, making the human the source of the nature, when Romans 6 clearly states that we always have a master, either sin or righteousness, and that the master is the nature, not some property inherent in ourselves. We obey a master and yield our members to a master, so if we are never the master, how can we be the nature?

NOVITIA: What a useless thing it is to keep digging around in the flesh or even our own spirit for a nature, as if we produce either the good or evil that we do, when God and the devils know all along that humans must serve an indwelling spirit and eventually yield their members accordingly. Only when we get clear that we must serve a master do we begin to make progress in what is otherwise a deceived view of life that supposes that we may be lords ourselves over our own lives.

PERCEPTUS: I often give the example that God gives us a multiple choice question with two answers: a) serve the devil or, b) serve Christ; and we start by wanting to write in our own answer, c) be our own bosses, to which God only offers the same first two alternatives repeatedly. Further, we cannot even serve on our own but can only operate by faith, which is simply to say that we receive, since faith means receptivity and not what we do. Unbelief is the blocking and resisting of the flow of the Spirit into us and out from us, since without resistance, faith comes as naturally as breathing.

SYLVESTER: I remember that we mentioned last time also that independence is the deception fostered by the enemy, and that many Christians mistake Paul's intent in Romans 7 when he speaks in the present tense, falsely supposing him to mean that he always lived in the condition of not doing the good he wished and instead doing the evil that he didn't want to do, when in fact, Paul only uses the present tense to recreate the passion of his misery and quest for deliverance in such a way that those reading him, still mired up in the agony he describes, may also see the deliverance he describes when he asks who will deliver him, meaning that he realized finally that he could not deliver himself, and no man can, hence implying the powerlessness that addicts in the mid-20th century grasped onto as the basis of the modern recovery movement.

PERCEPTUS: This is review worthy of all saints, and Mount Zion rejoices when these harmonious notes of God's expressed purpose get so clearly sounded as you have sounded them, my brothers, and we do well to add the marvelous insight that not only are we vessels, but we are temples as well, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19, meaning that we are the very Holy of Holies for the Shekinah glory that once inhabited the room behind the curtain in the tabernacle and later the temple, a room only entered once a year by the high priest when he took the annual atonement blood behind the curtain to put it on the ark. But now, that perfect propitiation has been made by Christ, never to be made again, and the old covenant is superseded now that we are walking temples of the Holy Ghost, having been bought by the blood of Christ so that the hope of glory might return to us, and we might walk as the holy temples that God now sees us to be as believers in His Son.

NOVITIA: What pleases me to note as well is that a temple only has the purpose of containing its god, which even the nations of antiquity realized, though their gods were statues not possessing life, for even those not knowing the one true God, knew instinctively that life is about gods and temples and man's relationship to both, though those in ignorance did not know the mystery of the Gospel, as none did really until the time of revelation under the New Covenant, which could only come after the Old Covenant had served its purpose of demonstrating that it could not produce the efficacy needed to recreate man into what God intended.

SYLVESTER: The good thing too about seeing God's plan for us as His temple is that it diverts worship away from ourselves, which infuriates the enemy, and places worship on the One worthy of it, our Lord, so that we cease to see ourselves as gods and enjoy instead our created role as

temples to contain God, freeing us to get on with the glory of living in His presence as united to Him and expressing Him, instead of endlessly trying to establish shrines to ourselves, which mirrors the fall of Lucifer, who became the devil because he desired to worship himself and receive worship from others, promising them a freedom in so doing that only led to self-for-self bondage and the destruction of hell in the fallen angels, which fall spread to humans through Adam, and which fall will remain eternally in those refusing to come to the true light, repent, and receive the life of God instead of trying to generate life by their own efforts.

PERCEPTUS: Notice too that Paul extends the picture of us as temples to include not just our spirits, where we are joined to the Lord, making us one spirit with Him, a union divinely wrought and putting the focus on our oneness with Him; but he says that our bodies as well are members of Christ and not to be used for immoral purposes, for in sexual intercourse two bodies become one flesh, which is a great mystery indeed and a fact intended by God to set our minds on our spirit union with him, having the implication then that our bodies are included in our union with Christ, not being our own, and not being left as separate entities for us to use according to our own pleasures.

NOVITIA: Truly, this unifies man, and unifies man with God, for God sanctifies us spirit, soul, and body— not intending that any part of us not share in His glory; and this is our inheritance by faith, leading us while living in these bodies not to see them as more or less than they are: for some make the body all in all with the purpose of life being to constantly attend to the appetites of the body as if they are the point of our living; and others, seeing the Spirit as the point and our union with God's Spirit as the point, minimize the body in such a way that the body becomes evil— something to wish oneself without, hating it as a gross encumbrance hindering

the spiritual life. Neither of these two views is correct, for though the body is not the point, yet it is true that God will reward us in eternity for the things done in the body, and so the body has its essential role, and our Lord indeed came in a body, though not in the line of fallen Adam, meaning that He had to be born of a virgin to avoid being just another fallen son of Adam; yet to save us He had to be human, and Christ did not hate the body, though He said that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, noting weakness and not evil as the main property of the body, granting as well that it is under that Fall as perishable in its present condition.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, and Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the body is dead because of sin, meaning as you said that it is perishable, and he tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 that we groan in these bodies, wanting to be clothed, meaning that we instinctively know as Christians that we are to be clothed and not naked, a call in us unto our glorified bodies, which Paul also mentions in 1 Corinthians 15, where he says that we have been sown as natural bodies, but we will rise in glorious bodies. We have the glory in us now through Christ in us, but this glory is hidden to the world by our mortal bodies, which God intends us to see by faith as instruments of righteousness, meaning the organs and limbs, eyes and ears of the living God in this world to radiate out His glory as a call to others to rejoice in Him and surrender to Him. So, weak as our bodies are, they are neither evil nor good, but they are our vessels to contain Christ, and He means for His life to quicken them and keep them from sin as we walk by faith.

SYLVESTER: I think that some resent the idea of choice, thinking that God should automatically make us do what He wills and automatically make us immune to the pulls of bodily lust or the enemy's drawing to pride, covetousness, envy, and wrath— as if we should not know consciousness by opposites that we view and select from, but as if God should produce

an automatic consciousness in us apart from anything we wish or desire, a notion which would contradict the whole design of faith, which has to operate according to the truth that what you take, takes you, and taking comes from something being available and desirable.

PERCEPTUS: You bring up again what theologians debate endlessly, and I know you do not do the same, but it is good to review that there exists desiring and taking so that one may see the incongruity of thinking that he wishes to go to heaven, when the truth is that he hates heaven and everything in it. C.S. Lewis illustrates this brilliantly in his book *The Great Divorce*, in which a busload of people from hell visit heaven, only to find it lifeless and dull, leading them to crave their return back to their land of shadow and darkness, where self centeredness is the ruling atmosphere.

NOVITIA: Truthfully, to desire heaven but not the Lord of heaven and the nature of heaven is, as you say, mere wishing to avoid the tragic results of hellish thinking and loving, which leads back around to the point you made earlier that Paul brings spirit, soul, and body together in our union with Christ so that the body gets included, even though the body is not good or evil of itself, but a clothing of manifestation that God means as His intended instrument of expression in this present world, until the time that the new body comes forth into manifestation.

PERCEPTUS: The body of itself, then, is a response to stimuli, and our spirits are meant to rule them, by our union of being one spirit with the Lord, so that our bodies serve us and not we them— so that we do not live as mere glands and organs known only by various appetites, but that heaven and our brethren know us as those who partake of the nature of the Cross, whereby our appetites are fine, but they do not rule us or hinder Christ's love by us, which constantly opposes the

mere fulfillment of appetite and life of pleasure. The spirit of sacrifice, the nature of our indwelling Lord Jesus Christ, takes over our spirits and bodies so that we can be led into many and various situations that fly against our bodily desires or initial thoughts, leaving us available to live as expressions of His nature of love, which always seeks the best for others even when it causes suffering to us. We naturally flee from suffering and need take no condemnation for that, for Jesus Himself would have left Gethsemane if there had been another way to save us, so humanity of itself does not possess the constitution to will or embrace suffering; but our spirits, in union with His Spirit, can will to be made willing to endure suffering so that the body of Christ might grow.

SYLVESTER: Some will turn back at this, hoping that salvation is the life of ease, free from suffering.

PERCEPTUS: Some will, but others will realize that it is easy to walk in the Spirit, though often excruciating, not confusing the suffering of a matter with its ease of doing; for God has made faith as simple as breathing, but He causes it to be attended with suffering that we might live not as beasts of mere appetite but as vessels and temples of His love.

NOVITIA: What a wonderful conversation, and I must go but look forward to talking even more about how God created us to operate, for we have mentioned that we are slaves, but we have not said all there is on that, and we have yet to talk about how it is that we are the body of Him as head or how we abide as branches of Him as the vine.

PERCEPTUS: All of this we will do as the Lord unfolds, and I bid you brothers peace and a good day.

SYLVESTER: And I the same to you all.

NOVITIA: And I too to you all, adieu!

Dialogue XIII

We are the Body and Branches

SYLVESTER: Here we are, walking along on a March day, enjoying some blooms already out but nothing like the hoped for burst of the next few weeks, when the glory of God will so overtake me that rapture will hardly describe the joys I feel and the thanksgiving of such heralds in even this dark, fallen world to a paradise that will last forever when once the final glorification arrives.

PERCEPTUS: Your love of nature is no ordinary thing, Sylvester, but the bloom of faith that allows God to slow us down to see the light of His glory in the birthing of new life, though sadly some look with an eye for beauty upon Nature without ever seeing the springs of light and blessing pouring from the creator, supposing instead that random events in the universe precipitated random progress to the colors and sounds of spring, with flower and bird song, the greening of the grass, the sound of mowers along the street, and children outdoors after winter' s cold

NOVITIA; I think, Perceptus, that Sylvester intoxicates us with a finer wine than we know, and how glorious it is, but tell me, is the light of Nature enough to save one?

PERCEPTUS: Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and we can see from Scripture that God' s word to Abraham prophesied him a father of many nations, and so Abraham believed the word spoken to him by

God. God spoke to Abraham, not leaving him to Nature alone to know the plan and wisdom of God; for God's plan concerns offspring wrought supernaturally— the procreative power of God far beyond Nature, miraculous as that is, for God desires sons in His image who know Him and His wisdom and His Son crucified to save those who believe; and though God did not speak the name Christ to Abraham, surely Abraham knew the promise made to Adam and Eve in the garden after the Fall, when He told them that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, so how can we imagine that Abraham would not have come to know this promise; and did not God give Abraham a picture of the Cross of Christ when He required of Abraham the sacrifice of Isaac, and did not Christ in His day say, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad," as John's Gospel tells us? So Abraham knew Christ by the Spirit though not by the mystery of the Gospel fully revealed as given in the New Testament, but we see that one can know a thing in its essence, though not yet in its form and name, as even Shakespeare says that a rose by any other name smells as sweet, and so therefore, Abraham surely knew the Gospel more than many today who can recite the facts of the Gospel but who have no inner connection to it by faith and heart love toward God, but only possess information to debate and quarrel about, as the letter people have always done with the written record of Spirit words.

SYLVESTER: I don't feel slighted at all by this Perceptus, for as much as we revel in Nature, we know too the pressure upon us to make known the history of God's dealings with mankind, for the Psalmist cries out, "What is man that Thou dost consider him?" and so we do well to know who and what we are and how it is that we fell, and what God did to save us, and how we can proclaim this salvation to the ends of the earth.

NOVITIA: When the deceit of the deceiver is exposed back by the Spirit' s opening theeyes of our hearts, we see that we are the body of Christ, as Paul says, and Christ is the head. How can a head operate without a body, or how can a body know its implementation without the guidance of a head, and more especially, a divine head, the mind of Christ? Christ without a body remains Christ without offspring and brothers, and He desires a body joined to Him of sons appointed to glory. He was already God in eternity, but the Father wished Him to become the head of a race of sons to manage His universe, as Norman Grubb put it so well, in that God is sufficient within Himself alone in the plurality of His divine being, but He, in His love, wishes to have a family of created sons to express His love nature in a manifold variety, taking their birth from Him, through the Cross, and carrying on in ecstasy the endless love exchange between God and His human offspring, and between mankind and their glorious God.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, apart from a divine head, we must be divine ourselves or become divine. Lucifer tried the latter, the narcissistic delusion of looking at Himself too long and seeing himself instead of God' s glory, precipitating his fall, supposing he could have a glory of his own, which is not possible since there is only one God with one glory, which He tells us He does not share with another except to illumine one as the sun illumines the moon. The moon blesses us by night with light given by the sun, for the moon on its own would be only a dark, hard ball– unperceived without the grace and glory given to it a its radiance.

NOVITIA: It follows too, that having been deceived by the enemy into thinking that we are independent selves, we have supposed as non Christians that we were to strive and do for ourselves to make ourselves into a form and fashion approved of by the world. Watching the film Jason and the Argonauts I heard a line by one of the mythical gods who said

that the gods most approve of those who need them least, implying that self sufficiency brought favor from the gods, and yet the mythical gods were jealous and chose to intervene when man's hubris led to ignoring them. We know from Scripture that God is a jealous God, and He makes no secret of commanding total obedience and dependency on Him, which becomes our first love when we see it, for we are slaves of God as Paul tells us in Romans 6, and when we accept our slavery to God, He turns around and calls us His friends as Jesus called His disciples before His death, knowing that they, excepting Judas, had remained with Him despite their frequent blindness.

PERCEPTUS: This is where I love to talk about the branches and the vine, and how sweet are those words about Jesus calling us His friends after we have accepted our slavery to Him as master, and we do well to mention further the devil's deception, hidden to us for so long, that led us to think of ourselves as able to function on our own or perhaps with some help from God, if humility has reached that far. Think of how we pictured life when Christ in us meant no more to us than Jesus in our hearts, with us still in control but calling on Him as needed to help a big, independent "I." To find out that we are the body to express Christ as head, the two joined as one, brings Christ into focus as a total Christ in a total human, to quote Norman again.

SYLVESTER: This is wonderful; I am ravished every time I read the verse in Corinthians, "We have the mind of Christ." Having been disillusioned with the limitations of my own brain, I gladly accepted the beauty and wonder of the mind of Christ as my true mind, joined to my created mind. This takes me out of myself, that lost in His mind, I find a new mind operating in me, transforming me into the Sylvester of His making— not the Sylvester I formerly thought I was that ended up a complete disappointment in mental turmoil and insanity.

Gladly then, I lose my mind to find it, for I find His mind, and therefore then my own. I am the expresser of His mind in my curious Sylvester form; and I might add that your forms appear equally curious to me as I' m sure mine does to you!

PERCEPTUS: No wonder the world thinks us mad, for we do sound out of our minds, and we are in good company, for after Paul' s witness to King Agrippa, he charged Paul that much learning had made him (Paul that is) mad, but who would not like to be mad as Paul was mad, for being out of his mind, he was in his right mind, which was the mind of Christ as you say.

NOVITIA: May we as madmen talk now about the vine and the branches, for I have had a conversation with a friend just today who all but swears at me for making abiding to be so easy. My friend labors at trying to abide and sees it as the most difficult thing possible, considering it to be the province of a few gifted and mature saints who have diligently attained to such a high state of being.

PERCEPTUS: I know how in my early years, easy talk of abiding brought me to rage, for it seemed to contradict the imperative I saw of hard work, and anything easy indicated to me at that time sloth and carelessness leading to sin. My own working, however, proved ineffective, for in the mirror of the commandments I only saw the record of my failure and inability to keep the commandments, and so I sought to abide in the same way that I had worked, making abiding therefore, still a work, leading to the same frustration that your friend expressed to you. Abiding does not mean starting out each day as a branch on the ground that must lift itself up to the tree, attach itself to the tree, and hold itself to the tree throughout the day; and no wonder I raged at such an idea, for I cannot hold my hand above my head for more than a few minutes without strain and agitation, so how would I

expect to daily hoist myself as dead weight from the ground, attach myself to a tree that in my mind is different in nature than my branch, and hold myself to this tree until mysteriously falling off again during the night?

SYLVESTER: Perceptus, you have a way with absurdity— I mean explaining simple truths with absurd pictures of how we turn a straightforward truth around in our minds to conform to the deception of our old thinking when we do not see the grace and ease of God for our walk in the Spirit by faith. It is absurd to look at trees and then talk as we did about abiding, for we see that branches do not work to remain attached: the tree holds them in place, and in their state of rest, they receive the rich nutrients of the tree and manifest the leaves, blooms, and fruit of the tree, without daily doing anything to get to where they already are. Only storm or disaster separates a branch from a tree, and this because of the occasional upheavals of fallen nature, but we are not to consider our union with Christ as subject to the disaster of this fallen world or the devil, for Paul tells us in his matchless poetry in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ; therefore, by faith we may continue in union with our Lord without doubt or fear that anything can sever us from our union with Him.

NOVITIA: Not only this, but we see then that walking in the Spirit is easy and not to be confused with the suffering that we experience, for if we equate pain with ease then little in life will be easy; but if we know that it is easy to walk in the Spirit, then we may do so, not considering daily excruciating circumstances as contrary to our ease of faith or walk in the Spirit of holiness. We need not take condemnation for our temptations or our initial pulls in thoughts or feelings, as if the desire to respond negatively is a nature of ours or indicates that we are not abiding. This is the glory of not living in a sin consciousness, for we can experience the continual

pulls of sin, while recognizing the enemy as their source, and not attributing these pulls to a falsely supposed old nature of our own. Instead, we can continue by faith that we are abiding, that He is keeping us, and that He is at work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure as the Philippians letter says.

PERCEPTUS: Excellently expressed! And thank you! We can never hear too much of this, and the sin consciousness that many live in acts in a way contrary to what those living in it suppose, for instead of it being a true humility and guard against sin, it keeps the worshiper from the generous provision of calling clean what God calls clean, for He looks at what His Son did once and for all and not at all at what we do. Granted, He does see our words and deeds, but He does not attribute them as means to either our justification, for He only looks at whether we believe Him and His work or not. I knew the new birth the day that I saw that God had done all He will ever do for our holiness when He sacrificed His son, and no letter say this better than Hebrews 9 & 10, where we find terror in the statement that if one sins willfully, there is no more provision for sin. The terror becomes our comfort, however, when we see that all is done forever in Christ and His work, and therefore, we do nothing but believe and find ourselves reckoned righteous in the same way that Abraham did. This faith is easy, even in the jaws of excruciating pain, the worst of temptations, and the bitterness of circumstance: when hell screams its loudest at us, heaven is most alive to those who walk in faith, for they count it as meant by God that they go through these constant assaults, and they do not register constant surprise at fiery ordeals but expect them as well as the contradiction of sinners against themselves.

NOVITIA: So— simply said, most of what Christians consider as reasons that they cannot abide prove to be no reasons at all but merely excuses to wallow longer in a sense of

incompleteness, loneliness, and inability; whereas God makes all His provision available to us at all times, and we need not say, "If only..." any more.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, this all comes from looking at the self and not at God, and those under the law will keep saying, "We should look at God," but that "We should" keeps them from the faith of "I am looking to God, and He is keeping me." When the Bible says that we should do a thing, it means that we need only to move to faith that God is doing this in us, and we can watch His constant miracle of producing in us the life that we can never produce in ourselves.

SYLVESTER: How rich, and I hate to break off here, but I must go.

NOVITIA: I too, and I look forward to our next conversation.

PERCEPTUS: Blessings to you and your families; I am grateful for your fellowship in the Spirit and always find myself blessed through the Spirit by you.

Dialogue XIV Soul and Spirit

SYLVESTER: Although spring is not yet here for another week, the willow trees already bear tiny green leaves that will grow into the weeping willows we love so well. The forsythia is bright yellow today, and the buttercups in the yard, carefully planted last fall; and think of all we have to look forward to—the Bradford Pears, the dogwoods, the tulips, and the roses, not to mention the trees turning green all around us. A clear

sky with sunshine boosts any day, and just this morning in the campus café, Shelly asked a student how he was, as they stood ordering coffee, to which he responded, "I'm here" She lavishly exclaimed, "Look out that broad window over there and see the beauty of this glorious day," which he could hardly refuse to do, given such chiding.

ERNEST: I too found rapture this morning, but as soon as I was inside four walls with other duties pressing, my soul slumped into the darkness of depression, feeling as if others belong and I do not, and imagining that others bustle about busy with the satisfaction of goals attained, with one thought after another productive and energetic, so that I only seem out of step with the world. Yet, I know that this cannot be for Scripture says that all temptations are common to mankind; but when one slumps, the tendency is to think that others do not understand what we feel and how we suffer. Then I feel guilt over my self-preoccupation, and I attempt to fight off the difficulties assaulting my soul, thinking surely that to witness the love of God to others, I need to present myself bright and optimistic in demeanor.

NOVITIA: I'm worn out already, not that I think less of you, Ernest, for your honest doubts, but they remind me of the turmoil I lived in until recently. I thought that the essential thing to do was to keep constant track of every thought and every feeling, analyzing a meaning behind each, to find an agenda, speak a spiritual truth to it, and thereby gain ease of soul. I tried many prescribed formulas for spiritual well being offered in books and seminars, all of which are good, but none of which can help us if we are always taking our temperature, as it were, with respect to our thoughts and feelings; for like the weather, they change ever so quickly and turn about with no apparent reason. They go up and down, high and low—seasoned cruelly with foul thoughts and supposed malicious intents, evil jealousies, wanton lusts, and

self-exaltation or self-deflation depending on a look or gesture of another that may mean no more to that person than indigestion, though we take it as connived intent against us or dubious opinion of our abilities or achievements: and even if such and such a one does harbor such calculated agendas against us, who are we to make ourselves the center of the world and minimize Christ's completeness in us because of our fluctuations of thought and emotion— as if they are some great quake that demands the attention forthright of all the world to attend to us? Such is to live from soul and not spirit.

ERNEST: I'm too embarrassed to speak further at such a reproof, which I know that you do not mean personally, but I already feel enough humiliation over my low estate as a Christian and cannot help but think that God Himself tires of my constant inability to rise above my emotions. I need to steady myself on a walk of faith that rebuffs the grossness of my flesh and the arrows of the devil. Why just today I had enough poisonous thoughts and lustful drawings, mixed with strange ideas that I fear an exposure of them would render me as insane and qualified only for an institution.

PERCEPTUS: I would not call Novitia's to you a reproof but rather relief on his own part, and hope for you, since none living escapes what you describe. We can, however, walk without condemnation and ignore all of this that disturbs and provokes us, not as if these upheavals of the soul are imagined— unreal in the sense that they do not occur; but we can ignore them. They do not have to determine anything that we speak or do, for the Lord keeps those who walk by faith in His keeping, and He does not reckon the negatives of our souls as anything other than the pressure of living in a groaning world still under the Fall in its effects against us, including the stream of lies from the devil. These seem as if they are our very own thoughts and a nature at that, which they are not: for as Christians, our nature is Christ Himself,

and His mind is our mind, and all that suggests itself to us as venom and lust come from the enemy acting upon the organs of our natural minds and bodies, which are neither good nor evil in themselves since they do not of themselves operate choice— choice being a function of the spirit.

ERNEST: I have heard this teaching but cannot separate my mind and all the flurries of disturbance from the supposed seat of peace and perfection residing in me in Christ at my center. What I experience daily that pulls on me and would drag me into the things that I fear, seems potently real, whereas the truths that you, Novitia, and Sylvester speak, seem dry and unreal, as if they are supposed to be real but are not unless I make them real by some action of my will.

PERCEPTUS: They are real, not needing for you to make them real, but you cannot experience them except by faith, since faith is receptivity— not blocking what comes with ease to us as dry ground soaks up water when rain falls. Furthermore, God intends that the real not be real according to our feelings and fluctuations of thought, but real according to what God says He has done in Christ, which things we agree with Him concerning and accept as real despite outer evidence that argues the opposite.

NOVITIA: My time with Perceptus has led me into newness of mind, not because Perceptus can create a new mind in himself or others, but because he plants or waters as God gives opportunity, and God Himself opens my mind to know the mind of Christ, affirming that this is now the mind joined to my spirit in a union whereby the Lord keeps me all the while that He means for the world to have its fallen impact against me, including the assaults of the devil; but as spirit people, we do not any longer live according to the dictates of a flesh that is destined for the grave, but we live according to the Spirit that quickens our mortal bodies and supplies our

minds with every remedy for the suffering we endure, relieving us of the sin consciousness that formerly dominated us when we clung to the flesh as our reality and held ourselves aloof from entering into what we cannot see, though in truth we do see with the eyes of the heart. Also, far from spurning these vile bodies, as Paul calls them, we count them vile only because they are dead because of sin and incapable of generating any good or evil of themselves, having only the reactions to stimuli that lead us either to use them in faith as instruments of righteousness or to offer them as beasts to a world of lust promoted by the devil, who gladly would have our members captured by every impulse of mere mortal flesh.

ERNEST: What you say sounds good, but I thought that the body is supposed to be a wonderful seat of right appetite and potential to express the life of God, or so that's what I think I've heard you say. Some go about so enamored with their "right flesh," calling it Christ that one could hardly distinguish their flesh from the Spirit anymore, and honestly, some of these do not appear to live differently from the carnal world except that they call their appetites Christ.

PERCEPTUS: You bring up a good point, for we are not angels but humans, though not in the form that God created us when Adam had a glorious body greatly different from the body after the Fall. Adam grieved to see the body he consigned himself and us too. Our present bodies, therefore, are not good when compared to the body of Adam before the Fall or the body of the ascension that we will receive when the glorified body appears; they are harsh and beset with imbalances caused by Adam falling into the flesh as his reality instead of reigning over the flesh in a glorified way, not partaking of the harsh potentials that turned actual when he fell into sin. Even so, we are not to despise our bodies, for Christ died for them and the Holy Spirit washes them with

pure water as Hebrews says, and so we are to honor our bodies as presently indwelt by Christ and meant to be His present outer expression of our inner beings united to Him, meaning too that we do not live by “taste not, touch not, handle not,” as if ascetic practice makes us holy. Neither, though, do we glorify our appetites and make them the point as if to eat and drink and join to our spouses as one flesh can bring us contentment; for contentment comes only from the Lord, and the Holy Spirit makes us content in our hearts, enabling us then to enjoy our earthly lives, living as good stewards of the mortal body and of the possessions that God gives to us, so that in both these—the body and our possessions—we glorify God in much or little and show forth contentment unknown to the world, which, no matter how much it revels in the body or possessions, never has contentment despite its boasting and acquisitions.

SYLVESTER: This is why I find awe in the floating eagle, joy in the flowers though they quickly fade, warmth in a kiss, or satisfaction in a favorite food, for I do not mistake them for the source of my contentment, yet I do not despise them for not being what they cannot be or for passing so quickly by as temporal. I thank God for each and enjoy what He provides, recognizing lust as the devil’s taint which he would put upon God’s goodness for God shares His goodness with us even in a fallen world awaiting its rebirth when the sons of God precipitate it at the appointed time. Though temporal, the beauties of the external world and the enjoyments of life, when granted, bring occasion for celebrating the generosity of God and His calling to trust that, “at His right hand are pleasures for evermore,” as the Psalmist says. Therefore, I am neither cynical nor overly optimistic about the external world, merely seeking by faith to gain favor as a trustworthy steward who uses the things of the world as a testimony to Christ in us as His regents even now before the time when He will sum up all things in Christ so that every knee will bow and every

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.

NOVITIA: This is a good hymn of praise, Sylvester, and I echo it, thanking God for His rich favor both in abundance and suffering, for He tells us to be content in whatsoever state we find ourselves, and we may one day have money in the bank, children at our knee, a loving spouse, and good health, and another day find ourselves suffering the loss of any or all of these.

PERCEPTUS: Truly, as the flower passes, so will we, and all too quickly, so it profits us to hear again the words of Jesus to Mary at the time she sought Him in grief after her brother's death. He told her that Lazarus would rise at the last day in the resurrection, which comforted her, but He had more to say, for He also told her that the one who believes in Him shall never die; so our comfort in the face of present sufferings or physical death, is that this time is fleeting and lived in bodies already dead as it were, and our hope of glory is Christ in us, who has joined Himself to us in Spirit and made us the abode of the wonderful Godhead, so that we set our minds on things above and not on things of the earth.

ERNEST: How can I rid myself of the earthly thoughts that drag me down, and how can I repel the attacks of Satan; and even more, how can I rid myself of the consciousness of this dead flesh and the evil thoughts and lusts that work in me continually, for I fear that unless I find a remedy, I will break down and become a patient rather than a healer?

PERCEPTUS: You cannot in this present life rid yourself of earthly thoughts and the attacks of Satan, for God means them to come to you though God does not tempt you and cannot be tempted. But temptation is not sin, and the earthly thoughts you so lament and dread are not sin unless you take them as your own and permit them to conceive, which you

cannot help but do unless you know the keeping of the Lord. Truly, you must let the Holy Spirit divide in your consciousness these two— soul and spirit— and make them as apart from one another as two things can be, so that you see the infinite gap between them and do not mistake the one for the other, which one can do only with divine discernment according to the Spirit and our willingness, which is still a gift, for when Rees Howells was not willing and could not make himself willing, the Holy Ghost asked him, “ Are you willing to be made willing?” which Mr. Howells was, and so the Holy Ghost took him on into the life laid out for him by God. So it is for us; we are not willing and should not take condemnation for not being willing, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and flesh apart from Spirit is immediately the dwelling place of sinful lusts as Norman put it, so our place is to rest and be made willing, if indeed we wish God to make us willing, which not all do, for some choose to live in their lusts and burn in them and take them as their food rather than the Spirit of God.

ERNEST: But what thoughts will enter my mind when I do this or what feelings will I have when I surrender to be taken over like this into God’ s keeping? Will my mind become a clean slate and my body immune to carnal lust?

PERCEPTUS: I can only say what I think is true and also my experience— that you will experience in your soul and body the same things that distress you and provoke fear now, except that when you walk in the Spirit, you lose the sin consciousness, and you do not take condemnation for the thoughts and lusts that formerly brought you torment from the devil and caused you to fight and resist as if in your own strength you could make yourself a clean slate or immune to carnal lust. This does not mean that you make a home for evil and lust, delighting in them and incorporating them into word and deed so that your life is an expression of them; rather,

this means that by not taking condemnation and by not recognizing them as your true consciousness, you move in the stillness of the Spirit which is willing to sit quietly and not speak or act but let the Holy Spirit give you the words and deeds that are the expression of who you are, even while the things in your soul that formerly distressed you and served as the occasion of torment from the devil still go on, but known to you now as not your true consciousness

ERNEST: The word consciousness bothers me since I associate it with mystical teachings that have nothing to do with Christ and His salvation.

PERCEPTUS: Do not let this bother you since Hebrews tells us that under the Old Covenant, the temple sacrifices had no power to cleanse the consciousness of the worshiper, but Christ's once and for all blood sacrifice takes away our consciousness of sin, meaning that we have a cleansed consciousness.

ERNEST: I know that I can still sin, so how can I not have a consciousness of sin?

PERCEPTUS: You walk in His consciousness, which means that you see with the mind of Christ how that He did all the work and did it completely, never to be done again, enabling you to walk in His Spirit and know Him, being kept by Him and enjoying Him as your all, so that every earthly pull and devilish assault only drive you more to cling to Him and His word that He has washed you completely and provides you with His Spirit, and the mind of Christ as your consciousness, making you born again so that you not only hear about the kingdom of God but actually see it by faith. You live in a new world as a new creature at the same time that in your present physical body, with all its infirmities, and with your human mind, you experience being in the world but not of it since

you are a citizen of a new kingdom not of this world.

ERNEST: This makes me tremble, and I do desire it but doubt if this is real, though I respect you and acknowledge that you walk in something I do not know.

PERCEPTUS: Consider that in John's first epistle, he tells us that we have all sinned and need the propitiation of Christ, assuring us of God's forgiveness and cleansing if we agree with God that we have sinned. Further, John writes that if we sin, we have forgiveness, which means that God always looks at the very same thing, the completeness of Christ's propitiation and not how many times we sin and need to acknowledge that. But note that John tells us his urge is to get on and tell us how we can live free from sin, for he says, "I write these things to you that you sin not," and then he talks about abiding, which Novitia, Sylvester, and I spent some time discussing in our last conversation, and which we can refresh you on; but for the moment, I want to say that John definitely writes to say that we can abide in Him and live without sinning. He does not say that we have not sinned, for God says the one who claims this is a liar, and God does not say that we cannot sin, but He does say that He can and will keep us from sin as we live in Him, and the ease of that is nothing like the tedious and near impossibility that many Christians make it who say repeatedly, "We sin every day," meaning really that they never get free from the consciousness of sin.

ERNEST: But what if I deceive myself and say that I am walking in the Spirit, kept from sin, when I should instead be confessing the sin that constantly besets me?

PERCEPTUS: The clear mark of true confession is that the Holy Spirit convicts you and brings you to repentance; it is effortless and not weighted down with torment or

condemning regret. The Holy Spirit will give you His own grief and cause you to know that conviction, repentance, and godly sorrow come not from you but from the Spirit working in you, making the whole process supernatural, which also means that when you enter into living without a sin consciousness, walking in the Spirit, you hold nothing against yourself, though not necessarily thereby acquitted as Paul says. So I have ceased looking at myself all the time, trembling in fear at every thought and pull of lust; I stop thinking, "This is more than I can bear" or "Surely others do not know what this feels like," or "This is worse temptation than ever so I should beware lest I have fallen to a dreadful state, no longer in the heights given by God to walk in."

ERNEST: I will consider these things, and I do think that my desperation, having made me think myself mad and a devil, has pressed me to receive what you say, and as I listen and talk here, I do believe; yes I do believe that Christ has done all and therefore all in me. I am willing to be made willing and find even as I speak that a miracle has occurred, the Holy Spirit making me willing. Glory has come!

SYLVESTER: This has quickened me more, for I never tire of this glory.

NOVITIA: And so with me.

PERCEPTUS: Let us encourage our friend and even though we are at the end of our walk here among the gardens and go our ways, we can look forward to our next blessing in these heavenly ways.

Dialogue XV
More Insights on Soul and Body

SYLVESTER: To walk with the three of you again so soon affords me great pleasure, especially since each day the auguries of spring rapidly advance; each vision of new blooms holds me, and all the more, knowing the transitory nature of them, so that I cannot enough enjoy the sight of varied color and the tiny buds, like packets, on the trees, about to spread into full green, like an umbrella slowly opened. This morning too, a workman at his table saw outside an old building in town, cut his boards, as the sun warmed his bare arms, and an unbroken blue sky made the ticking of the clock forgotten for a few moments.

ERNEST: I appreciate your reveries on Nature, but since the clock is ticking, may I advance two points on my mind this morning after our conversation yesterday?

SYLVESTER: Of course, I only interject to ease our minds from the hurry of life around us, knowing that any moment we will move into matters essential to discern from Scripture if we are to rightly regard the Christian life and how one may live it; so please, let us hear what concerns you.

ERNEST: We have been discussing flesh and what it is, how that soul and body differ from spirit, as they must, and how we are spirit people but live in these mortal houses, fraught with thoughts we would not have and in upheaval over emotions we would well do without, yet we are not angels or pure spirits but humans, and even our Lord became a man that he might save us: and God created our race of humans that He might express Himself in us and as us, so that to despise our humanity would indeed be a sin and rebellion, yet our flesh is not trustworthy as our guide and mentor, and

to follow the flesh in its impulses would make us no better than the animals, though to completely ignore our bodies would signal refusal to live as stewards of what God gives us grace to do.

SYLVESTER: You speak so well I can hardly discern a question in what you say but think rather I should just enjoy your comments as I do this beautiful bed of buttercups here or this tree loaded with new, white blossoms.

ERNEST: Enjoy them as you will, I have been provoked by reading that some think that Boehme disdained the flesh, making it too negative, arguing that we should seek a spiritual or celestial body within us and count this body only as a house of sin, ugly and distorted in its fall from its original state of glory in which Adam was androgynous and lived covered by a garment of heavenly glory, knowing no such vile and exterior functions as Boehme graphically implies whereby our reproductive organs are external and our digestive functions gross. Then I read that Norman Grubb asserts that our bodies and appetites signal marvelous God-made faculties so that we are right humans in spirit, soul, and body; and we therefore should delight in our bodies as well as our souls, not that our bodies are trustworthy like the Spirit is, but that we need no longer fail to accept any part of ourselves as precious and delightful to God as His expression and agency in the world. So I scratch my head and do not know what to say about this perishable container, for indeed Paul calls it vile, as well as saying that the body is dead because of sin: furthermore, it is sown a natural body and will be raised a spiritual body— all of this leaving me to think that Scripture does not give this body too much glory, though we are to see ourselves sanctified in body. Consider, for example, from 1 Corinthians 7 that it is good not to touch a woman (note that the Scripture does not say it is not good to touch a woman), yet we are to hold the marriage bed in

honor and keep it pure. So both the negative and the positive are ascribed to the body, and it appears erroneous to magnify either more than what the Scripture says, and I don't simply that Boehme does this or Norman, but each has his emphasis, and we know that two opposing emphases may lead to wide swings one way or another in adherents of either side, so that one day, one might revel as Sylvester does, in Nature, or the kiss of a spouse, or the taste of something delectable; yet the next day, one might express vexation with deteriorating health or an unhappy circumstance.

PERCEPTUS: I agree with Sylvester that we can enjoy your insights and find blessing in them, not pitting one thing against another, for I find that the only problem occurs when one would renounce his humanity and rebel against God for bestowing sight, taste, and touch; and why does one do this except that they are avenues of delight but also avenues of temptation, for how can a thing exist for right use if wrong use does not also present itself as possible? The Bible tells us that we live in the age of temptation where the devil may pull at us as he will, God even meaning the same though He is not tempted and tempts no man. He means the devil, however, to do the job the devil does, giving us grace abundant at the same time so that we do not need to complain, though we suffer; for the point is not the severity of temptation but God's great, keeping grace to sustain us and cause us to walk in the right way. We are accustomed from our habit of unbelief in the past to magnify the negative, frightening aspects of our tempted flesh and hardly consider the power of God to quicken us and lead us through temptation into opportunities we would not have known apart from those very temptations, though he is unwise who seeks temptation since plenty comes to us without exercising an increased appetite for it. So I well remember a time during which I gladly would have been only a spirit in order to be free of the weight of temptation upon me, which would rob us as well of delight in

God's creation, for as C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape* says, the devil and his laboratories have never yet found a way to invent a single pleasure; the devil may only misuse pleasures created by God.

ERNEST: I worry that I, like some, might leap upon this right view of God's expression by flesh and so dwell upon the appetites that I call them God and miss the sacrificial part of the Christian life, such as the assertion by Paul that he beats his body to keep it in submission lest he be disqualified. Some go about with minds so intent on sex or upon eating and drinking that one would think the sum of the Christian life is to pleasure the body and call that the life of the Lord. It is also true though that much of Christian history declared the body not evil, but left it so much to be rebuffed that one could hardly enjoy being human, feeling obligated to view as inferior the basic functions of the body and daily life. In the New testament we also see that in Colossians Paul reproves those who say, "taste not, touch not, handle not," and some called Jesus a wine bibber and glutton, meaning that their ascetic fanaticism led them to criticize what for him was blessed and given by the Father to enjoy as a human. Frenzied, legalistic accusers would have had Jesus be a mere spirit, not out of respect for the spiritual nature of man but out of ungodly fear at what it means to be human.

PERCEPTUS: Well put, and what do you say Novitia, since you have been quiet thus far?

NOVITIA: I think this conversation is marvelously instructive, and remember Paul's exhortation to not live as those whose god is the belly or appetite, yet as we have seen, Paul and our Lord do not mean that appetite itself is a sin but rather that one should not make a god of appetite, thus quenching the Spirit. As we present our bodies as living sacrifices, we cease to be conformed to the present world in which the devil

solicits us to make the outer appetite take the place of inner Spirit leading. We mortify by the Spirit our members when God' s way is best served by sacrifice rather than eating or drinking: for as he says, " the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost." Our bodies are to be in the world but not of them; they are to be quickened by the Holy Spirit in all endeavors of life, so that we prove ourselves excellent in every domain of learning and occupation, not retreating from the world but challenging its decadence by offering ourselves as stars against a dark night, in which we shine in every way. We do this through these very bodies, as the instruments of the Lord, not giving fearful sway to the pressure of ungodly men, swollen by the devil, who think that the godly are useless and only hinder the pursuits of mind and art.

PERCEPTUS: This battle rages, extremes often prevailing, for some depart so far out of the world that they cannot empathize with those that need them; whereas others immerse themselves so much in the world that, seduced, they are too much of it. At either error, the cynics feast. The Bible offers an easy solution— walk in the Spirit and we will not do the deeds of the flesh, flesh meaning the deeds of one who thinks himself independent, though no such possibility really exists, since Paul says we always present our members to a master to obey, either sin or righteousness, making Satan the operator in the one who sins.

ERNEST: I hear much of finding balance in life, but balance usually indicates double-mindedness as far as I can tell, for when grace and law mix, the end is law; and when flesh and Spirit mix, flesh results, making balance a false premise. I myself go to sleep at the talk of balance, tending always to an extreme, and as you can see from yesterday, my fears and doubts suggest that I had not centered on how to live the Christian life, thinking that I had to rid myself of body and

soul pulls to confidently assert that I walk by faith in the Spirit. So I had for a time tried increasingly to withdraw from the life of the senses, to attain what the Boehme calls the super-sensual life, yet in so doing I felt remote from the world, aware of its vanity and temporal nature so much that I wished to live only in a realm of spirit– untouched by body and soul.

PERCEPTUS: I too have experienced this as we all do, for all temptations are common to man, and we seek our escape either in carnality or the more subtle fleshly mind of asceticism.

ERNEST: What I tried did not work, for underneath, I wanted to be out of the world rather than in it, and the conflict of the world led me in ignorance to fear being fully human, for if one can extract oneself sufficiently from the world– where greed and lust no longer even tempt– then one might as well be dead, and truly, I thought myself ready to go on, hating the wait in the mean time until the Lord sees fit to take me. This was a most unhealthy condition, ascetic in tendency, and grasped as a hoped-for means of escaping the body and soul, since it is not the glorious body anyway. Further, Norman Grubb' s words on us as right selves looked like a cloak for bodily excess, and so I distrusted his words as a step back from the spirit emphasis I had thought he majored on in his earlier years. I see now that two things are true: first, our bodies are vile as Paul says, as well as mortal, and we do not make gods of our appetites; second, our intercessory calling leads us to deny the body certain good and rightful things at times when others are served best by this denial. But to renounce the human self and pleasure, as if pleasure is of the devil, shows ignorance and contempt for God as creator, who is the author of everything good, and so we receive His blessings with our daily provision of food and raiment, and enjoy our spouses if granted the sanctity of marriage, not

mistaking our spouses as our means of completeness but as God' s gift in this life to be enjoyed in faith as we know our completeness in Him.

PERCEPTUS: This is why I resolved by faith to live until I die, all out, both in Spirit and body, trusting God to keep my body and soul, using them with all force and vigor, as He leads, never retreating from the enemy and turning over to the devil and the world what belongs to the family of God; for though His manifest reign begins later, His reign in us has already begun, though suffering come our way, for eternity is underway for us, and these years in these fading bodies are the front edge and determiner of all that eternity will be for us, so on with Caleb we go, striking every blow against the enemy. We do not lower our heads and cease to praise God when the beast declares war and looks victorious for the moment.

NOVITIA: This has been a powerful walk, and the glory of Nature noted by SYLVESTER has spiritually lifted us up into the bosom of God from whence all glory comes. Brothers, I salute you as we end our talk today.

SYLVESTER: And we salute you. Peace brothers.

ERNEST: The anointing of God has been upon us for sure.

PERCEPTUS: I agree. See you anon.

Dialogue XVI
Faith

SYLVESTER: I have thought about faith since our last conversation— faith in its many facets, and I do not espouse a systematized view of faith, as if faith will always look like so many rows laid out in a flowerbed; but neither do I think that faith is vague and ethereal as some describe it— a potion or misty air that of itself enlivens and invigorates us, giving us hope in times of disappointment. The idea that faith of itself is an answer, as if one can say, “ Just have faith,” and expect another to brighten up with solace, makes faith an entity itself, whereas those more acquainted with faith know that it is not an entity but the receiving of an object by which one is taken over, making the object to be the point and our receiving that object by faith our internalizing of it so that what we take takes us.

PERCEPTUS: So very well said, and may I add that for years I have remembered Bill Bright’s comment that we do not put our faith in faith, for that would mean casting the anchor within the ship. Sadly though, for years I cast my anchor partially upon myself, which in effect is to cast one’s anchor wholly upon oneself despite any pious talk about God. But like many points of understanding, this one came back to me later in the Spirit when I had impaled myself all too many times upon my own anchor, only to wear out that much more and proceed, though I didn’t realize it, toward Paul’s Romans 7 cry, “ Who will deliver me?”

NOVITIA: I reread the other day in Galatians where Paul quotes from Genesis that Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, a curious passage in Genesis for it’s being in the Old Testament, though we know that Abraham was not of the Old Covenant but the father of

faith. We who are acquainted with the New Covenant see righteousness clearly as the gift to us in Christ that we receive by faith, since God justifies us not based on any works that we do, but He justifies us solely based upon the righteousness of Christ given to us through the atonement, meaning that we see the object of our faith more specifically since the revelation of Christ, whereas Abraham believed the promise of God that God would make him the father of many nations, and God reckoned Abraham's faith in this promise as righteousness, though surely Abraham learned of the promise made to Eve in the garden that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. Not only that, Jesus said of Abraham, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad," and how could Abraham more clearly have seen it than at Mount Moriah when called upon to put the dagger through all his hopes and dreams in his divinely wrought son, Isaac, in whom God had vested the promises to Abraham.

ERNEST: This was not an academic faith!

PERCEPTUS: Surely not, for Abraham acted according to his faith, but he did not act according to flesh and blood but according to the nature of God at work in him, which Abraham knew to be supernatural, for no man can do what Abraham did unless God is the doer in him.

SYLVESTER: When we take God, then God takes us, making God the doer in us of what we cannot do, which amounts to everything, for Jesus said that of Himself He could do nothing, which tells us equally that of ourselves we can do nothing, and Jesus, in talking of our abiding in Him said, "Apart from me, you can do nothing."

ERNEST: What makes faith seem so hard, for I find faith extremely stressful at times? While I am enamored with the

Spirit of faith or the anointing that quickens the words of God to me, I think that I can do anything; but later, the anointing is gone, the atmosphere of fellowship among friends is a mere memory, and I find myself alone, faced with appearances that defy the high mountaintop of certainty that I so recently enjoyed in the Holy.

NOVITIA: You describe the normal process of faith, and you do not need not to get into discouraged, for God means this apparent contradiction as our normal dilemma while in this world, which does not mean dilemma in an overshadowing sense as if we must obsess on obstacles or the negative, but dilemma as in setting the negative backdrop that makes the positive breakthrough all the more glorious for the swallowing up of what looks to our flesh and blood eyes as impossible.

ERNEST: Do we ever get used to that so that we find ourselves not surprised at the infinite gap between appearances and Spirit, or will we always feel shock and even possibly consternation when a wave of appearances first hits us? I feel guilty when I see that only by a labor of faith do I enter into rest about a given situation or when having entered into rest after such a labor of faith, I find myself temporarily shaken.

PERCEPTUS: How well I remember as a young man my upset when Norman Grubb would say of himself, "I never start with faith." This sounded weak and contemptible, especially for a man with a reputation for great faith. When I would hear him say that he never starts with faith, I would react in quiet scorn, priding myself on at least hoping for a day when faith would come automatically and instantly whenever challenged by contrary evidence. How wrong I was, though, for I did not want to embrace the negative or feel shaken in any way, not recognizing my attitude as one that expects the human to be strong instead of the container of God's strength made

perfect in weakness. Weakness to me was no more than that— weakness, and despised at that, and Satan hates weakness, and therefore can only transmit his own will, wanting us to adopt it as our own.

ERNEST: This sounds encouraging, though until now, I would have shared your former attitude when hearing words like those from Norman.

PERCEPTUS: We have lived accustomed to the lie that courage is courage only, and not courage willed while feeling fear; or that love is love only, and not love willed while feeling hate, for we have identified ourselves precisely as the embodiment of emotion and mental reasoning, supposing courage and love, for example, as human qualities to arrive at on our own, implying also the disappearance of anything contrary, whereas courage and love are not human characteristics but divine ones that only God can be in us, even while we feel the opposite. We desire soul and Spirit to line up in harmony, which may or may not happen, and we are not wrong for wishing this, but we don't have to accept condemnation when they do not. My wife Tandy told me of a Bible study she attended, in which a member of the class affirmed that we should manifest the fruit of the Spirit as Paul lists them in Galatians 5, but Tandy caught on that the class member visualized the fruit as a product of trying to be like Christ instead of as the fruit of the Spirit. This story nonetheless delighted me for the image that came to mind, for I said that one might as well expect to become an orange.

ERNEST: So what is the great enemy of faith?

PERCEPTUS: The great enemy of faith is trying, for when we try, we presuppose that we can make a thing happen or keep from happening: we believe that we have control, and we don't for God created Adam and Eve powerless even before

the Fall, since His sole purpose was to create us to live in, being the power in our powerlessness, so that the two work as a one. But the serpent deceived Eve into thinking that she could have her own power, and Adam, even though he saw her dark countenance and sensed the presence of evil, chose Eve over God, deliberately sinning, whereas Eve fell through deception. They then became powerless over sin, which is to say, Satan, and they were powerless to keep Satan out of themselves, for God created them as vessels to contain and not as self-operators; and as Nature abhors a vacuum, so Adam and Eve could not remain empty when the Spirit left them. Satan entered them and then promptly hid from them that he had done so since his goal is to make us think that we are independent selves rather than dependent selves. Therefore the most hideous shock in the world comes when God reveals to us that we have not been free persons but slaves of sin— powerless over the spirit of error at work in us as unbelievers or powerless of the spirit of error in our external members when as Christians we yield our members to unrighteousness. We are always powerless: powerlessness is not a product of the Fall into sin, but powerlessness is our eternal condition as creatures. Even in eternity, Christians will be powerless, for powerlessness is not about sin or addiction but about our created state as vessels to express the life of an indwelling lord, which fact was true before the Fall, after the Fall, and is true after salvation.

ERNEST: You have opened my eyes to powerlessness, for I have thought of it as pertaining only to a truth needed by those sunken into addiction and sin, and I have not entertained it as the province of man regardless of his innocence, Fall, or redemption. Please go back to what you began to say about trying, for I sense that in this is much to discern and learn from, and I do not see exactly what you mean.

PERCEPTUS: You often hear, “ We should try to be like Christ” after all He’ s done for us. What a blind statement, though true, for the error is not in the desire but in the means of fulfilling the desire: those who walk in faith, abiding in Christ, do find that Christ is formed in them, and they manifest His life in their members, which they count a miracle– that which is supernatural and not their own doing, but only the life of God received in faith, which is what Peter means when he says that we are made partakers of the divine nature. Why then would one try to be like Christ when the point is union with Christ so that Christ manifests Himself as us.

SYLVESTER: The birds are singing for me, though others may greet what you say as dangerous and not trustworthy. Yet Christians know that they will not go to heaven based on good works since Isaiah calls our works filthy rags, and Paul tells us that by the works of the law, no one will be justified. Christians know that their salvation is based only on what Jesus did on the Cross for them, making justification that which God and God alone does and something we only receive. Yet, horribly, when discussing sanctification, these very same believers fall back on works as the means to walk as Christians, not recognizing that it must be God who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, making sanctification equally by faith as much as justification is.

PERCEPTUS: Bully, bully!

NOVITIA: Ahhhh! This is the sound I crave and love; even though to the works-minded person , this sounds irrational, even dangerously self-indulgent, we who have tried and failed endlessly, come to see that continued trying can only produce more of what we seek to avoid. Paul says in Galatians 2 that if we rebuild what we destroyed, we only prove ourselves transgressors again. What does he mean by rebuilding? His argument unmistakably centers on how it is that one is

righteous, and Paul unmistakably teaches in Galatians that we are not justified or sanctified by law and that to the contrary, law only causes sin to take over again, which point he also makes at the end of Romans 5 where he says that the law was given that the transgression might increase.

ERNEST: All of this is good, but come now, talk more of trying!

NOVITIA: Do you recall how in Romans 7 Paul says that he discovered the principle that the evil he did originated not from him, for what else could he mean when he says, "It is no longer I but sin dwelling in me"? Yet, those baffled by his clear intent run on to make of this an old nature rather than Paul's clear distinction between sin and his "I," for if the "I" is sin, than sin cannot be removed from the "I." Paul's point in Romans 7 is the reverse side of Galatians 2:20: in fact, we can say that Romans 7:17 is the negative reverse image of Galatians 2:20.

SYLVESTER: Yes, and then Paul says that he finds a principle that when he would do good, evil is present with him, but this is only the case as long as he tries on his own to be like Christ. Trying is the root sin for it presupposes an independence that we do not have, failing to recognize our sole created purpose as containers, and meaning that we do not yet see Satan's deception that we can keep the law.

ERNEST: How does one go from trying to faith?

PERCEPTUS: Years ago, Sylvia said to me, "Perceptus, your problem is trying," to which I replied, "How do I stop trying?" She answered, "You have to try until you can't," which left me depressed since I still had lots of trying in me. But the time came when I could not try anymore and said to God, "If anything gets done, You will have to do it," which He did, and

so I have left off trying since, not having any strength now to try anyway.

ERNEST: I see an exciting connection between faith and the end of trying: when one does not try, faith must come easily because trying resists receiving—trying is a stirring up to block what would come easily without effort against it.

PERCEPTUS: You have it! Faith is a matter of will, a choice, but how simple faith is when we know that it is the will to have a thing done in us. Trying, when the scales get removed, appears to us in its real nature, rebellion, which perhaps we pursued in ignorance, but nonetheless sinfully, for we did not recognize the real sin as our effort to do good or avoid doing evil, thinking instead that sin is a word or deed, which certainly sin manifests by, but sin underneath is the self, deceived by the enemy, into thinking it can do its own stuff.

ERNEST: Why does faith feel like such a labor even though we stop trying?

PERCEPTUS: Faith feels like a labor because we labor to enter into faith. We feel great discomfort in our emotions and mental reasoning, and we come under attack from the enemy, who does not want to get exposed. Our labor does not mean that faith is hard or that one only with great difficulty walks in the Spirit; our labor only means that we experience suffering as we walk in the ease of faith. I regularly say, "It is easy to walk in the Spirit, just excruciating at times, and as long as one does not take the discomfort and suffering of a thing as the measure of its ease in doing, one will move on in faith." Faith is easy—nothing could be more natural now—but we may expect trauma in our mortal members and attacks from the principalities and powers.

NOVITIA: I see that we have come to the end of our walk

again, but we have more to say of faith, for we have not discussed walking by faith and not by sight in full detail, and we have the great Hebrews 11 to look at.

PERCEPTUS: We will do that.

(They bless each other and depart until their next walk.)

Dialogue XVII Some Clarification on Man as Spirit

NOVITIA: I am almost breathless I have so much on my mind, but where to start, for I know that last time we talked about faith, and while we talked about it, I could see myself in a different world than that of the five senses, though not wishing to be divested of the five senses, for I do not agree with those who falsely use the Bible to proclaim an asceticism whereby we taste not, touch not, handle not, as if to be material in part of our constitution is less than spiritual and therefore to be despised, making only the realm of angels the proper realm; and I renounce in strongest terms also those who take the opposite view and plunge into the flesh as if the desires of soul and body are the point, scorning the spirit realm as if the superior view of oneness is to unite man into one being primarily known on a flesh level.

PERCEPTUS: You have taken off haven' t you, andwith an

urgency that demands our looking into what presses you, for this is not the casual disposition that I am accustomed to from you, even when speaking on matters of gravity. What immediately comes to mind is Jesus our Lord, who, fully human, ate and drank, causing detractors to accuse Him of being a winebibber, yet his detractors also hated that He spoke of His Father and a place that they had never seen, since they were not born again. So here is Jesus, spiritual so as to baffle those looking only at the senses, yet human so as to enjoy God's gifts for the body without enslavement to them, whereas those mired up in sin are controlled by the lusts of the devil, which burn always with insatiable appetite so that even though one partakes of the goodness of the earth, no provision is ever enough, since the partaker tries to meet spiritual hunger with earthly food, and not successful at doing so, continues in various pleasures and surfeit until depression finally cracks through the frenzied attempts, leaving the seeker in a spiral of despair and self hatred.

NOVITIA: I have lived as you say, and know too well the despair of trying to make a right self mean that the body and soul are the point of living. No sooner did I learn that as a Christian I am Christ in my form then I found myself awakened to emotions and physical appetites that seemed to have a sanctity about them, and thinking so, I pursued them to the point where to go further would have been indisputable sin according to Scripture, but I pressed these desires up to that edge and lamented having to die to them as if I had lost my best friend, not yet understanding that the awakening of such appetites is not the same as spirit love. Therefore, when I read William Law in those days of ignorance, I fancied him to be writing a romance on a human level rather than what he actually wrote, which is how the sacrificial nature of God takes us over so that we deny ourselves instead of indulging ourselves; for I did not see the death to self-for-self in what Law writes and so read him through the eyes of flesh.

PERCEPTUS: How well I know what you say, for I have trod the same road and imagine that all do who come to see the difference between flesh and spirit. I did not hear for many years, the plain teaching of the Bible and its truthful expositors that God is spirit and created us as spirit also, meaning that, as Norman Grubb says, we are spirit people and not matter people. This was a senseless statement to me for years, sounding abstract and philosophical and lacking all practicality; yet how true that statement is and in accord with the Scriptures, for Jesus told the woman at the well that she had her mind on everything exterior and had missed that "God is Spirit."

NOVITIA: What a spirit He is, for He desires, knows, and wills, and is therefore conscious, and He is conscious of His eternal choice to be a self-for-others and not a self-for-self. I remember when I used to think life unfair, reasoning that I have to choose, whereas to my mind God was automatically who He is, as if He did not have to endure the agony of choice. I did not see choice as a royal freedom, and I certainly did not think God had made a choice to be who He is. I misinterpreted what it means that He never changes, thinking that to mean that He never chooses, when the truth is that He, not bound by time, has made the eternal choice to be who He is, and that He alone in the universe is love, by choice, meaning that He is always at all times self-for-others.

PERCEPTUS: Well said, so God is spirit, and He is love by His eternal choice, immutably so, not by a power outside of Himself, but by His own decree; therefore, when the Bible says that He created us in His image, we are not to think that He created us the same as Himself, for He alone is God, and to be His creature means that He made us to indwell us and express Himself as us, making us temples, vessels, and branches, as we have already talked about at great length. Yet

what we have not filled out in conversation is the fact that He made us spirit beings with capacities similar to His, in that we desire, will, and know, except that we do not decide what nature we will be, but instead, we decide what nature we wish to contain— He intending us to choose Him as our indweller.

NOVITIA: This is a vital point or else one can only come to the conclusion that a man can be a god, and Scripture does seem to indicate this, calling man elohim, but this is not intended as if we are God eternally as God is God; but the Scripture means that by birth from God, being creatures mixed with Him, joined spirit-to-Spirit, one with Him, we are as gods, not confusing the vessel with the contents of the vessel, or as Norman often said, not thinking that the cup is the coffee. So we are elohim by indwelling of The Elohim and not by our own constitution, for of ourselves we can do nothing, and to think so is the plain deception of the enemy.

PERCEPTUS: This is right and leading to proper praise and worship, not of ourselves, but of Him who made us to indwell us and to be as us, and when we know this, we find ourselves, for who finds himself these days? Not many, for you can see that the bookstores line the shelves with books on self-improvement of every kind, and television talk shows abound on how to improve the self and become a better, more productive self. This is useless, for man's whole quest to know who he is can only be solved by knowing why God created us in the first place— to contain and express Him.

NOVITIA: I suppose Adam originally knew this pristine purpose, that his whole meaning lay in union with God, but he knew this only in innocence and in an untested way, and so when the serpent approached Eve, it put forth deceit as if a man can be God, a lie that Lucifer embraced in self-infatuation, causing his fall, along with those he led into the same infatuated deception. So what other deception could he

proffer to Eve than the one he still believed, even despite his own fall. And in his jealousy and rage, which he cleverly concealed when he tempted Eve, he led her to think that a higher estate stood before her, which she fell for and then led Adam into, even though he clearly saw that she had lost her glory and stood before him a darkened animal, devoid of the glory of God. Adam sinned willfully, making Eve his god.

PERCEPTUS: We could ask why neither of them sought the counsel of the One who forbade them to eat of the tree, and how naïve it was of them to think that He that forbade them could not have prevented the tree from their presence in the first place, but instead made it available. Man is curious, but where was the sense of danger in disobeying God? Perhaps Eve thought, "God forbade it, but wouldn't He commend my initiative in eating of the tree?" This view, however, undermines authority and makes all commands merely goads to ignore them, as if the sole purpose of authority is to find a way around it. This view also implies that no danger really exists and no hurtful consequences follow when disobeying. Finally, it's hard to think that the still, small voice of God wasn't speaking to Eve, then Adam, not to do what they did.

NOVITIA: We commend those who make decisions on their own: we can't check every decision out with another, for then we would not set our alarm clocks, brush our teeth, pick a particular shirt out to wear, or select an item off a menu without direct consultation. Life would be absurd. God created us to live spontaneously, knowing that we contain Him and can choose safely on a multitude of things without fear of not walking in the Spirit. But when God expressly forbids a thing, spontaneity best serves us by spontaneously avoiding what God proscribes. I call it, like many, having a "check in my spirit," implying that we do hear His voice and can easily move as guided by the Holy Spirit, even when ease of walking in the Spirit means a choice that we do not like.

PERCEPTUS: Weren' tyou reading Kierkegaard last week on this matter of our being spirit persons and not soul-body persons? Tell me about that since we are discussing man as a spirit being who lives in a flesh realm but as a Christian does not have the mind set on the flesh.

NOVITIA: I indeed have been reading Kierkegaard, and I confess that in earlier years, I found him immediately unintelligible and so put him down without investing much effort, though much effort would have accomplished nothing since I still lived as a carnal Christian, and one cannot understand Kierkegaard with the carnal mind. Kierkegaard says no more and no less than what Paul says about distinguishing flesh from spirit, and which Hebrews 4:12 talks about in discerning soul from spirit, and which Norman often talked about, and Jacob Boehme, and many others. But as to Kierkegaard, let me first say that I see in his expression what I also see in Jacob Boehme, who says that heaven or hell is in us and that when the material body with its pleasures passes away, our naked spirit remains, and the carnal person, the man at enmity with God, will find himself in wrath and hell, both of which can no longer stay masked under the pleasures of the flesh. Kierkegaard says the same thing in *Sickness Unto Death*, in which he argues that the sensual man least knows himself as a spirit being but has the same despair in him, though he is unconscious of it, for despair is not a function of consciousness but is what it is, though hidden to the one in it. When the pleasures of the flesh can no longer mitigate that despair, the one now conscious of despair has the opportunity for faith, to come to know himself as a spirit person and submit himself to God. Refusal to do so is defiance and rebellion; and the ultimate despair of course is a hell chosen, rather than arrival at faith and acceptance that God created us as spirit beings made to know the eternal.

PERCEPTUS: You summarize this well, and as you say, this is none else but what the Bible says, and does not our experience confirm these truths, for I remember how carnally minded I was, even while affirming myself "Christ in my form," but my mind was on the form and how pleasure can be God, and He does indeed give us the good things of life to enjoy and thank Him for, but when the appetites become our point, then spirit awareness fades, and man becomes an animal and loves only himself.

NOVITIA: I think about how one can know the difference, and what I know comes from a willingness to die to self will and come alive in God's will, and His voice does speak to us, and though one might argue, "How can you know His voice?" we must say that it is possible for Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice," so we know that they do, and while many claim to hear from God and yet live in folly, that does not undo those who do hear His voice and live from what Paul calls in Timothy the power of a sound mind. The surest test is that slavery is broken, and sin loses its dominion in our members. If this does not happen, then all talk is useless anyway, for why know anything if the thing known cannot break the hold of sin in a man's members, and that man lives a slave to his lusts, which are really the lusts of the devil played out in the man's members.

PERCEPTUS: We have, in an unanticipated way, talked about faith, since faith means that we do not walk by sight, which means that we do not live by our five senses but by the Spirit of God, and we do not see the Spirit of God, but we see the Kingdom of God with the eyes of our hearts in Christ— quite a different pair of eyes than our natural eyes, and in the beginning, Adam saw with his spiritual eyes, and he even saw the natural creation through them, his natural eyes being subordinate to his spiritual eyes, but in the Fall, his spiritual eyes closed in death, and his natural eyes became his

interpreters of the world around him, and he saw only the natural world, no longer aware of the spiritual world. In the new birth, we regain our spiritual eyes and see the kingdom of God, though when we describe it, we sound like fools to the natural man or the carnal man, since what we see is spiritually seen and discerned, and therefore, the Bible says that we see by faith. The heroes of faith in the Bible and since then could never have done their exploits if governed only by the flesh, for who would sacrifice happiness if that is all that exists?

NOVITIA: Yes, for if we do not know the Cross, then we think that death on any level defeats us and takes us into darkness, depriving us of what we need. We will always be slaves of need, using others and things in attempting to fulfill ourselves– the Cross being abhorred. But when we see that death to the flesh awakens us into the kingdom of light, wherein Christ is Lord, and the Cross the principle of our living, we know that death is always the prelude to resurrection.

PERCEPTUS: So we do not need to despise our appetites– our souls or bodies, but we see them as agents of our spirits united to Christ. We nurture them as good stewards do but do not expect our fulfillment on that level, and we accept the body as our connection in this world to others, knowing that we are in the world but not of it, so that two men may be eating ice cream, one worshipping his belly in so doing, and the other praising God for His gifts.

NOVITIA: How good too, it is when we do not take condemnation for the thousand pulls of flesh upon us, telling us, “You need, you need,” for the drawing of an appetite is not sin, though the devil would have us either live in the flesh or wish to be without it– despising the quickening from the Holy Spirit whether in times of provision or lack.

PERCEPTUS: I learned to live in eternal supply on the Spirit level while crucifying the lie of need on a physical level, and this led me to know the new birth and the kingdom of what I cannot see, according as people think of seeing, but what is the kingdom of seeing in the Spirit. I see we have finished here again for another day, so I bid you good day. I only regret that others could not join us for this conversation, but may they be blessed in hearing about it.

NOVITIA: Amen, and see you anon.

Dialogue XVIII

Operating Faith and Seeing God in All Things

NOVITIA: I am still enflamed from our last conversation about man as a spirit and the radical import of that, for if we do not grasp this, we must live as animals. No wonder that evolution gained popularity, for it offers two attractions to the flesh: first, by implication, no accountability exists toward a random cosmic event; and second, one may therefore live like an animal— being little more than a beast with mental prowess. But though scoffers deny God's existence, He exists nonetheless, for note that the Bible never endeavors to prove God but assumes any but a fool believes in God, and even the fool underneath does as well but will not admit it. Why, even the devil believes in God though he hates Him and is contrary in every way to Him, which reminds me how much I

enjoyed our discussion of God' s faculties of desiring, willing, and knowing; and also His fixed nature of other-love, which He is because He chooses to be, so that one cannot rightly say that God is not conscious of what He is and what He is not, for consciousness occurs only as one thing swallows up its opposite, else all would be a one, undifferentiated, and good and evil might as well not exist for they would not even be categories.

PERCEPTUS: Ah, yes, and how we love to speak of God' s nature, for He is the eternal self-for-others, and the Bible calls Christ the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, meaning that God already had prepared the propitiation for our sins before we committed them, though His knowing of them in advance does not mean that He occasioned them, for James tells us that God tempts no man and cannot be tempted Himself, but we are tempted as we are drawn away by lust and enticed, sin occurring only when the will conceives to sin, meaning simply, when one determines to do a thing.

ERNEST: I have been bothered much by temptation lately and had hoped to have progressed beyond the intensity of lustful drawings that still occur with me and the blasphemous thoughts that enter my head at times. Though I resist them, I confess to feeling substantial guilt over this, for I' m sure that advanced souls register much less the drawings that I daily encounter.

SYLVESTER: I think, Ernest, that you do not realize that we all experience the same manner of temptations as you do, with the same intensity, but by faith we expect these to happen, take no condemnation for them, since temptation is not sin, and though the Bible plainly declares this, many Christians (and we too once) think that the first flush of a negative emotion or thought proves sin, and therefore, since we all

know that we have them all the time, thus we are, to the minds of most Christians, always sinning, meaning that we must be fanatics and in denial to say that one can live free from sin.

ERNEST: Some of my friends do admire and respect you all but think you wear rose-colored glasses and assert teachings that make your sanity suspect; though, I find it difficult to know how one respects a person he at the same time fears is a quack.

SYLVESTER: The error is not in affirming that one may live free from sin; the Bible says in Romans 6 that sin shall not have dominion over us, and so how is it that one can by faith agree with Romans 6 that we are dead to sin, and Romans 7 that we are dead to law and still live in a sin-consciousness, which is to say still under the dominion of sin? I grant you that if feelings and thoughts are sin, then we need to learn how to rid ourselves of the negative ones, but if a bird may land but not be allowed to nest, and only the nesting is sin, then the landing is not sin, even if the bird sometimes hangs about longer than we feel comfortable with. But we need to go back to our foundations of who God is and that He alone is love and perfection, so by definition in the Bible, God is the only perfect one. Therefore, we need not look to ourselves as perfect but as those who may, by the blood and body of Christ, contain and express the perfect One as we walk in the Spirit. Then we know that He expresses His perfection as us.

ERNEST: My friends argue at this by saying that no one walks in faith all the time.

PERCEPTUS: Here is where one runs amiss by arguing from experience, for all we have is the moment, and faith does not deal with more than the moment. So if one can walk in faith one moment, why not the next, and why make faith so

difficult, for don't people mistake the pain endured with something for the ease of its doing? What if faith is easy but full of suffering at times; and we might say that faith always includes the discomfort of going against the natural world, and we major on the discomfort as long as we look only at the outer and natural; but as we turn our eyes away from it, we focus on the supernatural as our regular element.

SYLVESTER: How edifying, regarding temptation that we can look away from it and not dwell on it, so that the answer, Ernest, is that we do not take condemnation needlessly and we do not obsess on the negative, and therefore we pay it less attention and move to the words the Holy Spirit gives us to say about situations.

ERNEST: That is what I want to learn more about— how to speak faith into my situations. I understand basic faith for justification: I look to Christ's work on the Cross and who He is as my righteousness; and I understand basic faith for sanctification: only Christ can live the Christian life. What I seek to know more of is how to operate faith in stressful situations, or what the Bible calls trials or tribulations.

PERCEPTUS: We start out by seeing a lack or a need; this is not wrong. The old missionary, Norman Grubb, shocked me when I was a young man when he began a talk by saying about himself, "I never start with faith." I thought, "How unspiritual," but I only thought this because I wanted to get rid of the negative rather than see through it to the positive. I didn't want there to be a negative in the first place. Rather than come to faith like Joseph, who said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good," I would rather focus on saying, "His brothers should not have sold him into slavery." Well, they shouldn't have, of course, and we all know that, but anyone can agree to that, while not everyone agrees that one can see by faith that God means a thing for good.

NOVITIA: It is exciting too is that we do not have to wait until good happens later to anticipate it. We can feel the full hell of the negative and begin to know that God means it for good.

ERNEST: Some think you are passive and too easily tolerate evil, but I know that you prevent it in every way that you can, and what looks like passivity to others really means wisdom on your part in learning to accept what you cannot change.

PERCEPTUS: Having strived to change myself and others, I wore out with that, though still tempted a times. God is faithful to quiet my spirit, leaving to Him details with others and letting me know what boundaries to set for myself, so that I might say to someone, " You are free to do that, but here is what God leads me to do or say." I have learned that God means to put us into one jam after another just so that we will say, " God, what word do you have here?" Sometimes, it' s a wait to know. We do best not to speak or act just because we think we have to or because others seem impatient while we don' t yet know the mind of the Lord for us."

ERNEST: Plenty come to me and say, " God told me such and such," often implying or saying outright what they see the will of God to be for me.

PERCEPTUS: This is all well and good, but I say, " I must get a thing from the Spirit for myself, so I don' t worry about whether someone says a thing is from God, but I concern myself only with what God says to me, either through another person or directly, and either is fine, but I must know the Spirit for myself. Only then are we safe, for if we depend on others, we never really know a thing within ourselves. So God means to put us into one stress after another s that we will

look through the stress to know that God is keeping us and telling us what He means us to say back as our word of faith.

ERNEST: What about those who go to meetings where miracles occur and where anointing gives them an elevated sense during the meeting or even for days or weeks afterward, only to be followed by coming down? Would it not be wonderful if we could always have that beautiful sense of anointing and miracles?

PERCEPTUS: The Bible is full of anointing and miracles, but the nowhere do we read that these are a place of shelter from the trials and suffering of life, so one cannot therefore, go to enough meetings to avoid the ultimate confrontation with the issue of the self and the negative. A friend of mine mocks those who are always looking to "fall out under the next pair of hands." Surely, the gifts of the Spirit are manifest where the Spirit is, but the fruit of the Spirit comes from walking in the Spirit by faith, and these fruits imply a Cross working in us, which means suffering; for the fruit of the Spirit is contrary to what we like on a flesh level. So the miracle in the fruit of the Spirit is that God's self-for-others nature gets expressed in us instead of self-for-self, though one may be carnal, like many in the Corinthian church, and witness or participate in miracles. But where one lives out of the Cross nature of God, that itself is the miracle—love, patience, longsuffering, and the rest of those impossible fruits—impossible that is unless Christ be them in us.

SYLVESTER: Therefore, faith then means calling God's supply into situations of need and lack, and the first lack usually is the lack of a single eye of faith that sees through evil to God's love purpose, for if we love those who love us, what do we more than others, as Jesus said: so love means that its provision is present for the very people and situations we would least like to exercise them in, else what is a Cross?

PERCEPTUS: At the time our flesh feels torn, and we do not feel inclined to love, here is where we most benefit by knowing ourselves as spirit beings joined to Christ, for we can feel the revulsion and horror of our flesh against a person or situation and yet affirm that in our spirits joined to Christ, love comes forth. What we recoil from turns into opportunity and excitement.

NOVITIA: God loves the impossible for He wills all of life to be miraculous to us, so He puts us into negative predicaments so that we will, as His sons, call forth His words and action into a situation— call it completely other than what it appears. One of my favorite verses is in Romans 4 where Paul says “ Calling the things that be not as though they are,” and how well I remember Norman Grubb quoting that verse in a letter and adding, “ because they are,” which I marveled at, though I did not see what he meant. On the appearance level a thing is not, but on the spirit level it is, and so we speak according to the spirit level and not according to the flesh level.

ERNEST: This is exciting, but oh how I sense a death in me to confess what you are saying, for I will look like a fool to myself and others, and feel torn between two— my soul and my spirit, and this death is a constant Cross that I have dreaded, but I see that it is the only way to look through evil, for if God is the One in control, and evil must serve His good purpose, then the triumph of evil is only a temporary appearance and not the final word. But why do I feel so much anger at evil?

PERCEPTUS: That is where we start, for if we did not recoil in anger at evil, we would have no fire of God, for God hates evil, not as a self-for-self, but as hating the destruction to those who do it. Our first reaction often has the pull of self-for-self: this is temptation and our opportunity to not take

condemnation for how we feel but instead affirm that we are spirit, joined to Christ, and He will take the fire and use it as the energy that comes forth in light and liberty. This we know is not in us to do, and so our faith is that He does this in us, and when we see it in ourselves, we know that a miracle has occurred.

ERNEST: I have learned much today, especially that by faith I can call forth the love of God no matter what happens, and to praise Him is always right, for in thanking Him, we release power and blessing in ourselves, which then goes out to others.

PERCEPTUS: How quickly our time went today, and what blessing we have all received, for who can ever hear too much of these things? Let us meet again soon!

Dialogue XIX
From Negative to Positive Faith

SYLVESTER: My mind has jumped everywhere the last few days, which doesn't surprise me, but the intensity of the negative, though I know now to expect it, still leads me to marvel that as Christians, God means us to find ourselves so buffeted; for truly, many years I sought an answer, thinking surely that it would be some meditation or practice whereby I could remain in a positive state only, with pleasant feelings of love toward all and the power to instantly repel and dissolve all negative thoughts.

PERCEPTUS: I too sought the answer like that, only to find that the Bible speaks contrary to all our natural hopes, exhorting us to count our trials as all joy, and Paul tells us as well that no temptation hath taken us but such as is common to man, and that God makes a way of escape. I formerly thought that the escape was on a soul or body level, meaning positive thoughts and emotions, whereas those vary unpredictably: they storm one day, are dry like the desert another, feel icy at times, not to mention any mixture of elation or squall, on a spectrum such that for one to try and interpret life on this level could only lead to madness, despair, or both— leaving us only truth on a spirit level as our remedy and stabilizing comfort.

NOVITIA: I never tire of your story of how you once went to Norman Grubb as a young man, pouring out the woes of all your temptations and awful circumstances, expecting him to speak comforting words to you as if indeed you labored under a weight no man ought to bear. Yet, as you spoke to him, his countenance lit up, and beaming, he exclaimed, "Very healthy! Good practice!" causing you to want to strangle

him. How foreign it seems to us in our juvenile days to think that God means us to be tempted, though He tempts no man; and how strange to really grasp the import in Peter's exhortation that fiery trials should not surprise us— and even worse that the devil prowls about as a roaring lion, ready to catch us out and devour us if we don't know how to defeat him.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, it was a shock when I went to Norman that day, and I did not complain overtly like that again to him for some time, not wanting to hear the same good report about how blessed I was to receive such buffeting and shocks in daily life. I tried Sylvia as well, only to hear, after much lament of work-stress and difficult circumstances with people, "Oh Perceptus, this is so good for you." As I held the telephone in my hand, I wished to climb through the wire and strangle her as well. Mimi was no easy shoulder either, for when I would complain about things that I ought not to have said or done, thinking to persuade her of my sin, and indeed sin doubtless was present in some of what I described, she would say, "You couldn't have done differently," which left me livid since I labored under the deception that I had power of my own, not knowing yet that such delusion only guarantees that one will do the things one would not do.

ERNEST: Listening to this, I quake some because I hate the negative situations I find myself in; then I hate my negative reactions to them and assume myself already sunk because of the turmoil I feel— the anger, the fear, the lust, etc. I find it hard to drop the ubiquitous view that we are already concluded in sin for our initial reactions, and though many technically know that they must agree with James that temptation is not sin, they yet live as though they must continually say, "Father, forgive us of our many sins." I see from my conversations with you all that this really means that the confessor has a sin consciousness— the constant sense of

being a wrong self with wrong thoughts and feelings, such that the worshipper constantly questions every motive, seldom giving himself the benefit of the doubt— always certain that under everything benevolent, some selfish motive must be driving one' s words and actions. What a dismal way to live, and yet it seems pious to hold such harsh judgment on oneself, as if this policing and censure pleases the Lord, when in fact you say that He laughs at such, as if to say, " Cut it out!; read Hebrews 9 & 10 and see that My Son has accomplished all for your cleansing, both of sins and of the sin consciousness. No more will I do; rest in what I have done."

PERCEPTUS: I think, Ernest, that you talk yourself into what you have heard that you formerly doubted, and do see the first light of walking without a sin consciousness, not that one cannot sin of course. But when we know that our souls and bodies constantly register as temptation the very things that would be sin to actually perform, we need not take condemnation. We may quickly know that we are not what we feel like— that we are what we do not feel like because spirit truth operates in the invisible, against every wave of the opposite pulls, which are visible.

ERNEST: I think too that I am supposed to like things or try to like them, when in fact most often my first response to things is that I don' t like them. I have, however, tried to like them, tried to act like I like them, often then agreeing with what I do not agree with, and doing what I inside seethe over.

PERCEPTUS: I lived in this misery for years, unwilling to stop and take a place where I am willing to say nothing and do nothing, waiting on the Holy Spirit. I feared that such a wait would immobilize me. It doesn' t but instead puts me in a place of quiet in my spirit even while the negative storm goes on in the outer man— the thoughts and feelings. When we do

not take guilt for these reactions, trusting that God is keeping us— knowing that our negatives are gears not engaged to word or deed except by the will, that these gears are merely that, not the engine of intent— then we maintain our rest and do not allow hurry and the frantic demand for action urged by the world, the flesh, and the devil, to gain a stronghold in our members.

NOVITIA: Think how foolish it would be to expect that Joseph had loving thoughts for his brothers when they sold him as a slave, or when Potiphar' s wife accused him, or when Pharaoh' s cupbearer forgot him. Anger and hurt caused him anguish, but he cast himself upon the Lord, and the Lord, our faithful God, gave him one of the great insights in the Old Testament, the one we find in Genesis 50:20: " You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

ERNEST: I would that God would settle for intending good for good and simply remove the evil!

PERCEPTUS: He will in time, but in this life, our light afflictions, as Paul calls them, work an eternal weight of glory, and glory only comes by suffering: no suffering, no glory.

ERNEST: Hmm, I might forego the glory except that I cannot stand the thought of eternity without glory when temporal life as we know it now fleets by so quickly, and one who lives for merely pleasure now will find much wood, hay, and stubble having to be burned up at the bema of Christ, not that one incurs condemnation for such, but neither does one with such losses shine in eternity as gold refined by the fires of suffering in this life.

PERCEPTUS: Again, I think you talk yourself into the true, and see how glorious it is even as you speak, that you feel the full import of the negative, knowing its pain and affliction, yet

knowing that to will it, or to be willing for God to make you willing, yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness; for note how the Hebrews writer says that no discipline in the present is joyous: therefore, we need not expect it to be, but we know that later, as we continue, with our eyes set upon the author and finisher of our faith, we will experience the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

NOVITIA: We do not know the trials and afflictions that await us, and it is good that we don' t; we need only know that they do come to us because this world groans and travails in pain waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, meaning that day when the sons of the Son will again take the scepter in full and rule over a world no longer fallen. As we are more than conquerors in our present situations, we hasten the day when Satan and all belonging to him will be forever consigned to the lake of fire, never again to trouble the people of God. In the meantime, we live in a fierce and brutal world in which Satan is, as Norman Grubb repeatedly called him, God' s convenient agent, meaning that we are to see Satan but not ascribe to Satan power to do anything that God does not take and turn into glory for those who believe. Therefore, we look through what Satan does and what he does through those in whom his spirit of error works, to what God means in the situation.

ERNEST: Can we know what God means?

PERCEPTUS: God most often means waiting and endurance on our parts as we hold fast to His keeping, and hold fast to the words that the Holy Spirit gives us to say in particular situations. We would like these positive words of faith to come to us without the negatives that precede them. The truth, however, is that God gives us words of faith in the very darkest of our situations, choosing to make His light shine out of darkness, not that darkness is transmuted into light, for

darkness cannot become light. Darkness merely provides that out of which light miraculously shines, though they never meet or join as one entity, for God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. So where darkness pervades at first, our willingness to faith incites God to give us words of faith as we waiting and endure, and we see each time that light swallows up darkness.

ERNEST: I could gasp at this, so glorious it is! We may in this life expect the shock of the negative and know that though we may at times quickly move to faith, other times, we may reel perplexed but not in despair, even knocked down but not destroyed. But the liberation too is that we need not take condemnation for our dislike of suffering, and I heard you quote the other day the beginning of Norman' s famous New Hampshire talk on suffering which begins with the simple but revelatory line, " Suffering is what I don' t like." That covers anything from annoyance to rage doesn' t it, anything from a small hurt to a deep wound from an enemy missile?

PERCEPTUS: Yes, if we do not embrace our suffering, we resist what God means for us; we find anger and depression, not wrong in themselves, turning into unbelief, marked by obsession with ourselves, commonly called self-absorption— that self-centered state in which one progressively examines and endlessly reexamines his feelings and thoughts as if they represent the bottom line. This leads to immobilization, and when continued without the receptivity to God' s wooing, leads to an isolation within the self so cold and tormenting that no place called hell could be more hell than the self consigned finally and only to itself, without thought for the good of another.

NOVITIA: This is why we find it relevant to periodically say that God is eternally self-for-others, that He made the eternal choice to be that— swallowing up eternally all darkness of

self-for-self that sees others only as a means to satisfy the self. God, though, is a living sacrifice, so that when He commands us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, He only commands us to see our bodies as temples of His fixed nature, leading us to be fixed not as such a nature ourselves, but as vessels of His nature. So Christ is called the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, implying that the Cross is eternally in the heart of God, and as such, predicates His longsuffering. He too experiences the assault of the negative, though He is already fixed in His disposition toward it. But the Bible is sincere when it talks of God's grief over the unbelief of His people or over the hard hearted refusal toward His Son from heaven, sent not to condemn the world but to save it.

ERNEST: I have heard some say that given the sacrifice that Christ made for us, we should sacrifice for Him. Yet if I try to do that, I fail.

PERCEPTUS: The key word you used is try, for if we try to suffer or think that we should want to on a flesh level, then we guarantee the opposite of what God intends. I feel perfectly free to avoid suffering whenever I can, and free to dislike it completely. Yet, I know that when the Holy Spirit points to suffering as my cup, then from my spirit, I am willing for Him to make me willing. I know that He guides me into it and keeps me through it, sustaining me, giving me positive words of faith where my initial inclination is to see everything wrong with a person or situation. We start there. Jesus started there, else He would not have gone to Gethsemane. If there is another way, we do ask God for it.

NOVITIA: Also, it is no use to attempt calculating what we should or should not suffer as if we can discover a law about it and measure out what we or others should undertake. Let the Holy Spirit commission a person. Let the Holy Spirit drive

that person into the labor of faith that a commission entails. Let the Holy Spirit be the comfort while one pays the cost. Let the Holy Spirit keep in view the goal that makes us able, by the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, to endure in our faith.

ERNEST: Sometimes I see a person in all the ways that he is not what God wills, noting that person's unbelief, sins, and failure to move into the life of "not I but Christ." I can call this discernment where the Spirit gives insight and detachment. Other times, though, I feel these things on a personal level, moving toward obsession where the negative threatens to swallow me up such that my joy would leave. I would even then find myself wishing that person's ill rather than that he come to faith. I see that the answer is that Christ in us desires the restoration of that person and the love and fellowship that results.

PERCEPTUS: This can be dire, and we have all known this place of obsession; it is fierce and dark, relentless if we let it be the all of what we see. Our eyes can turn dark and double, magnifying evil instead of pressing through to where God's grace and love give us a vision of what a person can be in Christ. This is not to say that we do not grieve the sins of others; it is to say that we do not see them as evil vessels but as misused vessels to whom we appeal as the Lord leads. Don't we find though, that the Holy Spirit may not let us appeal beyond a certain point, for much of our suffering is that we cannot control the choices of others but must endure the painful process in them that unfolds when they choose to go to the same bottom that we in our unbelief went to as well. How hard it is to know that we may exhort as the Lord leads, but we cannot keep another from his painful process by which faith may come to birth.

ERNEST: I try sometimes to make a list of what I want to believe for a person, only to find it mechanical and forced, as if I should include certain things or expect the experiences of others to replicate a common pattern.

PERCEPTUS: There is a common pattern, but it is an inner pattern and not an outer one, so that we may see a variety of situations in people's lives but only one underlying pattern, namely that failure to let the sword of the Spirit divide asunder soul and spirit leaves one mired up in guilt, fear, and torment— and worse, bound by the enemy. We can safely say that the main thing to wish for another is the clear light of knowing that life is "not I but Christ" and as such, we gain clarity that God created us to contain and express Him and not to imitate Him as if we are independent selves. That lie comes straight from the devil, always has, and will until the day that God puts him out of earshot in the age to come. In this age, however, we may confidently expect for Satan to shoot at us since we are in his camp for now, not meaning that the world really belongs to the devil but that God has given him temporary authority within the sovereign limits set out by God Himself.

NOVITIA: Yes, this is our basic desire for others, which only accords with the plain Gospel of Romans 6-8 and Galatians 2, not to mention Hebrews 3-4 and 8-10, though it is also true that the whole Bible commends us to faith, some Scriptures more lucid and concise than others, but all of one fabric leading us to live by the power of God and not ourselves, this only made possible by the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. Too, we may find many words of faith given to us by God for all sorts of situations: finance, health, marriage, job, etc.

ERNEST: I know some who think that we should claim financial prosperity, good health, the best of marriage, and desirable employment, meaning that we sin if we do not

claim these things by faith and apprehend their manifestation. And yet I know that Sylvia's mother, for example, got cancer, and she was not led to claim healing on a body level, but instead she claimed her illness as an occasion to pay a price of intercession in which she specifically set forth words of faith about many in her family—words which in some instances would take years to manifest. Some would say that she failed in faith because she was not healed.

PERCEPTUS: Surely God does work many miracles, and John's short letters wish for his reader wellbeing in the natural ways we assume. So this is right and good, and God is glorified when we believe Him and prosper. Equally true and much more glorious, however, is Romans 8, the great victory chapter, that tells us unless we suffer with Christ we will not reign with Him, and do we not know that no matter how much we prosper, we will die of something unless we are the generation present when the Lord returns bodily? I say, enjoy as much as you can and accept as much suffering as you can. When the Lord makes you abound, give thanks, and when the Lord makes you abase, give thanks. Take all negatives as opportunities for faith and you will know the abundant life indeed, for the most abundant person is the person who turns the most adversity into faith, for faith is substance as Hebrews 11 tells us. Faith does not lead to substance, faith is substance; it is our gold and silver.

SYLVESTER: With this, I must take leave of you, but though I have not said much, I have basked in the beauty of holiness and the meaning of "Christ in you the hope of glory."

NOVITIA: We have had a wonderful time, and thank God we can share in the richness and comfort of fellowship in the one Spirit of God.

ERNEST: I sense myself stretching more each time we get together and thank you for your faith and patience on my behalf.

PERCEPTUS: Ernest, you are as our very own selves; truly you are, for what you reach and touch in faith has also been our journey and continually is! Adieu all!

Dialogue XX

What is Intercession?

ERNEST: Yesterday, friends told me that they are interceding in prayer, and I remembered hearing once that intercession includes prayer but means more than prayer.

NOVITIA: Yes, we have had that conversation about the meaning of intercession— that it involves a commission from God to see a specific thing brought into manifestation by means of the intercessor's bodily involvement. In Romans 12 Paul exhorts us to present our bodies as living sacrifices— holy and acceptable to God, and he follows this exhortation with discourse on how we move past knowing who we are, to seeking the best for others. He spends the first eight chapters laying the foundations of justification through Christ's work to forgive us of our sins and then indwell us by His Spirit, enabling us to live in completeness and victory in all circumstances by the power of God. But after dealing with the individual, Paul moves to the preaching of the Gospel to his countrymen, the preaching of the Gospel to the world, and the way in which Christ lives His sacrificial life in us toward others. This provides the basis for specific callings from God whereby the intercessor makes his body available to God to fulfill the commission that God invites him to.

ERNEST: You make it sound like intercession is voluntary, which doesn't sound like the life one lives when obeying God.

PERCEPTUS: Truly, one who does not advance to intercession as a way of life falls short of God's highest purpose for living. But not all take up the Cross for others if they never get past their own problems, having little urgency for others since they remain occupied with themselves. This is sad, but many

precious saints of God live wounded, going from one counselor to another, reading various books, and living like a hypochondriac with a dresser full of medications that never get one well. This patient's mindset prefers to be sick anyway, which is why Jesus asked the man by the pool of Bethesda, "Do you wish to get well?" I remember the shock when the Holy Spirit showed me that I had loved the very things I had been most zealous in complaining about. Thus, the loudest protests of a sick person may disguise contentment with the very problems voiced in misery.

SYLVESTER: Yes, an angry person or a depressed person may hate the maladies of anger and depression but hate even more the idea of giving them up for peace in the Spirit. The intercessor feels these very same things but moves past them to positive believing for those he is called by God to give himself to.

ERNEST: Your thought is of a more sober nature than I have encountered with several people claiming the banner of Galatians 2:20 who mistake fleshly desires for call to intercession, though it is apparent to observers that the supposed intercessor flees the Cross instead of embracing it for another person.

PERCEPTUS: Well even with the Spirit's definite calling to intercede, one may live in the flush of an ideal, only to find the grind of daily faithfulness and sacrifice not so glamorous as previously supposed. Then comes our opportunity to grasp God's love in us that makes us willing for our flesh to sustain suffering in order to see God's life formed in another.

ERNEST: This sounds like what happens in marriage after the honeymoon is over, and the lovers begin to see the imperfections hidden before by amorous emotion.

SYLVESTER: Marriage is a good example, and those who do not die to self-will in their marriages likely will not die to it beyond their marriages, and though not all marry, it is true that marriage serves as a good test for Christ's love, though some remain married for no other reason than mutual self-centeredness, a demonic and symbiotic arrangement.

PERCEPTUS: I learned the principles of intercession from Norman long before I grasped any of them but remembered his repeated emphasis on Christians getting stuck at a level short of intercession by mere attachment to family or things in a possessive way—MY family, MY possessions. Such independent self still clings in a possessive way without the detachment necessary to freely say and do the things truly helpful to others.

ERNEST: I have tried not to be so possessive in my relationships and with ownership of things, but when I try not to be possessive, I flare up and find myself more possessive than ever.

PERCEPTUS: As with everything about the Christian life, trying never works, but only faith. The Holy Spirit has to detach us from people and things so that we live as stewards. A steward is willing to be made willing. Norman himself learned the truths of intercession from Rees Howells, later writing the biography of Mr. Howells, which tells the story of how Mr. Howells could not make himself willing, but the Holy Ghost asked him if he was willing to be made willing, which Mr. Howells was, thank the Lord.

NOVITIA: It's not unusual for someone interested in intercession to read a stirring biography and think, "I should be an intercessor," hurrying then to look for an intercession, when the truth is that we only invite guilt when we compare ourselves to others or go looking for an intercession.

Consider Isaiah' s commission: The Lord prompted him by asking, "Who will go?" See how the Lord approached Isaiah and defined the commission. When you are ready for intercession, it finds you.

ERNEST: I have also heard of the priesthood of Melchizedek as a priestly intercession, but I don' t know exactly what that means.

PERCEPTUS: The Hebrews writer begins his epistle with the glory and uniqueness of Christ, without which no one can intercede, for Christ is the true intercessor, and where one does not operate from union with His indwelling life, there can be no intercession. The writer then explains why the Israelites in the wilderness did not enter into God' s rest: they continued to live by their appetites instead of by the Spirit of God. God tested them to see if they would let the Holy Spirit divide soul and spirit for them, but they saw this as too painful and remained on a level of bodily craving that blocked their entry into rest. In God' s rest, the soul and body get sorely tried, but the person of faith abides in rest and does not fall back into the works of independent self. When one falls back into the works of independent self, the devil' s rage still keeps a place in that person' s members. When the time comes for faithfulness to God and service to another, the old enemies of pride, covetousness, envy, and wrath resist the grace of God, leaving the worshipper defeated and unable to intercede. Intercession, however, clings to the Cross so that the life of Christ swallows up resistance to suffering, releasing the sweet savor of Christ' s love to those that God calls us to love in the manner described by Paul: "death worketh in me but life in you."

SYLVESTER: This brings up another vital point, for some who attempt to intercede go into the dire negatives and call these negatives intercession, but they live obviously in defeat

themselves, while thinking that their miseries have healing effects for others. It is apparent to others that the would-be intercessor is mired up in self-for-self darkness that can heal no one. People get healed from the light, not the darkness: so only as we die to self-for-self, which occasions Christ's light coming forth, do others get healing, for then Christ's life communicates to them, which heals them, not the darkness that God called us to die to. It is erroneous to think that darkness can produce light, and those that think this presume that the more one languishes in darkness, the more that intercession takes place, when in truth, only death to the darkness and victory over it can occasion Christ's light in us that others may see by.

ERNEST: A man told me that he is interceding for another man's wife, but by all appearances he is merely infatuated with the woman, wishing that he could have an affair with her. I told him that he probably would help her more by not enticing her with feelings that they both will have to die to anyway. If he is really concerned for her, he would do better to believe for God to make her more devoted to doing good to her husband and less inclined to complain about him without believing anything for him.

NOVITIA: It is quite normal to experience attraction, but to think of it as more than that has deceived many into prolonging the very thing one must die to. The simplest thing is to refuse guilt over feelings, recognize them for what they are, and see how God's real purpose is to cause us to know and walk in our completeness in Christ.

PERCEPTUS: I agree. That is why I say that I have only one relationship, and that is my relationship with God. I have fellowship with others. That frees me, and my completeness comes from union with God, not relationships with people. Most people are codependent and feed on the useless

analysis found in numerous talk shows, where the victims and analyzers rarely exceed flesh level efforts at reform or repair. God's way is that He transforms us by the power of His Spirit, making self-help formulas worthless since no one can change his own flesh or anyone else's.

ERNEST: I can see where your viewpoint would be offensive to many.

PERCEPTUS: It was offensive to me once, before which time I thought I would die without human relationships to meet my needs, and it is true we are not to live isolated and without fellowship. However, when we do not know God alone as our life, then we try to get from others what only the Holy Spirit can provide. How can a person intercede for someone if the intercessor depends on that person instead of the Lord? The other's refusal to meet a need will precipitate hurt and anger, leading to retaliation. This is why learning to suffer opens the door to the freedom to intercede for others because we then expect inconvenience, opposition, and resistance along the way. These are the second aspect of intercession, the first being the commission. This part is the cost, and only by expecting to suffer can we look through to the goal as Jesus endured the Cross for the joy set before Him.

ERNEST: The world is set on selling products by creating appetite for them and marketing products to meet the appetite. But you're saying that we die to stirring up craving in others that satisfy fleshly craving. I see that this is why the Israelites fell into unbelief in the wilderness and why Hebrews uses them as an example to avoid. Those driven by soul and body appetites can never intercede, since they do not enter into rest and cannot lead anyone else to rest either.

PERCEPTUS: Yes, for again, the Hebrews writer tells us that the priesthood of Melchizedek is the laid down life for others,

and to know that, one must live in rest and accept suffering at the same time. That's why I say that it's easy to walk in the Spirit, just excruciating at times. If we reckon something hard to do because it is painful, we will never know the ease of faith that goes on unhindered even in suffering. This mindset opens us to hear the calling of God to specific commissions and follow on in faith by paying the cost, which is not we paying the cost as if we alone bear the Cross, but Christ bears it in us, offering Himself to others as He leads us.

ERNEST: How can I know if I am called to an intercession? Other Christians regularly tell me things that I ought to do to better serve others. I say that I will pray about these, but not that often do I feel led to do what others think that I should, and then I get pulled into guilt at their disapproval.

PERCEPTUS: The intercessor must know his own calling, directly from the Lord, or else he will be serving man and not God. When the cost comes, if we are serving man, we will break down. But if our calling comes to us directly from God, then God enables us to do what He calls us to. Even when you hear a call from God and others celebrate with you, you will find them soon enough to disappear, and God means them to, in order to put you only on faith. Norman called this "going out where the human cold winds blow." God has to call us, God has to enable us in the cost, meaning the suffering, and God has to test us to keep us on faith so that He alone is the intercessor in us.

ERNEST: How will I know when an intercession is completed?

PERCEPTUS: You will have the witness of the Holy Spirit. This may even come before you see the manifestation of what you interceded for. Sometimes we see the fruit, and sometimes we die not seeing the promises. But we usually get a good slice of the pie on this side. Intercession brings out the

meaning of two good Bible words, wait and endure. This is not all, however, for as we wait and endure, we do not waver in our faith, but continue to look unto the completion, remembering that Jesus says to a mountain, "Be thou a plain."

ERNEST: What about those who give up?

PERCEPTUS: My favorite line from Norman's book *The Law of Faith* is the line, "Faith's only sin is giving up." Of course we will if God doesn't keep us, so I say, "Thank You that You are keeping me."

ERNEST: What books are good to read on intercession?

PERCEPTUS: My favorites are Rees Howells *Intercessor*, C.T. Studd: *Cricketer and Pioneer*. Also, you will find that Norman's books on who we are lay out the truths of intercession after he builds the foundations of who we are in Christ. I remember *The Spontaneous You* as having the presentation most like the presentation he would give when doing a talk on intercession. But remember, none of this will work unless a person has really given up the big MY of possessiveness, for that is still the evidence of independent self, which is Satan in a person's members, and no one can intercede without living only out of Christ Himself.

SYLVESTER: I rejoice in this discussion, taking it as a good review, which I never tire of.

NOVITIA: And I too. May the Lord continue to give us the joy of intercession.

ERNEST: You have given me much to think about, and I sense that the Lord will soon open my doors to these experiences.

PERCEPTUS: Amen. He will, and He is faithful to us all.