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Shaqah®

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Colossians 2:8

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Step Into the Springs!

For us it's nothing short of a miracle that for the nineteenth year, Living Springs Institute is publishing its daily planning calendar that gives you the Biblical calendar alongside the calendar most of us use every day. I know I've used the word "miracle" a lot lately but it's the only word that fits the circumstances especially considering we are once again offering this calendar for FREE! Now, let me just say how sorry we are to all those who have ordered a 2026 calendar and have yet to receive one. Orders have truly been more than we can keep up with but it is our hope that when the 2027 calendar is ready we can get them to everyone who wants one as quickly as possible. Getting back to those of you who don't end up receiving a 2026 calendar you ordered before you get a 2027, please understand that for several years now the commitment to getting the newest calendar out as fast as we can has meant we have to end production of the prior year's calendar. This, in turn, means when the stock of the previous year's calendar runs out, we stop sending out those calendars altogether. We will continue that policy for the 2027 calendar. We will also continue the policy of not having that pre-order white card so many of you were use to seeing in this Sept./Oct. issue of *Shaqah*. This simply means that with this issue of *Shaqah* you should have received a regular white card for ordering the 2027 calendar and there will be no white cards send out in the Nov./Dec. issue.

For those of you who have not had a calendar before, the white card might be the easiest way to order your calendar. Just be sure to fill in your mailing information in the return address portion of the card and check the correct box for ordering just a calendar or for ordering a subscription to *Shaqah* along with your calendar. Now, for those of you who received a, 2026 calendar you will only want to send in this white card if you have not already sent in the yellow card that came in your 2026 calendar. If you have sent that yellow card in, you're already on the mailing list to be one of the first to receive the 2027 calendar. If for any number of reasons you haven't sent in your yellow card, do so now or feel free to use the white card in this issue to order your 2027 calendar. Of course, anyone who would like a 2027 calendar can also order through our website. Go to Shaqah.com and in the footer of that page you'll see a link to our online Resource Shop. The 2027 calendar is the first item listed on that page. Then there are also the e-mail and regular mail options. Just send your e-mail to resources@shaqah.com. If you're using regular mail, write to us at: Living Springs Institute, P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539. Just tell us you would like the 2027 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*, and/or any other materials we offer. Be sure to give us your physical mailing address and your order will be sent out as soon as we can process it!

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Saying that makes this the perfect place to say, the calendar is a great Biblical education product but even if you don't use/want the calendar, the companion book, *Counting The Days,* is still a book you're going to want to read. With a full example calendar in the back, this book is a great way to learn about the Biblical/Jewish calendar all by itself. *Counting The Days* is an overall teaching about the calendar and feasts God gave in the Law but more specifically, it teaches the how and why God set up a calendar that contains distinct events, all of which prophesy about God's plan for our existence. This book also teaches why there is a Biblical and Jewish calendar that differ from each other, and much more! If you do not yet have a copy of this book, you will want to receive one when you order your 2027 calendar and if you decide you want *Counting The Days* after you have received a 2027 calendar, it should have come with a pink card for ordering the book. Simply fill in that card with your name and address, and for only the price of a stamp you can order your free copy of *Counting The Days*!

After going over all that info about how to order, keep in mind that if you're a regular mail subscriber to this publication and don't by then have one, you should receive a 2027 calendar with your Nov./Dec. issue of *Shaqah.* We'd also like to send calendars to all of our e-mail subscribers, but we don't necessarily have your current physical mailing address. Thus, to get your 2027 calendar be sure to contact us and put in your order soon. For those of you who may never have ordered anything from Living Springs, know that ordering will not put you on any mailing list! Living Springs is happy to send people only what they request and all our teaching products are free! Of course, if you don't want to wait for a calendar and/or write to request one, Living Springs also produces a PDF version of the calendar which you can download from our website just as soon as the calendar is published. Just go to Shaqah.com and in the footer under "Learning Center" you'll see a link for "Calendar Project." Click on that link and right near the top of the page you'll see a graphic link that says, "Want To Print Your Own Calendar? Download The PDF Version!" The page that link takes you to has not only the newest calendar we've published but all the prior years since the first year we started producing these calendars. Along with those links you'll find helpful instructions for how to print and put together your own physical copy of the PDF calendar if you'd like!

Also keep in mind that while you're on the website there are other things available to download in PDF. One of the easiest to find and benefit from is the this publication, *Shaqah*! If you go to Shaqah.com the center button on the header of that page will take you to the "Back Issues" page and there you'll find all the back issues of *Shaqah* along with a great many of them published in PDF. This is a great resource if you're wanting to read many of the series segments that proceeded where you began your subscription as well as whole new articles you have not yet read. Now, that makes a perfect segue into what we also want to cover in this "Step Into the Springs" segment and that's the fact, just like the last issue of *Shaqah*, this issue does not contain the continuance of our normal segments like "Following The Biblical Stream," "The Bible As A Book," and "What About God's Chosen People." As I explained last time, we are trying to get caught up in publishing *Shaqah* and in order to do that we're reaching back into Q&As that have never before been published for reading by anyone other than the person the Q&A was originally written for. In this issue we will begin a somewhat lengthy question which, of course, required a more lengthy answer. This means what you'll find on the pages of this issue is part one of the Q&A segment that is according to our filing system, Q&A #24.

One thing I'll note about this question being long is that part two, Lord willing, will appear in the next issue of *Shaqah* but it won't have the full wording of the question asked. Instead, it will have an abridged version of the question and the continuance of the answer. This will be done to, of course, save space but it also means it's important to keep part one around so you can refer back to the full question should you feel the need to. I'll also say, this question is one I've thought long and hard about never publishing because it's about a personal story of living for God but finding yourself convicted until depression sets in. As you can probably imagine the question itself is one of a very personal nature and for that reason names and dates have been changed so as to do our best not to violate our privacy policy pertaining to people who submit questions to us. That said, this question is powerful and speaks to feelings and coming to a place many people in this day and age find themselves. That makes the answer to it equally important, and it is for that reason I have chosen to publish this Q&A. May God bless each of you who read it and whether now or in the future it's my prayer it will be a great help to many people. With that I'll say we pray all our materials are a blessing to those who receive them, including this issue of *Shaqah*!

Have I Lost My Faith?
Part I

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

My name is Ashley and I am terrified that I have committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit was trying to lead me to saving faith. I know that I need Jesus in my life but am terrified that I am beyond repentance.

I was raised in a Christian home and professed to be a Christian. I had responded to an invitation at a church camp as a teenager and said the sinner's prayer. In obedience, I was baptized when I returned home from camp. I began to read my Bible, pray, participate in various ministries in church, and help others. I truly believed that I was a Christian and even my family and church family thought I was a growing Christian. It was not until events in 2005 that I realized that I did not truly have a personal relationship with Jesus.

In late 2004, God began to quietly and occasionally prompt me that I was missing Jesus. At first, I dismissed these promptings as being from the devil because at the time I was involved with several other ladies from our church in a women's shelter ministry where we shared the gospel with the women living there.

The promptings subsided and I continued to serve in ministries in our church and work and maintain our home for my faithful, Christian husband of ten years.

In early 2005, the promptings returned and were more intense. I began to think that these might be from the Lord, but could not understand why God was telling me that I was not saved and that I needed Jesus. I would argue with God that I was already saved, otherwise, why would I be serving in these ministries that shared the gospel with others? Looking back, I do not understand why I was so resistant to God's promptings. He was lovingly trying to show me that I was wrong and had been basing my salvation on works instead of trusting fully in Jesus. I do think that I was mainly afraid to admit to myself and others, particularly those in our church, that I did not know Jesus like I professed that I did.

There was a night in June 2005 when God seemed to speak to me and remind me of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. (where the rich man received all his pleasures in this life time and spent eternity in torment) and immediately the promptings departed. I have been terrified and in a depraved state since that night (it has been almost 2 years) It is as though my mind has become dull and not capable of functioning. (I keep asking myself if God gave me over to a reprobate mind because I would not listen and obey His call to salvation. Romans 1:28). My thoughts are constantly filled with fear of death and Hell and I have no zest for life. (Is this the scripture in Hebrews 10:27 being fulfilled in my life?) I'm in despair & therefore am not eating much at all, my hygiene is very poor; I neglect brushing teeth & showers, & am not at all motivated to do housework or work of any kind; I have lost all zest for life. I feel like a living corpse. I quit my job in mid 2005 because I could not concentrate on my work and had very bad performance. I can not seem to get my mind to turn off, so I have to take sleeping pills to sleep. Although I sleep, it is never a restful or refreshing sleep. I awake to the same awful nightmare each morning; fear that I am condemned.

I have shared with my family and church family about this, & they're all tired of hearing about this. I either have them tell me 1) that it is never too late (until you are dead) to be saved and that I just need to cry out to God to save me, or 2) if you are concerned you blasphemed the Holy Spirit then you haven't.

I myself used to believe that you had until the time of death to choose to accept Jesus, but after my experience and the research I have done on falling away or blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, I believe that a person can be alive but have missed their opportunity for salvation. I do struggle with the second comment. I am truly concerned that I have blasphemed the Holy Spirit but it offers me little comfort to think that my concern means that I have not committed it. If I hadn't committed it, why do I feel so dead inside and rejected by God?

I know that I need Jesus as my Savior. The problem is, I know that I can't manufacture belief & faith on my own, no matter how much I read the bible, pray, or go to church. God draws us to Himself and the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

I don't know what to do. Am I really damned or is this a trick from the devil to make me think I am damned and give up hope? If I choose to remain in this hopeless state and believe that I am damned, then maybe that is what the devil wants and I may end up truly missing my opportunity for salvation because I have chosen to give up. If I am not damned and there is still an opportunity for

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salvation, why do I feel like God has given me up?

Please give me a straight and honest opinion; pray for the Spirit's leading prior to answering - please. Thank you.

I usually start answers to longer, seemingly complex questions by breaking down the main points in them and organizing the thoughts. I will likely do this to some degree as we go deeper into teaching about some of the points you made. However, I believe in my heart it is vital that I start by talking about what you said near the end of your story; because I must say, you are in a very dangerous place right now, and it is one I want to help you with right up front. You may think I'm concerned about your mental state of depression or the like but I will not insult you with typical platitudes. No, what makes your place dangerous is that you are so close to the truth, yet in a place where your life could break in either direction. You are worried that what is going on might be a trick of Satan to get you to give up hope. This thought has plagued you seemingly since the beginning of all this. The problem that really concerns me is that if you have not already been confronted with it, I am almost certain you will be confronted with a minister, counselor, Christian friend or the like, who is going to take that thought and run with it. They are going to make a very convincing argument that yes, it is all the work of Satan in your life in order to destroy the "joy" God wants you to have. Let me just warn you, if you believe this theology it will be the biggest mistake of your life!

At the end of your story you said, "I don't know what to do." This is true and untrue! There is no doubt you believe you don't know what to do but at the same time, you are doing exactly what you should be doing! You are continuing to reach out in search of the answer! This makes the answer to your last question of, "If I am not damned and there is still an opportunity for salvation, why do I feel like God has given me up?" the easiest one. Your story makes it fairly obvious you would not have reached out quite like you have if God had not taken you to the state you currently find yourself in. Contrary to a large part of what Christian theology teaches these days, God is working for our good, but that certainly does not mean He's worried about us having a bad day. It doesn't mean everything that seems negative in our life is some dirty trick of the devil trying to harm the perfect life God wants or intends Christians to have. God is operating in a capacity we can only begin to understand by seeing parenthood in it's proper light. Sure, we want our children to be happy but any good parent knows we do not refrain from teaching our children long-term life lessons just to maintain a current and temporary good feeling. We do not say to our kids, no you don't have to go to school anymore because you would have a lot more fun playing. You don't refrain from teaching your children not to do such things as steal, even though taking what they want may make them very happy, because in the end, this behavior will destroy their lives! (Matt. 7:9-11)

God wants to teach you what He knows you need to learn in order to grow in your walk with Him, and what Paul is teaching us in I Corinthians 10:13 is that God is not a God Who will put more on us than we can bear. Thus, I know you feel hopeless, but you would not be going through this trial if you did not contain the strength to make it through to what it is you can gain from it. Make no mistake about it, it is up to you whether you are going to make it through this; ultimately choose to give up on God; or turn to whatever belief makes you feel good again. However, you should know, God is doing everything He can, without violating your free will, to bring you to an understanding and place that you are ready to obtain in your walk with Him! It is clear you did not properly respond to Him the first time He tried to move you. You simply tried, for one reason or another, to push the feelings away. In fact, you were relieved when they seemed to subside. When they returned, you were more disturbed than you had been at the first. You even seemed to consider what you should do about it a bit more than before, but you still did not respond with the determination to find the answer you should have. Thus, if you were not going to get serious about finding the answer by feeling what you had been feeling, God had no choice but to change the feeling altogether. Now that you no longer have the feelings at all, you find that fact more disturbing than anything you've experienced yet. You are now concerned, like you never were before, that you need to deal with what those feelings were about; and that is what you are doing!

Now, at the risk of sounding too much like those already around you, I must say no one whom God has truly given up on feels like God has given them up. However, that is not where our knowledge on the subject should end. We should understand, the only way for God to give up on someone is for them to desire He give up on them. The blaspheming of The Holy Ghost and being turned over to a reprobate mind is something we will get to a little later, but there are some things we need to cover first in order to make the subject more understandable. The first thing we need to deal with is what I have been pointing to already. You need to solidify your understanding that these feelings are from God! You see, if you did not desire what God is trying to accomplish in your life, God would have left you alone in the first place. That might be hard to accept right now, but you are not the only one who has gone through this. Throughout time there have been many people who struggled like a fish on some kind of a hook when God attempted to lead them closer to Him, and many times their resistance to His work caused

God to take drastic steps in their life. At the same time, there is an even greater number of individuals who can honestly say they've never experienced such a thing but it is important to note very, very few of these can say this due to the fact they simply never resisted God's moving in their lives when it came. If this was the reason, we would be surrounded by more Elijahs, Isaiahs, Jeremiahs, Daniels, and the like than we would know what to do with! Getting through the barriers our sinful flesh and this life puts on us in order to know more of God is not an easy task or one to be taken lightly, in spite of the fact many churches desire to teach otherwise. (Gen. 32:23-30, Ex. 19:10-25, Dan. 10)

The real truth is, many people have never even gotten this far because they are satisfied with their religious experience and find no reason to truly seek or desire God deeper. You are being given what is an opportunity to go deeper because your spirit is crying out and God is responding. You are now miserable because your spirit has not received what it is crying out for, and you have not attempted to cover this fact by satisfying the flesh. The first thing is not so good, but it can be reversed. The second thing is fantastic, and it is the key to not missing your opportunity! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10:31 but praise be to God, that is exactly where you are! My greatest advice to you is don't give into your fears about the things of this world, the people in it, or the religion you may have been taught to follow or you will end up missing out on what God is trying to teach you! The fact this could be what happens to you is why The Holy Ghost brought the parable of the rich man and the poor man to your mind so pointedly. Things such as your religion may seem comfortable but truly knowing God is the only thing that is going to satisfy the longing in your soul!

Continuing with the subject of just how wrong it is to believe God has given up on you, let's look specifically at that question you ask near the end of your story. "Am I really damned or is this a trick from the devil to make me think I am damned and give up hope?" This is actually two questions more than it is a multiple choice. However, putting this question alongside what you had spoken of earlier in your story about thinking the entire prompting may just be Satan and your later thoughts of the possibility it was from God, it would again seem clear you have struggled a lot with where the responsibility lies in this coming upon you. It is true many people struggle with problems because they have allowed Satan into their lives and/or they are listening to him instead of resisting him as they should. (James 4:7-10) In the end, this leads many people to fall away from The Lord because they do not recognize Satan's lies, but this is part of the reason God tells us in His Word that His people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hosea 4:6) Many people just can't overcome their unbelief when Satan tells them God could never love them; they will never be good enough to serve God; and/or God doesn't have the power to do what He has promised. Satan has a whole bag of these lies, but in truth, they are literally as old as dirt and the fact they still work so often is just really sad.

What God tells us is that we are not justified by our goodness but by the blood of Christ! Thus, the only real question Satan is playing on is, do you believe God and His Word or not? You may be tempted to believe you are having this same old trouble with Satan, but what is really disturbing you is you already know better and have for some time! You even make two statements that prove the point. "He was lovingly trying to show me that I was wrong and had been basing my salvation on works instead of trusting fully in Jesus." This shows, at least at this point, you know the first round was God. Stop questioning that knowledge! Then you said, "The problem is, I know that I can't manufacture belief & faith on my own, no matter how much I read the bible, pray, or go to church. God draws us to Himself and the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment." As a mental knowledge, you show you understand the basic dynamic of how one grows in God. Thus, with that comes a ton of frustration because you know growth should be happening, you desire it to happen, but you can't figure out how to make it happen. Another fact is one we touched on earlier, now that you no longer feel the way you did, it terrifies you more than having the feelings. All this shows you know very good and well these feelings are from God and you need to completely let go of the flesh's hope that you don't have some hard spiritual work ahead of you, as well as things in your life you may need to let go of in order to draw closer to Him!

If it seems I'm being a little gruff with you, I am! However, I can afford to be in a way any good trainer is known to be from time to time. This is because you are not as crushed as you believe you are. What you show all through the situation is that you're basing your responses to the questions entering your mind by leaning on the truth you already know from the Word of God. The fact you understand you don't know it all has even prompted you to do some studying of God's Word into areas you might not have previously taken on personal responsibility to know for yourself. All this is excellent, and part of the reason God is working to make you stronger in Him by allowing you to go through this. (Prov. 3:5-6, I Pet. 1:5-9) You say, "The problem is, I know that I can't manufacture belief & faith on my own, no matter how much I read the bible, pray, or go to church." However, the Bible tells us, "So

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then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17 People who do not lean on the Word, but on earthly understanding do, in fact, give up on God or walk away into some feel good religious belief that gets it over with. People who lean on the Word of God and are struggling to hear God's voice, start coming up with ideas such as, maybe I've done something that has caused God to turn me over to a reprobate mind, or I've committed the one unforgivable sin! This is why you should not be so concerned about Satan's involvement in all this. He is certainly not the one bringing the promptings, because these promptings are working for your good! (Rom. 8:28)

At the same time, we again need to have more in-depth understanding than just the idea that has been thrown at you about, if you're worried, you shouldn't be worried. Without greater understanding this tends to take the responsibility for the negative feelings back to blaming the devil. This is not good, because the shorthand answer as to why God allows Satan to work on this earth is that Satan himself gets to serve as "the devil's advocate" in our lives! I don't know when this term first came into use, or how many people have come up with it not knowing others have already used it, but it is the best description of Satan we can use in talking about his work in the personal lives of individuals who are truly trying to follow God. Sure, Satan has bigger plans about overtaking God; this is why he was cast out of heaven. However, if one reads that account in Revelation chapter 12, you find Satan is referred to there as, "...the accuser of our brethren...which accused them before our God day and night." When people talk about someone being the devil's advocate, they are saying the person is arguing the other side of something (usually the negative side, at least as it is seen in the situation) or causing there to be an irritant in the situation others do not feel would be there if it were not for that person's actions or presence. This is what Satan does. In fact, far too many people believe Satan is more powerful than he is but Satan's real nature, as well as what he is best at, is shown right out of the gate in the book of Genesis when he comes to Eve. He had no power to cause Eve to sin by taking the fruit. In truth, he never really even lies to her. However, what he does for Eve is lead her to the best arguments one could make as to how God might have had selfish or malicious intents when He told them not to take of the fruit. Eve chose to go with that possible interpretation of the situation, mostly because she was enamored with the potential plus side that she thought breaking the rule would bring to her life and the life of her family. She was wrong!

Yes, Satan would like to be involved in what you are feeling, because he would like to see all those serving God turned away from Him or, at the very least, wading in the kiddy pool of religion their entire lives. (Heb. 5:12-14) There is nothing that dampens Satan's power on this earth more than individuals who serve God in truth! Ironically, in your situation, Satan is the one trying to get you to think "the devil" is behind the promptings you've been having! This emphasizes the negative aspects of what your feeling and gives you the excuse you need to take the path that simply gets rid of them. Satan will continue enforcing the negative feeling you have in the situation and encourage the growth of those negative thoughts in the hope they will ultimately cause you to cease your quest for the truth, which I warn again, can easily include giving in to some false belief that covers your feeling with a feel good religious experience! You see, not only do many people give Satan too much credit - and by doing so give him a lot of power in their lives and thus, the world - they misunderstand the powers at work. When people think of spiritual things and the powers at work, they believe there is God, of course, and they believe there is "the devil." (That is to say a pure negative force of some sort which many people have little understanding of) What we so very often forget or never understand is there is a third very powerful force involved, and that is the will of man; both our individual will as well as what that culminates into collectively!

God gave you a free will and He has taken actions such as the flood of Noah's day and the confounding of languages at the Tower of Babel in order to protect that free will, not just against "the devil" but from other people! If God had not protected your and my free will at the Tower of Babel, we would not be having this conversation, nor would anyone. There would be a universal religion telling us all what to think and believe and when God attempted to intervene and teach us personally - as He is doing in your life right now - we would have no place to turn except that universal religion. The answers we would get from it, I can only imagine would be very similar to those you have experienced which are a form of learned platitudes that when they failed to appease, lead ultimately to the, "Go away you're bothering us!" attitude. One thing I would encourage you to keep forefront in your mind is the truth that the reason you get that response from your friends and family is simple - they don't know the answer! The reason this is not easily seen by you is because this action plays on your humility; humility many who claim to be Christians don't actually have! You think, just because they aren't going through what you're going through, they have it altogether in a way you don't. You view the situation kind of like a child who just can't seem to grasp a concept your seemingly wiser friends have. Thus, they have, or you at least fear they will, outgrow you to the point of being tired of you tagging along, asking questions they consider redundant and/or dumb. In reality, the truth of the situation is one of two things. First, they, for one reason or another, have never experienced the promptings you are so dire to figure out and because of this they do not have much of a clue what you are going through. The

second possibility is they have already had the promptings which are keeping you up at night and because they too could not figure it out, or did not want to make the sacrifices necessary to accomplish the goal, they simply pushed them aside and have went on with their lives. Believe me this second one has caused countless proclaiming Christians to feel a false sense of victory and boldly make the deceleration, "I have over come!"

Now that is really what you should not do because it is putting one's foot on the path to what causes blaspheming or being turned over to a reprobate mind. The fact you refuse to simply ignore, push aside, and/or cover over these promptings with some platitude about how God just wants us all to be free and happy is what has led you to fear the blasphemy and reprobate mind truths! Now, understand, I'm not trying to put anyone down or elevate anyone's ego here in any way, for the Bible tells us the servant of The Lord is to instruct those who oppose themselves in meekness, and that is a very important point! (II Tim. 2:24-25) That being said, let me give some Biblical insight before we move on, which if understood and taught, would change what we call church! Going to church is fine but the Bible never tells us to go to church. What we are instructed to do is not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. The "ourselves" who are to assemble are those of like precious faith, because iron sharpeneth iron! (Heb. 10:25, II Pet. 1:1, Prov. 27:17) This does not mean the church and church services can't be an evangelistic thing, but people in the church should realize they should do the one and not leave the other undone! If those around you are, in fact, of like precious faith, then maybe on the other side of this you will be able to greatly help them. It is possible they may be on different paths of learning and understanding right now. This is why they are not to be blamed for not knowing the answer. That being said, as true believers, our response to another true believer should never be, "We're tired of you." If someone is calling themselves a Christian, but refusing to follow or seek The Lord, choosing instead to continue in a life of sin, we should not continue keeping company with them just because they claim to be a Christian. (I Cor. 5:11) However, our response to a fellow believer who is struggling and still seeking God should be, "We will seek The Lord with you, and continue in that seeking until the answer comes." Now that's having a church!

Now that we've confirmed there are many things you are doing right in the situation, even if you do not understand it as yet, this is where we can start looking at the true flaws in what you think you understand. You said you grew up in a Christian home, and that, together with another fact about your story, may help explain why no one around you can really help. I noticed that not once in your writing did you truly refer to the feelings you've been having by their Biblical term. You did use the word once when talking about what God does in a person's life. You stated, "...the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment." However, in a related issue to the doubts in your mind about whether these feelings are from the devil or God, your training is making it difficult for you to come out and call the promptings you have experienced, "conviction." Obviously, if they were from Satan they would not be called this, but it may also be that you do not think these promptings should be called conviction because to you conviction is something you only feel for things you have specifically chosen to do which are wrong. I can't over stress how important to your situation that last statement is. Yes, you need to listen to what you already know and be careful not to miss the application of righteousness to your situation. However, it is a common thought pattern among Christians that righteousness is something we have, and/or righteous is something we are, unless of course we happen to "sin." Now, I don't know a single minister or person who would define it exactly that way but the belief can be seen as underlying when listening to what people say and teach, nonetheless!

Because of this theology, Christians tend to think of sin only in one respect, and that's as something we intentionally do. It is definitely true that God tells us point-blank in James 4:17 "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." However, knowing to do good is the real point of conviction! It is a very good thing that when we do something we already know is wrong, The Holy Ghost does not leave us but is there to convict our hearts about it. However, being good is not a fable. We can go through a day, a week, a month, etc., without committing an act we know is not right before God. In fact, we need to strive to live this way, because it is in these times that the opportunity opens for God to step in and bring the knowledge of righteousness into another area of our lives. We feel conviction because all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and there are many things that need vast improvement in all of us! (Isa. 64:6) By convicting us of actions we take or thought patterns we have in our lives, God is revealing the knowledge of sin to us. We then know to do good in a way we did not know before. This is how true believers grow to be truly Christ like which is what the word, "Christian" means and why it was applied to the disciples as they went out to take the Gospel into all parts of the world! (Acts 11:25-26) Thus, instead of hoping we never feel conviction because we don't like the idea God is telling us we have done something wrong, we should pray for conviction so we can come to understand the ways we are still not correct in our thinking and actions. This is how we grow in righteousness and holiness!

The fact most churches do not teach conviction as a good thing we should continually seek, comes about because they see it as only the sign we have gone off the

path in some way. (To get a really good sense of what this thinking looks like in full bloom, read through the Book of Job.) If this was the case, we would only need conviction when we intentionally do something we know is wrong. However, if this was true, then one should ask, how are we suppose to grow? Another big reason churches do not like to teach conviction the right way is because it is simply something they do not like to feel. This means teaching it wrong is very often not a mistake but very much so a choice to teach something wrong because it has "benefits" to the immediate circumstances. Teaching conviction correctly, in more ways than we have space to list here, gets in the way of wrong church doctrines that have been accepted and followed, many of them for centuries! Admitting your church doctrine may be wrong is a very difficult thing to do and something the religious leaders of Israel in the days Jesus walked this earth simply refused to do to the point they were the ones who first came to the conclusion Jesus had to be disposed of! This kind of misstep has caused a great deal of false teaching to develop in the church and remain there. It has also caused the loss of great truth that could and would be helpful to individuals like you!

All this is why it can be such an easy answer for most church-going people to simply tell you all this is from "the devil." Without conviction ever being looked at as a positive, they believe Satan is the only one who could make you feel so wrong; the only source of such horrible struggle. People like to say things such as, "I don't have to worry about my actions, because I'm covered by the blood!" or "I'm a child of The King!" or my favorite, "I'm living in the freedom of The Spirit!" Even if the thought is not purely the idea of, I can do whatever I want because God will or already has forgiven me; the thought is, we should not have to worry so much about even our everyday righteousness because no one is perfect. It's a way of believing you've found a loophole because there is the truth God will have to forgive us for not being perfect in order to accept us in any case. Now, I don't believe this is a direct false thought in your mind or at least one you take to heart yet, but let's keep it that way! In truth, it is a good thing to hear you are fearful of Hebrews 10:23, because we all should be. However, I assume you fear this verse for the same reason many people have in the past. Many Christians who lived long before the prevalence of the, "God is working to make us feel good, instead of for our good," attitude, believed this verse was telling us something like, if we are truly saved and we choose to sin, we are condemned forever! There have been whole denominations that have enshrined that idea into their doctrine. However, that's not what it means at all and the simple fact God did not give up on the likes of Cain, but instead came to him asking him why his countenance had fallen, and again even after Cain had killed his brother Abel, shows us this is not the nature of God! The truth of the matter is that this verse in Hebrews comes as Paul is teaching much of what we have just covered.

I like to say the Book of Romans is Paul's greatest expounding of the Gospel. At the same time, Hebrews is a sister book, if you will; it is Paul's greatest expounding of the Gospel - to the Jews! In Romans, Paul gets right down to the root of sin; what it is; how people should think about it; and what God has done to save us from it. This is valuable information about the dynamics of what God wants from us all and why our fleshly excuses to continue in sin, such as, "I'm living in the freedom of the Spirit!" should actually be, "Because I understand I live directly before God, I must now be more mindful than I ever have been in striving to make my fleshly actions line up with what I know to be righteous!" This thought pattern had been taught to the Jewish people through the Law. In fact, the Law was a killer in that it was specifically designed to crush you with the understanding you were never going to defeat sin! Your actions could never be good enough to be worthy. Nor could you truly make payment for the sin you had already done. (Gal. 2:16, Heb. 10:1-4) The Law made it hard for Israel to turn to a - let it all go because no one is perfect attitude, and a main reason for this is because they were required to continually bring a sacrifice for their sins. This was done not just for the times you felt you needed to offer a sin offering for something specific you had done but year by year in general as well. When this was taken to heart, it brought the Jewish mind to a humility unlike no other and caused them to long for a Messiah Who could show them what real salvation looked like. By packaging the truth of - you're never going to be good enough on your own, with the truth - God is sending you a Saviour, God seriously injured Satan's guilt-trip trick. Because the Jews, and any non-Jew who would listen to the message, knew we all awaited a Saviour we will have to lean on for our forgiveness in the end of it all, Satan was left with a more limited and honest angle of attack. Satan has to temp man to desire the pleasures of this world instead of God. This takes us again to the "feel good" idea, because what God was sending The Messiah to set us free from was not the unpleasant things that come upon us in this life, nor from what the Law teaches us, but from the fact we will all stand before God for judgment of our eternal soul, and there is none righteous, no not one! (Rom. 3:9-12)

It is from this perspective Paul lays out Hebrews and the fact The Holy Ghost can bring us to this understanding, even without the sacrificing of animals, is why it was/is a vastly important book to all true believers. Even as non-Jews, we can put ourselves in the shoes of being

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Jewish and see what Paul is explaining (This is why the Hebrew Bible, which Christians often call the Old Testament, is so important to study and understand). What he is telling us in chapter 10 must be understood from a Jewish perspective, and again, a Jewish perspective - not to put to fine a point on it - is that when we sin, we take certain sacrifices to the temple. It is this repetitive action of continually sacrificing for the sins we do that is crushing. Now, we should understand it is highly probable the sacrificing was still going on at the time Paul wrote these words. However, there is a related fact people teaching the Bible often don't know because of more false teaching that took hold in our churches. This fact is that the temple being destroyed a little while after the coming of Jesus was not the first time the Jews were without a temple. I won't take space here to get deep into this but the point is - it is a false teaching to say the temple was destroyed shortly after Christ's first appearing on this earth because the sacrifices were no longer needed or were intended to stop. This teaching is based on the idea that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross brought the usefulness of the sacrificing to an end. However, this is to believe the sacrifices and temple service were, in fact, doing something more than representing how sin is destroyed in the first place. It is to believe, before the coming of Jesus, sacrificing was necessary to do the same work Jesus did on the cross; and one would be in deep trouble in the same way someone who has not received Jesus and asked forgiveness of their sin is now if they had failed to do so!

If you stop and think about it, this is practically blasphemy of Christ. Sure, people do not believe the sacrifices did everything Jesus accomplished, but you can't wiggle out from the fact you are teaching that taking the lives of animals can, on a temporary basis, take the place of God giving His life for our sin! All we have to do to see this teaching as incorrect is look at some facts. First, the temple being destroyed after Christ's appearing was not the first time the Jews were without a temple. It is clear by studying the Hebrew Bible that many times the temple was not properly maintained and not only fell into disrepair but became unused, or unusable in many ways, such as it did at the time of Eli's sons. (I Sam. 2:12-25) Then there are times such as Daniel's, when not only was he unable to follow the law completely because he was a captive in Babylon and could not go to Jerusalem's temple, but the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. The temple certainly was not destroyed on this occasion because the sacrifices were suppose to cease for some reason. The temple was allowed to be destroyed because of Israel's sins. In spite of all that truth somehow Daniel served God in a tremendous way during this time. Now, the temple would eventually be rebuilt, but even later as that temple stood during the Greek era, the Greeks would set up the abomination which made the temple desolate, or unusable, for a time. The re-cleansing of the temple following this incident and the miracle of the temple lamp's oil at that time is why Jews celebrate Hanukkah to this day. In fact, Jesus directly refers to this incident, which was prophesied in the Book of Daniel, as being very much a foreshadowing of the truth the temple would be destroyed again. Not just in that it would be torn down but something would stand in its place that would make the rebuilding of the temple unworkable. (Dan. 11:31-32) This is certainly where we are today but make no mistake about it, if God doesn't change the circumstances before Christ's second appearing, Jesus will rebuild the temple when He returns. The battle we call the Battle of Armageddon, which is described as taking place at Christ's return, is about His crossing from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on that day will be very different than it was the first time! (Zech. 14)

Now, I have gotten a bit off track from our main subject but my point is, in all occasions the Jews have not believed anyone who died during a time of being unable to take a sacrifice to the temple was doomed to hell. Some who held a similar belief to the one that causes Christians to think sacrifices were intended to cease believe that for the true follower of God, those sins will be dealt with when the temple was/is once again established and the sacrifices resumed. However, what Paul is trying to remind the religious minded is that the sacrifices were never what saved them or going to save them in anyway. Even the prophet Micah refers to this fact long before Solomon's temple was destroyed! "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Micah 6:6-8 The proper way to look at it is not that the sacrifices did anything to save people from their sin before Christ came and on this side of His coming we no longer need them. The proper perspective is to understand, sacrificing has always been and always will be just a learning experience which represents the truth that we need a Saviour!

This is directly related to what you are feeling and it is exactly what Abraham understood long before there was a law or a temple. While taking his son Isaac to that same mount where the temple would eventually stand, to sacrifice his son in obedience to God's instructions, his son Isaac says to him, I see wood, fire, and all the elements of offering a sacrifice to God, but where is the sacrifice? Some believe Abraham simply did not want to tell his son, "You are." However, that is not really the

point in what Abraham said. He said, "...My son, God will provide Himself a lamb..." Genesis 22:8 Abraham understood the fruit of his body, sacrificed to God, was not going to cover the sin of his soul! No matter what he did, it would not be good enough to cover his sin. What he, his son, and all of us who desire God need, was/is to obey God's voice in all things and wait for God to provide a perfect sacrifice for us. This can only be done by God providing Himself as The Lamb. The good news, or Gospel message we are tasked with taking to the world is the fact this is exactly what God did by sending Jesus to die on the cross!

Thus, what Paul is talking about in Hebrews is not the idea the temple was no longer standing and they could not or should not take a sacrifice to the temple anymore. He was not talking about or promoting the idea the sacrifices somehow swept sin under the rug until Jesus could come and deal with them. (Matt. 5:17-18) Thus, he was also not telling us once we sin willingly we are doomed to an eternity in hell because there is no more sacrifices to be made. What Paul was talking about is a fact that directly relates to what Jesus said in John 2:19 when He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." What Jesus meant was that in going through the three day and three night process of being tried, crucified, buried, and raising from the dead, He would change forever what the temple and the things they did there meant. No longer would you sacrifice saying God "will" provide Himself a Lamb but in recognition to the fact God Himself "has" provided a Lamb. The temple and its sacrifices were ended not long after Jesus' coming, for the same reason the temple had been destroyed before. Israel, as a nation, was not hearing and obeying the voice of God! (Lev. 26, II Chron. 6:36-39) It was not that the sacrifices should end because Jesus had replaced them but that as they did them they should have been done in recognition of Jesus' work!

Paul was attempting to get the Jews to understand this when he wrote the words of Hebrews and those who would come to the understanding that Jesus was The Messiah they had all been waiting for needed to grasp the facts we just covered. When they took a sacrifice to the temple, they could no longer sacrifice in any kind of callous or caviler way saying, "There I did my duty, and if I sin I'll do it again." Those who despised Moses' law were to die without mercy but that being true, how much more should the punishment be for the one who has this attitude knowing Who they are sacrificing again and again? This is not as with blasphemy or reprobate mind, describing an unforgivable sin, or a reason for God to give up on you. If for no other reason, we know this is true because when talking about the blasphemy issue, Jesus said it was the only sin God would refuse to forgive us of. Paul was telling us to turn completely from the idea that we can afford to continue in sin because Jesus' blood covers all sin, by explaining the dynamics of salvation which is, we have to care about that blood that was shed for us or we will not be one of the chosen few! We need to understand that we cannot stumble or trick our way into heaven. In spite of what many churches teach, just like sacrificing animals, there is no prayer that grants us a magical ticket of salvation!

Too many people believe they are a Christian, and that puts them on the other side of a line they must be careful not to cross. Thus, a formulation has been developed by the "church" to help us not cross that line and make it into heaven. We attempt to serve God like a bunch of pagans where we simply try to know how to appease our god so he will not send us away, and when we do the right things according to that formula we have been taught, we expect to receive blessings in return, just as pagans believed their crops would do good or they would see rain! This theology is why people are going to have trouble finding or having an answer to your problem. Just as with many Jews and sacrificing, so too the church looks at the work of The Holy Ghost today. There are those who attempt to wiggle out of the truth the Law and The Holy Ghost shows us all, and this is where I must ask you to remember that you were the one who asked me, "Please give me a straight and honest opinion..." The truth we want to wiggle out of is the truth that none of us are saved!

Everyone wants to believe they are something special. Especially inside a religious context, we want to believe we are in a realm of special favor with God in some way, shape, or form. However, the Bible tells us a very straight forward truth, "For there is no respect of persons with God." Romans 2:11 Every human who has ever lived or will ever live is equal in God's eyes. The Lord "...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." II Peter 3:9 God is waiting on every human to repent, or in other words: turn from the sin in their lives, desiring Him and the ways He created us to live instead of the ways of this sin-filled world. The problem with this is just what you talked about in your question, "I myself used to believe that you had until the time of death to choose to accept Jesus, but after my experience and the research I have done on falling away or blasphemy of The Holy Spirit, I believe that a person can be alive but have missed their opportunity for salvation." Now, there is a lot of information to cover before we are done with what you said there but let's just look at the first part. You, at the very least, used to believe that a person had until the time of death to choose to accept Jesus. It would be a good

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thing if you are serious about not believing this anymore, because to be a better Christian who is more in line with what the Bible tells us, we need to reverse this. Instead, one should believe a person has until the time of death to choose to reject God and thus, His saving plan for their life!

Why is this a better theology? Because it covers the truth and perspective we should have in a better way! It sounds more evangelistic to say it the first way and that's why we like it. However, after coming to the "saving knowledge" of Jesus Christ, instead of living our lives believing we are something special which other people are not, we should live in humility being thankful we responded to God in accepting the key to existence which not everyone has accepted in their lives in spite of the fact it is right in front of us all! To make a funny sounding but true statement, everyone who exists, exists. Why we exist is the true universal question and the answer is to commune with God. Without this purpose there is no point in our existence! Thus, everyone who has ever walked, and ever will walk this planet, has had, and will have, the ability to commune with God. The only real question is, have they or will they? Christians are taught when a person says a sinner's prayer or the like, they are then "saved" but from what? Christians still have trials and tribulations. A large part of what we are talking about here is the fact: becoming a Christian does not make us perfect. Then there is the big question Nicodemus was trying to deal with that night he came to Jesus. Why do believers in God still suffer death? (John 3:1-13) The struggle to pound this square peg in the round hole is what causes many false thoughts about how to live for God, and it's a good chunk of what you're struggling with. You have been trying to quantify the idea you are "saved," with what The Spirit seems to be telling you which is that you're not and you don't know Jesus like you should! The truth I have just explained to you should unravel most all the mystery. You're right, you're not saved, and you don't know Jesus like you should! However, this is not due to the fact you have failed to perform the formula right in order to be saved. It is because none of us are saved as yet and none of us know Jesus like we should. Maybe a better way to say that second part is to say, like we could and ultimately will be able to! This is why Jesus wanted to leave this earth. He wanted to go and prepare a place for us that where He is we may be also - for eternity. A place where sin, sickness, and death will no longer be a part of our lives. He also wanted to leave so The Holy Ghost could come and do the work that could bring us closer to God in a way Jesus' earthly, be in one spot at a time, presence ever could! (John 16:7)

Now, at this point in the conversation you may not be as excited as I am, but that is because you need more explanation to get you over the shock of finding out you are not saved, in spite of the fact this is what you have been worried about! Thus, what you really need is more information about why this is alright and nothing to fear. So, to continue on the point of evidence that we are not saved as yet, a good example is the simple fact we still get sick and it is not always God's will we be completely well. I know that may sound like crazy stuff compared to what most churches teach but Paul tells us he had this exact problem. In II Corinthians he tells us he had a physical ailment and had asked God three times to heal him of it, but God would not. Because of this, Paul came to accept the fact this ailment served a purpose in his life and he would not continue to ask again and again to be set free from it. Why was Paul able to accept such a fact with confidence? Because he knew this life is temporary and we can afford loss when it comes to the things in this world in order to be more of what God wants us to be. Why? Because we do not live for this world, and when he was truly saved, Paul's born-again body would not have this ailment. Nor would it need it, because he would also be set free from the circumstances and sin which for whatever reason made it better for him to have it in the here and now!

It is a true fact we can be healed by the power of God of everything that has ever and will ever ail us, but we should stop to consider how Jesus never asked anyone in the multitudes if they were saved or not. He simply passed through touching and healing them. What He did very often mention in the stories we read about specific encounters with individuals, is faith. Why? Because faith is not blind belief, it is the Biblical word that should replace the idea of being "saved" in the here and now. We should say, I'm living by faith, because faith is a relationship with God! Without it, it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) This is why in another place we are told the key to being saved is not some formula - such as a sinner's prayer - but having faith. How does an individual receive salvation from this world and all its sin? By walking this life in faith! "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9 What was/is being explained in Hebrews chapter 10 is that as a Jew you may still be thinking about the words of Abraham and even understand the sacrifices don't really do anything more than remind us of our need for a Saviour. However, once a person comes to the knowledge that God has, in fact, provided Himself a Lamb, you can no longer go on with the idea that someday the ultimate sacrifice for my sins will be accomplished. Instead, there is the truth that when we sin, whether we have to take a sacrifice or not, we know Who we have killed. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:5-6

Jesus is The One we violate when we do wrong in our lives. Unlike Abraham, we now know the exact suffering He went through to ultimately heal us. We know His burden in going to the cross is something our sin was a part of and if that does not cause us to do what sacrificing animals should have caused us to do, which is refrain from sin to the best of our ability and seek to continually drive it from our lives, then there is nothing more to wait for. There is no other sacrifice or saving grace for us to look forward to. Even if you sin and take a sacrifice to the temple for it, you no longer stand there watching the blood pour from the veins of that animal and think, God has something more effective to offer for my sin. Now you watch, knowing that blood represents what poured from Jesus' veins as He died for you and me on that cross! The death of an animal may not have been compelling enough to drive you from a life of sin but if the truth God Himself shedding His blood for you is not, there is no hope for you and the reasons are quite obvious!

The dynamics of salvation go like this. God's unwillingness to see any human perish caused Him to create us in innocence in the first place. Adam and Eve truly had no sin because they did not even have the knowledge of right and wrong in them. Once they took on that knowledge by taking of the fruit God had told them not to take, they understood many things, which they failed to live up to, and that very day they did something worthy of death. This did not send God away from Adam and Eve but it did cause Adam and Eve to think the best course of action was to hide from God! Let us never forget it was God Who came to them just as He always had, in spite of the fact He already knew what they had done. When He did not find them acting and coming to Him as they had always been, God called out to them. When Adam finally responded, God asked him to think about why he had hid. Just as in your case, Adam did not fully appreciate what he already knew, for what he truly said is that he hid because he was not a perfect person. Thus, he was afraid to stand before a perfect God! God then asks Adam to think about why he suddenly knew all this and Adam had to finally admit to himself they had done the one thing God had told them not to. This should have brought home the real reason God had told them not to take the fruit in the first place. In any case, the fact God knew there would be those who would not in innocence be willing to serve and follow His leading from the very start; the fact He knew we would take the hard road instead of the easy one is why Jesus is referred to as The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world! (Rev. 13:8) God has been prepared since the beginning, not to simply throw us away the minute we fail, but to meet us wherever we may roam and bring us into the relationship with Him, He created us to have!

You see, God presents each human with a gift. With the exception of blasphemy or reprobate mind, that gift is offered no matter how "good" or "bad" a person we are or have been. This means, we will be ultimately saved, not by anything we could do ourselves (including the saying of a specific or general prayer of acceptance), but first and foremost by grace. The gift He offers us by grace is faith or in other words - a relationship with Him! We simply could not obtain this relationship if He was not offering it to us to begin with. What this means is every human is born knowing the God Who created them and God's hand has been, and will continue to be, extended to us our entire lives! (Rom. 12:1-3) This is why I say it is a better theology to say, we have until death to reject God. Death is the only way we can lose God's presence in our existence and even then it will only happen because we never bothered to acknowledge and take advantage of the faith He has been offering us all along or we intentionally reject it. Thus, in the here and now there are those who have never given the out-reached hand of God a second thought and many never will. These will walk out of this life where God's presence was with them, whether they liked it or not, and into an eternity where any chance to ever get God's presence back will never exist again. (that like it or not part is important to the discussion about blasphemy and reprobate minds so remember it!) Then there are those who at one point or another (if not at multiple points in their lives) have lived for God but due to the things of this world they have intentionally or unintentionally walked away from their relationship with God. If they do not correct this mistake, these too will walk out into eternity having rejected God's gift of faith in spite of the fact they did accept it at certain points during their life here. Then there is a fact many who are taught the Christian philosophy of salvation find very hard to understand, but because none of us are perfect and God has always been with us it can simply be true. There are those who have never intentionally rejected or ignored the hand of God reaching to them. What this means is something that should most easily be seen by those in the church but sadly gets rejected out of hand instead. In the past, as well as walking among us right now, there are those individuals who have lived for God from their mother's womb! (Ps. 22:9-10, Isa. 49:1, Jer. 1:5, Luke 1:13-15) Now, before you reject that, really think about it and you may realize you are, in fact, one of those people!

Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by Philip E. Busby.

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