

FOUR THINGS YOU CANNOT AFFORD NOT TO HAVE

Part I

It's a proven fact that human nature never changes. For generations there have been currents of thoughts that have tried to prove that there is no God. Through reasoning, though science, literature, philosophy, observation, men have tried hard to convince themselves and others that there is no God or that God would exist indifferently and far away from man's daily life.

It is a fearful thing that we have the potential to believe almost anything. The world is so full of ideas, religions and thoughts that contradict each other and many people have concluded that it's not worth the while looking for the truth, since there are so many religions and every one claims their religion to be the true one. But who is right? Some even dare to say that everyone is right in their own way.

We don't want to be of those that are looked upon with suspicion or prejudice, so we try to feel comfortable with a neutral position, but we still cannot settle just by being grey. For some reason we feel the need to take position in order to have an identity.

The Lord Almighty who made heaven and earth has put in each and every human being a mechanism that can be lit up by the will of man; a mechanism that will lead us to the truth. However, it all depends on the way we perceive things and the conclusions we make; a very similar mechanism can lead us into a lie that eventually we will convince ourselves that it is the truth. Being deceived by our own imagination is the cruellest thing we can do to ourselves, however, it has happened to each and every one of us in more than one instance, since we by nature seek for our own immediate convenience and we adopt the "truth" that makes us feel comfortable.

I remember one day when a man came selling blankets. He said that they cost \$8 each and I asked him if he would sell them for \$10 each. He just couldn't catch on to what I was suggesting and insisted that the cheapest he would sell them for was \$8 each, no less. I was offering more and it was a joke but he didn't laugh, because he took for granted that the consumer is guided by his own interest.

In our nature we do seek to please ourselves, always trying to find a truth that will fit our convenience, in fact, this is the essence of the human being.

When we read the newspapers, isn't it amazing how every President, every person in charge, has the right answers for every complex accusation. Have you ever heard of a President who has in agenda of the apologies he should do to the people whom we have wronged?

I have to admit that sometime, in history, different leaders have asked for forgiveness, but it happens very seldom. It is not a part of the diplomatic agenda since they need to appear to be right so they will not loose popularity.

Whenever there is a confrontation, private or public, the main issue should be to reach an agreement founded in the truth and that would benefit the majority. Instead when we look at confrontations between Presidents or candidates, most want to prove they are more intelligent, wiser, more clever than their opponent.

The funny thing is whenever there is a public confrontation the audience is able to see when the protagonist says or does something wrong, but the person himself is seldom aware of his mistake. That's why it is easier to judge things from the outside and not in the subjective way from the inside.

The point I want to make is this, that none of us want to be deceived, not even sincerely deceived, therefore, we all need to know how to switch on the mechanism that will lead us towards truth, towards real liberty.

There are four things we cannot afford not to have, those are:

- 1) *Conviction*
- 2) *Sincerity*
- 3) *Time to think*
- 4) *Patience to wait for the Answer*

Let's analyze them individually and also as they affect and influence one another:

Conviction is something similar to faith. We are designed to believe in what we cannot prove. For example, if I buy a pen, I just trust it will write. If I get in an elevator and push the right button, I trust its mechanism will take me to the desired floor. If I buy a computer or I get married and if I have a son or a daughter..... We trust things will function properly and our quality of life will improve, finding fulfilment, even though we cannot know in the beginning what could eventually happen.

Something similar happens in the spiritual realm, as there is an evidence of order and harmony in the universe, as the earth moves around the sun every year and as it also turns around its own axis giving us the day and the night. Considering this, you can see that an intelligent mind created everything we see and if He created the universe, He also created us as beings who can desire, love, create, think, etc.

Conviction does not only come by observing the universe and ourselves. It is just there, especially when we do something wrong; we feel bad. Every decision leads to an action that is justified or condemned by our conscience.

True conviction can also come by reading the Scriptures, about the life of Christ, with an open heart, loving the truth unconditionally and not being afraid to discover ourselves.

We can also conclude that there is a God of righteousness, through reading History. Wars and injustice can last many years, but at the end; every evil deed receives its just reward. Terrorist regimes or oppressive governments all come to an end. God humbles the proud and exalts the humble.

We can certainly be wrong in our convictions and we all have been in different occasions, but here comes *Sincerity*.

There are those who enrol in "Holy Wars" because they have strong convictions. Terrorism is based on conviction. The kamikazes and suicide bombers are perfectly convinced. Those doing kidnappings, threats, abortions have a purpose in mind and a cause to fight for, but there is no real love for the truth, no space for confrontation, dialogue on equal basis. Deep in our hearts we all know that the life of another human being is as important as mine. I have no right to decide over someone else's life. I also know that I should love my neighbour as

myself. All the commandments are ingrained in us. If I resist true conviction and if I am not sincere, I will deceive myself and I will believe a lie. In this way I will have conviction however I will be deceived.

Making mistakes is human but persisting in our mistakes is Satanic, since Satan will never admit being wrong.

Was Moses right when he killed an Egyptian soldier that was mistreating a Hebrew slave? No, he was wrong and he fled as he was afraid. He also went through an identity crisis. Was he a rich Egyptian or was he a child of a Hebrew slave? Would you consider someone as him a possible candidate for a leadership position? God did. However God dealt with Moses for 40 more years before entrusting the mission as a Prophet and Liberator. But even in a place of leadership God kept dealing in his life during the next 40 years. But there has never been a man like him who spoke face to face with the Lord. Moses is today a common denominator between Moslems, Christians and Jews.

Another example is Paul the Apostle. He had been a persecutor of the Christian faith and the purpose of his life at that time, was to exterminate those who believed in Jesus. He was deceived but he was sincere and eventually, God opened his eyes.

What about Martin Luther before he became the great reformer? He thought to please God but misunderstood the Scripture about denying himself, thus making a vow of chastity, poverty and obedience. Once he walked from Germany all the way to Rome, Italy, just to listen to a Mass performed by the Pope. Eventually though, by studying the Scriptures, Luther came to the revelation that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works, and he revolutionized Christianity in Europe.

Sometimes I wonder why we don't have more men like them, who in spite of their errors, they received revelations directly from God and through their lives they influenced their generation and the next to come. Perhaps we don't have personal convictions. We are just following the crowd; the fashion of the thought of our generation.

Part II

Nicodemus, the Pharisee, had conviction. He understood that no one could do the kind of miracles Jesus was doing unless God was with him. Of course, his conviction came from the evidence of the miracles, even if he couldn't understand Jesus' words about being born again. Jesus was suspected to be an enemy of their traditions but Nicodemus tries to influence the religious leaders in the other direction by reminding them that if they hadn't figured out what kind of person Jesus was, before accusing him, he should in any case have the opportunity to defend himself in front of them. This shows that Nicodemus was on the right track. The last thing we heard from him was that he brought aromas for Jesus' burial.

Instead, Caifas, another Pharisee, was on the wrong track, saying that if Jesus would continue making miracles, the Romans would come to destroy their temple. I have often wondered what foundation he had to make such a declaration that would produce so much fear. The fact that Jesus, a Hebrew, could do miracles, like raising Lazarus from the dead, would that mean that the Romans would be against their tradition, against their "religion"?

The fact is that Caifas was deceived. However, in his position as a High Priest, he prophesied. The Holy Spirit spoke through him that Jesus was not only going to die for his

people but for the whole world, but Caifas himself did not realize it. It is also fearful and sad that since he was a man of high position, he had a very strong influence in others; those who couldn't think for themselves, and therefore without knowing, he deceived others. Caifas was not convinced by evidence; therefore he could not be lead into all truth.

Here we see two men with the same background. One was sincere and the other was not.

The two men that were crucified at the same time as Jesus', hanging at his left and right. One was sincere, the other was not.

Pilate was a man who didn't allow evidence to convince him. He well knew Jesus was innocent, but he didn't have the guts to defend him or absolve him. He tried to gain time by diverting the issue, avoiding it. He even asked Jesus if he was a King and Jesus told him: You have said so and added, I have come into the world to give testimony of the truth, whosoever if for the truth listens to my voice.

How can a man be convicted by the truth if he loves darkness rather than light and if he is afraid to take position? It is impossible.

What about the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb where Jesus was buried? For them, an amount of money was more important than declaring that they didn't fall asleep or that the disciples didn't come and steel his body. They were cowards, since they were afraid to declare the truth. They were in fact the only eye witnesses in the whole world of Jesus' resurrection, but they were quiet. For sure they never expected that his resurrection was going to make history. They thought it was just an event that was going to fade away.

What about us? What are we doing when the Spirit of Truth brings us under conviction? If we resist Him, He will go away. He will not contend with us and we don't know if there will be another opportunity, since the Scripture says that the Spirit of God shall not always contend with man.

When we have convictions as Shadrac, Meshac and Aned Nego did, then we will not be afraid even by the threats of an Emperor. If we don't adopt a universal religion just because everyone has decide that it is "true". Maybe every one is bowing before the Beast and the Antichrist but we will not fear to take the position like Daniel, who ended up in the lions' den.

Or as Ruth, being a poor widow, a Moabite. Her identity was pagan since she was born in the midst of a pagan people. When she got to know about the God of Israel, she said to her mother in law, to Naomi: Wherever you go, there will I go also, wherever you be, I shall be there also, your God shall be my God and your people shall be my people and may God deal with me with harshness if nothing except death shall separate me from you. This is real conviction, when you realize that circumstances are against you but you keep trusting, as Job said: even though He slays me, I will trust in Him.

Rousseau, who was an atheist said: Reason can deceive us but conscious doesn't. I would rather say: Reason can deceive us and even our conscious can play tricks on us. However, if we are sincere and we have unconditional love for the truth, if we are not afraid to discover ourselves and are willing to admit our mistakes, the Spirit of God will lead us into al truth. His Spirit is exclusively for those who love light rather than darkness.

One of my favourite Proverbs is 20:27. "The spirit of man is a lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts." (Revised Standard) Therefore the mechanism is within us. We can turn it to; leading us into all truth or, we can turn on the similar one; leading us into darkness.

We can also put it this way. We all have two natures: -- One that is made in the image of God, that is, loving justice, truth and light. Even if we are not born again we do desire what is right even if our carnal self pulls us the other direction. -- Our negative part consists in a deceitful heart out of which comes hatred, envy, immorality, evil thoughts, as Jesus said; all this evil comes out of the human heart.

These two natures will never reconcile. Life consists in defining if we will be lead by the Spirit or by our own ideas and thoughts. If we try to reconcile both tendencies, we will have some sort of a light signal with red and green simultaneously, we won't know if we should pass or stop. The tragedy is that most people do prefer to live disoriented or just accepting other people's ideas. Of course there is a place for learning from others but the utmost decision is made by you.

When the Holy Spirit brings us under conviction, we must not resist Him, since He brings light in the dark areas of our lives and leads us, if we are willing, but if not, we will be trapped believing our own sophisticated lies.

Since the way that leads to destruction is broad, I'm afraid most people are going to wake up in a place where there is crying and gnashing of teeth. I wish Jesus would have answered that the way that leads to life was broad and that many were on that road, but it's just the opposite.

I have mentioned conviction and sincerity. Let's talk about the third subject: *Time to think*.

Our way of thinking makes us different from one another. As A.W. Tozer said: We are what we think.

I'm surprised to see how most people are just happy to following the crowd such as: making commentaries on politics or sports, following the fashion, being mediocre, watching TV, playing video games and just having entertainment.

If I make the question to someone: -What do you think when you see the stars at night? Most people would answer: -I don't really know what to think. What do you think?

Abraham perhaps thought that the stars were many and that they couldn't be counted. He thought about God's promises and his own descendants that he still could not see.

David thought that the heavens declared the Glory of God and that the firmament announces the work of His hands.

I think on how small we are in such an immeasurable universe and how amazing that I am also a creature, created and known by the Creator of that vast universe. I think it is a fact of human destiny that even if you or I misconduct, He still loves us unconditionally but by going unrepented we will not be able to experience His love.

I could write a book of what I think when I see the universe, but this is not the purpose for now.

Part III

What did people think in the old days while they sat by the beach in Spain contemplating the Atlantic Ocean? Wondering what was there on the other side of the horizon. Of course their fantasy could go wild with speculations. There were men though, who diligently observed, who wondered with amazement, who observed the moon, the sun and its movements, men like Galileo, who concluded that the earth was round.

Men like Christopher Columbus who dared to propose an exploration trip, travelling east on the Atlantic, just to find a shorter way to the Indies. Of course the earth looked flat. It looked flat every day of their trip.

Certainly nothing is the way we see it. Even our real self is invisible. People who think they are good fellows end up being the worst of all. When a person is aware of his true nature, he will conclude like Paul the Apostle: -I am the chief of sinners, the worst of all men who ever walked this earth.

It is necessary to take time to meditate, to ponder, to reflect, to let God speak to us in the quiet. No wonder why so many times the word Selah is written in the Psalms. It means that we should stop and think.

Nathaniel used to spend time just thinking under a fig tree. When the question of Jesus being the Messiah came up, he seriously questioned it since he thought nothing good could come out of Nazareth. He had preconceived ideas and he was wrong but when Jesus told him that he had seen him under the fig tree, Nathaniel got the revelation. Perhaps Jesus said what he said because he knew his thoughts and his unanswered questions.

When Isaac was about 40 years old and his mother Sarah had died, he had gone out to the fields to meditate in the afternoon. He then saw a Caravan coming with a woman. The woman covered herself with a veil as the Caravan came closer. As they met, he loved her at first sight and that was God's provision. It was the fruit of much waiting, much patience and trusting in God.

One of the ways through which we can seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, is by just taking time to meditate the Scriptures.

Being alone is something most people avoid. They feel bored and lonely. This is because they don't realize that they are ignoring God, who is ever present.

One of the idols of our generation is entertainment. People want to be constantly entertained with games, videos, movies, concerts and TV. As a result, many young people cannot express their convictions about God or life or religion, because they don't take time to think on their own.

The fourth point is: *Patience to wait for the Answer*. However there are revelations, directly from God, that come like a lightning, all of a sudden, unexpectedly, as when He spoke to Abraham or Moses, but most of the time, revelation increases as we wait on Him, walking in the light, loving one another.

Some revelations can be gradual, as the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman by the well. First she thought Jesus was just a simple Jew. A moment later, she thought he might be a Prophet and at the end of their conversation, she discovered that He was the Messiah.

Some things Jesus declared seem to be completely irrelevant, rather crazy: For example in John 2:18,19 when Jesus had driven out the vendors from the temple area. “ Then the Jews demanded of Him “What miraculous signs can you show us in order to prove your authority to do all this? Jesus did not answer their question but said something that would provoke their anger more rather than trying to calm them down or to justify himself. He said, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days”.

In this particular circumstance, Jesus didn't come down to the level of their understanding. He did not give a logical explanation. It would have been so easy for Him to explain that He was not talking about the building, the construction that had taken 46 years to finish but that He was talking about the temple of His body.

His own disciples understood this only after He had risen from the dead. They then remembered what Jesus had said.

Something similar can happen to us also. We just don't understand, it seems like God doesn't know what He is doing or what He says is irrelevant but as we wait on Him, eventually we will understand.

Let's see another example: Jesus said to them: “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink”. John 6:53-55.

As people didn't understand Him, they just left, all but His disciples. They didn't leave but they hardly understood the meaning of this. Nevertheless, I'm sure, that during the last supper, they understood what He meant and we as Christians, we can also understand better now.

Sometimes it can also happen that we think that we've gotten a hold of a great mystery, a great truth, directly from the Lord, as when Jesus was asking His disciples: Who did people said He was. Simon Peter answered: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God and Jesus answered: Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man but by my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 16:16,17.

Certainly that revelation meant a lot, it was a matter of true identity, something that only very, very few knew, something essential of great importance. Peter could have felt some sort of spiritual pride since he had answered the Master in such a convincing way but let's see what happens a few minutes later. Jesus started mentioning that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, Chief Priests and teachers of the law. Peter took Him aside to rebuke Him, but Jesus told him: Out of my sight Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. Matthew 16:21-23.

Peter knew who Jesus was by a direct revelation from on high. He thought he knew it all but there were other things of great importance that he didn't know.

Part IV

Larry King says that the person he really would like to interview is Jesus Christ and the first question he would ask Him is if He was indeed born of a virgin. If the answer is yes, then that would make the difference in history and in humanity.

However Peter was not aware, he was completely ignorant about what was the real purpose of Jesus being there. Not only did he not know but none of His disciples knew. Therefore it is necessary that we wait for revelations to come. We see partially and in spite of that, life continues. We have to act while we wait with no fear. If we cannot understand today, we will some day, or perhaps in eternity.

It is sad to see many people resented with God because something unfair happened in their lives or when people stop praying because they don't see an answer to their prayers.

Moses could have easily thought that God didn't care about delivering the people from slavery. He himself might have felt that God had not really identified with him for 80 years of his life but he knew of course that he was rescued from the Nile River by a miracle. When God finally called him, he was not willing, perhaps he felt too old.

If God would call you or me at that age, we would probably tell Him that He should have assigned that task to us when we were 23!!

But God never comes late, neither the revelation of His will.

There are also many things happening today. Why is it that it is so difficult to preach in Afghanistan? Look at the story of George Taubman and the Talibans the year 2001. Instead of seeing doors open to preach the Word, the doors seem to be closing more and more.

Why did the Russian authorities not allow us to return to Russia? We were seeing souls saved and making an impact in the community.

Why did the three Central American teams have to come together in one team working only in Honduras, when there is such a great need in El Salvador and Nicaragua and even now our team is fragile. The prayer that the Lord of the Harvest would send forth labours into His fields, seems to be unanswered.

Some of you might be disappointed with God, as you've seen the years passing by and God doesn't seem to open doors so you can reach more souls, or perhaps you're struggling with a disease....Just have passive faith, wait on Him, Be still and know that He is God.

In a few words, you cannot go wrong if you are sincere, if you put aside every pre-conceived idea, if you don't let resentful or ungodly people influence your life. Just take time to be alone with God. If you do, He will whisper to your ears what you need to hear.

"Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully". Proverbs 28:5

Nothing new under the sun, since you already knew all this, I'm just reminding you.

