

I have been forgiven
Now what?

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A post-modern lamentation

*I have felt myself lost, I am feeling with an empty **heart**;
It may not be real, for I consider myself so smart;
In the midst of so much information, I cannot define my goal;
It's hard to feel direction when we have an empty **soul**.
Where should I go, it looks like I am blind;
I have studied so much, but feel I am losing my **mind**;
This world has so many attractions, how can I feel with discontent?
Even in the vigor of my youth, I cannot find more **strength**.
This emptiness in my soul for spending all in my labor;
Has brought even separation between me and my fellow **neighbor**;
Is there any answer here, or perhaps one coming from above?
If there is something I need to know is, what does it mean to **love**.
Is there any **greater** counsel I've forgotten, anything I left that make
me so flawed?
Maybe it is something I have never considered, maybe it is something
related to **God**.
What have I despised? What have I despised...*

*"**Love** the Lord your **God** with all your **heart**
and with all your **soul**
and with all your **mind**
and with all your **strength**.*

'The second is this:

*'Love your **neighbor** as yourself.'*

*There is no commandment **greater** than these" (Mark 12:30-31, emphasis added).*

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1. Before forgiveness

1.1 What is the truth?

First of all, we need to be convinced about the necessity of changes within ourselves - which comprises our thoughts concerning life, desires, aspirations, perspectives, dreams and objectives - and the reality of the world in which we are living. As a matter of fact, all the problems that surround us are just evidence of the great misunderstanding of what it really means to be human. This misunderstanding is found within the mind of each and every person. Illustrating the real scenario of the present world and the consequence of a life without God is of fundamental importance, whether you are Christian or not. For the Christians, a reminder of what your life really is, relevantly different from those who are still looking for answers. For the non-Christian, it is an opportunity to understand the absolute reality of life.

Why do I need the truth? Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian and philosopher, once said, "The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die."¹ It is not merely a question of "who has the best answer in a conversation". Discovering what is true is a matter of life or death.

Truth is required in every area of our lives. We do not want an airplane pilot to say anything but the truth. This principle applies to courts of justice, family members, doctors, and so forth and so on. No one likes to be deceived.

However, with regard to our lives, which involve morality, many are denying any possible absolute answer. Let me ask you to really consider a total commitment and openness of heart in the pursuit of truth. Either you are not a Christian and must consider this worldview as one of which your questions can be answered, or you are a Christian who requires reminding of certain things. Perhaps, even being a Christian, you have never heard about the real changes we must inevitably have on this new journey nor the danger of neglecting a Christ-centered life.

The definition of truth is, "that which corresponds to its object"². Basically, truth "is what it is". As it is found in the The Talmud, "If you add

to the truth, you subtract from it.”³ Therefore, you are either a Christian or not. There is no partial conversion. You are either forgiven, a new creature, living according to God’s will or not. We must remain constantly mindful of truth in our daily life.

Truth, regardless of our response to it, will keep being the truth. It never changes. Like it or not, the truth is the truth. There is an obvious disconnect between how many Christians live and the truth as revealed in the Bible. I am concerned about these Christians as much as I am concerned about those who have not found an answer to their questions.

I agree that some know the truth in their minds. However, for having a disconnection with their hearts, they do not put it into practice. The American writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The greatest homage to truth is to use it.”⁴

I am convinced the truth is not only an abstract thing. It is much more. By searching the truth, you will not likely find something, but more likely, someone. C.S. Lewis, a former atheist and one of the greatest Christian writers ever, discovered, while looking for answers:

“I thought I had come to a place, I found out I had come to a person.”⁵

Am I living a genuine life?

Before directly addressing the problem of humankind, the new life offered by God, and how we should conduct our lives, let me challenge you with this illustration of our world today. This is the complaint of a “post-modern man” in the days in which we are living:

“We are used to living a life with a strong collision of priorities and duties, being so occupied that even the common act of stopping and thinking are despised. We still have a mind, we still have a heart, we are still living, but sometimes it seems as if all people around us are dead. Am I not dead?”

It seems that we have set ourselves up like robots, or Androids (literally), programming all the activities we need to do, with the certainty those activities are the best way to get whatever we all are looking for in this short life. We are living in the era of information, however, we are not concerned about the simple lessons from the past years. Imagine of the past centuries. Whichever one, it really does not matter

when it comes to the lessons of the emptiness of a life, spent with a huge amount of material treasures, but with nothing truly valuable. Treasures treasured up, not enjoyed, finite, destroyed with time, which took the central place of many hearts. We are burying ourselves under these goods.

We are so afraid of losing what we already have, yet we do not use what we already have. We are not even enjoying it.

We are not using our minds as much as we should, or the way we are supposed to.

We are not enjoying our family.

We are not enjoying the times of health and strength we still have.

We are not using the only chance we have to pursue eternal values; the dramatic consequence of the "here and now" generation.

We are not seeking the answers we have available, for being lost in the billions of pieces of information we claim to have. We brag about the knowledge gathered in the last 24-hour news, which cannot transform even the life of a dog, for the superficiality that is presented.

We are looking to happily live, yet we are found dead.

In losing the sense of eternity, we have lost the sense of meaning, the sense of purpose, the sense of life itself.

We are so afraid to lose things, that we are unknowingly giving our own life in order to keep these things safe.

We are changing life itself for what we have ambitiously defined as the ultimate goal, even if we cannot clearly define what this ultimate goal is.

We are terrified of losing what we have conquered, at the same time we are afraid not to conquer all the other things we still don't have.

For this reason, the fear has taken us and has dictated the rules.

A life based on fear.

A life based on the need of approval.

If some material things have not been conquered yet or partially lost, a life based on anger and disappointment.

A hopeless, purposeless, meaningless life.

The modern world. The new generation. The time of technology. A time of solutions. The lack of happiness. The increase of selfishness. The decrease of joy. The pride of men. The death of God.

I think God is not dead Himself. He is dead in our conscience. Since then, it seems life is no longer life.

What is life? Why are we so unhappy?

Words of a man... post-modern, proud, rich... unhappy. Why are we so unhappy?"

The above illustration is answered by a dialogue between this man and a wise one, who better understood what life is all about. This is my introductory way to bring you the superficial, yet real problem before entering into the essence of it. Here is the dialogue:

Post-modern Man

I run to my goal, I strive to reach
The hurdles I jump, the law I may breach
Get out of my way, no time to speak
What's important is to make it, to become rich

I've given my health, I've given my strength
I've given my family, money I haven't lent
I've given myself, money I haven't spent
Life has just gone; I kept every single cent

It is not for love, it is not for life
It is not to help and to avoid strife
To share with others, to give a slice
To invest in my sons, to help the wife

Why, answer me, have I lost my sight?

Wise Witness

Better to give than to beg in the street
The boastful man was utterly deceived
He begs no money, but begs to live
Spending his life to buy and to eat
He lived his days in constant greed
Now it is coming to an end with no place to seat

Condemned to work, imprisoned in his mind
The miserableness has just made him blind
The modern man: so rich, so proud, so refined
Forgot to remember, or perhaps to be reminded
That the fate of the rich man, is the same of mankind

Post-modern Man

What's the answer, where's the way
That bring us hope, which brightens our day
If there's something, how much should I pay?
Above the sun, is there someone I could pray?

Wise Witness

Look to the heavens, look above
Under the sun there's nothing worth thinking of
Meaningless, meaningless, you made your choice
You covered your ears, did not hear the voice

Be wise, count your days, you cannot return
No way back, now teach the others how to discern
Your time has gone, your life you gave
Thinking to be a strong man, but indeed a slave

Post-modern Man

If I could return and start again
How different it would be, how much I would gain
Looking at my children, dancing under the rain
Laughing with my wife, while riding on a train
I want to feel the wind without any pain
Free from the system, breaking the chain
But now is too late, full of regret I am

God, please forgive me today. That is my prayer, sincerely, amen.

This is the portrait of many lives in our times. Nevertheless, the real problem goes beyond the superficiality some are living. The unhappiness and meaninglessness just point out a greater problem. This is not found in a place, but in people; people like you and I. Until we are conscious of the problem, we will not care about finding a solution. The problem with this new generation is the carelessness about life. This attitude alone is a great fault. As Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish writer, said, "The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none."⁶

We need to understand

Lack of knowledge is the only thing that can destroy someone. Within this context one of the most important things is understanding.

To understand is to get hold of the meaning of what we read or hear. It is, according to the *priberam* dictionary, “the faculty by which the spirit seizes ideas and understands them”.

We need to understand things in order to have the right attitude and make the right decisions. Life is made up of decisions and attitudes. What differentiates one man from another is his attitudes (not necessarily what he speaks, but how he acts) and his choices, which has determined the place he has attained and occupies today.

The process of having an understanding about things is something so important that God has not even made it optional. Jesus once mentioned the first commandment instituted by God, highlighting its importance and the duty to put it into practice. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

God demonstrates a concern of this by giving specific guidance with regard to our understanding. If it is not with all our mind (the ability to grasp ideas and understand them) we will never please God. After all, it is a commandment, not an option.

As John, the closest apostle of Jesus, said, “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands” (1 John 2:3).

How are we going to do something well without understanding? Or how can we say that the world was created by someone we do not know? Why would any man offer to die for Jesus Christ unless he knew Jesus Christ?

Our faith cannot be supported by emptiness. If we know what, whom, and why we believe, we have sufficient conditions to overcome every challenge. There’s no denying that life is full of challenges.

God, knowing his creatures, put forth a mandatory way of seeking to understand and comprehend things. We are easily induced to accommodate ourselves in idleness, but this is not an attitude that God expects. We cannot settle for half-truths.

How important is it for a man to be wise? Solomon, historically known as the wisest man who ever existed, stated something vital. “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

We have the capacity to assimilate many important things. What should be said is that human knowledge by itself cannot guide us to absolute truths. See what Solomon directs: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

Seeking God is the best way to acquire the knowledge necessary to overcome all life’s difficulties. The great king of Israel, David, knew this very well. “I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Psalm 119:104).

Now, people who spend hours hypnotizing the computer in front of Facebook or doing superfluous things, how will they acquire wisdom? I know some people can be offended by reading this. I am not against technology or about the freedom each and every person has. As the apostle Paul said, all things are permitted, but not all things are right, we can do all things, but not all things are constructive. However, no one should complain about the things he allows to happen. God does not take people by the hand to make decisions all the time, since he has given us the autonomy and authority to do so.

Parents who spend too much time watching television or using a computer are not adequate role models for their children, who will grow up imagining that no effort is needed to understand things. Then, as a result of this laziness, we have citizens who laugh at the grandest political maneuvers of corruption, the greatest attempts to violate laws and regulations that protect freedom, among other things that leave anyone with understanding astonished. The world becomes a place of “zombies” that have no opinions of their own and accept everything that happens.

There is an answer to everything. With wisdom you can, to a greater or lesser degree, understand all things.

Having said this, let us put our minds to work and understand what the real problem with human beings is and how we can overcome it.

The real problem. In the beginning...

When God created the world, he clearly set limits. For our well-being, for the good course of this life, they were established. These limits were described to the forefathers by God through Moses (see the book of Exodus). Nevertheless, these limits were also written within our minds, carved in our conscience, either approving or condemning us

about what is right or wrong (see Romans 2:15). Unfortunately, these limits have been constantly broken.

Humankind is, as a consequence of that, dead in their transgressions. A straightforward truth. The consequence of trespassing the limits, which is called sin, is destructive. The reality of mankind can be well understood in some verses that Paul wrote to the Romans, in the third chapter of his letter:

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12).

Consciously or not, our earthly nature is not good. Not at all. If that was not enough, the world’s system regulates and promotes hate and all sorts of sinful actions, which leads to sin itself. Living in a sinful world makes us sin all the more. We ourselves are bad in our own nature, surrounded by a bad environment. Could this be any worse?

The question is, “is there any chance for men to change their own behavior?” “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jeremiah 13:23).

No one can do it. No man can redefine his inner being. There is no attitude, effort, meditation, action, or anything that enables one to be changed. Corruption became part of our nature. “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).

We are, therefore, continuously enemies of God. Thankfully, after the biggest and most glorious event that took place some two thousand years ago, some of us can boldly affirm “we **were** enemies of God”. Furthermore, all human beings on this earth could boldly say this same statement. It is available to each and every single person. What was necessary to change this terrible situation already happened, now it is just a question of conscience. We need to be aware of this truth, about **the Truth**. Salvation is at hand. God made it. God conquered it. God offers it. We need to decide.

1.2 The conscience reveals the truth

We have a conscience. Basically, if we do what is good, we feel well. If we do what is bad, we feel bad. There is no way to deny this truth. The conscience itself brings us to something, I mean, it helps us to conclude about actions or words that we have done/said. In other words, we are all born with a sense of right and wrong.

How can our conscience point to a moral standard? From where comes the outline determining what is right or wrong? Why do we have an inborn sense of morality? Does not this come from God? Intuitively, I believe that we all know the answer. All people, in their inmost being, know it. Still, the majority despises it and keeps trying to appease their own minds. People are discouraged to change, being taught to make up their minds instead. Willing to do their own thing, they disregard the known source of their moral code.

In view of that, many people avoid the simple act of “stop and think” about their actions, since their own minds can accuse them. Solitude scares this generation. In practical terms, sitting before the TV, changing channels the whole night, listening to some improper music with empty letters and repeated expressions, or using drugs, alcohol or cigarettes are examples of distracting the mind. Definitely, what many people are doing today is just finding an imaginary world to flee from reality, where the conscience cannot accuse themselves. The world needs to know something; that is impossible! Socrates, the Greek philosopher, once wrote, “If you practice some shameful action, do not think it can be completely ignored. Because, though you might conceal it from everyone, you would always know it yourself.”

Not surprisingly, the great majority, who tried to flee from reality in the ways I have described above, either died unhappy or are still living an unproductive life, with some of the life’s areas in constant and evident instability.

Conscience is one of the ways God chose to communicate with men. The Bible says, “They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their **consciences** also bearing witness, and their **thoughts** sometimes **accusing** them and at other times even **defending** them” (Romans 2:15, emphasis added).

God is talking. Notwithstanding our conscience, the natural world reveals God (see Romans 1:19-20) and I repeat, intuitively, it is impossible to say “God does exist”. In spite of this, mankind is always trying to either flee or to hide from God.

Most people who avoid God justify their reasons based on relativism, “What is true for you is not true for me”. I strongly disagree with this affirmation, given the fact that this is a false statement itself. I like to think about it by this very simple illustration. If a doctor says to a patient, “You have cancer”, and the patient just tries to flee from this reality, assuming not to be true, he will never be healed and will consequently die. His denial will not change the fact itself. This is obvious as two and two is four. The same is true in our relationship with God. He communicates with humanity continually. Denying an absolute truth will not change the destiny of mankind. Unless people listen to his words, accept his peace, love, and life - for all that God offers is good - changing their lives in a realistic way, people will suffer the consequences of their own bad deeds, dying without hope. It is not God who will punish them, it is people themselves who decide to stay in disobedience. C.S Lewis said it best when he wrote, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”⁷

The word of God, the Bible, is the third way we have available to know him. The nature, the conscience, and his word. Jesus said, “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; **the very words** I have spoken will condemn them at the last day” (John 12:47-48, emphasis added).

The point I would like to emphasize here is our conscience. Even if we have never learned about anything, not having the proper ability to rationally discern right from wrong, our own conscience can easily confirm what is morally correct. We have no excuse for immoral behavior. We were set, defined, created, and programmed to distinguish right and wrong. Not to **define** what is right or wrong, but to **distinguish**. The Christian philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal once said, "Conscience is the best book of morals we have, it is to her we should consult" (Blaise Pascal - 1623-1662).

I deeply believe that men have always waged a constant struggle against their own conscience. Often, we wonder how evil men, as corrupt politicians, murderers, kidnappers, among others, can have a clear conscience after doing imaginable evil things. No one in their right mind could do these things and comfortably rest afterwards. Therefore, let us try to understand something that is going on throughout history before coming to the subject matter at hand.

Fighting against the conscience

Having this thought, that our conscience constrains us, accusing us of what is right or wrong, we found that if we do not have a rational knowledge about what is wrong, we manage to escape from a mental discomfort, rather, an accusation of our own being. That is, if we do not have a rational knowledge of what is wrong, we are able to handle situations without worrying about our own thoughts. Since I hypothetically do not know what is wrong, I will not bother myself to keep doing it. However, is it really possible to deceive the conscience?

We know our mind to be the place of the greatest struggles we may have. All our fights, visible and invisible, are fought firstly within our minds. We deal with situations as we can think about them. Certain battles in our lives go beyond our reasoning ability, but generally, everything we do comes from what we think. In view of that, the renewal of our mind is the first step towards a change in behavior. We change our lives by changing our thoughts. This only happens as we come to think differently, mainly through a new vision of life, a new worldview. Certainly, having our eyes opened to a true worldview is the biggest

challenge, and I strongly believe that only Jesus can effectively help in the process.

However, in order to by-pass the conscience, men have usually thought the following: "If there were no laws to say what is right or wrong, our conscience would not accuse us so strongly, as if they existed. Therefore, let us change or put an end to every moral law."

As already mentioned, this is a fight against the conscience, since even those who do not know the law "show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them" (Romans 2:15).

It is precisely for this reason, to lead men to the knowledge of what is naturally correct or incorrect that the well-known law was given by God, strengthening this natural consciousness; The Ten Commandments. In fact, all the commandments given to Moses (163) made clear the boundaries through God's eyes. As my old law professor once said, "If only the Ten Commandments were in the Constitution, no further legislation would be necessary."

The fact is, once we have the awareness of what is right and wrong, we are convinced that we need to make a decision. Because of this consciousness, we will seek to change our attitudes in order not to feel this weight within our hearts, this heavy yoke that imprisons us, this charge (by the knowledge of the law), affirming that we are always wrong. In other words, awareness of our sinfulness prompts us to action. We do not like to be wrong, to do things wrongly, but more importantly, we do not like to be constantly accused because of it.

Based on all the above, we can reflect on the human condition, and the current petitions and mass complaints about controversial issues concerning correct and incorrect attitudes, whether by nature or imposed by civil laws. Men, not to feel they are doing something wrong (since feelings have become rules), trying to have a clear conscience (even if only a disguise), want to silence the voice of people who accuse what is wrong (what it is called sin), and are struggling to pass laws that make these mistakes be, in fact, something beautiful and correct. This is the picture of our "post-modern", now labeled as "post-truth" society.

After all, who is the man who does something wrong and like others pointing out his mistakes? Nobody wants to be discovered, and mankind is trying to cover up his own conscience. The thought is as follows: “If there are laws saying that what is wrong is indeed right, I would not feel uncomfortable....let us change the laws!” That is a big mistake, because the consciousness of sin is already within the human being and should be rather strengthened. There is no sense in creating laws and legal means to try covering it up; men's nature will not change, nor his own minds if they keep finding ways to deceive it.

By his wisdom, God reinforced our conscience by bringing the laws to written form. The consequence is found in the words of the apostle Paul. “Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death” (Romans 7:9-10). Only by the full conscience of what is wrong will one look for what is right. This is, however, what our corrupted society is trying to avoid.

As Charles Spurgeon said, “The more sinful a man is, the less he is conscious of it.”⁸ Evil and wicked men want to continue living in the darkness of their thoughts, far from any light that may shine in their minds. “It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light” (Ephesians 5:12-13).

John the Baptist was, according to Jesus, the greatest of all prophets. John was beheaded by a powerful man who was thinking the exact way I've been talking about. The man, named Herod, did not want to hear that he was doing something absolutely wrong. The natural response should be the changing of his behavior and the adaptation of his thinking to what is good. However, this man escaped from life's reality by cutting off the voice of truth, which used to condemn him. This is what people today are trying to do. In order to flee from reality, they are “cutting off the heads” of principles and laws. I am afraid the time will come for the West, when even those who proclaim these principles and laws will have the risk of having their heads cut off.

The scenario is this: men are fleeing from reality, not believing in redemption, set forth by God, which is the only way to restore our consciousness, being transformed by the renewing of our mind.