

## Appendix A

### Salvation: What it is and how you get it, or *Who's Your Daddy?*

Salvation is a mysterious word among the unchurched. And rightly so. It's not a concept they spend a lot of time pondering, I'd wager. But I suspect it may *be*, despite its ubiquitousness, even more of a mystery among church-goers.

Huh?

The subject of salvation reminds me of the old song, *What's It All About, Alfie?*

Do we really know? Is there consensus? We say there is, but *is* there?

Well.....a little bit yes, and a lotta no.

There is a very narrow strip of common ground that winds through the majority of churches, but even that narrow strip is fading into nothingness at various points along the Christian continuum. And the Church *is* a continuum, encompassing everything from ultra-liberalism to evangelicalism to strict fundamentalism to those wacky Charismatics and Pentecostals (*kidding!*) and all points in between, all with their variations on the theme of salvation. Human nature being what it is, and the devil being who he is, a multitude of interpretations and theories have arisen over the centuries to describe this profound notion. Salvation is "bought" and "sold" under various guises, as different as night and day. Here are a few of the more common conceptions (or misconceptions) of what constitutes salvation in the various churches.

Salvation results if and when you:

1. Believe and espouse certain facts about Jesus Christ. That:
  - a) He was the incarnated eternal Son of God;
  - b) He was born of the virgin Mary;
  - c) He lived a sinless life;
  - d) He was crucified and died in payment (atonement) for our sins;
  - e) He rose again from the dead;
  - f) He will return to judge the living and the dead.

The mere mental assent to these facts is believed by some to qualify a person for salvation, or eternal life with God in heaven. (And many who don't openly admit this, nonetheless live as if it's true.) This could be called creedal salvation. Get your theology right and you're in. It's that simple. How one lives is secondary, if not actually irrelevant, according to some, because our sanctification (as well as our salvation) is God's job, and He will get it done. Not to worry. And if He doesn't, oh well. We're not saved by our own righteousness anyway.

2. Pray a "sinner's prayer" acknowledging that you need forgiveness for your sins, and appealing to God for redemption on the basis of Christ's shed blood on Calvary. This prayer can be prayed at any time in one's life, even at ages well below that at which one could actually understand the concepts of sin, repentance *or* salvation. It is often believed that, after praying this prayer, a person cannot "lose their salvation" no matter what they do or don't do, believe or don't believe, during the remainder of their life. They are sealed "in Christ" forever and nothing, including their own sin, rebellion, or rejection of that salvation can undo what has been done for them by God in response to this one-time prayer. The door doesn't swing both ways, in other words. Once you're in, you can't get out, even if you want to. This is high motivation for getting children to pray at the earliest opportunity.
3. Are predestined or pre-selected (before the foundation of the world) by the sovereign choosing of God. This has nothing to do with *you*, or even with what you do, according to some who hold this view. God chooses those He wants to save as it pleases Him, completely apart from any "dignity or indignity" in them (so that they will get no credit). He then makes sure they hear the gospel, gives them the gift of faith to believe it and basically *makes* them receive it. They cannot resist it, even if they want to. In fact, they are saved before they know they are saved. It is "irresistible grace." Those He does not pre-select cannot be saved, even if they want to be and live like they are.
4. Perform certain "works" that qualify you for heaven. These vary from age to age, church to church and denomination to denomination, but might include such things as baptism (infant or otherwise); weekly church attendance or Saturday Sabbath-keeping; regular

participation in the Lord's Supper (Communion, the Eucharist); "partaking of the sacraments" (i.e., including perhaps regular Confession to a priest or confessor); giving alms (tithing, for example); doing good or charitable works; attending "Mass" on Sunday; wearing a scapular or other religious clothing; and perhaps having certain rites performed over you at, or immediately after, your death. Some denominations would include abstaining from meat, alcohol, caffeine, smoking, gambling, wearing makeup, dancing, going to movies, and other worldly pursuits. This harks back to the concept of law-keeping as a *means* to salvation (not an expression of it), though the laws one is required to keep vary from church to church and denomination to denomination. This could be called "works" salvation.

5. Your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds at the moment of your death. This is another form of "works" salvation, and a commonly held belief among adherents of many non-Christian religions; but many nominal Christians and unbelievers espouse this idea as well, particularly those of the more mainline churches. Basically your deeds are put on a scale and if the scale tips one degree to the good side, you're in.<sup>1</sup>
6. You die, because Jesus died for all men, and so all men will be saved. This is called universalism. The rationale is put forth that since God desires all men to be saved, they will be. Since He is all-powerful, His *will* ultimately will triumph and no power on earth or in heaven can thwart it.

We could cite other beliefs about what constitutes salvation and we could go into a lot more detail on those we mentioned, but it's fairly easy to see that these views cannot all be true, since they conflict with one another. In fact, none of them may be true.

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<sup>1</sup> This is probably the most common belief among men: that we are justified by our own deeds, provided the good ones outweigh the bad ones. Problem with this theory is this: Imagine a scene at the final judgment. God opens the books (the record of our lives) and evaluates everyone according to their relative goodness (considering motives, deeds, omissions, etc.), and then puts, for example, a Mother Teresa-type figure on His right as the "best" person who ever lived, and a Hitler-type on His left as the "worst" person and everyone else in between in order of relative goodness or badness. Then at some point in this line (presumably the middle, where the theoretical scale would tip), He divides the line, sending those on His right to heaven and those on His left to hell. Do you see the problem? The two people in the middle, on either side of the line, are so close together in terms of their deeds that it could hardly be "just" to send the one to heaven and the other to hell for eternity. In essence it means the person on the left goes to hell for that one extra white lie or selfish deed that tipped their scale to the bad side, because had they not committed it they would have been on the other side of the line. And the person on the right goes to heaven for having one *less* white lie. It is not only not fair, but it does not provide any guarantee that heaven will be any different than earth, since those on the right are still as likely to sin in heaven as they were on earth. No heart change has been required.

What a discombobulated religion. If Christianity is the truth, how can this be? If God is God, how can the most fundamental doctrine of Christianity not be spelled out in rock-solid form in the Bible, so that all can see and know what the truth is? And if all Christian churches share the same Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of *Truth*,” how can they profess such different *means* of salvation, especially when they all base their claims on the same Holy Scriptures? Why isn’t there a formula for faith, one that is not open to interpretation? After all, there is no more important subject in the entire Bible. Why do even seminaries, full of people who are supposed to know such things, promote contrary theologies if the leading of the same Holy Spirit is claimed by all of them? Some of these seminaries are even teaching that Jesus was not God in the flesh, and yet still call themselves Christian institutions. How can that be?

All of this makes one thing certain. *Someone* or *something* is laboring very hard to make sure that the clear message of salvation, the “good news,” is obliterated, or at least distorted, for the vast majority of humanity, despite the best efforts of two millennia to the contrary. It’s all very confusing. Today’s Christianity comes in so many variations, we wonder if there really is an authentic form of it out there somewhere, hiding in the bushes. We’ve all been taught so many wrong theories and perspectives that, in many churches, the truth has been almost completely obscured. The Bible itself has been analyzed to death. Almost literally. Clearly the devil has been working overtime to muddy the doctrinal waters from the very beginning, as the apostle Paul attested to in his own day.<sup>2</sup>

Why did God inspire the *Bible*, a collection of stories, histories, genealogies, letters and songs, instead of an A-Z guidebook for salvation, especially if He really meant it when He said He desires for all men to be saved and none to perish? How hard would it have been to just write down the steps in a simple order so that all people in all countries and in all generations could easily find, understand and apply that information? How simple it would have been to translate a simple generic list of requirements into all the world’s languages, as compared to the vast compilation of documents we have in the Bible. Men still have

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 20:29; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 Tim.4:1; 1 Tim. 1:3; Gal.4:17

not accomplished that one task, translating the Word of God into all known tongues. Did God have to make it this hard?<sup>3</sup>

One could hypothesize an answer to these questions.

The best one I've been able to come up with is that God isn't interested in just having a heaven full of people so much as He's interested in having a heaven full of people who want to be there for the right reasons. Not just to escape a fate worse than death (hell); not to get a boatload of pleasure and riches for themselves (Islamic virgins to the contrary). That would be to have a heaven filled with those who are basically selfish and self-seeking, the very sins God wants us all to repent of! God wants a heaven filled with people who are there because, first and foremost, they believe He exists, desperately want to be on good terms with Him and will do whatever is necessary to make sure that happens. In other words, they love Him. By not writing out a formula for us,<sup>4</sup> God has limited His heaven to those who will expend the effort to seek Him with all their hearts because they know they won't be happy without Him.

And there's another factor at work here, too. God wants to preserve the nature of His heaven. It's His home. It is perfect. So He only will allow "perfect" people to live there. "Well," you might say, "He's going to be sorely disappointed then, because there are no perfect people." And you'd be right about that if it weren't for the fact that God has found a way to make people "legally" perfect through the transaction they make with Jesus when they enter into faith; and then He goes to work to perfect them on a heart

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<sup>3</sup> I can imagine a book like this would be decried for its simplicity. "Anybody could have written this! What's so special about it? It's just a list!" They can't say that about the Bible, arguably the most complex and relied upon book in history.

<sup>4</sup> Some would say there *is* a formula, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And it's true that this is a pretty good one. But one could ask: What does it mean to believe in Him? Is it to believe that He existed? That He is God? That He died for our sins? That He rose from the dead? All of the above? Or is there more to it than that? Is this a "fact based" theological religion? Or is it a relational religion? If it's relational, what constitutes genuine relationship? Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Now things get more complicated. And we're off to the races!

level once they've yielded that heart to Him.<sup>5</sup> And when those who are being perfected stand before Him, He will complete the work of burning away the dross, so they will shine like the stars of heaven.<sup>6</sup>

So, if you're interested in being one of those people, you might be asking about now, "What *is* the truth? What is salvation actually, and how do I really get it? And why should I believe *you*?"

Let's answer that last question first: Why should you believe *us*?

We're not asking you to believe us. We're asking you to consider what we have to say, search the Scriptures for yourself, and see if you agree. One thing I *will* say to our credit, to give you some sense of confidence: we (the authors) have been exposed to, if not deeply indoctrinated in, several of these views on salvation during our combined 60-odd years in the faith, so we know them inside and out. We know their strengths and their weaknesses. Other views we've also studied thoroughly on our own and have found to be in opposition to foundational, pivotal truths in the Scriptures. We have been educated in bible schools and seminaries, but have, like Paul, cast much of that aside in favor of a simple, humble, childlike approach to God and the Bible. We hope you will see the value in what we say here and will take it to heart. It will transform you and your relationship with God in profound ways. For the better.

So what is salvation?

Salvation is like a diamond. It can be viewed from multiple angles and illustrated by various metaphors.

First let's talk about what it is not.

Salvation is not a commodity like a fire-insurance policy or a stock certificate that you stick in your back pocket and whip out at the moment of your death. "See God, I'm saved! You gotta let me in!" It's not a

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<sup>5</sup> This is the process of sanctification. Salvation is a work of God on our behalf. I am saved by His death and payment for my sins; I am being saved by His work of transformation in my heart and life; and I will be saved in eternity when He takes me to live with Him forever. It's a complete spirit, soul and body work, but it does not all happen instantly at salvation. If I die momentarily after my salvation I will go to heaven, yes. But there's a lot more that can be effected in me if I go through the arduous process of transformation. I learn a lot. I change a lot. I grow a lot. And I can model that for others along the same road.

<sup>6</sup> You might be asking how God can just purge away the impurities once we die, and if He can do it once we're dead, why not when we're still alive? Two responses: He does purge away the impurities while we're alive as we repent and trust in His finished work of salvation; and for those who have demonstrated a heart of obedience in this life, though they have not attained perfection, He can purge away the remaining dross on the basis of their previous perseverance through trials and tribulations.

ticket-to-ride on the heaven-bound express that's stuck to your hand with heavenly glue. It's not a "piece of the Rock," though that makes a nice metaphor and might give you peace of mind in case something really bad happens. It's not a "thing" that you have to worry about losing, like a car key. The sinner's prayer is not a magic formula, like "open sesame," that will automatically spring the pearly gates and usher you into God's heaven at the opportune moment. It's not a contract you sign, agreeing to abide by certain rules drafted by a church committee, nor does it consist of membership in a particular denomination conferred through baptism or any other rite of passage. It's not something you get automatically by being "born into" a certain religion or denomination or family. No one is born a Christian.<sup>7</sup> And finally, it's not something you earn by being "good enough." The "good enough" that is *good enough* is perfect, and I hate to break it to you, but...you aren't. (And neither am I.)

Okay, we've talked about what salvation is not. Now let's talk about what it is.

There are several ways to express what salvation is.

Though salvation is not a "thing," it *could* be described, metaphorically at least, as a "place." That place is referred to in Scripture as being "in Christ." When a person decides to believe and respond in faith and repentance to the gospel message, they are placed, via adoption, into God's family. They are purchased by the blood of Christ out of the devil's family and placed into God's family. They become Jesus' sibling. His legally adopted brother or sister.<sup>8</sup>

Another metaphor for salvation is marriage. As we've mentioned in some of the previous theories, God is creating a Bride for Himself, and we become part of that Bride when we believe and respond appropriately to the gospel message, surrendering our hearts to His lordship. The Holy Spirit is then given to us as a token or pledge, much like an engagement ring, that signifies that we are no longer "available,"

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<sup>7</sup> Even though no one is born a Christian, it appears that children of believing parents *are* sanctified by their parents' faith until they reach the age of accountability (God determines what that is for each individual), at which time they become "sons of the law" themselves and are responsible for their own decisions and beliefs.

<sup>8</sup> Metaphors for salvation are many, but all center, interestingly enough, around relationship: Father/son, Brother/sister, Husband/wife.

but rather belong to our intended. No one can take the “ring” away from us,<sup>9</sup> but we can return it if we choose another suitor or decide that we’re no longer interested. The betrothal is not a prison. It’s a bilateral covenant, freely entered in to. The door swings both ways. If we want out, we can opt out at any time. God desires no reluctant or coerced wife. The Bride is not a slave, nor is this an arranged marriage in which the wife-to-be has had no say. In this betrothal, the Bride commits of her own free will, because she is convinced the Groom loves her and will be a faithful husband and provider for eternity.

Salvation, then, is relational. We begin that relationship as little children (“unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” — Matt.18:3), and over time, as we continue in close fellowship with the Father, we are disciplined, trained and transformed into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:29) That conformation ultimately makes us a suitable eternal companion for God, and able to function as a co-ruler with Him in His kingdom. Though we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light the moment we receive salvation, our sanctification continues throughout our earthly life, making us more and more like Christ as we submit to the transforming process that God initiates in and for His children.<sup>10</sup>

Another “place” that metaphorically speaks of salvation is a military encampment. When we believe the good news of the gospel and accept Christ’s provision for our sin, we defect from the camp of the devil and cross over into the camp of God. He becomes our new commander-in-chief. We put on His armor and become one of His soldiers. His goals become our goals, and His strategies our strategies. As long as we remain within the encampment of the saints, we are safe and protected. If we wander outside the camp, however, or begin to fraternize or flirt with the enemy’s soldiers, we are in danger of being

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<sup>9</sup> Although the devil does his best to convince us to throw it overboard. He goes to work almost immediately trying to convince us that we made a mistake, that what we’ve believed is a lie, that we are not worthy of it, that it won’t last, or that we didn’t do it right anyway. Perseverance requires us to hang onto God and continue trusting Him throughout our lives until death.

<sup>10</sup> This transformation or “sanctification” process is uniquely designed by God for each individual. The pace, order, and length of this process are not under our control. This is one reason that it behooves us not to judge each other too harshly. God isn’t finished with us yet. And He’s not a cookie-cutter God either. He doesn’t do sanctification the same way in every person. If you are a person who has a hard time receiving good things, God may keep giving you good things until you learn to be a humble and genuinely thankful receiver who can rejoice in good fortune. If, on the other hand, you are a person who struggles with covetousness and greed, God may require you to give up things that you desire or covet, taking that as far as needed to teach you not to put your trust in riches or things. He knows where we need to change and grow and the best route to get us there.

recaptured.<sup>11</sup> That is why the Bible warns us to flee from immorality and temptation. We are told that the devil “goes about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”<sup>12</sup> Someone vulnerable. Someone on the edge of the camp, or straddling the fence. Someone trying to live with one foot in each camp.

Another common metaphor is to suggest that salvation is like a car. Before we’re saved we’re driving our own car. We get flat tires, get in wrecks, lock our keys in the car, get lost from time to time, accidentally take the long way and run out of gas. We let people into the car who distract us or try to control our driving. We fill our minds with the rakish sounds of the radio of life, and sometimes we drive to places that are sure to lure us into sin. Salvation, on the other hand, is like getting into God’s car and letting Him drive. He’s always in control of the vehicle, never gets lost, doesn’t run out of gas, knows where He’s going and how to get there by the most direct and scenic route, and He is certain to get us there as long as we stay in the vehicle with Him. If we want to keep driving He’ll let us, but we’re certain to get into trouble. He won’t force us to let Him drive, because He’s a perfect gentleman, but He will take the wheel as soon as we decide to give it to Him. This, obviously, is the wisest course.

Being “in Christ” could also be described as endeavoring to walk according to His commandments, or abiding in His will. But it is even more than that. When we put our trust in Jesus, He comes to live inside us, literally.<sup>13</sup> “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:7) We are in Him, He is in us, and we are in the Father. Our security, our hope, our identity, is “in Christ.”

Salvation has been available to all men from the day that Adam and Eve fell.<sup>14</sup> And it has been achieved, if you will, by the same means (which we’ll discuss next). But the amount of light or knowledge men have

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<sup>11</sup> This does not mean we must sequester ourselves, join a monastery and cut off all our contact with the outside world. It does, however, mean that we need to recognize our weaknesses and avoid those people and places that entice us to sin. “Bad company corrupts good morals” and we need to be good stewards of our salvation.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 5:8b

<sup>13</sup> The author once had a vivid experience that made this fact utterly real. One day during my customary walking and praying, I was pouring out my heart to God, with tears, about a difficult and ongoing trial in my life. And in a state of distraught anguish I heard myself say, “Lord, hold me!” That very moment, on the inside of my chest wall, my entire insides compressed inward what felt like about an inch, held for a second or two and then released. An inside hug! “Oh my gosh,” I said, “You’re really in there!” I have never since doubted the fact of His literal indwelling presence to this day.

<sup>14</sup> However, the indwelling Holy Spirit has only been available since the cross. Why? Because God cannot cohabit with sin, and until our sins were wiped away by the death of Christ, we were not cleansed vessels. Old Testament saints had the Holy Spirit come upon them, but He was not in them, even though their sins were temporarily “covered over” by the sacrifices of lambs and

had has varied throughout history. Some have known about Jesus. Others have not. However, there has always been sufficient light available, in every time and in every culture, for men to be saved. When they respond appropriately to the light they receive, they are on the road to salvation. Romans 1:19 says that "...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." (Ro. 1:19) In other words, whether it is evidence from creation, from the conscience, an inner witness or awareness, or the gospel message itself, men have no excuse. They cannot claim ignorance of God's existence, though they may "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Ro.1:18)

Suppressing the truth is extremely dangerous, because how a person responds to the light they have determines whether or not they get more light and, ultimately, their eternal destiny. Romans 2:6-11 tells us that God will "...render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil...but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good...for there is no partiality with God." (Ro. 2: 6-9, 11) This does not mean we are saved by our works, but by our response to the light we receive and the attitude and motive with which we pursue our course.<sup>15</sup> If we suppress the knowledge we are given, woe to us.

Take, for example, the issue of abortion. There isn't a woman alive who doesn't know instinctively that the thing growing inside her is a human life, a baby, which, if allowed to develop normally, will one day be walking around outside her body. To suggest that this "thing" is just a lump of flesh, or is "her own body," when we know it has its own blood supply (and perhaps even a different blood type) and in fact never shares hers, and that it may even be a different sex, is absurd. And yet we, as individuals and as a nation, continue to suppress the truth in unrighteousness for, virtually always, entirely selfish reasons.

This is clearly one of the things God is most upset about: our lying and then pretending that we are not

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bulls. Those sins had to be expiated once and for all by Christ, expunged from the record, before their hearts could be suitable habitations for God.

<sup>15</sup> By this statement we do not mean that we pay for our own sins. But even Paul said, "Save yourselves from this perverse and wicked generation!" Our response to the gospel, or to the light we receive from God in any age, reveals our heart attitude toward the Lover of our souls. Will we be a suitable mate? God does not select certain people and, by some robotic or magic process, turn them into righteous saints or potential mates. Jesus' paid for sin and that is the only way anyone can be saved. But we must accept His payment and make Him Lord to qualify for heaven.

lying. Ultimately we so damage our own consciences that we actually begin to believe our own ridiculous falsehoods. This is not to heap guilt on women who have aborted their babies. We are all guilty sinners, and we all need to be redeemed. This is just one very common example of how we, even as a society, go about suppressing the truth.

The conscience is a form of light, or knowledge. Knowledge about right and wrong. That knowledge was put into us by God as part of our human heritage.<sup>16</sup> When we ignore, or disobey that inner voice, we are, in essence, disobeying God's voice and rejecting *Him*. That's why Paul says "whatever is not of faith is sin." (Ro. 14:23) When we do things, knowing they are wrong, or even suspecting they are wrong, that is sin.

So how *does* one respond appropriately to the light one receives?

We believe there are three critical components to true salvation.

Let's take them one at a time.

## **FAITH**

What is faith? Why is it necessary? And what must we have faith in?

Faith is not just mental acknowledgment or assent to certain theological facts, though that may be required. James says to the believers in James 2:19: "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and they shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?"

If I could rephrase this in modern vernacular, it would sound like this:

"You got your doctrine right. Good for you. There *is* only one God. But the demons also believe this, and guess what! They're not saved!...but, *unlike* you, they're scared to death. You, on the other hand, don't

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<sup>16</sup> The conscience can be shaped, perverted, deceived or seared by input from our culture, our parents, our teachers, or our own choices and lifestyle. We are to guard our consciences by refusing evil and choosing good, both in what we do and in what we believe.

even shudder! You don't have a clue how serious this is! Are you so foolish as to think that your mere belief is sufficient? Think again! Without real evidence that you are trusting in God, and without obedience to His commands, your 'faith' is no better than that of the demons!"

Why? Because the demons believe the facts, but they don't *do*. They don't act on, or in accord with, their belief. Therefore, their actions condemn them. Believing facts is not enough.<sup>17</sup> God is interested in the heart. And most people know this instinctively.

People will often say to somehow justify themselves after they do wrong: "Well, God knows my *heart*." Yes, He does, absolutely. And He knows it, for the most part, by what you do, because what we do generally reflects our true beliefs, our true priorities, our true desires and our perception of reality. That is, it reflects our heart. The Bible says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7) Our beliefs about reality govern our feelings, and ultimately our decisions. We act on what we believe or perceive to be true. An example: If we hear a strange noise in our house, and we conclude our house is being broken into, we will respond with appropriate action; action that we believe to be right, efficacious or self-preserving under the circumstances. The course of action will vary from person to person based on what each one believes is right or wise under the circumstances to secure their life and property. But nonetheless, all will act on what they believe, one way or another. Various perceptions may come together to determine one's course. If I believe someone is breaking into my house, and at the same time, I believe that I am powerless to defend myself, I may cower in a corner or hide under the bed. Nevertheless, I am still acting on what I believe.

But oddly enough, when it comes to sin, we often go against what we know is right or wise or self-preserving under the circumstances, and engage in self-defeating or self-sabotaging behavior for the sake of momentary pleasure, because what we really believe is that the momentary pleasure is worth whatever it costs us, or that we can "get away with it" this time. That's where the trouble begins. We substitute our immediate foolish sensual desires and delusions for what we know in our hearts is pleasing

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<sup>17</sup> The word translated "believe" in the New Testament is a word that encompasses more than belief in a fact. It includes trusting in, putting our faith in, and being willing to act in accord with what we believe.

to God and ultimately wise—because we're selfish *and* we're stupid (the Bible uses the word "foolish") enough to gratify our short-term desires at the expense of our long-term ones. Remember the old adage: "You can't have your cake and eat it, too?" Well, most of us either think we can, or don't care (in the heat of the moment), or aren't willing to think about it because we really *don't* want to change what we're doing. We want to eat what we shouldn't because it tastes good now, even though we know it will stick to our thighs like mortar and be more work than it's worth to get rid of. We spend our dollars on the things that seduce us now instead of giving to the less fortunate or saving them for the future when we know we'll really need them. And with God, we put off believing (and acting on) what we know is true (thus suppressing the truth) because we want to sin now without guilt, and we know if we acknowledge God, our conscience will tie us in knots over our deeds. And we'd rather be free of all that nonsense! We think license to sin is freedom. But, in truth, it's the worst kind of bondage. Delusional bondage. Like meth, a drug with the fiercest power to enslave, and for what? Momentary, and, I might add, always diminishing pleasure, accompanied by the utter and irretrievable destruction of our physical and mental assets. What a price we are willing to pay for short-term pleasure and a little numbness! But in a very real sense, it is this very decision that reveals to God who we really are and what we really want; what we really love. Pleasure. Comfort. Relief from pain. And for its sake, we are ultimately throwing our own selves into the broiling sea of destruction.

So what *is* faith? True faith is taking God at His word, and putting our trust in Him: in His character, in His power, in His love, in His provision. When we have faith in someone, we can truly rest in their care. When we trust or have faith in God, we have no reason to worry or to control or to manipulate, because we believe God knows what is best for us, and for everyone else, too.

Rest. That is what real faith looks like. It's not easy to get there for most of us. We have an uphill battle against fear. But get there we must. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) In other words, faith is believing (being sure of) what we cannot see, based on our conviction that God's word is trustworthy.

Saving faith today starts with putting our trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross, believing that God has made a way for us to be delivered from the domain of death and transferred into the kingdom of life and light. And then living consistent with that decision.

Of course there is always the issue of who God is.

Basically there are only three choices as far as God is concerned. We are all in one of these three buckets:

- 1) We decide for ourselves who God is, what He is like and what He requires of us, putting our trust in a God of our own design, essentially accepting God on our own terms. Virtually all non-Christian religions are swimming together in this bucket and they are all, basically, “works” religions;
- 2) We deny His existence, or say He is unknowable or that we don’t really care to know Him, and become, by default, our own God. This is the bucket of the agnostic or atheist or humanist; or
- 3) We believe God is who He says He is, accepting Him on His terms. This is the bucket of those who believe in the God of the Bible.<sup>18</sup> And this is saving faith when we repent.

Faith is the first essential element required for salvation, but it’s not the only element.<sup>19</sup>

## **REPENTANCE**

We would say that, of the twin essential pillars of salvation, one is hardly mentioned and rarely ever required in the church today: and that is REPENTANCE.

When John the Baptist came, preparing the way for the Messiah, his message was “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Mat.3:2) And men came in droves, publicly confessing their sins and

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<sup>18</sup> Someone might say here, “Aren’t you making an arbitrary assumption as to the reliability of the Bible and its claim to be God’s revelation of Himself?” And we would have to say no. The Bible is the only “sacred” text that *demonstrates* that it is God’s revelation of Himself, by a multitude of means: fulfilled prophecy, validating miracles, unmatched wisdom, archeological verification, historical verification, manuscript evidence, extrabiblical corroboration, internal consistency, and the witness and testimony of Jesus, to name a few.

<sup>19</sup> Keep in mind here that we are discussing man’s part, not God’s part in the issue of salvation. Grace (sometimes called “unmerited favor”) is supplied by God through the sacrificial and atoning death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Without God’s grace, no amount of effort could open the way to heaven for sinners like ourselves. But God’s grace is offered to all, though by itself it does not bring us to heaven. There is a response that is required, and our response determines whether or not we receive forgiveness and eternal life with God.

being baptized for the remission of those sins. John, however, railed against the Pharisees who came to be baptized without true repentance. “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance...The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Mat. 3:7,8,10) John required evidence of sorrow over sin and a changed heart before he would consent to baptize someone into the family of faith.

When Jesus began preaching in Galilee, after John the Baptist was thrown into prison, He was saying: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent* and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15) Later He reproached the cities in which most of his miracles were done, “because *they did not repent.*” (Matt.11:20)

When Peter preached at Pentecost to the Jews, they were pierced to the heart and cried out to the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s message? “Repent! And let each of you be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:37-38)

When Peter preached to Cornelius, opening the door of faith to the Gentiles, the Jewish brethren responded (Acts 11:18): “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the *repentance that leads to life.*”

And Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, declared to those in Athens: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should *repent*, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31)

And in his testimony to King Agrippa, telling him about his conversion, Paul says: “King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should *repent* and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.” (Acts 26:19-20)

If this is not an important, indeed pivotal, concept with regard to salvation, then what is it?

Romans 2:4 says: "...because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."

1 John 1:7,9: "If we walk in the light as He is in the light (transparency before God)...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ...If we confess our sins (repent), He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteous."

And Jesus speaking to the churches in Revelations, says: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent." (Rev.2:5) And again: "Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it and repent." (Rev.3:3)

So repentance is for those new to faith, but also for those who have continued in the faith. It's an ongoing requirement, or else Jesus wouldn't have spoken this to the churches.

Humbling ourselves and acknowledging our sin is a non-negotiable part of salvation. God has given us a conscience, and He expects us to live in accord, or agreement, with it. When we violate it, that is sin. In any time or place, given whatever knowledge men had, they could be saved by seeking God and responding to the light they were given and then attempting to live consistently with their own inner witness, their conscience:

Romans 2:14,15: "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law (10 commandments) written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them..."

Romans 1:18-20: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they (who do not respond) are without excuse."

Whether men lived before the cross or after, all hope of salvation is based on the full and complete settlement for sin that Jesus, the one and only Savior, achieved on the cross of Calvary. No other religion has a sinless savior. No other religion has a savior who claims to be God. And no other religion provides a way for sins to be paid for apart from one's own efforts.

It seems clear, then, that the "gospel" or "good news" is simply this: that sin has been paid for and that we can access that payment by repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. Our only hope of escape from the judgment we deserve is to entrust ourselves to Him and let Him pay for our sin. If we reject that payment and refuse to put our faith or trust in Christ's finished work, we reject the only hope we have of being separated from our sins. There is no other payment available and ultimately we will be required to make our own payment, through our own suffering. In that case, our sins will follow us beyond this life. That is because all sin has to be paid for, and there are only two options: pay for it yourself, or let Jesus pay for it. Letting Jesus pay for it requires personal FAITH and *personal* REPENTANCE.

What do I mean by *personal* repentance?

I *don't* mean saying a generic prayer, simply a general, and I might add, painless, acknowledgment that you are a sinner, but identifying specifically what you are doing or have done that is sin, and doing something about it. Repentance is an act as much as it's an admission. Not only do you have to admit that you're a screwball, you have to stop doing whatever it is that makes you one. As John said, "First go and perform works worthy of repentance." Or as Paul said: all men "should *repent* and turn to God, *performing deeds appropriate to repentance.*" (Acts 26:20)

Sincerity is essential. What he meant was, God is not mocked. A simple acknowledgment of guilt without the intent and subsequent good-faith effort to change course will not effect salvation. Only godly sorrow produces true repentance, a changed life.

Some people say, "No, God is merciful. He can't wait to forgive us."

True. He is merciful, but He's no chump. He knows a sincere heart when He sees one. And He's not letting anyone into His heaven who is not truly repentant.<sup>20</sup>

How does He know?

Take this for an example. Let's say someone raped your daughter. What would you require of the guy before you'd ever even *think* of letting him near your daughter alone again? Believe you me, that guy would never get near *my* daughter. Hell would freeze over first. Right? Well, God is even a more loving parent than we are. He would require that the guy demonstrate a changed heart and life, with some good evidence and track record, before He would let Him into *His* house. That guy would have to eat dirt.<sup>21</sup> I don't think God is going to take any chances with His heaven. But on the other hand, God is patient with us and will work in us as long as we have a submitted attitude. Full and complete understanding does not generally come with salvation, especially in this dark age, so God makes the best out of what He has to work with. But actual rebellion will keep a person out of heaven. Paul tells us: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

We all start out on the same road to hell. If we want to get off that road, we have to do something about it. And that something is this: repent, believe the gospel and receive Jesus as Lord.

Please read this carefully. I am speaking from personal experience.

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<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, God judges us on the light we have and the way we respond to that light. If a person does not hear the message of repentance when the gospel is preached to them and is merely told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God will honor their heart intention to be saved. Then He will bring them to understand the need for repentance in due time.

<sup>21</sup> Some of you are freaking out because this sounds like works salvation to you. But it's really just exactly what John the Baptist spoke of. Your repentance must be real, sincere, and you must *demonstrate* it, or show evidence (fruit) consistent with repentance. Mere words said primarily to get yourself off the meat hook are not going to cut it. God wants to see genuine sorrow for sin and a bona-fide effort to cease from that sin. That's what repentance is. This does not negate grace. It does not negate mercy. God exercised grace and mercy on our behalf when He died on the cross for us while we were yet sinners. And He extends mercy to the truly repentant. But He's not fooled by mere words, particularly insincere words or self-serving motives. Godly sorrow is not just regret because of the consequences. It is grief over having offended, hurt and disappointed the God who loves us so completely. True, someone could truly repent and immediately get hit by a truck and die and would not have produced any demonstration of a changed heart. But God would have known whether or not he was sincere and would offer salvation on the basis of that knowledge. But for most of us, God allows us to live quite some time after we come to faith and requires us to be tested and proved in the furnace of affliction before we enter His heaven.

Virtually every sin you've ever committed has given the devil legal rights in your life. This is called "ground" in Scripture. Whenever you agree with the devil, to perform a sinful act, pursue a sinful thought, or believe a lie (agreeing with him), you give him a little piece of your soul, so to speak. That is a base of operations, a place from which he can exert further and stronger influence in your life. In addition, even when you are the victim of another's sin, and your body is used against your will,<sup>22</sup> he sometimes claims ground, because legally speaking, you participated, and he will use whatever loophole he can to gain power in your life.<sup>23</sup> Therefore it behooves you to acknowledge and repent of every sin God brings to your mind so that the ground the enemy is holding can be taken back and yielded to the Holy Spirit. (See Appendix B for instructions on this process.)

Jesus tells a parable about a man who had a demon, and that demon was cast out, and the "house" (the body) the demon had been inhabiting was swept and tidied up, but remained empty. Subsequently the demon, after "wandering in waterless places looking for rest"<sup>24</sup> and not finding any, came back to the man, brought seven demons worse than himself and they again took up residence in the man, making his final state worse than the former.

This is instructive. Demons like to inhabit things. They don't like to be unclothed<sup>25</sup> or unhoused. And they will use any legal justification for moving in.<sup>26</sup> In the West we completely pooh-pooh these spiritual truths, but we do so to our own peril. No wonder our society is riddled with addictions, lusts, and evils of every kind. We refuse to acknowledge our vulnerability to spiritual forces.

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<sup>22</sup> This does not mean we will be held legally responsible for this sin by God. We are not responsible unless we have a choice. But the devil is a legalist and he will finagle any way he can to get ground. Demons do not want to be unclothed and they will take flesh any way they can get it. Remember the story of the Gadarene demoniac? When the demons were cast out of him, they begged Jesus to send them into the pigs. Anything was better than being without a body to operate through.

<sup>23</sup> This happened to me and that is how I *know*. Satan is a cheater.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 11:24

<sup>25</sup> Demons who gain habitation in a person will usually stay with that person until death if they can (unless evicted) or will transfer onto an offspring at the earliest opportunity. If the offspring can be induced to commit the same type or category of sin, the attached demon gains the right to transfer to the child. It can only transfer to one child in a family, however, as demons are not omnipresent. That is one reason why sometimes certain children will exhibit the same stubborn sin patterns as a parent, but other siblings will not.

<sup>26</sup> Some deliverance workers say a person has to have been involved in witchcraft, occultism, homosexuality, drug abuse or other such sins before they can be inhabited by a demon. I dispute this because I have a first-cousin with whom I am close who had five demons cast out of her which manifested with different voices, gave their names, rolled up from her gut, came out with a cough, yawn, sigh, etc., and she was not involved in the occult, homosexuality or drug use. The demons gave the names of Worry, Fear, Anxiety, Depression; things that are endemic to our society and to women in particular, but not occultic. Now it's possible these demons came to her at conception or birth from some ancestral involvement, but at the very least, this tells me that a person does not have to engage in occultism, etc., to be inhabited. Interestingly though, her mother and grandmother were riddled with these same habits of mind.

When we are saved, Jesus comes in and takes over the ground that is unoccupied. If we surrender all, and we have not actively given ground to the enemy, He can take up residence in the vast majority of our being. If, however, we have already surrendered a lot of ground to the enemy, we will have little left to give to Jesus. UNLESS, of course, we REPENT. Confession and repentance are not only a good idea. They are required for salvation and the new life of faith to be effective.<sup>27</sup>

I suspect that the repentance John the Baptist and the apostles required of their converts was not in any way similar to the kind of repentance that is happening in the Church today. For the most part, the Church doesn't require *any* repentance, certainly not publicly, but is satisfied with an often-parroted profession of faith in the basic tenets of Christianity. When a church does require repentance, a nominal and general admission of sin is usually sufficient.<sup>28</sup> And perhaps God accepts this because of ignorance, for the time being.

But I suspect a generic acknowledgment of sin is as unsatisfying to God as it would be to a wife whose husband had strayed into adultery. Imagine, you're sitting in the counselor's office, and your husband, who has had a lengthy affair with a younger, prettier woman, is told he needs to repent if he wants to save the marriage. He turns to you and mutters (drum roll): "I'm sorry for anything I've done to hurt you."

Well, whoo-hoo. Big whoop.

Sorry folks, that wouldn't cut it for me. I wouldn't be having him move back into *my* house anytime soon. Would you?

Such a statement can easily be made without tears because it does not require a humbling of oneself commensurate with the wrong committed. It does not require the baring of one's despicable soul and the

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<sup>27</sup> Without repentance, salvation does not gain a firm root in the life of the believer, and will soon wither. Pride must be vanquished.

<sup>28</sup> In many, if not most churches, an altar call looks something like this: "With heads bowed and eyes closed, is there anyone who says, "Yes, that's me, I need to be saved"? Just slip up your hand. No one looking around...just slip up that hand, brother and we'll pray for you." This kind of salvation, absent the requisite humbling, repentance, and public confession, is hardly the stuff of which perseverance is made. We need to require people to come boldly to the throne of grace, to admit their sin and their need of a Savior, without pandering to their pride. We don't need to shame them, but at the same time, we don't need to make salvation so painless that they come without true surrender. Jesus said to "count the cost" of discipleship before you sign on, and one of the costs is admission of sin, repentance, grief, and humiliation of one's pride. If one is not willing to pay this price, perhaps one is not actually seeking fellowship with a holy God, but merely an easy entrance into eternal bliss.

gut-wrenching admission of the heinous nature of one's sins. And it is in no way cathartic (or cleansing), for either party. It doesn't free him of his guilt and shame and it doesn't help her get free of her anger, hurt or bitterness.

What would work better?

What if, between gut-wrenching sobs, this wayward husband knelt before his wife and, with his body heaving from the humiliation, regret and sorrow, said something like this: "I'm so, so sorry. I have sinned against you in the worst possible way. I have violated my vows to you. My word is worthless. I have betrayed your trust in me. I have taken your love and given you only lies in return. I am not worthy of you. You did not deserve this. You have been a wonderful wife to me. I will spend the rest of my life making this up to you. If you never extend yourself to me again I won't blame you. Please, please forgive me. I hope, in time, I can prove that I have changed, and that you will allow me to be the true husband I have never been to you."

Now granted, few earthly relationships are this black and white in terms of guilt, but it's a good picture of our situation with respect to God. He is not at fault in any way. We are entirely in the wrong. How does that feel if we really acknowledge it? Pretty bad, doesn't it? We have wronged Him, time and time again, and often without the slightest thought. How callous we are. And part of the reason we are so hard is that we have given so much ground to the enemy of our souls. He has filled us with his self-righteousness and arrogance.

You see, salvation is heavenward. It's like a bilateral contract or commitment between us and God. We give Him all of our *past* sins in exchange for the settlement He purchased at Calvary. We also give Him our future, our possessions, and our very life, agreeing to surrender control, or Lordship, to Him. In return He promises to discipline us (train us in righteousness) as sons (or daughters), and transform us into the image of His Son as we yield to Him on a daily basis. In other words, He gets to be in charge. This is the process of sanctification through which we are prepared to be co-rulers with Him in eternity. When we are like His Son, we will be qualified to reign beside Him. We will know His mind so well we will be able to imitate Him in every situation. And we will have the character required to do so.

But we need to recognize that, prior to our salvation, we have been making agreements hellward, perhaps for a very long time. Every time we've agreed with the devil, believed his lies, fallen for his temptations, surrendered to his will and made him lord, we've given him a legal right to a piece of our heart (and have, in effect, become his slave). And that's territory he legally owns, until we repent and renounce or repudiate those contracts and agreements. When we do, he has to vacate the premises so to speak, and then we can assign that territory to Jesus, so that He can come in and occupy more and more of us. This is what it means to be truly filled with the Holy Spirit. To have every part of us occupied by His Spirit. As we "clean out the old leaven" (sin), we become "a new lump," one that is infused with the Spirit of God.<sup>29</sup>

The Church has done a poor job of teaching these truths, and consequently many of us have limped along in our Christian lives like lame beggars, trying to grasp for any morsel of hope and joy we can find and yet slowly starving to death. Are you struggling in your Christian life? Wanting more but unable to get it? Wanting peace but finding it elusive? Wanting joy but not knowing where to get it?

I have.

Not until I went through the process of repentance and threw the devil out of my house was I able to get truly free, of guilt, shame, hopelessness, defeat. You can, too.

Ask God to show you all those you need to forgive and what sins you've not repented of. Use the instructions in Appendix B if you aren't sure how to go about this. Salvation comes when we confess faith in Christ's finished work of redemption and put our trust in Him and if we die that day, we will go to heaven. But maturity, fruit, holiness, confidence in God, transformation and power increase as we are cleansed and filled with the Spirit of God. This comes as we repent of our sins and surrender all to God.

Paul makes an enigmatic statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you *entirely*; and may your spirit, soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Is this an implication that one's spirit, soul and body could be preserved *incomplete*?

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Cor.5:7

As much as we would like it to be otherwise, salvation is not one size fits all, even though all who are saved get to go to heaven and the ground of our salvation is the same. The question is, how *much* of us goes to heaven?<sup>30</sup> Jesus didn't die for our old nature. But He is faithful and He will sanctify us as long as we persevere with Him in faith.

## OBEDIENCE

Rather than being a requirement *for* salvation, obedience is the fruit of true salvation. It is the evidence that true salvation has taken place, and it is thus essential. Salvation requires a submission of our will. That submission will result in obedience, or at the very least, in a heart that sincerely wants and tries to obey.<sup>31</sup> We cannot qualify for heaven if we have a willfully disobedient heart,<sup>32</sup> so we include obedience here as a requirement because it must flow from salvation in greater and greater measure. Perhaps a better way to say this would be to say, we must have a heart to do God's will. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) And He said in Matthew 7:21-23, "So then you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."<sup>33</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, ' Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

Pay attention. *These people think they are saved!* But despite their church-going and religious works, they are living lives of sin. What a rude awakening! To find out that it's not enough to believe the right things, or to do religious acts.<sup>34</sup> God is not fooled by such things. If our "faith" is not accompanied by a

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<sup>30</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely (as if to say, one can be sanctified only partially); and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete (as if to say it can be preserved incomplete), without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>31</sup> It may take years in the faith before an individual understands how to conquer sin, how to find the "way of escape" from temptation, and how to walk in the Spirit, but that must be our heart's cry. A callous or cavalier attitude toward sin is a sure sign of a divided heart.

<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 10:26-31

<sup>33</sup> This "will" of His includes repenting when we fail.

<sup>34</sup> Righteous acts may include such things as daily devotions, bible reading, abstinence from certain foods or entertainments (cards, dancing, coffee, cigarettes), reading Christian literature, goin' to meetin', etc. Even working of miracles. None of these things prove a Christian heart. They may accompany it, but they don't prove it. Obedience proves it as far as God is concerned.

submitted heart that yearns for righteousness in the inner man and relationship with our heavenly Husband, it is not authentic.

Again in Matthew 7, verses 24-27, Jesus says, “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.”

In other words, it’s not enough to “say” you believe. If you do not sincerely strive to live consistently with your profession of faith, God will not be fooled. Granted this flies in the face of much of today’s Christian teaching. But this is Jesus talking. He is not saying this only to Jews. How do we know this? Because He tells us He has “other sheep, which are not of this fold;” and He must bring them also, and “they shall become one flock with one shepherd.” (John 10:16) The Gentiles are not a separate plant, but are the wild olive branch grafted onto the cultivated Jewish olive tree.<sup>35</sup> We are to be one plant, one Church, and we Gentiles should thank God for allowing us to be extended the same grace and mercy as His chosen people, the Jews, “for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father....There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 2:18, 4:4-6) Dispensational teaching to the contrary.

Many protest this idea of obedience, saying it leaves one with no confidence of his salvation. They say “you weren’t saved by works, so how can you keep your salvation by works?” And “which sin is it that puts you out of the faith?” The fact is, obedience, along with repentance when we fail, is the evidence that we have truly given our hearts to God and received of His Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> We are not booted out of the kingdom when we sin, but God expects us to repent. And if we “go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth” and refuse to repent, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain

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<sup>35</sup> See Romans 11, especially verses 13 – 24 for a discussion of the olive tree metaphor.

<sup>36</sup> Paul speaks to his disciples saying, “You have not yet resisted sin to the point of shedding blood.” Their *own* blood. We are to be so committed to resisting sin that we are willing to suffer any consequence or die for the sake of obedience.

terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant *by which he was sanctified*, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God....Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." (Hebrews 10:26-31,35,36) This is a serious business. Salvation is a process as much as it is an event. We *must* persevere. There is no alternative but wrath.

John says in 1 John 2:3-5: "And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments,<sup>37</sup> is a liar, and the truth is not in him..."

So it seems clear that God looks at our actions and judges our hearts by them, and if we are not willing to submit to Him and to what He says is right and good, then we are none of His. Now granted, no one does this perfectly. We come to Christ as babes and as babes we must be disciplined, taught, and conformed to the Father's will over time. But if we resist Him, and continue to resist without repentance, we are on dangerous ground and cannot have any confidence in our salvation. And we will be disciplined, like any child of a loving father.

Does this mean that salvation is not "by grace through faith" in the finished work of Christ on the cross? (Eph.2:8) No. It merely means that faith is not mere mental assent to a few facts about God. True saving faith, as James clearly tells us, must be evidenced by our deeds. "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?...Faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself....For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 2:14,17,26)

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<sup>37</sup> What are these commandments? At the very least, we believe, they are the spirit of the ten commandments. Remember, if we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the letter of the law. They may also include other instructions Jesus taught His disciples regarding life in the sheepfold or anything He tells you personally.

John says again in John 3:36 (NASB): “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not *obey* the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” You will not find this taught in much of the Church today. We have been spoon-fed a gospel of easy believism and eternal security, which removes all fear and all responsibility from our shoulders. But Jesus, and his apostles, put that responsibility squarely *on* our shoulders, commanding us to live obedient lives consistent with our words and our faith. To do less is to disregard countless warning passages and to devalue the words of our Savior Himself. Those who do so risk their eternal destiny. Do not be among them.