

## FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

### Introduction

This booklet examines the way the Bible describes the great change that takes place when a person becomes a Christian believer. It is very much like a great journey, which the Bible describes as being brought from darkness to light.

To help our understanding of what takes place in the human heart when God brings someone into his marvellous light, we shall illustrate the Biblical teaching from the experience of Jim Hamilton. As you will see, before being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, Jim was in a terrible state of spiritual darkness that grew worse by the minute. And you will also see the wonderful transformation that the grace of God revealed in Christ has made to Jim Hamilton's life.

If you are not a Christian believer yet, it is my prayer that this booklet will help you to see your need to seek the Lord Jesus Christ to be your own Saviour. And if you are a Christian believer already, my prayer is that this book will remind you of your own salvation, and cause you to be filled with praise again to God. And along with that, that Jim Hamilton's story will greatly encourage you to make Christ known to those whom you know are in sin's darkness at this present time. Jim Hamilton's story reminds us of what the prophet Jeremiah has told us in the Bible (Jeremiah 32:17): "*Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and*

*outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*" (See also Genesis 18:14 and Matthew 19:26.)

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### Chapter 1 Sin's darkness

#### a. The Teaching of the Bible

I think all of us are familiar with change from time to time. We might change our work or school or college or home or friends. What's interesting is that the Bible uses the ideas involved in the word 'change' to describe what happens when someone becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. A vivid example of this is found in the first of Peter's letters that we find towards the end of the New Testament part of the Bible. Peter was writing to some of his friends who had become Christian believers, and this is how he described the change that had taken place in their lives. He said in 1 Peter 2:9 that God had "*... called them out of darkness into his wonderful light...*"

If your eyesight is reasonable, then it's quite easy to recognise the change from darkness to light. For example, the difference between night time and daytime is quite striking. Or you may have entered a dark room and switched the light on or lit a lamp. When you were in the dark you could not see, but the light changed all that. Now, the Bible's use of this metaphor raises an important question for us. What does it mean when it speaks of people being in darkness? This is a theme that recurs quite regularly throughout the Bible, which emphasises its

importance. For example, we find it in Acts 26:18 where Paul described the work the Lord Jesus Christ gave him to do. Jesus said to him, *“I am sending you to them (that is, to people) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light...”* And the Lord Jesus himself said in John 8:12, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

Well, what is this darkness which the Bible speaks about?

It really refers to the terrible effects of sin on the human heart. Sin puts us in the dark as far as God is concerned and cuts us off from him. It is a spiritual darkness. This is the condition we are in from the time we were conceived (Psalm 51:5): *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* Being in this darkness means we are ignorant of God. We do not know him personally, and although we may know about him, we are really strangers to him and he seems far from us. The thought of having a warm loving relationship with God is outside of our experience. It is as if he is a long way away from us. And because we are in this spiritual darkness, we cannot find the way back to him on our own, because we cannot see where to go. And the tragedy is that our sin drags us down and down and further away from God. However hard we might try, we just cannot get ourselves out of it. In short, we are helpless and hopeless.

Left to ourselves, our sinfulness will simply increase, getting worse and worse and keeping us far from God, because it will keep us in the dark. It is the terrible condition that everyone is in from our very beginning.

This is why we need to follow the Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world (John 8:12), because he alone can bring us out of this darkness, but on our own we simply sink deeper and deeper into it. To demonstrate this we turn now to begin our look at the life of Jim Hamilton.

### **b. Jim Hamilton’s background**

Jim Hamilton comes from Scotland and was born and brought up in the city of Glasgow. As a child he experienced a number of tragic events. When he was aged nine his father’s business collapsed with the result that he deserted the family, leaving Jim alone with his mother and sister, Margaret. Over the next two years he watched his mother suffer a long and painful death. Jim was only aged eleven when this happened and it was an absolutely devastating blow. Jim and his sister, Margaret, went to live with their grandparents. Within a short time death struck again as their grandfather passed away.

In addition to these tragedies, Jim’s life began to take a very sad downhill path. He began using bad language and misusing God’s name. He started smoking, and when he left school to work in a shipyard he began to drink alcohol, which was to become a major problem for him. In his early years, Jim had attended church with his family, who had been very religious, but they were not Christian believers. However, this good influence had no effect on him at all. He left home and sadly his drinking increased.

In spite of all this Jim was very dissatisfied with life, so he changed jobs and joined the British Royal Air Force, and eventually he got married. Sadly, these changes did not help his drinking problem at all. Many of the RAF stations

were in isolated areas with very little social life, and drinking was often the only thing left to do. In addition, he was a rather shy individual and the only way he could overcome his shyness was to drink alcohol. This was to have a profound and tragic effect on his marriage. He was posted to Singapore for over two years, where he discovered that drink was much cheaper than in Britain. Sadly, his wife spent many lonely hours at home with their two children, while Jim went on one drunken spree after another. A year or two later he was posted to the Middle East, only this time his family were not allowed to travel with him. Without any restraints, his drinking became wild, and eventually this resulted in the break up of his marriage. But even this did not stop him drinking. Instead it got even worse.

Jim's life could most certainly be described, as we saw earlier from the Bible, as being 'in darkness'. Sin had certainly gripped him, and was dragging him further and further down into misery and unhappiness and further away from God. How much he stood in need of having the Lord Jesus as his Saviour, but he seemed completely unaware of the awful state he was in. His spiritual darkness was very dark indeed.

Reader, I wonder if this is also a description of you? Oh, you do not have to sink as low as Jim Hamilton sank, but you know full well that you are far from God and a stranger to him. It is possible to be perfectly respectable, and even to meet regularly with Christian believers and be very religious, yet still to be in sin's darkness, and to be cut off from God.

If that is your condition, then take real note of what the Bible says about you, and turn from your sinfulness and turn to God. Plead with him to shine into your heart the light of his love, for one thing is certain, like Jim Hamilton, you are powerless to change yourself. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can do that.

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## **Chapter 2 Rejection of the Gospel**

### **a. Two Biblical examples**

Unrepented sin is a most solemn matter and has some devastating effects on the human heart. One of those effects is that it makes people reject the very good news about Jesus which they so urgently need. We can explain it by using this illustration. One of the sadder experiences of life for those who cannot see is that the light can be shining all around them but they are unable to appreciate it. They are still in the dark. And this is also true in a spiritual sense. In our previous chapter we saw that the Bible describes the change that takes place when someone becomes a Christian believer (1 Peter 2:9) as God calling them "*out of darkness into his wonderful light*". And we saw that the darkness was the condition men and women are in because of sin. Now, those who are still in darkness because of sin, can have the light of God's love and truth shining all around them yet still not appreciate its significance nor benefit from it at all, with the result that they still remain in the dark. In other words, because of sin they cannot see the light, nor do they want to. In fact, they deliberately reject the light of God's truth and love and grace. And that is really tragic.

Let me illustrate what I mean by looking at some examples from the Bible itself. Someone in the Old Testament who was like this was the ruler of Egypt during the time of Moses. He is known as the Pharaoh, or king, of Egypt. At the time when Moses lived, this Pharaoh made the people of Israel his slaves, and treated them in a very cruel way. So God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh's tyranny. Moses went to the Egyptian ruler with God's command to let his people go. But Pharaoh refused. As a result God sent a plague in which all the water in Egypt was changed to blood. You can read the details in the book of Exodus. Moses went to Pharaoh with God's word again, but still he refused. This time God sent a plague of frogs to the land. Now Pharaoh knew it was God who was doing this because he asked Moses to pray to God to stop the plague, promising he would then let the people go. And Moses did just that. The plague stopped, but Pharaoh changed his mind and refused to let the people go. This was repeated again and again as God sent further plagues of gnats and flies and one that killed the livestock, and boils. God was speaking very plainly to Pharaoh to repent of his refusal to let his people go. If you like, the light of God's truth was shining all around him. Indeed, Pharaoh knew without any doubt that God was speaking to him because after God sent the plague of hail to the land, he said to Moses in Exodus 9:27, *"This time I have sinned. The Lord is right, and I and my people are wrong. Pray to the Lord, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don't have to stay any longer."* But no sooner did the hail cease, than Pharaoh changed his mind

again. This went on until the final plague of the death of the first born in every family brought bereavement to all the homes of the Egyptians. Pharaoh then sent the people of Israel away, but changed his mind again and charged after them with his army, only to die eventually in the Red Sea. He had the light of God's word yet refused to accept it, with the result that he remained in the darkness of his own sin and rebellion and perished.

An example from the New Testament is the Roman governor Festus and his friend King Agrippa. The details are recorded by Luke and are found in the book of Acts chapters 25 and 26. Agrippa was the ruler of the northern territory around Galilee. Festus invited Agrippa to listen to Paul give his defence after he had been arrested. And Paul used the opportunity very wisely. As he gave a record of his life he emphasised how he had been wonderfully transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ, who had forgiven his sins. Then he described what the Lord had said to him, in Acts 26:16-18, *"I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."* So in a very helpful way Paul shared the good news about Jesus with these two rulers. In other words the light of God's love and truth shone in that room. But what is so tragic is that neither of these two men became a follower of Jesus. Festus interrupted Paul and

said, *“You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane.”* While Agrippa said, *“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”* The light of God’s love was shining all around them, but they preferred to remain in the darkness of their own sin. And that was tragic.

The lesson for us is this – unless men and women repent of their sin they will continue to reject the very light they need to dispel their darkness. In other words they will reject the good news about Jesus, even though his light is shining all around them. And this is exactly what happened to Jim Hamilton, and we must turn to that now.

You’ll remember we saw how Jim, sadly, had sunk into the mire of his own sin, and how the place of alcohol played a major influence in this downward slide. His persistent drunkenness resulted in the break up of his marriage, but his drinking didn’t cease. And we take up his story now at that point.

### **b. Jim Hamilton rejects the light of God’s truth and love and grace**

Having driven his wife from him, Jim felt very low. Now, it had been a good number of years since Jim had made any contact with his sister, Margaret, with whom he had been very close, especially in their troubled childhood. Well, Jim turned to Margaret again. By this time Margaret had herself become a Christian believer and had followed the Lord Jesus Christ for a number of years. Her husband was also a disciple of Jesus.

As Jim poured out his heart to Margaret, something unusual struck him about her reaction. She offered him a lot of sympathy, and wise counsel, but there was no condemnation, even though he knew he deserved it. Instead, Margaret gave her brother a New Testament and a piece of paper with some Bible verses on it for him to read. And she also gave him two Christian books, one of which described how the Lord Jesus Christ had wonderfully changed the life of a man who had had similar problems to Jim’s. Sadly, however, Jim just did not want to know about any of these things. It was fine for his sister, but he had no time for God at all. Indeed, he never read any of the Bible or the books Margaret had given him. Although he had a deep respect for Margaret’s faith, Jim was full of self-righteousness, and could see nothing wrong with the sinful way he was living.

He continued his career in the RAF as a lorry driver, and travelled over much of Europe. His life became an endless round of working and drinking, working and drinking. Interestingly, though, he did not get rid of the books his sister had given him. Sometimes he would pick them up and flick through the pages, but only to laugh and ridicule, never to read them seriously. Little did he realise at the time that they contained the very message about Jesus who alone could change his life. The light of God was shining all around him, but he did not realise it. He was still in the darkness caused by his sin, and he simply rejected the message he so desperately needed.

The result of all this was that his life continued its downward slide. Though his drinking continued, he was a

desperately unhappy man. The break up of his marriage brought with it a terrible sense of loneliness, and he felt utterly abandoned and alone. In front of his friends and workmates he appeared to be the life and soul of the party, but it was all a façade. He would smile and joke outwardly, but inwardly he was breaking apart. And yet he never once thought about seeking God at all. It never entered his mind.

Sadly, though Jim Hamilton's sister, Margaret, shared the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ with him, so that he was exposed to the light of God's love, all he could do was to turn away from it. Like Pharaoh and Festus and Agrippa in the Bible, Jim Hamilton tragically remained in the dark, even though God's light was blazing before him.

But Jim Hamilton is not a rare case. Sadly, all around the world today there are those who have heard about the forgiveness that the Lord Jesus Christ gives to those who believe in him, yet they refuse to turn to him. Though God's light is shining in their presence, they remain in the darkness, and therefore are in danger of perishing.

If you are a Christian believer this should at the very least lead you to do two things. Firstly, to be filled with praise to God for his goodness to you and thank him for his love for you. And secondly, to pray earnestly for those you know who are still lost in the darkness of their own sin, because only God can change them.

And if you are not a follower of the Lord Jesus, then you desperately need to become one, because you are still in the dark. You are under the influence of your sin and of Satan, the great enemy of God and men. If you never hear

about Jesus again, reading about him today means you will be without excuse if you refuse to follow him, and remain in the darkness of your own sinfulness. Then why remain in that darkness where you are a stranger to God and his mercy? Why continue in your sinful ways as Jim Hamilton did? Seek the Lord today. Ask Jesus, who is the light of the world, to shine into your sin-darkened heart and to bring you into his marvellous light.

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### **Chapter 3 Sin's Hardness and Stubbornness**

#### **a. A shattering experience**

Sometimes the response someone makes to the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ is like the opening of a flower in the warm summer sunshine. I always think Lydia's conversion was like this in Acts 16. As Paul shared with her about the Lord Jesus, we read in verse 14, "*The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*" But on other occasions it takes something much more dramatic to make someone really take note of what God is saying to them. An example of this is the jailer who lived in the same place as Lydia, the city of Philippi.

Paul and his friend Silas had been telling the people about the Lord Jesus Christ and his death on the cross and how, through Jesus, sinners can come to know God and enjoy his forgiveness. But sadly, there was such opposition to what they were doing that Paul and Silas were arrested, flogged, and thrown into the prison. The jailer was commanded to guard them carefully, and so he put them in an inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Obviously, he had no sympathy for them or their message. Well, at midnight Paul and Silas were singing praises to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly the whole city was shaken by a terrific earthquake, and all the prison doors opened and everyone's chains fell off. The jailer, waking out of his sleep, was terrified and was about to kill himself. This was because a jailer's life would be taken in the place of any prisoner who escaped, and committing suicide would save both the shame involved and a possible long painful death. However, this earthquake was from God and, miraculously, none of the prisoners had run away. Paul and Silas shouted to the jailer to stop, and told him everyone was still there in the prison. The jailer was utterly shaken by what had taken place. He came to Paul and Silas trembling, and he asked them, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" He suddenly realised that if he had died he was not ready to meet God because he had not sought God's forgiveness. And he recognised that what Paul and Silas had been saying about the Lord Jesus Christ was true. So he wanted to know how he could be saved from his sin. Paul and Silas told him, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.*" And we go on to read, "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house." The jailer and his family were baptised and rejoiced because they had all come to believe in God.

### **b. Shattered but unmoved**

I suppose it's fair to say that not many people become followers of Jesus because of an earthquake-like experience, but this did happen to that jailer. Now, my

reason for mentioning it is that sometimes, even when someone has been through a shattering experience in which God has clearly shown them their need to become a Christian believer, they still refuse to obey God. You will remember that we have been thinking of how the Bible describes someone who is not a follower of Jesus as being in "darkness" because of their sin. And we have seen how this was true about Jim Hamilton, whose life was in an awful mess because of drunkenness. As time went by, Jim married his present wife Nesta, and then left the Royal Air Force.

One day, about a month after he had left the RAF, Jim faced a shattering experience. It all began as he was driving his lorry down a British motorway. This is a wide dual carriageway road with three lanes of traffic on each side of the central reservation, and a fourth lane on the inside called the hard shoulder for use when there is a break down. On this day the gearbox in Jim's lorry seized up and his vehicle came to a grinding halt. Leaving his lorry on the side of the motorway, Jim then proceeded to walk back along the road about a mile to telephone for help. As he returned he could see flames in the distance coming from where his lorry was parked. Another driver saw him running back to his lorry and gave him a ride in his van. As they rounded a bend in the road they could see that it was another lorry on fire and not Jim's, but that it was parked close behind his. Jim managed to reach the cab of his own vehicle and sat inside watching the blazing inferno behind him. By this time the flames were travelling across both sides of the motorway and the police

had brought the traffic to a standstill. It was then that Jim realised the cargo he was carrying was itself inflammable. He quickly left his lorry to go and tell the police of the danger. As he passed the burning vehicle he noticed liquid pouring out of it onto the ground. He jumped to clear this but slipped and fell in it, only to discover it was nitric acid! The effect was immediate. His clothes disintegrated and only his watch, leather belt and bracelet survived. His skin was terribly burned, particularly his back, and the pain was excruciating. Because the traffic was now completely blocking the road, neither the ambulance nor the fire brigade could get through quickly. Meanwhile, the acid was penetrating Jim's flesh and doing more damage. Car drivers who had spare water came and poured it on him to dilute the effects of the acid, and when the fire brigade eventually arrived they hosed him down with water. But by this time the damage was very serious. On the way to the hospital Jim was told that his prospects were not good, and he thought he was dying. Medication was given to ease the pain and make him sleep, but it was all to no avail. Jim remained fully conscious throughout.

At the hospital the surgeon who first examined him said he could do nothing for him, and he would need treatment from a special burns unit in another hospital. After a further painful journey he arrived at the Stoke Mandeville burns unit in Aylesbury. As he entered the hospital door, Jim prayed for the first time since childhood. He said, *"God, if you'll just give me one more chance, I'll promise you I'll be a different man."*

The next few months were critical, and Jim endured a series of operations and skin grafts, and pain such as he had never experienced before. Through the care of the doctors and nurses God spared his life, just as he had prayed. And it was really nothing short of a miracle that he survived at all.

Eventually, he was well enough to return home. It was marvellous, and an occasion for giving praise and thanks to God, but Jim did nothing of the sort. Although he had promised God he would be different if the Lord spared his life, the very day he came out of hospital he went straight back to his drinking! Though he had been pulled back from the jaws of death, he had no desire at all to seek God, nor to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. His sin of drunkenness seemed to control him completely, and though he had promised, he did not change at all. In fact, for the next five years he sank deeper and deeper into a terrible depression, and the only way he could handle it was to drink even more. And that only made matters worse, until he reached rock bottom. Sin's darkness really is a dreadful thing!

But I wonder if you are just the same as Jim? Oh, you might not be a drunkard like he was, and you may never have been involved in an accident or an earthquake. But you know that God has spoken to you of your need to be forgiven, of your need to have the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. And you have understood what God has been saying to you, but you have done nothing about it. You have simply continued in your own sinful ways. Then your darkness is as great as Jim's was! Your condition is as bad as the jailer's in Philippi that we mentioned earlier.

You need God to bring you out of that darkness and into his marvellous light. Don't act like Jim Hamilton did but, instead, do what that jailer in Acts 16 did. You need to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask him to forgive and save you from your sin. Then, like that jailer and his family, you will be able to rejoice that you have come to believe in God. But for Jim Hamilton, that joy was still outside his experience.

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## Chapter 4 Into the Light at Last!

### a. Amazing grace!

The story is told of how some years ago a man broke into the home of a judge and stole some items. As the thief was leaving, however, he was caught by the police, was arrested for burglary, and subsequently brought to trial and found guilty. The punishment was either a large fine or a term of imprisonment. The guilty man feared the worst, because he had no money. It looked certain he would be locked away. When the court was cleared and he was taken out, to his astonishment he was set free. He could not understand why, and was then told the reason. Someone else had paid his fine for him. He was both glad and intrigued to know who this benefactor was who had shown him such kindness. And further enquiries revealed to his astonishment that his fine had been paid by the very judge he had stolen from! If ever there was a time when the thief least deserved such kindness it was then. And to have the very man he had wronged show him the kindness was overwhelming.

With that story in mind consider these words from the Bible that were written by Paul. They are taken from his first letter to his friend Timothy and are found in 1 Timothy 1:15-17:

*“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – **of whom I am the worst.** But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

Paul felt just like the thief in that story. He knew himself to be guilty, and the “very worst of all sinners” was his own description of himself – one who had wronged the Lord Jesus Christ again and again. And yet the Lord Jesus had shown him remarkable mercy, by saving him from his sins. And elsewhere in the Bible Paul tells us that this meant Jesus taking the punishment Paul's sins deserved, in his place! The Lord Jesus paid Paul's penalty when he died on the cross.

It is really staggering to read about, and Paul never lost the awareness of how much the Lord had loved him when he least deserved it. And that is why he ended those verses on that note of praise to God. The grace of God is truly amazing! As we continue our look at the life of Jim Hamilton, we will see it was that same grace of God that was now to affect him radically.

### b. A sinner saved by grace

In the last chapter we saw how this man reached rock bottom as sin dominated his life. In fact, he was in utter despair. It was while in this dreadful condition that Jim picked up those books his sister, Margaret, had given him several years earlier. Margaret had actually become a Christian believer about 14 years prior to this, and throughout that period she had diligently prayed for her brother, that God would bring him to follow the Lord Jesus Christ also. Well, it was to those books that Jim turned, but this time his reaction was different. Instead of the mockery and scorn that had characterised him before, there was a seriousness and real interest in what he was reading. This time they did not seem to be nonsense, but plain common sense, and gave him a real hope. One of the books related the story of a man who had lost his wife, his children and his business because of alcohol, and yet how Jesus had changed him completely. It explained how Jesus had not come to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance. Up until then, Jim had honestly thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was only for respectable people, and certainly not for a wretched drunken lorry driver like him. And as he read further it brought a real glimmer of hope into his heart, the hope for which he had been looking for so long. As he read further he learned how the power and love of the Lord Jesus completely transformed this man. And the effect on Jim was profound.

As he finished the book, he did not really know what to do, and so he prayed again. But this time the prayer was different from the one made in the hospital. There was a reality about it, and an honesty in his words. It was a very

simple prayer, and this is what he said: *“Jesus, I don’t know if you’re there, and I don’t know if I even believe this stuff, but this man says you can change my life, and well, my life needs changing, and I’m asking you to do that.”* There was nothing dramatic that happened, but as the weeks turned into months Jim discovered he had the most incredible desires. Everything that he had been doing before seemed repulsive to him and unclean and unacceptable to God. The New Testament, which he had never understood before, he just could not leave alone. It was God’s word, and every single word was speaking to him. And though at times he would throw it away in anger as it exposed the sin in his life, he just could not leave it alone. He had to read it. And alongside all this he had an insatiable desire to be clean and pure and to be like Jesus. And he discovered that he wanted to pray to God every day. It was a most remarkable change.

He began to contact his sister, Margaret, again, who was both greatly encouraged as she saw spiritual life develop and blossom in her brother, and also was able to give him help and answers to his many questions about the Lord. Through her influence he began to attend a local church. His first visit was a great struggle for him. As he approached the building where the church met, a fight went on inside him. Should he go in or not? Indeed, he walked up and down the road several times before at last entering the building. Over the next few months God dealt with him through the messages he heard at the church, which at times amazed him as the visiting speakers seemed to know all about him, even though they had never met. God was,

of course, directing them as they studied the Bible, and gave them the right words to say as they explained it and applied it to the people at the church.

The Lord Jesus Christ had, indeed, heard and answered his prayer and was truly changing him. Jim Hamilton would tell you that if ever there was a time when he least deserved the mercy of God it was when the Lord Jesus forgave him for all his wicked and sinful past. This was, indeed, amazing grace. We can say of Jim as Peter said of the Christian believers he wrote to (1 Peter 2:9): “... *God ... has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” Jim’s own words were, “*I really had been truly converted.*” And the tremendous thing is that the Lord Jesus Christ is still showing that grace and mercy to undeserving sinners.

What hope this gives us, for it shows that no one is too sinful for Jesus to forgive. Whatever we may have done, however low we may have sunk, and regardless of how wretched we may know ourselves to be, the Lord Jesus Christ loves to show mercy to all who ask him for it. Paul discovered this truth for himself, and so did Jim Hamilton. The question is, have you?

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## **Chapter 5 Overcoming Sin**

### **a. New power to live for God**

We have seen from the Bible that the change that takes place when someone becomes a Christian believer is described by Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 as being brought by God “... *out of darkness into his wonderful light*”. The Lord

Jesus, talking about this same change on another occasion used a different picture to describe it. In John 8:34-36 he said, “*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son...*” (that is Jesus himself, who is God’s Son) “... *sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”

Now from these Bible statements we can see that the change brought about by God when he brings someone from darkness to light is the same as the change between being a slave and then being set free from that slavery. And that is a very useful description of what takes place when someone becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before anyone becomes a Christian believer, Jesus said they are slaves to sin, and that is the darkness which Peter describes. Sin dominates their lives, and affects every part of them. And Jesus used the illustration of a slave to emphasise that this is something we are powerless to break free from by our own strength, power and ability. Sin’s grip on us is that strong! However hard we might try, it is impossible for us to change ourselves. The prophet Jeremiah put it like this in the Bible (Jeremiah 13:23): “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*” And in Romans 8:7-8 Paul wrote, “... *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*” And really that makes the change which Jesus brings so much more remarkable and wonderful. For when he comes into someone’s life he sets

them free from sin's power and guilt. It's that radical a change! We become free indeed, and sin no longer has dominion over us. We have new power to begin living as God wants us to live, and we increasingly gain victory over those old sins that used to so control our lives.

If someone has been set free from sin's penalty and power by the Lord Jesus Christ then that should really show itself in their life. And it is this that we turn to now as we continue our look at the way the Lord Jesus worked in the life of Jim Hamilton. After years of being dominated by sin, especially drunkenness, we saw in the last chapter how the Lord Jesus Christ showed Jim mercy and saved him. We also saw how this filled Jim with a new longing to be pure and holy, and we consider now how this worked itself out in his life.

### **b. Living to please God**

As Jim read more of the Bible and listened to messages explaining it, he was filled with the wonderful desire to do everything and anything the Lord told him to do. One of the first things to change was his language. He no longer wanted to curse and swear and blaspheme God's name. And this was very noticeable to his work colleagues. However, there were still a number of obstacles in his life to be overcome.

Some of his old sins still troubled him. He found it so easy to give in to the temptation when other lorry drivers invited him to drink with them. He also realised he was addicted to smoking, and felt this addiction to be wrong. But both of these things had been part of his life for so long that they really had a grip on him. He wanted to show that he really

was a Christian believer by being baptised, but felt these sins needed to be dealt with first. Months of prayer went into this, and it was by no means easy, but gradually the Lord gave him victory first over his alcohol problem. One day when one of his friends, who had been a major source of temptation, invited him to go drinking, God helped Jim to simply and firmly say 'No'. And from that moment his alcohol problem never troubled him again. But his addiction to smoking was much more difficult. He was very honest about this difficulty and did not hide it away, but brought it out in the open. He applied to be baptised, but still he had no victory over it, so he shared it with his sister, Margaret. She urged him to be obedient to the Lord in baptism, and to keep on praying about the cigarettes. He was obedient and was baptised one Sunday evening as he testified to the Lord's saving grace, and the next morning something strange happened. He woke as usual and was eating his breakfast when he realised he had not had a cigarette, which was normally the very first thing he did when he awoke. And more than that, he did not feel he wanted one. By midday it was the same, and he was overwhelmed with joy because he knew the Lord had given him the victory over it, and he has never desired a cigarette since. The Lord Jesus had indeed set him free.

The way the Lord helped Jim Hamilton is heart-warming to hear. It is a reminder too that every Christian believer has to deal with the problem of indwelling sin. While sin no longer has dominion over us, we are not freed from its presence yet. That will happen one day when Jesus returns and brings in the new heavens and the new earth described

by Peter as the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). But that is in the future, and we still have to battle with sin now. What is so encouraging from Jim's story though, is that Jesus really does set us free from sin's power, and helps us overcome the wrong in our lives, making us into new people, both inside and out.

If you are a Christian believer who is battling with some sin, seek the Lord Jesus to give you strength to overcome it. His Spirit is given to enable us to overcome (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; Ephesians 3:16; 1 Peter 1:2). Then seek his help afresh and with renewed determination walk in his ways. James puts it like this (James 4:7-8): *“Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

But perhaps you are still a slave to sin and your life is full of wrongdoing from which you know you are powerless to break free. Then you need to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in humble repentance and trust, because he is the only one who can set you free. Those who do seek him in this way discover that he is much more willing to forgive and transform them than they ever realised (John 6:37).

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## **Chapter 6 Serving the Lord**

### **a. Unlikely servants**

One of the great privileges and delights of being brought into God's wonderful light is that he gives us work to do for him. He condescends to use us for his glory, and this really is remarkable because we are unworthy at our very best, yet still God delights to do this.

Now this is so unlike us, as we can illustrate. If somebody lets us down or does something wrong to us then it is all too easy not to trust them again, even though we might be willing to forgive them. For example, someone might promise to help us but then deliberately arrange to do something else instead. And when that happens it tends to make us rather hesitant to ask for their help again. What is so marvellous about the grace and mercy of God is that he not only forgives those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ, but he also entrusts them with work to do for him, even though they may have a most dreadful past. He makes us new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Consider these words by Paul who found this aspect of God's grace amazing. They're found in 1 Timothy 1:12-14: *“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”* The Lord appointed Paul to his service even though before he became a Christian believer he was a blasphemer, someone who misused and made fun of the name of Jesus. And he also injured, arrested and imprisoned many who followed the Lord. In other words, the Lord Jesus forgave him for all his unfaithful past, and then enlisted him in his service, so that the persecutor and blasphemer became the preacher who told people about the Lord Jesus Christ. That really is amazing grace!

**b. Lord, here am I – send me**

Many new disciples of the Lord Jesus are often so overwhelmed by their sinful past, and how much they have disobeyed God, that they think God would never want to use them in any way at all. But we have seen from those words of Paul, that is not the case. And it is also something that has been true for Jim Hamilton, whose life this booklet describes.

As Jim grew spiritually he discovered God filled him with a deep desire to serve him in whatever way he could. Even though he'd had a very difficult background with drinking and so on, this did not prevent the Lord from using him. The Lord had forgiven all his sins, and they were no longer held against him and never would be again, because the Lord Jesus had dealt with them at the cross.

To begin with Jim had no ambitions to be a preacher, but he simply wanted to tell people the wonderful thing the Lord Jesus Christ had done for him, and how he could transform ruined lives. He wanted to share with others the relationship he now enjoyed with the Lord. He wanted others to know the Saviour just as he knew him. But he did not know how to go about it. It was then that one day he came across a Christian leaflet which explained what the gospel was all about. He purchased several hundred of these and began distributing them wherever he could. His colleagues at work, the transport cafés he visited while driving his lorry, indeed anyone he met became a recipient of these leaflets. Sometimes this brought a hostile reaction, especially from some of the other lorry drivers, but Jim was not daunted by this, knowing that a servant is not

above his Master, and if Jesus suffered like this then he was willing to follow him.

Later on he met an evangelist from Birmingham City Mission who invited him to an open-air meeting. Jim went, not really knowing what to expect. A group of about fifteen people met for prayer first, and then they went into the shopping centre of Birmingham and the evangelist began to tell the people why they had come and what they were going to do. He said that each person in the group had something to share with them about the love of God, and that they were going to speak publicly about it. At this Jim was terrified, but as there were so many in the group he thought that by the time they got around to him it would be late and he would be excused. However, the evangelist called on Jim to speak first! He interviewed Jim and the Lord really helped him to tell the people about his Saviour.

From this small beginning the Lord eventually led Jim to become a full time member of the Open Air Mission. Throughout this period the Lord also blessed his wife, Nesta, and she has become a Christian believer herself. And now the Lord has called Jim into pastoral ministry in England.

We have said this before in this booklet, but it is worth repeating: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is amazing! He is able to take a person and forgive and so transform their lives, that though they were once his enemies, they become his servants. Paul in the Bible was once one who did all he could to oppose the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, but then he became a Christian believer resulting in his being one who promoted the very work he once sought

to destroy. And Jim Hamilton, a previously known drunkard, is now in the Christian ministry. And the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished this change. Jim truly has been brought from sin's darkness into God's marvellous light. It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. The praise belongs entirely to God.

In the same way, if we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever our past life may have been like, it has all been forgiven by him and he has made us his servants. Then let us serve him with all our hearts.

The Lord Jesus Christ who has saved, forgiven and transformed Jim's life is able to do that for all who will follow him. Then do not despair about your past or present sinfulness, but repent and seek the Lord Jesus Christ and he will abundantly pardon you.

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