

Cue Sport Evangelism
By
J. O. Hosler, Th.D.

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"I have seen the ruthless devastations of war—young men in their prime, gunned down like animals. I have helplessly watched the suffering of children—grotesquely twisted little bodies, crying out in pain, begging for love and acceptance, only to find ridicule, rejection, and at the most, the pity of the rich and powerful. I have grown bitter at the willful hatred of men toward men, for no reason other than the color of their skin, the shape of their eyes, or the sound of their speech. I am myself a brokenhearted and lonely old man whose own children avoid his presence. And you talk to me of your religion! Of all the religions in the world, the one whose constituency adheres the least to its stated beliefs is 'Christianity'!"

Full well I knew to avoid, at this moment, the simplistic reply that there was a sovereign God over the universe who would make it all too clear in the bye and bye. In this man's mind, he would have nothing to do with an all-powerful Being who could simply will such inhumanity out of existence and yet persistently chose not to do so.

Why should I waste my time with one who harbored nothing but utter contempt for my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? Why should I witness to him, when I could spend my time with others who would be much more open to the Gospel and much more likely to respond?

Perhaps it was because I had often observed how this man loved to talk of how he had no time to talk about the subject of a loving God controlling a hateful universe. Perhaps too it was the realization that Christ died to save and forgive just such wretched sinners as this unfortunate individual—and also for such condemnation-deserving sinners as myself. Not that I actually enjoyed, mind you, listening to his ranting or attempting a rebuttal to his extreme and bitter verbosity when he was confronted with any conversation regarding the subject of religion. Particularly was this true regarding to the "Christian" religion. His sharp retorts were capable of humiliating even the most humble of saints. Not being of that elite company of the most humble, I often found his comments infuriating and his person deplorable.

The old gentleman was, I would assume, in his late seventies or so. He had a balloon-like belly that protruded so far out in front of him that it seemed to push people away. His yellowed, bloodshot eyes, his balding head, with the fewest of gray, greasy hairs combed neatly across his shiny scalp, and his round, sagging face with its long nose, deep lines, and gray, scraggly moustache, curling limply at each end, made him look like nothing so much as a forlorn walrus. He was a

caricaturist's incarnation and I recalled seeing his perfect likeness in some Dickensian political cartoons from a history textbook in college days.

Some would have found him repulsive, and although I could not bring myself to be unkind as to say so, I had to admit that there was nothing attractive or desirable about him. Such thoughts reminded me of the words of the Prophet Isaiah describing Jesus, our great Messiah and Lord: "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isa 52:3).

In any case, I suppose that I had intended to encounter him this night, because he could usually be found standing outside the billiard parlor, waiting to snare some unsuspecting passerby into a game of eight ball, for which he would not have to pay. I knew that he was a formidable opponent at the table, and yet, I also knew that I would get little more conversation from him on the street. "Would you be so kind as to accommodate me in a game of cue sport since I have the entire evening free?" I asked.

"Of course," he exclaimed, "if you can also tolerate the ramblings of a bitter old man in the process and if you like the game of eight-ball."

This was exactly what I had in mind. Perhaps God was now beginning to answer my prayer for just such an opportunity. Toward the close of the second game, he was about to sink the three ball in the corner pocket. He laughed and said, "I once stood up all night trying to miss a shot like this."

"Just for conversation," I said, "can you give me a scientific, quantum physics description of the shot that you are about to make?"

"Elementary, my good fellow," he said, as he seized the opportunity to relay his intellectual expertise. "The elongated cue stick, which I hold in my hand, is an energy condenser and converter."

I couldn't believe that I asked this question. I knew full well that I would be subjecting myself to a long torturous explanation. Nevertheless, as a Christian with a burning passion to evangelize, I would be a good listener tonight in order to perhaps catch a subject that could lead me into a gospel witness. I learned this approach by reading of the Apostle Paul in Athens and how he used the altar to the unknown God and quoted the Cretan poet Epimenides, the Cilician poet, Aratus and from Cleanthes in his *Hymn to Zeus*. Not many, but a number of men and women became followers that day.

"Sooo!" You want to discuss pool physics and motion transitions?"

I didn't have his education in the math and sciences, so I wouldn't be remotely able to discern if his explanation was on-the-level or if he was just toying with me. But tonight I would be a compassionate listener.

“My explanation will be based upon a parameterization of ball motion which allows the time of occurrence of events, such as collisions and transitions between motion states to be solved analytically. I will try not to talk over your head.”

“Yea right,” I whispered to myself. He was already beyond my vocabulary but I wasn’t going to admit it. I didn’t have to because he somehow knew this already.

“This shot will involve accurate sensing and actuation, and there will be a significant amount of strategy involved.”

“I’m not just talking about this shot. The placement of the cue ball following a shot is one of my key elements to a successful play, and I like to plan at least 3 shots ahead.”

I knew a Baptist pastor like this in Benton Harbor, Michigan. When a church member would ask him a pointed question, he would give them the long answer followed up by a stack of his compilations on the same subject. If I could learn from this pastor, perhaps there would be something God could teach me from this seemingly endless recitation.

“You know, pool bears a similarity to other games of strategy, such as chess and checkers. The difference being that chess and checkers are played on a board with discrete positions so that the number of possible board states is finite, although huge. In contrast, a pool table is a continuous domain, with a truly infinite number of possible table states.”

“Really, you don’t say,” I replied, as I tried to hide a yawn, knowing how offensive it might seem if he saw it.

“To predict accurately the outcome of a shot—the final resting locations of all balls—requires some knowledge of physics. Game strategy and physics are therefore intertwined, which is one of the intriguing aspects of this game.”

Nodding as if I understood, I couldn’t help but wonder if this was a less-than-honest gesture and could God bless my plan of evangelism if I was only pretending to be thinking on his level. I somehow knew that we were going to get into a discussion of Newtonian laws of quantum mechanics, and I was straining my brain to even vaguely recall what they were. “Lord Jesus, help me to remember and forgive me for being pretentious at times.”

“Let me describe the physics of the impact of the cue and a ball, and the resulting motion. Each shot commences with the cue striking the cue ball. The ball moves across the surface of the table. The central axis of the cue is denoted by a vector, which by definition is parallel to the plane. Notice that the vector is oriented at an angle to the horizontal plane, and I will make the simple assumption that the cue contacts the ball at a single point, etc., etc.,...”

“Yaaaawn!” His eye caught me and I was slightly embarrassed.

He continued, “To calculate the trajectory of the cue ball and its initial velocity immediately after being struck by the cue must be conceived of in terms of the impact parameters and the magnitude of the velocity of the cue immediately before striking the ball. Newton’s second law is integrated to determine the velocity of the ball in terms of the force exerted on the ball by the cue impact. Assuming that the time duration of the collision is very small, the force can be treated as a perfectly elastic impulse, especially when integrating Newton’s second law with respect to the duration of time after the collision occurs”

“What is Newton’s second law,” I queried within myself. “Oh yes, *force equals mass multiplied by acceleration.*” “This is it,” I said to myself, “the subject matter for which I had been waiting—Newton’s second law which will lead me into a discussion of the third law: *To every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.* And if I can get him to discuss the second law of thermodynamics, he might be compelled to admit that there is a creator God to which he will someday be answerable.” But I needed time to go home and look up these subjects and commit some definitions to memory. Would it be worth all this effort? Was it worth it to the Apostle Paul to memorize Greek poets in order to open an opportunity of evangelism? I think so!

“Sooo!” said I, attempting feebly to wax scientific, “The magnitude of the force in terms of the impact parameters is derived by simultaneously solving the equations for conservation of linear momentum and conservation of energy before and after the cue impact.” My flesh thinking to itself, “You silver-tongued devil, you,” while my spirit wandered within me if I even understood what I just spouted and yet hoping that he would be impressed that we were thinking on the same level. “God, forgive me again. Please overrule my pretentiousness and use my witness tonight for Jesus’ sake.”

“Yes,” he exclaimed. “And in addition to linear velocity, the collision with the cue also imparts an angular velocity to the ball. Now this shot is achieved by striking the ball above center, so that there is a component of spin around the ball’s positive axis. The desired effect is to have the cue ball continue its forward motion after colliding with an object ball. I call this *follow.*”

“Now *draw*, on the other hand, is the opposite of *follow*, and is achieved by striking the ball below center. After the object/ball collision, the cue ball reverses direction.”

“How long is this going to last?” I pondered. “God, please help me to be patient and alert, and give me the wisdom to seize the right moment to begin my witness. Oh great! Here we go with some more.”

“Left or right English is achieved by striking the ball slightly left or right of the center respectively, resulting in a rotation around the ball’s axis. There are a number of possible effects of English, including altering the angle of incidence of the cue and/or object balls following a collision. Did you know that English can also be communicated to object balls?”

“No, I did not know this,” feeling a little more honest within myself for making such an admission and hoping that this would end the rambling. However, I must confess, I knew what I was getting into when I asked the question.

“There is a fourth type of spin.”

“Oh no! It’s not over yet.”

“This is usually attempted only by more advanced players such as myself, wherein the cue is elevated at an extreme angle nearly perpendicular to the table. This causes a large component of the entire transition resulting in a curvilinear ball motion and is the basis of *curve* and *mass e* shots.”

“As the ball moves across the table, the only unbalanced external force acting on it is friction with the table. This friction acts at the point of contact between the ball and the table surface, in a direction opposite to the ball’s motion. We approximate this as a single point of contact, although in reality the ball compresses the fibers of the tablecloth and sinks slightly into the cloth so that the point of contact is actually a small portion of the ball’s spherical surface.”

I will remind him of this description when I later use the second law of thermodynamics to lead into my witness, if God blesses me with such an opportunity.

“When a ball is struck by the cue, it begins its motion by sliding across the surface of the table. After some time, the interplay between the table friction and the ball’s linear and angular velocities causes the ball to begin rolling. The specific combination of the ball’s linear and angular velocities will cause it to transition from the sliding to the rolling state at a particular time. The ball will be rolling only when it makes a revolution about the axis to accomplish the distance that it travels along the table, equal to the circumference of the ball.”

“OK! OK! OK! Let’s finish this game before the parlor closes. I understand now the ball motion as either sliding or rolling by considering the relationship between the linear velocity of the ball and the angular velocity of the ball at the point of contact with the table surface.”

The old gentleman sensed my frustration and the lack of patience in me that I couldn’t hide and he attempted to cease his recitation, I would guess, as an act of mercy in exchange for my kindness in spending the evening with him.

And yet he could not stop himself from an attempt to reduce all we had discussed into more simple terms. "Back to the cue stick. Notice how the diameter narrows from the grip to the tip. This is for the purpose of energy conversion. What would otherwise be a harmless push of my hand is converted to an impact that would feel like a bullet between your eyes. There will be an instantaneous conversion of energy from the cue tip to the cue ball. Notice two balls when they touch. Their contact comprises only a minute fraction of a square inch. It is through this small, inappreciable area that the energy of the cue ball will be transferred to the eight ball. Now observe the change in direction in the inertia of the condensed energy. The cue ball, moving straight forward, impacts the eight ball slightly to the right so that the latter proceeds at a forty-five degree angle."

"That was a fascinating description," I said, as he finished the winning shot of the game. "So, would it be correct to say that every observable reaction is the direct result of some action?"

"This would be correct," he said, referring to Newton's third law of motion. "And furthermore, every observable action is itself a mere reaction."

"Ah! Then all observable motion is a chain of actions and reactions?"

"This appears to be correct," he exclaimed.

"Well then, can the cue ball be its own action and its own reaction simultaneously?"

"That would be impossible because then it would have to be not moving and moving at the same time. There must be a chain reaction. If we could develop a self-moving object, we would have a perpetual motion machine and the second law of thermodynamics dictates against this."

"Chain! Does that explain the universe of motion as we know it?"

"Yes indeed, but you must understand that the chain reaches back into infinity—infinite regress, if you please."

"You contradict yourself, sir. You are describing a chain that is its own cause of action in that it is not acted upon by anything outside of itself. Is this chain not a perpetual motion machine? What is the difference between this 'chain' and this cue ball? If the chain is what you say, then it cannot have a causative force outside of itself. It is a singular chain and yet it is its own cause and effect. Why is this possible for a chain and impossible for a cue ball? I used to collect old sets of dominos so that I could set hundreds of them upright on the dining room table and then watch the chain reaction when I knocked just the first one forward. They would always stand there motionless until something that was not a domino tipped over the first domino."

At this moment I was thanking the Lord that I had just recently read an article with a definition of the second law of thermodynamics that introduces the concept of *entropy* as a quantity that relentlessly increases because of heat dissipation resulting from motion. Because heat is the random movement of the individual particles that make up the system, entropy has come to be interpreted as the amount of disorder the system contains. This law provides a way to connect the microscopic world, where Newtonian and quantum mechanics rule, with the macroscopic (*visible to the naked eye*) laws of thermodynamics.

"Well, my friend," he said, "You are trying to trap me into admitting that there had to be an uncaused cause out there in infinity that set the chain into motion."

"Do you, in fact, admit that?"

"Yes, I suppose so . . ."

"Then, you are not an atheist."

"No, but even if I admit that there is such a force out there, and if I admit that it is an omnipotent person, 'He' still refuses to will away the evil of this world when it is obvious that 'He' could. This is not justice and I want nothing to do with 'Him!' Such a being that you call 'God' more closely approximates a being I'd call the devil!"

"That's pretty harsh."

"It's a harsh world, friend, and one that no caring, concerned person—whether divine or human—can stand by and watch without experiencing something akin to outrage!"

I breathed deeply and exhaled in frustration. The two of us stood there looking at each other for a minute, the penetrating glare of the neon and fluorescent lights in the pool hall filling the room with a garish, decadent glow worthy of Van Gogh's post-impressionism. At last, I spoke, deciding to use a different tactic. "Do you know what it's like to be lonely?"

"I most certainly do, my friend, and more than you would imagine. I have known love and then the bitter loss of it. It is a painful experience that you never forget."

"Love is a fascinating subject," I said, as a new strategy began to take shape. "Love is something you have to have in the first place in order to give."

"That is correct. Something must be possessed in order to be transferred."

"This would not be totally unlike the transference of energy from a cue stick to a cue ball."

"That is true. Energy must be possessed in order to be transferred."

"Forgive me for changing the subject," I asked, "but the sun is transferring energy from itself at an incalculable rate. We know that it is not replenishing itself. We also know that if it has always been there, it would have burned out long ago, for at the present rate it will burn out some day," taking him back to the second law of thermodynamics and the irreversible degeneration of energy.

"Correct, but how did we get back on the subject of energy?"

"Well," I said, "if the sun has not always been there it is logical to assume that it had to have originated. It could not have self-originated because then it would have had to exist and not exist at the same time, which is logically impossible. Neither could it have installed its own energy. Just as a cue ball cannot transfer energy to itself. Therefore, the sun's originator would have installed its energy."

"Correct again," he said, "and I am intrigued as to where this conversation is leading."

"Why don't you join me at the coffee shop and I will tell you what is really on my mind?"

The old gentleman agreed to allow me to buy supper for the both of us. I knew that it was a small price to pay for this opportunity. As we walked toward the coffee shop, I began to pray: "Lord, I know he will break this conversation off if I begin to quote Scripture to him now, but I must have an opportunity to present the plan of salvation to him from the Bible. I know that You can do all things and I ask You to create such an opportunity for me this very night. Amen."

"Well," I said, as our two cheeseburgers, fries, and cokes were served, "someone or something had to have installed the energy into the billions of suns in the Milky Way. If the Milky Way has always been there it would also have burned out long ago. Can you imagine how big and how infinite the energy of this one or this thing is?"

"That is what the word 'infinite' means, my friend," he said. "There can be no greater power or energy than that of the original originator."

"Could this also be true of other attributes of God such as all-loving, all-knowing, all-present, all-righteous, and all-justice?"

"I told you not to speak to me about a loving god!" he exclaimed with irritation. "The existence of such a one is logically impossible from my observation."

"To observe the absence of love we must have an understanding of what love is," I answered. "If the human race did not originate itself, then its ability to love had to have been installed. The installer had to have it in order to give it. We tried to conceive of His infinite power when we thought of Him installing the energy into the Milky Way. He had to have love; in fact, He had to be infinite love. All love we experience is merely a reflection of His original love."

"I disagree, but what is your point?"

"Suppose you were a young man again and had a choice between two beautiful girls. The first girl has a button on her shoulder which, when pushed, causes her to say, 'I love everything about you and I will be devoted to you and express words of love to you from henceforth.' The second girl stands on her own volition and willfully exclaims, 'I love everything about you and I will be true to you as long as I live.' Of these two girls, equally beautiful and charming in all other respects, which one would you choose?"

"Obviously, I would choose the second girl, if I wanted to know true love."

"Precisely. But if you choose girl number two, you are taking the chance that she will not continue to say these words, or if she does, she will not mean them. So you will take this chance. It is the option to hate that makes true love possible. It is a wife's option to hate her husband that makes her love valuable. If she were brainwashed or programmed to express love, she could not satisfy the true loneliness of a man. God could have created beings who could not choose evil or hatred, but this would not have satisfied Him or glorified Him any more than it would satisfy you or me. God in His wisdom created beings with the ability to choose hatred and evil."

"I see what you're driving at, my good fellow," he said. "If the God I've been looking for really existed, it would be impossible to know him or his love. It would be as impossible as true love and devotion coming from a computer. Hate is what makes love worth having and evil is what makes good so precious."

I wanted to keep going on and on, but the old gentleman, with a good meal under his belt, was beginning to fade, just as I was beginning to fade under the monotony of his endless pool-shot explanations. His sad eyes began to droop even more than usual, so I begged off for the evening, but not before obtaining his promise to return the following week.

In the meantime, I prayed much and studied not a little over a number of Scripture passages related to salvation. I drew much comfort from these verses and returned the next week ready for battle with the dark forces of unbelief in this man's soul. Incidentally, I also looked up some of His complex terminology that I pretended to understand at our last meeting.

After two challenging games of eight ball and dinner ("Dutch" this time), I reviewed our previous conversation, establishing the necessity of God's existence and His chief attribute of love.

The old gentleman challenged me at the end of my speech. "All you have said makes sense, but I still have one problem. If God is infinitely righteous and infinitely just, he must perform justice upon the human race. I believe Christians call this justice 'condemnation'."

This was the opportunity I had been waiting for. It was time to begin quoting Scripture to the gentleman. "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, no, not one'" (Romans 3:10); "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God . . ." (Rom. 3:23); "For the wages of sin is death . . ." (Romans 6:23).

After I had talked for a while about God's condemnation of sin, the old man spoke, "Your Bible has one flaw, my friend. There is a conflict between two of the infinite attributes of your God. If He is infinitely just, He will condemn you for falling short of His infinite righteousness. However, if he is infinitely loving, he infinitely desires for you to never experience His condemnation. He cannot compromise His love for His justice and He cannot compromise His justice for his love. Now He has a problem, and wicked man cannot provide a solution for Him. If He compromises His justice, He is unjust. Why should anyone believe an unjust God, even if He exclaimed a million times that He loved us?"

"You are absolutely correct, sir," I exclaimed with excitement. "God knew that this conflict would fall into play if He created a race with free choice. However, His desire to love was so strong that He determined to do it even if it meant not being loved in return. His attributes would not permit that He should be the creator of evil and so, in His wisdom, He created free choice in mankind. Thus, before He created such a race, He devised His own plan to resolve the conflict between His love and justice. That the conflict exists is logically undeniable, but the solution to the conflict has been explained only in the Bible.

"Before the foundation of the world, God determined to become a perfect human being who would choose no evil. In this perfect state of incarnation, He would effect a transference. Remember how energy is transferred from the cue ball to the eight ball? In a similar sense, God transferred the guilt of the entire human race and imputed it to His own Son's body. Because the infinite justice of God requires condemnation upon all guilt, He poured out His wrath upon His own Son until His justice was satisfied."

"The Prophet Isaiah foresaw this some seven hundred years before Christ in the statement: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' (Isaiah 53:6). Isaiah also prophesied that this alone would satisfy the justice of God: 'He shall see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied . . .' (Isaiah 53:11). The prophet Zechariah tells us that God Himself would be dying upon the cross. The God of the Old

Testament is speaking when He says: 'And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplications; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son . . .' (Zechariah 12:10).

"Now," I said, "He offers to make another transference. As a free gift, paid for 100% by His shed blood and broken body on the cross, He will transfer His pure righteousness and impute it to you, if you will just realize that you deserve condemnation without this free gift and say "yes" to Jesus Christ. When you accept His righteousness as a free gift, you will also receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. You see, you must be as righteous as God Himself in order to have eternal life. This righteousness is not something that you do, but something that you are made by the grace of God—'For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' (II Corinthians 5:21)."

Suddenly I noticed a change in his countenance and there was no longer the same hostility in his face. Perhaps God had answered my prayer and this was the moment.

He looked at me and said, "What you have said tonight is the only explanation of the conflict between the love and justice of God of which I have ever made sense. Are you sure that this is what the Bible teaches?"

"I will quote you three more passages and then ask you for an answer. 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit' (I Peter 3:18); 'to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Romans 3:26); 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast' (Ephesians 2:8, 9)." Then I asked him, "Will you receive this gift from God tonight?" He was silent for a long time.

Then at last, he said, "Not tonight."

"Why not?" I asked, trying bravely not to show my devastation and disappointment. I felt crushed. "God forgive me again. I know that you are in charge of this encounter and it must have grieved you when I felt crushed." It never ceases to amaze me that God chooses to use such Adamic persons like myself as His instruments to accomplish anything.

"I'm . . . just not ready," he exclaimed with frustration.

"Very well. Would you join me one week from tonight, same time and place, and let us talk further about these things?"

"I'll look forward to it."

In the intervening week, I enlisted as much prayer support as I could muster, both local and long distance, even sending out a few postcards and sending a request down the prayer chain at my church. I was determined not to let Satan keep this old man's soul without all the powers of heaven called upon to set him free.

At our next meeting, after the billiard game and dinner, we talked until the last customer had paid his bill and the waitress had cleaned the last table for the night. Finally, after listening to his ramblings, which for the reader's sake I will not repeat here, I began to talk to him in earnest. "A few weeks ago, friend, you gave me a little speech about war and suffering children and hatred and the hypocrisy of Christians. I have an answer for you now, if you will listen to me."

"Please continue." "This is an answer I hope you will never forget. You said that you've seen the horrors of war."

"Yes," said the old man, recalling his own words, " 'Young men in their prime gunned down like so many cattle at the slaughterhouse.' " I could tell that this was his standard line to anyone who brought up the subject of God with him.

I looked the old man straight in the eye. "You are not the only one who has seen such horrors. You are not the only one to recoil in outrage and indignation. There is Another who has seen all this and more, and that is God. His omniscient eye has seen; His heart has felt; and He has acted in response to these things."

"You see, He has given His only Son, Jesus Christ—a young man in His prime, sent to the slaughter, like a soldier into battle, like a lamb to a bloody sacrifice. Jesus Christ died a horrible, humiliating public execution, and rose again to ultimately conquer all war, all rebellion, and all senseless killing forever."

He started to speak, but I continued emphatically, determined for once not to let him interrupt and divert the conversation down another path.

"You spoke of seeing the suffering of children—well, God has seen all of them too and He cares more than you or I ever could. He allowed the body of His own Son to become grotesquely twisted on the cross, permitted Him to cry out in agony, to receive ridicule and rejection— not just at the cross, but for some 2,000 years thereafter, all to give us the very love and acceptance that His Son was denied for our sake."

"You have seen the hatred of men for each other, the willful pride and prejudice against all reason, and yet I tell you, there was no reason for Jesus Christ to be hated. He was the only perfect, sinless man to ever walk this planet, yet He was hated without a cause, and not just by man, but He became, by taking our guilt, the thing God hates most—sin—the thing against which God holds the most loathing contempt and righteous anger."

"You talk of love and mercy as though you were an authority, as though the God of the universe was on trial and you were His judge and jury! He is our Judge and all eternity hangs in the balance for each of us, unless we receive by faith the only One in the universe who can save us—Jesus Christ."

"You said you were heartbroken and lonely. Did it ever once occur to you that Christ died with a broken heart, that He felt the utter aloneness of being forsaken by God, His Father, so you would never have to experience that in time or eternity?"

The old man held up his hand. "Enough. I am a fool. Do not add insult to injury." "No!" I said. "I have one more thing to share with you. Let me say this and I am done." He nodded and threw up his hand, reluctantly consenting with an almost desperate resignation to hear the end of my speech. I feared that I would drive him away and undo all I'd worked to achieve, and yet something in me urged me onward, propelled me forward.

"You said that the one religion of the world whose constituency adheres the least to its stated beliefs is Christianity."

"I said that because it is true."

"But does the brutal honesty of the Bible not strike you strangely as it makes no attempt to deny or cover up the hundreds of instances of that exact hypocrisy?"

"And yet you have been so bitter that you have never seen the true adherents of Christianity really at work. You have based your opinion of Christianity on nominal Christians who may not even be Christians at all, or if they are, they have an awful day of reckoning when they stand face to face with Jesus Christ at His judgment bar. For every true Christian you show me who's failing, I'll show you a strong Christian who is not a hypocrite. Don't look at Sunday-only Christians and television evangelists. Look at retired ladies who live on Social Security, spending hours daily in their prayer closets. Look at obscure men and women, laboring faithfully on some remote mission field. They are examples of true adherents of Christianity."

"You have misunderstood the very nature of God's grace and love. You are not the only one, because most of the world is mistaken along with you. God's grace, by its very nature, can be abused, misused, taken lightly, or taken for granted."

"Christians are sinners just like unbelievers, and unfortunately they often share the same unbelieving, unappreciative attitude toward God's grace. The hypocrisy of some Christians doesn't nullify Christianity—if anything, it is the greatest proof of how loving and gracious and forgiving and patient God is to put up with people who should be deeply grateful, but who for the most part are ungrateful."

"But if all this were not enough, your biggest error of all is in looking at Christianity or at Christians and not at Christ. No church, no baptism, no preacher, no good work can take you to heaven—only Christ can do that. Right now, God is not asking you to trust in any Christian, since no Christian can save you. Only Christ deserves your trust for salvation, because He alone can save you."

I stopped, a little out of breath. When the old gentleman wouldn't look up at me or say a word for what seemed like minutes, I was afraid I'd said too much. At last, unable to bear the silence between us, I spoke. "It grieves me if I have offended you, it was because I was trying desperately to help you. A person doesn't speak softly to a man who is drowning."

A slight smile came across his lips, like the smile I'd seen when I asked him to dinner that first night or when I asked him to play a second game of eight ball. "Young man, I have been silent, because I've been thinking about what you've said. I've been thinking all these weeks of what you've been telling me and it all makes sense."

"I sincerely hope so," I said, looking down at the dregs in my empty coffee cup, "I hope that you see all I've said is really a restatement of what God said first in His Word."

"I understand that part."

"Then let me ask you a question again—the same question I asked you last week, only this time in different words. What would you say if the God of the Bible, Jesus Christ the Savior, were to walk into this coffee shop and say to you: 'I have for you the gift of eternal life, the righteousness of God and forgiveness of sin, but you must know that you are doomed without this and receive it as a free gift. Will you receive this gift from Me?' What would be your answer?"

By now his eyes began to get moist as he said, "My answer would probably be 'Yes.'"

I looked at him as he said this. "The God of the Bible, the God of the universe, is not a God of probabilities—He is the God of certainties. He asks nothing less of us. He does not have to walk into this room. The Bible says that He has been here all along; that He knows your thoughts, and that He wants your answer. What will it be?" Without hesitating this time, he said, "Yes."

I smiled, trying to hold back my own tears like a "real man," knowing a cheer had just resounded throughout the length and breadth and height and depth of heaven itself. And it came to pass just as it was written: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12) "Glory to God!" I shouted within myself.

That night as I left the coffee shop, the billiard parlor, and that whole seamy side of town, it seemed like a different world to me. My tears of joy were out of control and pouring like a flood over my face. I knew that I would have an audience with this new friend of mine quite often in the future. I had so many other subjects I wanted to share with him: the assurance of salvation, the authority of the Bible over our lives, the privilege of access to God through prayer, the importance of assembling with other believers, and the privilege of soul-winning. But at that moment, my surpassing joy was the realization that God had used me as an instrument this very night!

And beyond that, there was also the realization that this new brother of mine would accompany me into an eternal future in the presence of God. I felt in a fresh way the force of the Apostle's words: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (I Thessalonians 2:19).

Tonight I experienced that my life was not just passing through my fingers. Tonight I had experienced the dynamics of the divine purpose for a Christian's earthly existence. Tonight, in fact, I understood why God had left me here.