

My Testimony

Gary Westgerdes



At the age of seven I first heard John 3:16 a few days or weeks after being taught about heaven and hell in my Catholic catechism class. Like a child I took the verse to heart and really believed Jesus died for me that I might receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. The moment I believed, God's assurance of my salvation and the joy of the Holy Spirit filled my heart; I wanted to be the nicest little boy I could possibly be. **Not sure how long, maybe several months, my parents were having our home dedicated to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,** a church leader or Priest asked me why I was so happy I told him "because I'm going to heaven when I die" he just chuckled and laughed and said "Oh No! You can never know for sure if you're going to heaven or not until after you're dead, because you can never know for sure if you've been good enough or not." I was in shock! After his visit, I remember looking at my five brothers and sister running around the house screaming and Mom scolding and thinking "If you have to be good enough to get to heaven no one in this family is going to make it!"

However, my religious upbringing taught that eternal life is something that you must work towards through the church, with good deeds, the sacraments and devotions. **I always hoped the church was wrong and God's word was true, but I had nowhere to turn,** I was a good kid growing up but after high school, and then during my tour of duty in the Navy, I began conforming to the world's pattern. **After three years, I was moving up. I was having a good time and my daily jogging had me in excellent health.** (I had received a few witnesses about Jesus, and took them to heart, but I didn't really do anything about them, I felt my life was altogether.) I remember telling God jogging is what I wanted to do with my life. That very week I was given a desk job and began having pain in my leg. The pain continued and increased and three weeks later I found myself hospitalized with a blood clot in my lungs which had passed from my leg and through my heart. **With my life at age twenty-three coming so close to death I began to reconsider my life and its direction.** After recovering from the clot and being placed on limited duty, I began to think about my sin and my accountability towards God. I started going over to the library to read God's word and God began to work on my heart. A friend asked if I was worried about my leg, and I said, "No, because I knew God could work things out for the best." He asked if I was a Christian, and I said "I did not know," he then

invited me to his church. I went and after the service I went forward to pray and seek God. Afterwards my friend encouraged me to read the Bible. That week as I was reading in First John this verse hit me hard, **"HE THAT COMMITTEH SIN IS OF THE DEVIL ..." (1 JOHN 3:8).** I had always thought I was a pretty good person, but suddenly I knew I deserved and was headed for hell. I was shattered. God placed His finger on my sin and I could not deny it. **I went back to the library to read 1 John again the next two days, with the same results.** I knew my life wasn't worth living if I was just going to die and end up in hell. I cried out to God about my struggle, but did not communicate this to my friend. That following Saturday my friend helped me pick out some Christian books. One of the books I read shared the simple gospel message that I had always hoped was true back when I was seven.

(CLAP YOUR HANDS! A Young Catholic Encounters Christ)

There is nothing of myself that I can offer to God for my sins. My sins deserve the eternal punishment of a Holy God. But God's love reached out to me through Jesus Christ. Throughout the week I had acknowledged my sinfulness to God, I then read, **"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)** and realized that eternal life is given as a gift to all who believe in Jesus. It was then that God's mercy, grace and peace flooded my soul with understanding and forgiveness. I knew that what I was told at age seven by the Priest or Church leader was false. My joy returned as my eyes were opened to the truth of God's Word that salvation was through faith in Jesus and His atoning sacrifice on the cross. **I had experienced Emmanuel "God with us."** Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14. **Praise God: " Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).**

Larry Tomczak Sharing The Gospel With His Father

"These things I am writing to you that you may know that you have eternal life - you who believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13, Conf. Version). "Let me see that." Dad reached for the Bible. He focused on the verse I had underlined in red. "Hey! You're right! It does say that!" "Let me ask you another question," I began. "Dad, suppose that you were to die tonight and stand before God, and He were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' what would you reply?" Dad mused over the question for a few moments and then said, "Well, I've tried to be a good Catholic...lead a decent life and obey the Ten Commandments. I've never intentionally missed Mass. I don't think I've been too bad." "Anything else?" "I've been an usher for a number of years and helped out in a lot of parish projects. I've always given my Sunday offerings, too!" "So you'd say to God: 'I've been a good Catholic, led a decent life, obeyed the Commandments, attended Mass, served as an usher, helped out in the parish, and faithfully given a weekly offering, right?" "Right." "Dad, I've got some good news for you! Heaven is not

something a person earns, or deserves, or works for. According to the Bible, heaven – eternal life – is an absolutely free gift." "A free gift?" "Yep, the Bible says that eternal life is a **free** gift, unearned, unworked for, and undeserved. Free!" "Oh, go on, nothing's free!" I sat down next to him on the couch. Opening the Bible to Romans 6:23, I pointed to the verse so that Dad could read for himself. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is life everlasting in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Conf. Version). "Hey!" Dad exclaimed. "I never knew that!" "Dad, when the Gospel is read at Mass, do you remember hearing the words of Jesus, 'How narrow the gate and close the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it?'" (Matt. 7:14 Conf. Version). "Sure." "Well, if only a few find this gift of eternal life, wouldn't you like to be one of them?" "Of course!" "The first thing we want to look at is what God says about man." Flipping the pages of the Bible, I found Romans 3:23 for Dad to read: "all have sinned and have need of the glory of God." Dad looked up from the page. "So what's new about that? In the Mass we say, 'I confess to almighty God... that I have sinned through my fault.' I know that everyone is a sinner." "Well, because man is a sinner, and a sinner can do no good thing of himself anyway, it is impossible for him to earn his way into heaven, even if it weren't free, which we've just seen that it is. The Bible states this very clearly: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not from yourselves, for it is gift of God; not as the outcome of works, lest anyone may boast (Eph. 2:8-9, Conf. Version). "Hold on a second," Dad said. "Let me read that last one again!" His face appeared slightly pale. "Larry," he finally said, "I want to receive this gift of eternal life. What do I do?" "See Dad," I said, "**faith** is the key that opens the door to eternal life." ... **I tried to live a decent life. I tried to obey the Ten Commandments. I, I, I, I, I was really trying to be my own savior.** (pages 134-136)

Tomczak, Larry. Clap Your Hands!. Plainfield: Logos International, 1973. Print 134-136
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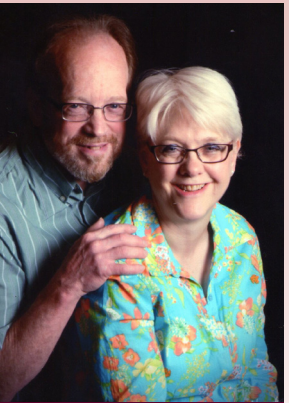
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For God So Loved!

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(Lamentations 3:22-23)



Gary and Victoria Westgerdes

"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

HOWEVER: "The Lord ... is ... not willing that any should perish ..." (2 Peter 3:9)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

www.thekeysofheaven.com

Compare the two Gospels - Which one do you think is: The “Way” the “Truth” and the “Life”

Christian Biblical [Gospel](#) of Salvation. Bible: KJV

Jesus: Matthew 16:19, 21 “And I will give unto thee [the keys of the kingdom of heaven](#): and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven ... From that time forth began Jesus to shew ... His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and [suffer](#) many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be [killed](#), and be [raised](#) again the third day.” **Paul: 1 Corinthians 15:1-5** “Brethren, I declare unto you [the Gospel](#) which I preached unto you, which also ye have [received](#), and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are [saved](#), if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have [believed](#) in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also [received](#), how that Christ [died](#) for our sins according to the scriptures, that He was [buried](#), and that He [rose](#) again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen ...” **Peter: Acts 10:36, 39-43** “[Preaching peace](#) by Jesus Christ ... whom they [slew](#) and [hanged on a tree](#): Him God [raised](#) up the third day and shewed Him openly ... even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He [rose](#) from the dead. And He commanded us ... to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness ... through His name whosoever [believeth](#) in Him shall [receive remission of sins](#).” **Paul: 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 21, 23, 30, 31** “[For Christ sent me not to baptize](#), but to [preach the gospel](#): not with wisdom of words, lest the [cross](#) of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the [cross](#) is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are [saved](#) it is the power of God ... it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to [save](#) them that [believe](#) ... we preach Christ [crucified](#) ... who of God is made unto us wisdom ... righteousness ... sanctification and [redemption](#): He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” **Paul: Romans 5:1, 17** “[Therefore, being justified by faith](#), we have [peace](#) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the [gift of righteousness](#) shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” **Peter: Acts 2:22-24, 31, 32** “[Ye men of Israel](#) ... Jesus ... being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have [crucified](#) and [slain](#): whom God hath [raised](#) up ... His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God [raised](#) up ... [we ... are witnesses](#).” **Paul: Colossians 2:8** “[Beware](#): lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, and not after Christ.” **Hebrews 9:22, 24-28** “[Without shedding of blood](#); is no remission ...



For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true: but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: [Nor yet that He should offer Himself often](#) ... For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world but now in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: [So Christ was once offered](#) to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him, shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” **Jesus: Matthew 11:25** “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and [hast revealed them unto babes](#).” **Paul: 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21** “[Now ... be ye reconciled to God](#) for He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” **King David: Psalm 51: 1-3, 7** “[Have mercy on me, O God](#), according to Thy loving kindness ... cleanse me from my sin ... For I acknowledge my transgressions ... Wash me and I shall be [whiter than snow](#).” **John: Revelation 1:4; 5:9** “[Peace from Him](#) which is, and which was, and which is to come ... unto Him that loved us, and [washed us from our sins in His own blood](#) ...” “They sung ... for thou wast [slain](#), and hast [redeemed](#) us to God by Thy [blood](#).”

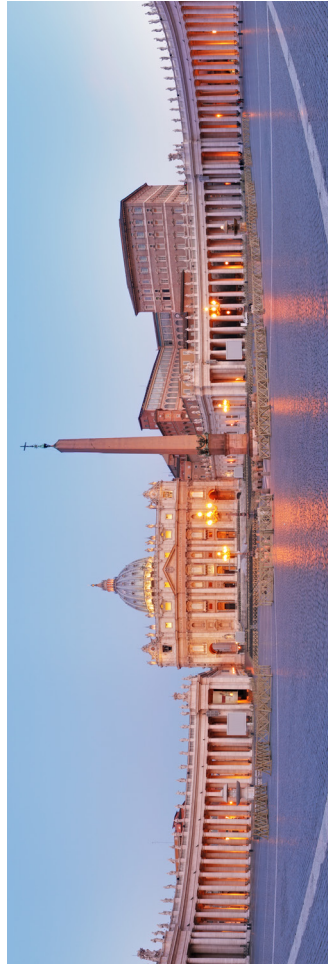
Paul’s Focus & Statement of Faith: Galatians 6:14; 2:20

“[But God forbid that I should glory, save in the CROSS](#) of our Lord Jesus Christ.” & “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me” John 14:6.

Catholicism’s [Gospel of Salvation](#). Catechism of the C.C. (c) 1994

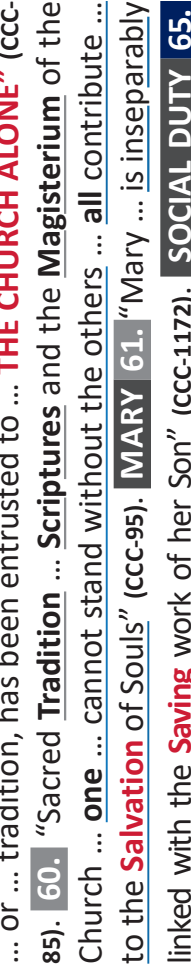
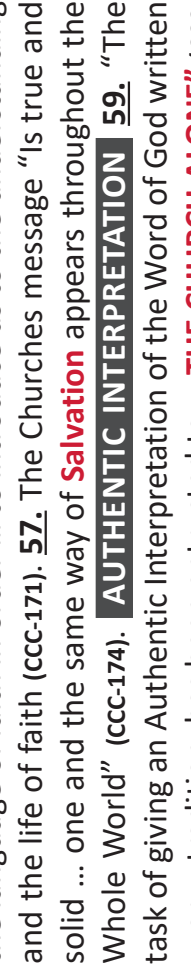
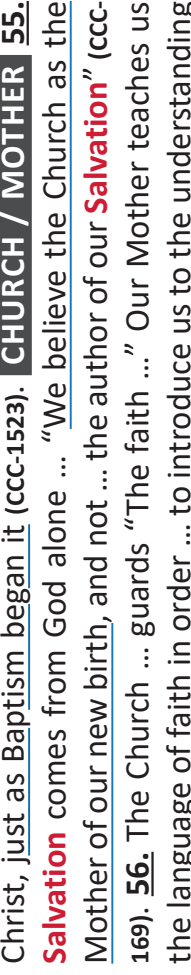
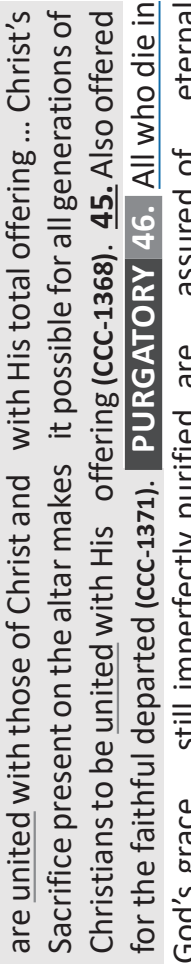
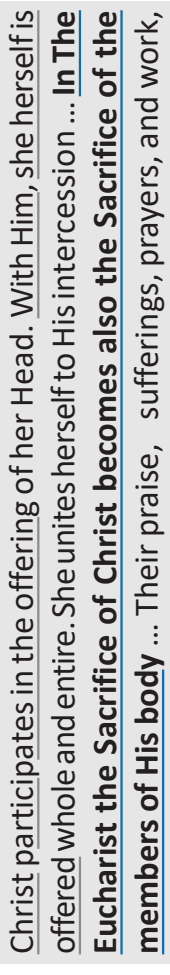
“**JESUS 1**. By His Death ... Resurrection, Jesus ... “Opened” Heaven to Us (ccc-1026). **SALVATION 2**. [The Church] Has Received [the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven](#) ... **IN HER**, sins may be forgiven through Christ’s **blood** and the Holy Spirit’s action (ccc-981) **3**. “Through Christ’s **CATHOLIC CHURCH ALONE** ... the fullness of ... **Salvation** can be obtained ... all ... should be fully incorporated” (ccc-816) **4**. “Outside ...



No **Salvation**.” Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition ... The Church ... is [Necessary for Salvation](#) (ccc-846). **SACRAMENTS 6**. [Saving](#) ... instruments by which the Holy Spirit Spreads the Grace of Christ (ccc-774) **7**. Sacraments: [Are Necessary for Salvation](#) (ccc-1129) **BAPTISM 14**. [Baptism](#) is birth ... New Life in Christ ... it is [Necessary for Salvation](#) (ccc-1277) **17**. Faith in ... Gospel ... Baptism ... One renounces evil and gains [Salvation](#) (ccc-1427) **21**. “Since Christ died for all, and ... Are in fact called to One and the Same Destiny ... The Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being partakers ... of the paschal mystery.” Every Man Who Is Ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the Truth and Does the Will of God in Accordance with his Understanding of it, can be Saved It may be supposed that Such Persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity (ccc-1260) **PENANCE 23**. If the Church has the Power to Forgive Sins, then Baptism cannot be her only means of using [the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven](#) (ccc-979). **24**. The Sacrament of Penance is [Necessary for Salvation](#) for Those ... Fallen after Baptism (ccc-980). **26**. Individual ... Confession and Absolution remain the Only Ordinary Way for the faithful to Reconcile ... with God ... Church (ccc-1484) **27**. Only Priest ... from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ (ccc-1495) **CONFIRMATION 30**. Full out pouring of the Holy Spirit as ... on the Day of Pentecost (ccc-1302). **EUCCHARIST / MASS 36**. Sacrifice of Christ ... Sacrifice of ... Eucharist are one single Sacrifice: “The Victim is ... the same ... only the Manner of Offering Is Different.” ... In the Mass ... Christ ... is offered in an [un-bloody manner](#)” (ccc-1367). **38** ... the Sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the Cross remains ever present ... Celebrated on The Altar, The Work of Our Redemption is Carried Out (ccc-1364). **39**. Christ gives us the Very Blood which, He gave ... on the cross (ccc-1365). **40**. It Re-Presents ... The Sacrifice of the Cross ... It applies its fruit: [Christ ... wanted] to leave ... the Church [a Visible Sacrifice ... Re-Presented](#) ... and ... Applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit (ccc-1366). **PARTICIPATION OF LAY PEOPLE IN CHRIST’S PRIESTLY OFFICE 42**. The Eucharist is also the Sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With Him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to His intercession ... **In The Eucharist the Sacrifice of Christ becomes also the Sacrifice of the members of His body** ... Their praise, sufferings, prayers, and work, are united with those of Christ and with His total offering ... Christ’s Sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with His offering (ccc-1368). **45**. Also offered for the faithful departed (ccc-1371). **PURGATORY 46**. All who die in God’s grace ... still imperfectly purified, are ... assured of ... eternal **Salvation** (ccc-1030). **47**. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this (ccc-1031). **48**. ... almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance ... on behalf of the dead (ccc-1032). **ANOINTING OF THE SICK 51**. (This Sacrament ... completes our conformity to death and resurrection of Christ, just as Baptism began it (ccc-1523). **CHURCH / MOTHER 55**. **Salvation** comes from God alone ... “We believe the Church as the Mother of our new birth, and not ... the author of our **Salvation**” (ccc-169). **56**. The Church ... guards “The faith ...” Our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order ... to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith (ccc-171). **57**. The Churches message “Is true and solid ... one and the same way of **Salvation** appears throughout the Whole World” (ccc-174). **AUTHENTIC INTERPRETATION 59**. “The task of giving an Authentic Interpretation of the Word of God written ... or ... tradition, has been entrusted to ... **THE CHURCH ALONE**” (ccc-85). **60**. “Sacred [Tradition](#) ... [Scriptures](#) and the [Magisterium](#) of the Church ... one ... cannot stand without the others ... all contribute ... to the [Salvation](#) of Souls” (ccc-95). **MARY 61**. “Mary ... is inseparably linked with the [Saving](#) work of her Son” (ccc-1172). **SOCIAL DUTY 65**. The Social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each man the love of the true and the good. It requires them to make known the worship of. **THE ONE TRUE RELIGION**

... **THE CATHOLIC ... CHURCH**. (ccc-2105).”

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