

Articles Exposing

COMMON ERRORS IN THE CHURCH TODAY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------------|
| What does it mean to be in “Error”? | Page 2 |
| What does it mean to be in “Heresy”? | Page 3 |
| How did the early New Testament believers understand the Scriptures? | Page 3 |
| Sound Doctrine | Page 4 |
| Evangelism & the Kingdom of God | Page 6 |
| What Does Justification without Sanctification Look Like? The Church Today | Page 9 |
| The Two-Fold Aspect of the Cross: Justification and Sanctification | Page 12 |
| Disciples or Christians? | Page 14 |
| Faith and Works | Page 15 |
| Prayer, Repentance & Salvation | Page 20 |
| Water Baptism | Page 24 |
| Whose Authority Are You Under? | Page 25 |
| Repentance and Faith | Page 31 |
| Make Certain About His Calling and Choosing You | Page 33 |
| Do you take this woman as your personal cook? | Page 35 |
| Confession of Sin | Page 36 |
| Are Some Ministries Robbing God? | Page 37 |
| What is the Church? | Page 38 |
| Personal Apostasy | Page 40 |
| The Error of Ultimate Reconciliation | Page 42 |

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN “ERROR”?

“Error” comes from the Greek word *plane* meaning “a wandering or forsaking of the right path,” whether in doctrine, or in morals (See James 5:20). In Scripture, doctrine and morals are never divided by any sharp line. “Errors” in doctrine are not infrequently the effect of relaxed morality, and vice versa (Vine’s Greek Lexicon).

False teaching and teachers “deny the Lord that bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1), that is, they deny the *Lordship*, his right to control one’s life. Although a person may be religious, their life and actions can deny Him. “*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate*” (Titus 1:16). The Greek word “deny” is *arneomai* and means “to contradict” (Vine’s Greek Lexicon). False teaching contradicts Jesus as Lord, Master, Ruler and King. False teaching contradicts Jesus words, teachings and lifestyle. A teaching of justification (being right with God) without sanctification (being under his rule) is false and should be avoided. A teaching of “grace” that says, “after we become Christians we can do just as we like” (Jude 1:4, Living Bible) is a false teaching on grace that is addressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:1-2, 15 and Titus 2:11-13.

“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, ***turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness (no restraints)***, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

“[1] What shall we say then? ***Shall we continue in sin***, that grace may abound? [2] ***God forbid***. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? [15] What then? ***shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid*** (Romans 6:1-2, 15).

“[11] For ***the grace of God*** that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, [12] ***Teaching us*** that, ***denying ungodliness and worldly lusts***, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; [13] Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13).

Consider the “error” of Balaam: Balaam spoke the true words of God. Later in his ministry his heart changed through greed. He ended up becoming a false prophet. Please take the time to look up these scriptures and see for yourself: **Numbers 22:8, 17-18; 23:3, 5, 12, 16, 23, 26; 24:13** compare **Numbers 31:16, 8; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14**. This is a warning for us today that needs to be heeded! (See 1 Corinthians 10:6-12).

Is there hope for those in “error”? “Error” demands a change of heart but can be corrected by repenting and acknowledging of the truth (See 2 Timothy 2:25-26; James 5:19-20).

“[25] In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them ***repentance to the acknowledging of the truth***; [26] And ***that they may***

recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

“[19] **Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth**, and one convert him (turns him back); [20] Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN “HERESY”?

Listen closely, you may be surprised! **Heresy** means *to pick or choose*. If I have forty Scriptures on two pages and I choose ten verses I want to believe and teach (while ignoring the thirty), I am already in heresy. Vine’s Greek Lexicon states, “Heresy means **to choose**, especially **the choosing of a self-willed opinion**. It is frequently because of **personal preference** or the prospect of advantage.” Whatever the reason, it will lead to spiritual ruin and destruction (2 Peter 2:1). Without acknowledging all the Scriptures on all subjects, we will be led to wrong conclusions that result in wrong doctrine. Wrong doctrine leads to spiritual ruin and destruction of oneself and others (1 Timothy 4:16).

“**Watch your life and doctrine closely**. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16).

HOW DID THE EARLY NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES?

The early church continued in the apostle’s doctrine by reading the Scriptures (the whole letter written to them by the apostles and applying the truths of that letter).

“And **they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine** and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

“**All scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and **is profitable for doctrine**” (2 Timothy 3:16).

“And when **this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans**; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16).

“**I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren**” (1 Thessalonians 5:27).

How did they hear and understand the letter as it was read to them? They did not have to mentally check the Scriptures by the various doctrines and creeds that have been

taught, most of those creeds did not come into existence until the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Nor did they have to check out what was read by their favorite TV preacher that may be adding doctrines the early church never heard of. They pretty much could take the apostle's writings at face value. If the Apostle said, "It would be better to not have known the way of righteousness, than after knowing it to turn your backs on it" (2 Peter 2:21), they probably took it at face value. They didn't have to say, "Well, what does (you fill in the name – your favorite teacher or preacher) say that this means?" "According to John Calvin or Jacob Arminius it could not mean this! I believe in eternal security, I believe in spirit, soul & body teaching, I believe in"!

The New Testament was written in Koine Greek. It was the common language (the street language) of the people of that day. God was not trying to hide the truth from his disciples (the early Christians in the New Testament church). They took what the apostles said pretty much at face value. It's only because of our various doctrines and teaching that we have read the Scriptures and then changed its meaning by reading into it something that is not there or taking something away from it. That's a No, No! (Rev. 22:18-19).

I personally adhere to the first-century church and what the early believers understood when they first heard a New Testament letter read to them. I personally do not believe that we should take Scriptures out of context (that which proceed and/or follows any part of a discourse). I personally do not adhere to a twentieth-century mystical interpretation that reads into the passage doctrines that the early church did not know nor perceive. *Don W. Krow*

SOUND DOCTRINE

Why Teach Doctrine? There are many that feel that it is unnecessary, even divisive, to teach doctrine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Bible doctrine is the truth of God's Word, which needs to be taught. Jesus said, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent Me" (Jn. 7:16). Paul said to Timothy, "But thou has fully known my doctrine, [and] manner of life..." (2 Tim. 3:10). Doctrine should lead to life, practice, and application. As believers we are told to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Apostle Paul said, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... And shall turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Three Sources of Doctrine. There are three sources of doctrine: (1) God. (2) Man. (3) Satan. In Matthew 16:13-23 we see all three sources revealed. When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (v.v. 16-17). This was the doctrine of God coming to Peter.

When asked the same question, many people said Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other prophet (v. 14). This was the doctrine of man, that is, only human thinking. Jesus said that traditions and doctrines of men make the Word of God of none effect (Mk. 7:7-9,13). Believers are warned not to be carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14).

In verses 21-23, Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to the cross. Jesus replied, "Get thee behind me Satan..." (Mt. 16:23). This was a doctrine of Satan. The Apostle Paul states that "in the latter time some will depart from the [Christian] faith and give heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). Proper understanding of God's Word is the only way to correct the false teaching of man and the doctrines of demons.

Doctrine Must Be Sound. Sound doctrine is revealed as (1) The doctrine of God (1 Tim. 6:1-3; Titus 2:10). (2) The doctrine of Christ (Heb. 6:1). (3) The Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). Contained within these doctrines are: Repentance from dead works, Faith toward God, Baptisms, Laying on of Hands, Resurrection from the dead, Eternal Judgment (Heb. 6:1-2), the words of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:3), the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43), godliness (1 Tim. 6:3), love (1 Cor. 13:1-2), and all that the scriptures reveal that is profitable to be taught; that is, for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16).

Do You Have Sound Doctrine? Sound doctrine keeps back nothing that is profitable (Acts 20:20), declares the whole counsel of God (not just your favorite verses – Acts 20:27; 2 Timothy 3:16), it builds up (Acts 20:32), rebukes, corrects and instructs in right living (See 2 Tim. 3:16). It holds firmly to the whole counsel of the apostle's doctrine that was delivered unto the saints through the apostolic letters written to the churches (See 1 Timothy 4:13-16; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).

Are You In Heresy? **Heresy** means *to pick or choose*. I have forty Scriptures on two pages and I choose ten verses I want to believe and teach (while ignoring the thirty). I am already in heresy to some degree. Vine's Greek Lexicon states, "Heresy means to choose, especially the choosing of a self-willed opinion. It is frequently because of personal preference or the prospect of advantage." Whatever the reason, it will lead to spiritual ruin and destruction. Without acknowledging all the Scriptures on all subjects, we will be led to wrong conclusions that result in wrong doctrine. How sad it would be to deceive others and be deceived (See 2 Timothy 3:13). Paul told Timothy to "watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16, NIV). I personally adhere to the first-century church and what the early believers understood when they first heard a New Testament letter read to them. I personally do not adhere to a twentieth-century mystical interpretation that reads into the passage doctrines that the early church did not know nor perceive. *Don W. Krow*

A Personal & Intimate Relationship with God. The purpose of all Bible doctrine is that man may come to know God in a personal and intimate way, as revealed in Jesus

Christ (Jn. 17:3; Acts 9:5). Not a god of our own making by picking and choosing what scripture we will believe and not believe. In doing this we make a god of our own invention. Selah!

Evangelism & the Kingdom of God

by R. Alan Streett

While the Kingdom of God was the central theme of all preaching in the New Testament, it has been virtually ignored by modern-day evangelists. This absence of Kingdom-centered evangelism has had devastating effects on the Western church and has now reached critical mass. An anthropocentric gospel of American individualism, which traces its roots back no farther than to the American frontier, has replaced the God-centered “gospel of the kingdom.” The deficiency is so great that most evangelists and professors of evangelism would be hard-pressed even to define the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 24:14; Mark 1:14). The result has been a watered-down message that has no power to change lives.

THE BASIS FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

When John the Baptist came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2), his hearers understood he was referring to the eschatological age foretold by Old Testament prophets, a time when God would send a promised messianic king to defeat Israel’s enemies and usher in a new age of universal peace. John called people to break with the past as a requirement to enter the Kingdom and escape the coming judgment.

After John’s arrest, “Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’” (Mark 1:14-15). Luke tells us that when Jesus stood in the synagogue and read a messianic passage from the prophet Isaiah, he concluded by saying, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Later, when asked if he were the promised messiah, Jesus replied, “I am” (Mark 14:62). The waiting period was over. The Kingdom had arrived in Jesus. It was no longer a distant hope, but it now had a name and a face connected with it.

Soon after his synagogue discourse, Jesus told the crowds, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). Everywhere He went He proclaimed the “glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). The 12 apostles traveled with Him.

Is it any wonder as He sent them out, He commissioned them “to preach the kingdom” (Luke 9:1-2)? Mark’s parallel account of the event says, “So they went out and

preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:12), showing the link between the Kingdom and the call to repentance. Jesus then appointed 70 others to “heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near you’” (Luke 10:1, 9).

Prior to His ascension, the resurrected Lord spent 40 days with the apostles “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Thus, He ended His earthly ministry the way He began it -- declaring the Gospel of the Kingdom!

On the mount, after assuring His followers that there would be a future dimension to the Kingdom, He told them that in the interim they were to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Therefore, it is not surprising to find them preaching “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:12). The Apostle Paul, likewise, taught “concerning the things of the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). He reminded the elders at Ephesus that he spent three years “preaching the kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25, 31). While under house arrest in Rome, “Many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23). The Book of Acts closes, significantly, with these words, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31).

There can be little doubt that the Good News of the Kingdom was the central theme of first-century evangelistic preaching. Consequently, it should be our focus as well.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM MESSAGE

The Gospel is not an invitation to “invite Christ into your heart,” although His Spirit indwells every believer. Neither does the Gospel center on the eternal bliss that awaits believers at death, although every follower of Christ will depart to be with the Lord. Few, if any, New Testament sermons deal with heaven. Rather they focus on the Kingdom and what it means to be part of it, now and in the future.

The New Testament kerygma announces what God has ultimately done in and through Jesus and invites the hearers to become part of God’s great plan for history. It is primarily about God, not us.

Additionally, the authentic Gospel is an historical, not an ahistorical or existential message. Through the Old Testament prophets, God foretold a time when He would send a mighty deliverer to establish a new covenant with Israel and bring all things in subjection to Himself. All independent kingdoms to which people give their allegiance, both spiritual and material, will be destroyed. The incarnate Jesus announced that God’s Kingdom had arrived, and then He called people to submit to His rule. On the cross He defeated Satan, offered His life as an atonement for sin, and regained dominion over God’s creation which Adam had relinquished at the fall.

Calvary was God’s death blow to Satan’s rule, sin’s power and death’s victory and,

hence, it became the “hinge of history.”

At His resurrection, Christ emerged from the cosmic battle victorious, proving that God, not the rebels, was in charge. After all, if Jesus could enter the heart of enemy territory and not be defeated, then their days are numbered!

From His exalted position at God’s right hand, Christ now rules from His throne until His enemies become his footstool (Acts 2:35; 1 Corinthians 15:23-24). The powers of evil may still function, but only under the authority of Christ (Colossians 2:15; 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8). As one theologian remarks, “All kingdoms are confronted with their rightful overlord.”

As sovereign Lord, Christ now directs the course of history toward its victorious completion, i.e. the future establishment of His Kingdom on earth and the judgment of all nations, which will take place at His coming.

Finally the Gospel is corporate in scope as well as individualistic. The Kingdom now finds root in the church. Becoming a citizen of the Kingdom cannot be done in a vacuum, any more than a foreigner can become a citizen of the United States without rubbing shoulders with other Americans. There is a corporate or community aspect to citizenship. It includes responsibility and privileges that cannot be found by living in isolation. Likewise, it is incoherent to say one can enter that reign of Christ and remain outside the church.

The church in turn, spreads the Gospel of the Kingdom to the entire world and summons humanity to submit to God’s rule in Christ and align themselves with other believers in His Kingdom. Whenever and wherever the victory of Christ is proclaimed and obeyed, Satan must retreat. As God’s rule expands, Satan’s recedes.

When asked what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age, Jesus replied, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

As we implement the Empowering Kingdom Growth initiative, it is essential that we as Southern Baptists re-examine the message we proclaim. Is it the same “gospel of the kingdom” preached by Jesus and the apostles?

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WHAT DOES JUSTIFICATION WITHOUT SANCTIFICATION LOOK LIKE?

The Church Today

If one were to suggest that the time would come when a group of evangelical Christians would be arguing for a salvation without repentance, without a change of behavior or lifestyle, without a real avowal of the lordship and authority of Christ, without perseverance, without discipleship, and a salvation which does not necessarily result in obedience and works, and with a regeneration which does not necessarily change one's life, most believers of several decades ago would have felt such would be an absolute impossibility. But believe it or not, the hour has come. (*A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy*, p. 71, Richard P. Belcher).

What confusion would many churches have today with these kinds of Scriptures?

"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14 NASV).

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." (1 John 3:7 KJV).

"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." (Romans 2:7 NIV).

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21 KJV).

Most scholars agree that the words *sanctify*, *sanctification*, *holiness* and *holy* come from Hebrew and Greek words which basically mean "to set apart" or "to separate" (*Sanctification*, p. 12, Robert D. Brinsmead). (1) It means separation *from*. The church is called to separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:17). (2) The church is called to separate from apostate doctrine (2 John 1:10). (3) The church is called to separate from sin (2 Cor. 7:1). (4) The church is to be separated *to* a new life. Those that are justified by faith also became servants of righteousness (Romans 6:18) and serve in the new way of the Spirit (Romans 7:6).

The New Testament often uses other expressions to describe *sanctification* such as: Following after righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11). Being transformed (Romans 12:2). Pressing toward the mark (Philippians 3:14). Partaking of the divine nature and escaping the corruption that is in this world (2 Peter 1:4). Cleansing ourselves from filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1), etc.

Sanctification – Its Scope. It was the whole man that sinned, and it is the whole man whom God wants sanctified.

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Any view of sanctification that does not include the whole man falls short of Bible sanctification. The Greeks taught that the body was a prison to temporarily incarcerate the human soul, Paul taught his Grecian converts that their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). But the Corinthian church did not easily abandon the Grecian outlook. They were prone to interpret the Christian message in terms of Grecian philosophy. They thought sanctification was only a thing of the spirit so that what they did with the body was a matter of indifference (Ibid. p. 17). One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. The reasoning was that, since matter – and not the breaking of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4) – was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence. In Colossians and in John’s letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians. John’s readers (in 1 Jn.) were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching of the Cerinthian variety. This heresy was also libertine, throwing off all moral restraints. Consequently, John wrote the letter of 1 John with two basic purposes in mind: (1) to expose false teaching and teachers (1 Jn. 2:26) and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation (1 Jn. 5:13). In keeping with his intention to combat Gnostic teachers, John specifically struck at their total lack of morality (1 Jn. 3:8-10) (NIV Study Bible, p. 1906).

There is some grace teaching today that makes the same mistakes. Arthur Pink, in his book *Practical Christianity* states, “*The terrible thing is that so many preachers today, under the pretence of magnifying the grace of God, have represented Christ as the Minister of sin; as One who has, through His atoning sacrifice, procured an indulgence for men to continue gratifying their fleshly and worldly lusts. Provided a man professes to believe in the virgin birth and vicarious death of Christ.*” (See Jude 1:4).

Obedience to God’s commandments cannot be separated from our love for Him in either the Old Testament or the New Testament (See John 14:15, 21). Righteousness is both relational and ethical. Righteousness can be defined as right relationship that is reflected in right conduct. (See Matt. 25:37-40). The concern is not whether a man or his deeds are ethically sinless but whether those deeds are evidence of his faith and loyalty to Jehovah. Sanctification is not optional for believers. They are not saved *by* it, but they cannot be saved *without* it. Since they are saved *to* holiness, they know that a stranger to holiness may very well be a stranger to salvation (See 2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 2:14) (Righteousness by Faith, pgs. 43,130; Robert D. Brinsmead).

Salvation has two aspects. (If clearly understood this would cause a revolution in many evangelical circles where people are resting on a salvation devoid of holiness). It

means salvation *from* something (Rom. 3:24) and salvation *to* something (Rom. 6:18). The *to* is just as much a part of being saved as the *from*. So salvation means being saved from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from guilt to innocence, from condemnation to justification, from disobedience to obedience, from defilement to purity, from pollution to holiness. The Bible declares we are rescued “*from* the hand of our enemies” *to* serve God “without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days” (Luke 1:74). This means if we receive God’s salvation in faith, a new life of obedience and holiness should be a part of it. As a train must operate on twin rails, so it is with a sound soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). And just as a train cannot jump one rail without jumping both, so it is with justification and sanctification (Sanctification, pgs. 38, 125-130, Robert D. Brinsmead). The New Testament keeps these two together. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ is said to have been made “our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (RSV); we cannot, in other words, have Christ as our justification without at the same time having Him as our sanctification (also 1 Cor. 6:11) (Sanctification, p. 83, Anthony A. Hoekema).

Let’s get our Message Straight: The proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom was the only gospel preached by Jesus (Mk. 1:14-15), John the Baptist (Lk. 16:16), commissioned to the twelve (Lk. 9:1-6; Mk. 6:7-130), then to the seventy sent out by Christ (Lk. 10:1-12,16), Peter (Acts 2; 2 Pet. 1:10-11), Philip (Acts 8:5-8, 12), the apostle Paul (Acts 14:19-22; 19:8-10; 20:20-27; 28:23-31), James (Jas. 2:5), John (Rev. 1:9; Jn. 3) and all Christians throughout the end of the age (Mt. 24:14). Within that message is the proclamation of Jesus as Lord and King and his redemptive work (Rom. 10:9-10). The teaching of the “gospel of the kingdom” is the only teaching that I am aware of that emphasizes both justification and sanctification together. “King” = “absolute Ruler.” “Dom” = “Those who have accepted his rule (also known as repentance towards God, Acts 20:21-25).”

Those preachers who tell sinners they may be saved *without* forsaking their idols, *without* repenting, without-surrendering to the Lordship of Christ are as erroneous and dangerous as others who insist that salvation is by works and that Heaven must be earned by our own efforts (Arthur Pink). Any professed faith in Christ as personal Saviour that does not bring the life under plenary obedience to Christ as Lord is inadequate and must betray its victim at the last (John MacArthur).

Some final words of thought: The words “king or kingdom” or its equivalent is used 3274 times in Scripture. 285 times it is used in the New Testament. The word “Christ” (“anointed” to rule, a king) is used 571 times in the New Testament. The word “Lord” is used 728 times in the New Testament. The word “Saviour” is used 24 times. The word “disciple(s)” is used 272 times in the New Testament. The word “Christian(s)” is used only 3 times. The phrase “ask Jesus into your heart” is used 0 times. The phrase “receive Jesus as your personal Saviour” is used 0 times. The example of having someone repeat a prayer after someone else is found 0 times in Scripture. The idea that grace allows me to do whatever I want to do, is found 0 times in Scripture (Titus 2:11-12; Jude 1:4).

John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church said, “Listen to the typical gospel presentation nowadays. You’ll hear sinners entreated with words like, ‘accept Jesus as personal Saviour; ‘ask Jesus into your heart’; ‘invite Christ into your life.’ You may be so accustomed to hearing those phrases that it will surprise you to learn none of them is based on biblical terminology.”

It’s time to cast off the error of the modern day church. For “Some godless people have sneaked in among us and are saying, ‘God treats us much better than we deserve, and so it is all right to be immoral.’ They even deny that we must obey Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord. (Jude 1:4 CEV).

A message of justification without sanctification is a message that denies the heart of our King, for a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom. For He loves righteousness, and hates iniquity (Hebrews 1:8-9).

THE TWO-FOLD ASPECT OF THE CROSS: JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

The redemptive work of our Lord at the cross provided two aspects of salvation in relation to sin: (1) Salvation from God’s wrath – justification (See Romans 5:9), and (2) sanctification – the breaking of the power of indwelling sin (See Romans 7:23-25; 8:2).

This was accomplished at the cross but made available to the believer when baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4). The Greek word for “baptize” is *baptizo* and means “the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition.” And that is its usage in Romans 6. It refers to the act of God introducing a believing sinner into vital union with Jesus Christ, in order that that believer might have the power of his sinful nature broken and the divine nature implanted through his identification with Christ (Wuest Word Studies in Greek, p. 97).

The apostle Peter said that God has given the believer all that is necessary to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3-4). One aspect of this equipment is what the Bible calls “the divine nature,” the divine power of Christ Himself given to believers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:2; 2 Pet. 1:3). Some refer to this by the term “the New Nature.”

Through hearing hundreds of sermons we have come to understand the word “sin” only as an action, something that we do. From a careful examination of Scripture we see that Romans chapters 5-8 uses the word “sin” only one time as an action (a verb) and forty times as a (noun) that is, a governing principle of power that was personified. That means this governing principle of power represents itself almost as a personage (See Vine’s Greek Lexicon under the heading “Sin”). Since “sin” is personified in these

chapters let us refer to it as “Mr. Sin” so we may simplify the understanding of these verses.

The New Nature and Mr. Sin are opposite dispositions toward God (Gal. 5:17). Mr. Sin is a disposition of enmity (hatred) against God (Rom. 8:7 in the Living Bible). The New Nature is a favorable disposition toward God and his law which is now written in the believers heart (Jer. 31:31-34).

When a person confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and is baptized into his death he ceases to be an “old man” (an unregenerate man). He loses his position as a slave to Mr. Sin and Mr. Sin loses his position as master over him. This means that he is no longer obligated to obey Mr. Sin. He receives the New Nature (a new, favorable disposition toward God consisting of the law of God written in his heart) and the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). All of these changes provide the believer with a great potential for living a different kind of life than that of his unregenerate days.

Even though Mr. Sin has lost his position as master over the believer, this does not mean that he has left the believer. He dwells in the mortal body and its members (See Romans 7:23; 6:12), yet is not you any more than a gold tooth that dwells in your mouth is you. The reason that Mr. Sin can live in your mortal body is because your body is not yet saved. It is dying and shall be saved and changed (Rom. 8:23-24; 1 Cor. 15:50-51).

Mr. Sin tries to exercise controlling power over the believer in spite of the fact that he no longer has the right to rule. When the believer relies upon himself for the power necessary to overcome Mr. Sin, he is defeated. Mr. Sin takes him captive against his will and prevents him from doing the will of God (Romans 7:14-15). This does not mean that the believer has to be doomed to continuous defeat. It only means he has lost his true focus which is Christ. Christ is the source of power through the indwelling Holy Spirit that is necessary to defeat Mr. Sin (Romans 8:2)

Because Christ (through the Holy Spirit) permanently indwells the believer, His power is constantly available. That power will not operate automatically in the believer’s life unless he personally turns to Christ in trusting faith, believing all that was accomplish in Him through the cross (Gal. 2:20). Moment by moment the believer must trust Christ rather than himself to empower him for victory over Mr. Sin.

For more information get the book “The New Nature” by Renald Showers. ISBN 0-87213-783-X See also several of the articles available at www.krowtracts.com

DISCIPLES OR CHRISTIANS

By Don Krow

It may surprise you to know that Jesus never called anyone to be a Christian, rather his call was to be his disciple. In the book of Acts, people were not invited to be Christians, rather their call was to become Christ's disciples.

Take your concordance and look up the word "Christian(s)" and then look up the word "disciple(s)." You are in for a shock! Look in the book of Acts and compare the word "Christian" to the word "disciple," you'll get the point!

In the Scripture the word disciple and disciples are used a total of 273 times. In all the Bible the word Christian and Christians is used a total of 3 times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the **disciples were called Christians** first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Notice that they did not become Christians first and then decide if later they wanted to be disciples, no, they were disciples and later had the name Christian added to their description.

What is a disciple? The Greek word *mathetes* (disciple) means more in the New Testament than a mere pupil or learner. It means an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct (Lexical Aids to the NT, p.933).

Mathetes (disciple) implies relationship to a teacher. In the New Testament *mathetes* occurs ... some 250 times, almost always for those who follow Jesus. Acts has it in the absolute for a disciple of Jesus. In each instance we find attachment to a person. Jesus as the head of the group is expected to give the ruling. The destiny of the disciples is bound up with his. A unique aspect of New Testament discipleship is that his teaching has force only when there is first a commitment to his person (Theological Dict. of the NT, pgs 556-560).

In the New Testament, the words connected with discipleship are applied chiefly to the followers of Jesus and describe the life of faith to follow, follow after and imitate. Learning is no mere intellectual process by which one acquires teaching about Christ. It implies acceptance of Christ Himself. Following Jesus as a disciple means the unconditional sacrifice of his whole life, for the whole of life (New International Dict. of NT Theology, vol. 1, pgs., 480-490).

In at least some cases it meant literal abandonment of home, business ties and possessions, but in every case readiness to put the claims of Jesus first, whatever the cost (New Bible Dict., p. 285).

The verb “to follow” occurs about eighty times in the gospels, and exclusively describes the relationship between the earthly Jesus and His companions. It became a synonym for disciple (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, pgs., 129-130).

Jesus charged his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). The mission was not to win loose adherents... Instead, Jesus said to his disciples that they were to teach those who believe “to obey everything” he had commanded them (Matt. 28:20). Jesus defined the goal of discipling when he said, “A student (*mathetes*) is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Likeness, not simply knowledge, was the goal of Jewish discipleship. And likeness to Jesus himself is the goal God has for you and me (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2) (Expository Dict. of Bible Words, pgs., 226-227).

Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Conclusion and Objections: The real objection (to the Scriptures that emphasize discipleship) is that to be a Christian requires no effort (it is by grace). To be a “disciple” requires real sacrifice and commitment. The truth is, that the redemption of Christ required no effort on our part, it is perfect and requires no effort from us. But Christ’s call is for our whole and absolute life. He did not call some to be Christians and some to be disciples, they were to be the same. Jesus saves us by his blood, but his rights over us are absolute... He is King, Lord and Saviour.

Jesus call requires a change of heart. This change of heart, is a change of direction and is *toward* God (See Acts 20:21), and *away from* Satan. This turn was toward discipleship. As one turned, God offered by grace, through Jesus blood the gift of righteousness (forgiveness). Christ did not offer his benefits without taking his Person. The call was toward God and Christ, this is discipleship, a call and allegiance to Him, but not to his benefits without taking his Person.

Faith and Works

There is perhaps no greater confusion among Roman Catholic Christians and Evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal Christians than the held over controversy of faith versus good works. This controversy best warrants the balance of scriptures necessary in reading the Word of God to understand what God means for us to know.

The Bible is clear that faith holds a prominent role in the salvation of every person.

Heb 10:38

But my just one shall live by faith ...

Heb 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him (God) ...

The Bible is equally clear on the role of good works in the lives of a believer.

1 Pet 2:12

Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that if they speak of you as evildoers, they may observe your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Rev 2:2

I know your works, your labor, and your endurance ...

Mt 5:16

Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

Mt 16:27

For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.

Mt 25:34-36

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

The Bible makes it clear that there must be a balanced relationship between our faith and its expression in good works.

James 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

1 Cor 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Heb 6:10

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones.

James 2:20-22

Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the

altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by the works.

Mt 16:27

For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.

1 Cor 3:8

The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor.

Col 3:23-24

Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others, knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment of the inheritance.

The Bible indicates that it is wrong to disturb the balance of works expressing a life of faith. Man is not saved by a dead faith.

James 2:24

See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

James 2:26

For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Nor is man saved by works of the law.

Rom 9:31-32

Israel, who pursued the law of righteousness, did not attain to that law ... because they did it not by faith, but as if it could be done by works.

Gal 3:11

And that no one is justified before God by the law is clear, for "the one who is righteous by faith will live."

The Bible declares that salvation is a gift of God.

Eph 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.

Heb 6:1

Therefore, let us leave behind the basic teaching about Christ and advance to maturity, without laying the foundation all over again: repentance from dead works and faith in God,

Heb 9:14

... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.

2 Tim 1:9

He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,

Titus 3:4-5

... the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy.

Rom 3:27-28

What occasion is there then for boasting? It is ruled out. On what principle, that of works? No, rather on the principle of faith. For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Gal 2:16

(We) know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Mental Ascent and Saving Faith

Two phrases are worth introducing here: mental ascent and saving faith. Mental ascent is the mental acknowledgment of something's existence. The demons acknowledge and believe that God exists. Saving faith is more than mental acknowledgment. It involves a trust in someone, a giving over of ourselves to them. This is the kind of faith that a Christian has in Christ. A Christian, therefore, has saving faith; that is, he has real faith and trust in Christ, not simply an acknowledgment that He lived on earth at one time. Another way to put this is that there are many people in the world who believed that Jesus lived and died: But they do not believe in Him as their personal Lord and Savior.

Mental ascent does not lead to works. Saving faith does. Mental ascent is not of the heart. Saving faith is.

What is James and Paul Saying?

James is simply saying that if you 'say' you are a Christian, then there will be some appropriate works manifested or your faith is false (dead). This sentiment is echoed in 1 John 2:4 which says, *"If you say you have come to know Him, yet you do not keep His commandments, then the truth is not in you and you are a liar."*

Apparently, there were people who were **saying** they were Christians, but were not manifesting any of the fruit of Christianity. Can this faith justify? Can the dead 'faith' that someone has which produces no change in a person and no good works before men and God be a faith that justifies? Absolutely not. It is not merely enough to **say** you believe in Jesus. You must **actually** believe and trust in Him. If you **actually** do, then you will demonstrate that faith by a changed and godly life. If not, then your profession is of no more value than the same profession of demons: "We believe Jesus lived."

Notice that James actually quotes the same verse that Paul uses to support the teaching of justification by faith in Rom. 4:3. James 2:23 says, *"and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'"* If James was trying to teach a contradictory doctrine of faith and works than the other New Testament writers, then he would not have used Abraham as an

example.

Therefore, we are justified by faith. That is, we are made righteous in the eyes of God by faith as is amply demonstrated by Romans. However, that faith, if it is true, will result in deeds appropriate to salvation. After all, didn't God say in Eph. 2:8-10, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works..."*

Empty Profession

Richard P. Belcher stated, "If one were to suggest that the time would come when a group of evangelical Christians would be arguing for a salvation without repentance, without a change of behavior or lifestyle, without a real avowal of the lordship and authority of Christ, without perseverance, without discipleship, and a salvation which does not necessarily result in obedience and works, and with a regeneration which does not necessarily change one's life, most believers of several decades ago would have felt such would be an absolute impossibility. But believe it or not, the hour has come."

A Final Word

In modern day evangelism I think we have substituted repentance, faith, water baptism and discipleship for reciting a little prayer. The first command for all mankind is repentance toward God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and water baptism (Acts 17:30, 20:21; 2:38). The apostles even included baptism in the call to faith (Acts 2:28; Mark 16:16). One can hardly read the New Testament without noticing the heavy stress the early church placed on baptism. They assumed that every genuine believer would embark on a life of obedience and discipleship. That was nonnegotiable. Therefore they viewed baptism as the turning point. Only those who were baptized were considered Christians. That is why the Ethiopian eunuch was so eager to be baptized (Acts 8:36-39).

Unfortunately, the church today takes baptism more casually. It is not unusual to meet people who have been professing Christians for years but have never been baptized. That was unheard of in the New Testament church. Unfortunately, we have lost the focus on initial obedience and a faith that works, that is, that expresses itself in actions.

Martin Luther's statements about Saving Faith

Faith is something very powerful and active which at once renews a person and leads him altogether into a new manner and character of life. What does James mean when he says in his Epistle: "Faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:26). *That is, as the works do not follow, it is a sure sign that there is no faith there; but only an empty thought and dream, which they falsely call faith...Works naturally follow*

faith...it is impossible for faith not to do them...man should thereby prove and see the difference between false and true faith.

The information in these notes were gleamed from the research of Paul Flanagan, Robert Schihl, Dr. John MaCarthur, Martian Luther and Richard P. Belcher.

PRAYER, REPENTANCE & SALVATION

"What the Lord Spoke to me, Evangelist James Brand, in the Philippines in 1982."

God called me as an evangelist in 1962 and I have been walking in that calling ever since. I have witnessed and ministered the gospel in America, Asia, and particularly Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and the Philippines. This includes pastoring and radio ministry. During all this time the Lord has given me a vision and revealed to me that there is a serious problem worldwide in evangelism regarding the manner of leading the lost to pray.

The Lord spoke to me in 1982 while in Manila seeking Him earnestly regarding why people, during an altar-call, would often try to repeat my words in prayer as tho they were their own and then they seemed to expect me to lead them in reciting or repeating "personal prayer for salvation." It was then that the Holy Ghost spoke to me so very clearly, "TEACH THESE PEOPLE TO PRAY, NOT TO REPEAT AFTER ANY MAN A FORM OF PRAYER OR SIMPLY RECITE THEIR WORDS!" This came as a great revelation regarding a serious error in the church and most especially in the area of evangelism. Prayer and crying out to God for forgiveness and salvation is to be spontaneous and completely FROM THE HEART, not a matter of a minister or an evangelist putting words in the mouth of the one seeking the Lord for mercy and salvation. This is very, very crucial. One seeking to repent and be saved should not be taught to parrot the words of another, THEY MUST CRY OUT TO GOD FOR THEMSELVES FROM THE HEART, LEST THEIR PRAYING BE A MERE PRETENSE, A RITUAL, A SORT OF CASUAL REPEATING OF "A SINNER'S PRAYER" THAT IS THE FORM AND PRAYER OF ANOTHER AND NOT TRULY THEIR OWN. This is a revelation from the Lord and it is in complete agreement with His Word.

At this point, let us consider carefully what the Holy Bible teaches and illustrates regarding prayer and repentance unto salvation.

We have four prime examples from the Bible that illustrate very clearly how a repentant sinner prayed and was justified in the sight of God. The first is found in Luke 18:9-14. In this parable from our Lord, the Pharisee stood and prayed a kind of casual, self-righteous prayer that did nothing to touch the heart of God. But the publican we read in verse 13, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." In the very next verse our Lord tells us that it is this man who went down to his house justified before God and not the other. The reason? One humbled himself and confessed and prayed FROM THE HEART, while the other did not.

Let us consider next the two thieves on the cross who made their confession before Christ on Calvary. We find in Luke, chapter 23, beginning with verse 39, that one of the thieves railed at Jesus and challenged Him, saying, "If thou be Christ save thyself and us." But immediately the other thief rebuked this railing accusation against our Lord and boldly declared, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? For we indeed are justly condemned; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing wrong." Then he turned and said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Did you notice that in both of these instances it was a completely spontaneous confession: no one was putting words in their mouth. No one TOLD THEM what to say. They sought God from their heart and He heard them in their own words and in their own way. There was no rote or ritual or repeating, only a heartfelt cry unto the Lord for mercy and forgiveness. -- This is what God responds to.

A very clear instruction is found from God in Jeremiah 29:12-14a. In this passage the Lord exhorts those who would seek Him, "Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, WHEN YE SHALL SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART. And I will be found of you saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity." Please understand that this DOES NOT SAY, "I shall be found of you if you just repeat this sinner's prayer after the minister or evangelist!" No! He said WHEN YOU SEEK ME WITH ALL OF YOUR HEART! GOD WANTS TO HEAR OUR OWN HEARTFELT PRAYER AND CONFESSION, not something someone else puts in our mouth to help us out or make it easier. THERE MUST BE REAL CONVICTION BEFORE CONVERSION, AND OUR CONFESSION MUST BE WITH REAL HUMILITY AND WITH A SPONTANEOUS AND HEARTFELT PRAYER.

What does the Bible say about conviction and godly sorrow that brings repentance unto salvation? Paul, in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11, spoke of a "godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto salvation that is not to be repented of." That is, unless there is a godly sorrow and conviction over sin, there is no real repentance leading to forgiveness and salvation. It's that simple. A mere rote repeating of words or ritual will not do it. ONE MUST SEEK GOD WITH ALL OF THEIR HEART, ONE MUST HAVE GODLY SORROW OVER SIN LEADING TO REPENTANCE, AND MUST CRY OUT TO GOD

IN RIGHT EARNEST FROM THE HEART TO RECEIVE SALVATION, OTHERWISE IT'S JUST A RELIGIOUS FORM OR A PRETENSE THAT GOD WILL NOT HONOR. "The LORD looketh upon the heart." Therefore, your prayer to Him must be from the heart, not words put in your mouth from another.

Let us read through a few more important scriptures that touch on this vital area of prayer and seeking God acceptably:

"We then, as workers together with Christ, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation) [2 Cor. 6:1-2].

"Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" [Isaiah 55:6-7].

"The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" [Psalm 34:18].

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. FOR I ACKNOWLEDGE MY TRANSGRESSIONS: AND MY SIN IS EVER BEFORE ME. AGAINST THEE AND THEE ONLY HAVE I SINNED, AND DONE THIS EVIL IN THY SIGHT...

CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME.

THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT: A BROKEN AND A CONTRITE HEART, OF GOD, THOU WILT NOT DESPISE" [Psalm 51:1-4a, 10, 17].

"Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and THAT SEEK HIM WITH THE WHOLE HEART" [Psalm 119:2].

Many other scriptures could be given because the Word of God is full of this truth: WE MUST SEEK THE LORD FOR OURSELF AND FROM THE HEART, NOTHING LESS WILL DO; NOTHING LESS WILL HONOR GOD AND BRING THE PEACE OF GOD AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

In our third illustration from the Bible we find that David was confronted with his sin by the Prophet Nathan, not only publically but even in the King's own court. In 2 Samuel 12:13, we see that David openly acknowledged his sin and repented before the Lord and the people. No one TOLD him what to say; it is clear he prayed and sought the Lord in his own words and with a humble and broken heart. The prayer quoted above from

Psalm 51 is well known throughout the world as David's prayer of repentance. It is a beautiful prayer and a model prayer of the repentant heart, but God does not want us simply reading or reciting this prayer either as tho it were our own confession and prayer before the Lord. Again I must emphasize THE LORD WANTS EACH PERSON TO CONFESS AND PRAY BEFORE HIM IN THEIR OWN WORDS AND FROM THEIR OWN HEART WITHOUT TRYING TO TAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S WORDS OR PRAYER AS THEIR OWN. This is absolutely essential and crucial. One of the main reasons so many of our churches are full of unconverted, unsanctified, and uncommitted "Christians" is that many of these people may have recited "a sinner's prayer" once or twice or even many, many times over and over again, BUT THEY HAVE NOT PRAYED THRU FROM THE HEART AND IN THEIR OWN WORDS THAT THEY MIGHT TRULY REPENT AND TRULY BE SAVED. What could be more tragic than that?

Am I exaggerating? No sir, I am not exaggerating at all. There's an old proverb and I think we've all heard it: "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." Well, let me say "You can lead a sinner to the Living Waters, but you're way out of line if you dunk his head in the river and try to make him drink!" As ministers and evangelists we can preach the gospel and plead with the lost and allow the Holy Ghost to convict of sin and righteousness and of coming judgment, BUT WE CAN ONLY LEAD THEM TO THE FOOT OF CALVARY. THEY MUST PLEAD AND SEEK AND PRAY AND REPENT BEFORE GOD IN THEIR OWN WORDS AND FROM THEIR OWN HEART...IT IS WRONG, WRONG, WRONG FOR US TO TRY TO PUT THE WORDS IN THEIR MOUTH AND MAKE IT ALMOST A ROTE PARROTING OF PRAYER RATHER THAN URGE AND EXHORT THEM TO SEEK GOD OF THEIR OWN UNTIL THEY BREAKTHROUGH INTO A PLACE OF MERCY, GRACE, AND PEACE. LET PEOPLE GET DOWN ON THEIR FACE BEFORE GOD AND STAY THERE UNTIL THEY'VE STRUGGLED THROUGH WITH SIN AND REPENTANCE AND MAKING IT RIGHT WITH CHRIST AS THEIR PERSONAL SAVIOR AND LORD. ANY THING LESS THAN THIS AND PEOPLE GO AWAY EMPTY AND UNCHANGED. People must prove they mean business with GOD before He'll do business with them. No more religious games or any of this casual, pretense of prayer. Let's get real before God and do it the way the Bible clearly teaches by precept and example.

Finally, our last illustration from scripture is that of the Prodigal who returned to the Father when he came to the end of himself and saw his true spiritual condition. At this realization he makes a confession and the ACTS UPON that confession. In Luke 15, verses 18 & 19 we read: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." -- There was the confession. In the very next verse we read, "AND HE AROSE, AND CAME TO HIS FATHER..." --There was the act of repentance and returning to SERVE God our Heavenly Father. You search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation: THERE IS NOT ONE SINGLE INSTANCE OF A SINNER REPEATING A PRAYER LED WORD-BY-WORD BY ANOTHER. NOT ONE. IN EVERY INSTANCE YOU WILL FIND SPONTANEOUS, INDIVIDUAL, HEARTFELT

PRAYER THAT SEEKS OUT AND SEARCHES OUT GOD'S MERCY AND FORGIVENESS. Think about that. And if you need to : change your ways.

Please pray about what I have shared with you here. I know the Lord has spoken to me about this problem. I pray that He speaks to you by His Spirit and thru His Word. God bless you.

"But what saith it? the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For WITH THE HEART man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" [Romans 10:8-10].

Water Baptism

As previously stated in the article "Faith and Works," I believe that modern day evangelism has substituted repentance, faith, water baptism and discipleship for reciting a little prayer. The first command for all mankind is repentance toward God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and water baptism (Acts 17:30, 20:21; 2:38). The apostles even included baptism in the call to faith (Acts 2:28; Mark 16:16). One can hardly read the New Testament without noticing the heavy stress the early church placed on baptism. They assumed that every genuine believer would embark on a life of obedience and discipleship. That was nonnegotiable. Therefore they viewed baptism as the turning point. Only those who were baptized were considered Christians. That is why the Ethiopian eunuch was so eager to be baptized (Acts 8:36-39).

Unfortunately, the church today takes baptism more casually. It is not unusual to meet people who have been professing Christians for years but have never been baptized. That was unheard of in the New Testament church. Unfortunately, we have lost the focus on initial obedience and a faith that works, that is, that expresses itself in actions.

Consider Vine's Greek Lexicon explanation of baptism. "The phrase in Matthew 28:19, 'baptizing them into the Name,' would indicate that the baptized person was closely bound to, or became the property of, the one into whose Name he was baptized."

Why do we in the modern church never mention nor follow up with baptism of new believers? The Scriptures are plain. This again I believe is an error of the modern church and evangelism.

Whose Authority Are You Under?

*“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the **power [mastery, authority & jurisdiction]** of Satan unto [the mastery, authority & jurisdiction of] God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18).*

The Apostle Paul’s commission from the Lord Jesus Christ was that through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, people would turn from Satan’s authority unto God’s. In so doing they would receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The common understanding of today’s gospel is that Jesus died for our sins, so ask Jesus into your heart, ask Him to be your Saviour, say this little prayer after me. We have heard these terms so often that it may surprise us to find that none of these terms and responses are necessarily scriptural.

I believe that in some ways the evangelical community has embraced a modern day gospel that is incomplete and without authority. A message of receiving Christ benefits without receiving His Person and authority is what is commonly proclaimed today. The whole point of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection was to secure His right of Lordship over the individual.

*“For we are not our own masters when we live or when we die... **Christ died and rose again for this very purpose, so that he might be Lord [master, owner & king] of those who are alive and of those who have died”** (Romans 14:7,9 The New Living Translation).*

The Apostle Paul was talking of the right to have authority, ownership and Lordship over the individual believer whether in life or in death. Jesus is Lord, Master and boss and has the right to reign with maximum authority over those He has purchased with His blood.

*“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and **ye are not your own?** For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).*

Whether we live in physical form on this earth, or whether we die, His redemption has secured the right to His Lordship over us. The essential facts of the gospel which involve Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4), had in mind His Lordship as the goal (Acts 2:36; Romans 10:6-10; 14:9; Phil. 2:8-11).

*“This is why Christ died and came to life again **to establish his Lordship over the dead and over the living**” (Romans 14:9, New English Bible).*

The purpose of Christ death was not only a redemptive act to deal with our sins but it also involved a redemptive act that established His authority and right to rule. It was for this reason that Christ died, was buried and rose again so that He might establish His Lordship over us.

The Holman Christian Standard Bible states,

*“Christ died and came to life for this: **that He might rule over both the dead and the living**” (Romans 14:9).*

The Message Bible says,

*“That’s why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: **so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death...**” (Romans 14:9).*

When becoming a believer we are confessing Him as Lord (Romans 10:9) and coming under the authority of God by repenting of our sins and turning to Him (Acts 2:37-38; 3:19).

Even in death we are not free from His Lordship. The purpose of redemption was to buy us out from under the jurisdiction of Satan that we might serve under the jurisdiction and authority of God! (1 Thess. 1:9). Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Either you serve the true and living God, or you serve under the authority of the evil one (Rom. 6:16).

The gospel of the kingdom is a gospel of authority and grace (Acts 20:24-25). In Romans 10:4-9 we have a description of righteousness by grace or faith verses the righteousness by law or good works. In verse 4 we read,

*“Christ [the anointed king] is the end of the law **for righteousness** to everyone who will believe” (Romans 10:4).*

Christ is the end of self-righteousness, the attempt to attain God’s righteousness by law keeping, to everyone who entrust themselves to the Messianic king. But within this act of grace and faith Jesus Christ has established His right to rule and to reign. In verse 10 it states that we must confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead to be saved.

The righteousness of faith is something that has been done by grace but has to be responded to by faith as we confess Jesus as our new Lord (Romans 10:9). This confession glorifies the Father as we acknowledge and confess the Lordship of Jesus (Phil. 2:11). A lot of people try to get away from the real meaning of “Lord” because they do not want to acknowledge that there must be a real change in the heart of an individual. So many people claim that “Lord” only refers to Jesus’ deity. The overwhelming meaning of the Greek word *KURIOS* (Lord) is “supreme in authority, the one who has the right to control.” The opposite of the word “Lord” is “servant.” Who is your master? Who do you serve? We are not talking about perfection but we are talking about a new direction because we serve a new master.

Many times because we want to emphasize “grace,” we fail to bring people under the authority of a new master. We just say, “It’s a free gift, it is all about grace and not of works, so you don’t have to do anything.” We bring people into error to some degree because we are not telling them they are changing authority, changing masters, changing Lords. The gospel of the kingdom brings a person under the authority of God and no longer under the authority of the wicked one (Acts 26:18; Col.1:13-14; 1 Jn.5:19).

There is only one gospel. There is not a gospel of Jesus, another of the twelve, another of the seventy, another of the Apostle Paul. There is only one gospel as stated by the Apostle Paul (Gal. 1:6-7). It is serious to change the gospel in any way. It is serious to add to or take away from the Word of God (Rev. 22:19). I believe that many are proclaiming a half gospel, not telling that within the good news of the gospel we are not just having our sins forgiven but we are also coming out from under the jurisdiction and authority of the evil one by coming under the jurisdiction and authority of God. In so doing we receive the free gift of righteousness by grace (Romans 5:17).

Jesus never told anyone to accept His benefits without taking His person (Jn. 6:53-54). He is Lord (Master), Jesus (Saviour), and Christ (the anointed King) (Acts 16:31 The Amplified Bible). Jesus said to sit down and count the cost if you want to follow Me (Luke 14:25-33). The scripture uses other illustrations such as "marriage" to bring home this point also (Romans 7:4). No one says to a person, "Today you look beautiful, I will marry you, we will go on a honeymoon. If later you begin to age, you don't look so good, I'll get rid of you." No, you sit down and count the cost. Will I commit to love this one now, tomorrow, ten years, thirty years, fifty years from now till death do us part. We sit down and count the cost. Marriage really illustrates a relationship between us and our God (Ezekiel 16:8; Romans 7:4; James 4:4), a permanent relationship of total commitment to one another. A relationship where no idols or others lovers are involved.

Jesus basically told a rich young ruler that was asking about eternal life to turn away from his idolatry. The man turned around and walked away without eternal life (Matthew 19:16-29; Mark 10:17-30; Luke 18:18-30; Luke 10:25-28). We would have called him back. Told him that he would be a great asset to our church, that he could help the church with his finances, etc. Jesus let him turn around and walk away because he would not forsake his false god to come under His Lordship.

Today I think an error has crept into the evangelical community. We so much want to emphasize, "God loves you!," that we leave people hanging by not telling them they are coming under the authority of a new master (the authority [kingdom] of God). God is a loving God, He is like a Father, but when we bypass foundations such as repentance, people end up not being converted (to turn around, to go a new direction).

The Bible says,

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19).

The word "conversion" means "to turn around resulting in going a new direction." If that has not happened in an individual, then they have not been converted. Conversion starts in the heart and works its way out in a person's actions and conduct. Because we want to only emphasize the love of God we fail to call people to the authority of Christ. The gospel of the kingdom emphasizes both the authority of God and the graciousness of God to forgive and accept us (Col. 1:13-14).

Jesus began His ministry by proclaiming the kingdom of God, and He ended His earthy ministry proclaiming the kingdom of God (Mk. 1:14-15; Acts 1:3). Everything that Jesus spoke related to the subject of the kingdom of God in some way or another (Matthew 4:23; 13:24,31,33, 44, 45, 47; 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:1, 14). I would say that the kingdom was really the only message that He proclaimed (Luke 4:43). Within His teaching different aspects of the kingdom appeared. The kingdom of God is like: unto a

man, a mustard seed, leaven, treasure, a merchant, a net, a certain king, a man that is a householder, ten virgins, a man traveling into a far country, etc. His teaching related primarily to his subject, the kingdom of God.

There are three things that make up a kingdom. A king, his rule and his subjects. The word “kingdom” is derived from two words: “King” meaning “the sole and absolute rule,” and “dom” meaning “the domain, or territory of rule, that is, his subjects.” Vine’s Expository Dictionary defines “kingdom” in the following way: “Since this earth is the scene of universal rebellion against God, the kingdom of God is the sphere in which at any given time His rule is acknowledged.” In other words, the kingdom of God has the idea of a group of people that would accept God’s rule. This decision must accompany a change of heart, referred to in scripture as repentance. When the kingdom is proclaimed a king is proclaimed. A king means an absolute ruler, a master, one who has authority.

The apostle Paul when preaching in Thessalonica was accused of preaching “another king, one Jesus” (Acts 17:7). Jesus kingship and Lordship is hardly mentioned in today’s Christianity except around Christmas in a few of our songs. Yet in the New Testament it was the heart of the apostolic teaching (Acts 2:36; 1 Cor. 12:3).

If you looked up the word “kingdom” in Latin you would see that it refers to one’s property, ownership rights and Lordship. In Hebrew it meant “rulership, dominion and realm [Strong’s numbers 18, 45, 47, 61, and 8]. In Greek it means “rule and the realm over which one has the rule” [See Strong’s number 155]. I am giving various definitions of “kingdom” because it is so very important that we understand the message that Jesus was bringing (Mk. 1:14-15; Lk. 4:43). His message was proclaimed by John Baptist (Mt. 3:1-2, 6), by the twelve apostles (Mk. 3:14-15; Lk. 9:1-2, 6), by the seventy (Lk. 10:1-2, 9-11), by Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8; 8:5, 12), by the apostle Paul (Acts 14:21-22; 19:8-10, 20:20-25; 28:19-31), and by all others that followed our Lord (Lk. 9:59-60). It is the message that will be proclaimed to all nations before the end comes (Mt. 24:14). It is a message that has not been understood clearly by many (Mt. 13:19; Mk. 4:11). It is the message that we should be proclaiming today (Lk. 16:16), but has been replaced by ask Jesus into your heart theology, a message that proclaims no one’s authority, mastery or Lordship.

Today we speak of being born again so that we might enter His kingdom, but we never define it. To define it means there is a king, He has absolute authority, the right to rule, and a domain (the people that have accept His rule). As stated before, “Since this earth is the scene of universal rebellion against God, the kingdom of God is the sphere in which at any given time His rule is acknowledged” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary). In other words, the kingdom of God has the idea of a group of people that would accept God’s rule.

The Jewish perspective of the kingdom is that it would be nationalistic. It would be a nation (Israel) that would accept His rule and reign. But Jesus came to offer His kingdom to every individual that would accept it (Mt. 8:11-12). People were ask to repent, confess their sins, go into the water’s of baptism and change masters (Mat. 3:1-2, 6). These decisions were made on an individual basis and each one involved a change of heart. Zacchaeus is a good example. He was considered an evil tax collector but welcomed Jesus as a guest in his home. Without even a demand from Jesus, Zacchaeus heart was changed. He repented and proved his repentance by

what he did (Acts 26:20). He restored income to those he had defrauded and gave half of his wealth to the poor. Jesus acknowledged his heart change by declaring, “This day is salvation come to this house” (Luke 19:9). “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Zacchaeus truly accepted God’s rule.

In another instance we have the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:3-11). She was standing there guilty and condemned when Jesus offered her the gift of forgiveness. It was an act of pure grace. Yet it came with the demand to “go and sin no more” (Jn. 8:11). In the Greek a present tense is used, meaning that Jesus was requesting her to go and continue to live a different lifestyle than that which she was practicing. In other words, come under the rule and authority of God.

In each conversion in the New Testament we see similar examples. In Thessalonica people turned from their idols so that they might serve the true and living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). The Message Bible states,

“You deserted the dead idols of your old life **so you could embrace and serve God**, the true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9, The Message Bible).

The book of Acts declares that the Thessalonians were embracing “another king, one Jesus” (Acts 17:7). So each instance of conversion shows us that people rejected the authority of Satan by coming under the authority of God (Acts 26:18). The kingdom message is the only gospel that brings a believer to the free gift of righteousness and under the authority of God. It’s the only message that brings justification and sanctification together under the same umbrella. It the only message that brings the gift of righteousness and holiness together (Romans 6:22, 17-18; Heb. 12:14).

If you understand what the words Lord [Master, owner, boss], Jesus [Jehovah is Salvation], and Christ [anointed, basically the one anointed to be king] means then you will understand that the entire New Testament is really teaching a message of the kingdom.

Just as there is a kingdom of God, there is also a kingdom of darkness (Matt. 12:26). As we turn to God we turn away from Satan (Acts 26:18). The New Living Translation states it like this:

“For he has **rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness**, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Paul is telling us that God has delivered us from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13 KJV). This word “power” actually means “mastery, potentate (powerful ruler, king), authority, and jurisdiction.” He has done this as we have received and believed the good news of God’s kingdom. People are delivered from the authority, rule and Lordship of Satan, to come under the authority, rule and Lordship of God (Romans 10:9).

“This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God – ‘Jesus is my Master’ – embracing, body, and soul... (Romans 10:9, The Message Bible).

Or as 1 John 3:8 states it, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (that is, abolish the Devil’s ways – The Message).

Or as the Apostle Paul states, “Who hath delivered us from the power [authority] of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13).

The good news of the gospel is that God has delivered us from the authority of darkness and translated us into the authority [kingdom] of His dear Son. This is an act of grace, accomplished by redemption and accompanied by gift of righteousness. But it is not a gospel of receiving God’s benefits without taking His authority. You cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24).

In Acts 26 the Apostle Paul is ministering to King Agrippa by telling him about his conversion. The Apostle receives a commission from the Lord Jesus to do the following things:

“To open [peoples] their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:18-19).

Through a revelation of the gospel a person does the following things. They turn from the authority and power of Satan unto the authority and power of God. They turn from one person [Satan] to another person [God]. From one jurisdiction to another, from one kingdom to another, from darkness to light. In the act of turning [also known as repentance], people are offered the free gift of righteousness (acquittal & pardon). We are not proclaiming a half-gospel, receive Jesus benefits but not His authority. Remember, this is the gospel of the kingdom (of God’s rule and reign). You will not truly receive forgiveness until you make this turn. You may say a little prayer, but you life will never change until you make this turn. The Bible calls this repentance. It is the first response of man that is commanded by God (See Acts 17:30), and without it men shall perish (Luke 13:1-5). Turn from the authority and power of Satan unto the power and authority of God that you may receive the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 26:18). Does this mean perfection? No. But it does mean we have turned to God that we may go a whole new direction in our lives (Acts 26:20).

“But God be thanked, that **ye were the servants of sin**, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, **ye became the servants of righteousness**” (Romans 6:17-18).

Whose authority are you under? The gospel of the kingdom brings a person under a new authority, a new king, a new Lord.

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Repentance and Faith

Repentance and faith is a response to the gospel, but can a one-time momentary act of faith save? (See Luke 8:13). Can it cease and still receive the promise? (See Col. 1:22-23). Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). If Abraham's faith ceased (stopped), would imputed righteousness cease?

From Scripture, we know that "faith" begins as a complete one-time action (*aorist tense*) but continues in the Christian life as is brought out by the Greek *present tense*. Commands that are given in the *present tense* are expected to have continuous, or repeated, application. When using the *present tense*, if we would supply the following words or phrases to the Bible reader, we would significantly enhance his or her understanding of Bible passages. These words are: ***repeatedly; that is, over and over again, constantly, continuously, customarily, as a habit or lifestyle, or uninterruptedly.***

Consider the following passages and how the Greek present tense affects them:

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth (*present tense: believes and continues to believe*) **in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**

Hebrews 10:14 – For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (*present tense: those that are set apart and continue to be set apart, that one offering has perfected forever. The New King James Version says "being sanctified." The New International Version says "being made holy."*).

1 John 3:9 – Whosoever is born of God doth not (*present tense: i.e., he does not continue to sin as his lifestyle, showing an unrepentant heart*) **commit sin; for his seed remaineth** (*present tense: God's seed remains and continues to remain*) **in him: and he cannot** (*present tense: as his lifestyle or uninterruptedly*) **sin, because he is born of God.**

Mark 1:15 – And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye (*present tense: i.e., repent and continue to repent as often as the situation or need arises*), **and believe** (*present tense: i.e., believe and continue to believe*) **the gospel.**

John 5:24 – Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth (*present tense: and continues to believe*) **on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.**

Luke 15:7 – I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth (*present tense: and continues in repentance*), **more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.**

Acts 17:30 – And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth (*present tense: and continues to command*) **all men every where to repent** (*present tense: and to continue in repentance*).

John 6:47 – Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth (*present tense: and continues to believe*) **on me hath everlasting life.**

Romans 4:5 – But to him that worketh not, but believeth (*present tense: and continues to believe*) **on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.**

Acts 26:20 – But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent (*present tense: and continues in repentance*) **and turn** (*present tense: and continues to turn*) **to God, and do** (*present tense: and continues to do works, or deeds, that prove your repentance*) **works meet for repentance.**

Conclusion: The *present tense* is used hundreds of times in Scripture. It is not my intention to show all the scriptures that relate to this subject. The truth about saving faith is that it is continuous and is taught by both Arminianism and Calvinism theology, although they come from different perspectives.

Calvinism, which professes eternal security, teaches that genuine believers may stumble or fall, but they will nevertheless persevere in the Christian faith (1 Cor. 1:8). Those who believe in eternal security believe also that true Christians have experienced a death to sin and will not continue in it (Rom. 6:1-3). Those who would later turn completely away from Christ show that they were never truly born again (1 John 2:19).

Arminian theology teaches that genuine believers can fall away from the Christian faith. They generally believe and teach that those who do fall away lose, or forfeit, their salvation. Their system makes no room for so-called Christians (those by name only) to live in continuous rebellion or deliberate sin with no fruit that proves their repentance.

The Apostle John said *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves”* (1 John 1:8), but he also said, *“Whosoever is born of God doeth not commit sin”* (1 John 3:9). Here we have a paradox, but not an inconsistency in Scripture. All Christians sin (1 John 1:8), but all Christians also obey (1 John 2:3). Sin and carnality are still present with Christians, but sin cannot be their master or distinguishing trait (1 John 3:9). True repentance and faith requires a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of direction, even though it is not perfection (Acts 26:18 and 1 John 1:8). “Fruit” is still a test of faith’s reality and genuineness. Faith is a firm supernatural conviction that governs the true believer’s behavior and results in accompanying actions. This is shown from the examples of faith in Hebrews, chapter 11, that results in corresponding actions.

In other words, what we do is the outcome of what we believe. The book of James 2:18 says, “*Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*”

When the apostles speak in a negative way about works, they are referring to “works of the Law”; that is, anything one is doing to earn, or work for, their salvation.

The Scriptures also speak of the fruit of salvation, which is good works, or works of faith. Those are the works, or actions, that proceed from repentance and faith (Acts 26:20, Matt 3:7-10, 1 Thess. 1:3, and James 2:14-26), they show the evidence of salvation. The unity that is expressed between both repentance and faith is that they both have the same fruit or evidence: good works. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works (Eph. 2:8-10 for the contrast of being saved by and unto). Works are a test of faith’s reality, and grace that does not eventually affect one’s life and actions cannot be considered being the true grace of God (Titus 2:11-12). Jesus teaches that by fruit, true believers will be known (Matt. 3:8, 7:16-20, 25:34-40; John 13:35, 14:23; Acts 26:20; Rom. 2:6-11; James 2:14-18; and 1 John 3:10).

Make Certain About His Calling & Choosing You

“Set your minds, then, on endorsing by your conduct the fact that God has called and chosen you. If you go along these lines there is no reason why you should stumble. Indeed if you live this sort of life a rich welcome awaits you as you enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:10-11, Phillips Translation).

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10, *New International Version*). It did not say, “This is how we save ourselves.” It says, “*This is **how we know** who the children of God are...*” (1 John 3:10, emphasis mine).

Jesus said it like this, “*By their fruits **ye shall know them***” (Matt. 7:20, emphasis mine).

In Scripture, God speaks of salvation in two ways: (1) that salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9) and (2) in terms of the good works that every saved person will perform (Eph. 2:10). Why are we afraid to speak of the **fruit** of the believer? The Bible does not shy away from such a subject. Here is **how we can know** we are in God’s kingdom and under God’s rule:

1 John 2:3-5 – [3] We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. [4] The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. [5] But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is *how we know* we are in him.

If **you know** that He is righteous, **you know** that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him (1 John 2:29). (Doesn't this make sense? The nature of God and Christ is righteousness, and everyone who practices righteousness is giving evidence of sharing His nature or, as John says, has been born of Him).

1 John 3:5-10 – [5] **But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.** [6] **No-one who lives in him keeps on sinning.** (*In Greek, this is in the present tense; this conveys continuous, or habitual, action. The Bible reader can significantly enhance their understanding of the passage by supplying the words: continuously, repeatedly, over and over again, uninterruptedly, constantly, keep on, customarily, habitually, as a lifestyle.*) **No-one who continues to sin** (*present tense*) **has either seen him or known him.** [7] **Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does** (*present tense: repeatedly, over and over again does*) **what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.** [8] **He who does what is sinful** (*present tense: habitual as a lifestyle because it's their nature*) **is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.** [9] **No-one who is born of God will continue to sin** (*present tense: that is, as their lifestyle, showing an unrepentant heart*), **because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning** (*present tense: uninterruptedly*), **because he has been born of God.** [10] **This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does** (*present tense*) **not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love** (*present tense*) **his brother.** (*John says, "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are." Those who do not practice righteousness and love show that they do not have the nature of the Father. Is evidence of the new birth not important?*)

1 John 3:14 – **We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.**

1 John 4:6 – **We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us** (*the apostles*); **but whoever is not from God does not listen to us** (*the apostles*). **This is how we recognize the Spirit** (*or spirit*) **of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

1 John 4:8 – **He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.** (*Love is the mark of a believer, for the nature of God is love.*)

1 John 5:2 – **This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God** (*present tense: and continually loving Him*) **and carrying out** (*present tense: and continuing to keep*) **his commands.**

1 John 5:18-19 – **We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin** (*present tense: as a lifestyle, showing an unrepentant heart*); **the one who was born of God keeps him safe** (*King James Version – keepeth himself, present tense: and*

continues to keep himself), and the evil one cannot harm him. [19] We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

WHY DID THE APOSTLE JOHN SHARE ALL THESE THINGS WITH US? I

write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God ***so that you may know*** that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Conclusion: Righteousness, holiness, love, the fruit of God's Spirit are evidences of the new birth. You yourself have no confidence that you belong to Him (God) while practicing an ungodly lifestyle. The conscience condemns, and there is no confidence toward God. The Apostle Peter admonishes you to make your calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10); i.e., assure your heart that you really do belong to Him by a lifestyle that corresponds to the glorious Gospel. I did not say, "This is how we are saved"; I said, "This is ***how we know*** we belong to Him."

DO YOU TAKE THIS WOMAN AS YOUR PERSONAL COOK?

Suppose that on your wedding day as you stood before the pastor he suddenly began to say these words: "Do you take this woman to be your personal cook, to clean your house, and do your dishes? Do you take her from this day forth to vacuum the floors, and to dust the furniture as long as you both shall live?" Suddenly your wife-to-be says, "Stop! If you want me as a person that only does things for you, you can hire a maid. I want you to love me, and take me for who I am. If you take me for who I am, I will do all those things for you, but I want you to take me! All of me! I don't want you to take just my benefits and not my person."

A.W. Tozer states, *Now, it seems odd that none of these teachers ever noticed that the only true object of saving faith is none other than Christ Himself; not the "saviourhood" of Christ nor the "lordship" of Christ, but Christ Himself. God does not offer salvation to the one who will believe on one of the offices of Christ, nor is an office of Christ ever presented as an object of faith. Neither are we exhorted to believe on the atonement, nor on the cross, nor on the priesthood of the Saviour. All of these are embodied in the person of Christ, but they are never separated nor is one ever isolated from the rest. Much less are we permitted to accept one of Christ's offices and reject another. The notion that we are so permitted is a modern day heresy, I repeat, and like every heresy it has had evil consequences among Christians (The Root of the Righteous, pgs. 84-86).*

Do you get the point? Why does the church want to take part of Christ, his benefits, an office of Christ but not Christ Himself? That's like taking a wife in marriage as your personal cook and not her for her person.

CONFESSION OF SIN

There is a false doctrine today that says we should never repent nor confess our sins. That is being sin conscious.

Do Christians Repent? Whenever believers sin, the Bible calls on them to repent.

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

“For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it... As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting...” (2 Cor. 7:8-9; RSV).

“Yes, I am afraid that when I come, God will humble me again because of you. And I will have to grieve because many of you who sinned earlier have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure” (2 Cor. 12:21 NLT).

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:5).

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS

“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16).

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent” (Rev. 3:3).

THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

BELIEVER’S INDIVIDUAL REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION OF SIN

SIMON

“[12] But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. [13] Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. [18] And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, [19] Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay

hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. [20] But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. [21] Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. [22] **Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee**” (Acts 8:12-13; 18-22).

DAVID

“[1] Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. [2] Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. [3] When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. [4] For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. [5] **I acknowledged my sin unto thee**, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, **I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD**; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psa. 32: 1-5).

“[1] **Have mercy upon me**, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. [2] Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. [3] **For I acknowledge my transgressions:**” (Psa. 51:1-3).

ALL BELIEVER’S

“If **we** confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse **us** from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). **The word “we” includes the author and his readers. “Us” is used as the objective case form of “we.” Selah!**

ARE SOME MINISTRIES ROBBING GOD?

Dear Don, I have a question about Malachi 3 references to tithing.

Before this, in Malachi 2, at the beginning of the previous chapter, it says “And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.” and then it proceeds to say much about how the priests were conducting themselves. It seems that the next two or maybe three chapters are all about their misdeeds and wrong attitudes.

When we get to Malachi 3 it speaks of not bringing all the tithes into the storehouse. Now, if I remember correctly, the people brought the tithes to the priests, and they brought them into the storehouse. If the priests did not do what was right, and did not bring it in, and not put meat in the storehouse to be used for the purposes God intended, then they took what the people gave to God, and stole it from Him. They were the ones robbing God. Not the people themselves.

Rather than calling a man who did not give a robber, it seems more logical that “robbing God” refers to stealing what had been given to God, dedicated to God. In Deuteronomy there is a prescription for the tithe that divides giving into three one year periods. One year it was set aside for the poor, one year given to the priests, and one year it was taken to the temple to throw a party for the purpose of praising God (try teaching that in church). So it doesn’t seem that not bringing the tithe into the storehouse could really refer to anyone but someone to whom the tithe was given for the purposes God outlined, but which purposes were not carried out.

And this is why there would be a curse on the nation as stated in Malachi. An individual lack of bringing a tithe would not curse a nation, but the priests lack of bringing it in for proper use could do that. That is the context of Malachi 3, the whole nation was cursed, but you know that someone in that nation gave tithes. And, sadly, that same is in operation today. How many leaders of churches are using the funds given to them in ways that God has not designed, nor planned, nor told them to do? Its really true that men rob God, but it may not be quite the way we think. C.S. Clovis, NM

WHAT IS THE CHURCH ?

The following article is by David Anderson. I found it to be most helpful in clearing up some misguided thinking, so I wanted to share it with you.

Several days ago a writer said he used to have great home meetings which may have been “church,” Yes they were, I believe.

Friends, I am spellbound that in reading the Scriptures, there is - nothing – about starting churches nor planting churches nor organizing such. No one is referred to as a church planter. No one is told to do such. No core group is seen waiting to become a church. Hmmm.

This isn’t just an insignificant detail! The tremendous reality here is that Jesus himself will build his church, as promised. No one needs to start one or plant one because its already been done once and for all.

The divine arrangement is: (1) to preach the gospel to all and then (2) to meet AS the church.

I am unaware of any first century Christians going out to “plant, start, or organize churches” according to such terminology. Rather, they sought first to preach the good news then to encourage the new converts to meet as the church.

Very simple, is it not? **First, they preached:**

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where **preaching the word**” (Acts 8:4).

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and **preached Christ** unto them” (Acts 8:5).

And then they met together as the church.

“**When ye come together** therefore into one place...” (1 Cor. 1:20).

“If therefore the whole **church be come together** into one place...” (1 Cor. 14:23).

“How is it then, brethren? **when ye come together**, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto **edifying**” (1 Cor. 14:26).

Furthermore, if we were ordered to “start” churches, surely there would be minimum requirements or specific instructions as to what this would entail. Surely there would be some mention of a “core group” somewhere waiting to attain “real church” status. Most assuredly would someone, somewhere be referred to as a church planter.

The modern plan for “starting churches” is, I believe, from the same factory that gave us the clergy, written creeds, and church buildings. When they speak of starting churches what they actually mean is starting a – parish – where everything will essentially be centered around the pastor, officers, and the building.

It should also be noted that no one in biblical history is ever said to have “joined a church.” WOW! This is because membership goes into effect at conversion. Yet “starting churches” and “joining churches” is just about all that I hear about these days.

All of us desire the same thing – to see more conversions and to see Christians meeting as the Church.

My problem is that I do not know of a single “church planter” who is able to immediately travel around the country to help churches “get started.” (This is not to imply that such persons do not exist.) Yet we receive hundreds of letters from folks desiring to immediately start a church.

In summary; (1) Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Assemble in His Name. (3) Exercise your gifts for the good of others. (4) Preach the Word and let this wonderful cycle begin again.

*“For where two or three are **gathered together** in my name, **there am I** in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).*

A church, we have observed, simply means a gathering, group, or an assembly. A church we learn from the Scriptures consists of believers assembling together to enjoy

the benefits of association. These benefits are not limited to any number. Even two can associate together. They can mutually assist, admonish, or reprove each other. When the Lord commands his disciples not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, he requires that they should associate as far as they have opportunity. The precept is as binding on two as on two hundred. These can continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42); and the abundance of the one may be a supply for the other's want.

There is no good reason why two or three believers, who have not an opportunity of meeting with a greater number should not assemble as the church and continue in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. Indeed it is their duty to do so. It certainly cannot be shown that elders or deacons are essential to the existence of a church. While it is true that the apostles ordained elders (older ones to be shepherds or pastors) in every church, the churches must exist before elders can arise from them.

The apostles appointed elders from within the churches that had already been established. They did not import religious professionals from the outside to be elders. Churches were churches before elders were appointed. Many think a church cannot be a church unless it has a building and a clergyman. In Acts, we see that churches were planted without elders. Elders were raised up and appointed in those churches. In areas where scattered saints settled, they would meet together, forming new churches. A new church can be formed by existing saints in the area, whether or not elders are present. The apostolic pattern for church planting involves planting churches and appointing elders from within congregations after these saints mature.

PERSONAL APOSTASY

The reason I have decided to include an article on this subject is because after studying so many of the apostolic letters in the New Testament, I have come to see that this is a major theme in the New Testament (Hebrews, 1 & 2 Timothy, James, 2 Peter, etc.) It is not limited to a few verses of Scripture.

Apostasy (Gk. *apostasia*) appears twice in the New Testament as a noun (Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3) and in Hebrews 3:12 as a verb (Gk. *aphistemi*, translated "depart"). The Greek term is defined as a falling away, defection, withdrawal, or turning from what one has formerly turned to.

To apostatize means to sever one's relationship with Christ or to withdraw from true faith in Him. Apostasy may involve two separate, though related, aspects: (a) theological apostasy, that is, a rejection of all or some of the original teachings of Christ and the apostles (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3) and (b) moral apostasy (See Titus 1:16). In the Vine's Greek Lexicon under the word "Error" it states, "*Plane*, a wandering, a forsaking of the right path (See James 5:20), whether in doctrine, or in morals. In Scripture, doctrine and morals are never divided by any sharp line. "Error" in doctrine are not infrequently the effect of relaxed morality and vice versa" (p. 369).

The Bible issues urgent warnings concerning the possibility of apostasy, designed both to alert us to the deadly peril of abandoning faith in Christ and to motivate us to persevere in faith and obedience. The divine purpose of these warning passages must not be weakened by the view that states, “the warnings are real, but the possibility of actual apostasy is not.” Rather, we should regard them with sincere alarm. A few of the many New Testament warning passages are: Matthew 24:4-5, 11-13; John 15:1-6; Acts 11:21-23; 14:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Col. 1:21-23; 1 Tim. 4:1, 16; 6:10-12; 1 Tim. 4:2-5; Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:6-8, 12-14; 6:4-6; James 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 1:8-11; 1 John 2:23-25.

Example of actual apostasy can be found in Isaiah 1:2-4; Jeremiah 2:1-9; Acts 1:25; Galatians 5:4; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Peter 2:1, 15, 20-22; Jude 4, 11-13.

The steps which lead to apostasy are as follows: (a) The believer, through unbelief, fails to take the truths, exhortations, warnings, promises, and teachings of God’s Word with utmost seriousness (Luke 8:13; John 5:44, 47; 8:46).

As the realities of the world become greater than the realities of God’s heavenly kingdom, he gradually ceases to draw near to God through Christ (Heb. 4:16; 7:19, 25; 11:6).

Through the deceitfulness of sin, he becomes increasingly tolerant of sin in his own life (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5; Heb. 3:13). He no longer loves righteousness and hates iniquity (Heb. 1:9).

Through hardness of heart (Heb. 3:8, 13) and rejecting God’s way (Heb. 3:10), he ignores the repeated voice of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19-22; Heb. 3:7-11).

The Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30; Heb. 3:7-8) and quenched (1 Thess 5:19), and he eventually departs from his former faith (Col. 1:22-23; Heb. 3:14).

If apostasy continues on its course unchecked, an individual may eventually reach the point when no repentance is possible (Heb. 6:4-6; 12:17). That is, a person may continually harden his heart to the Holy Spirit’s voice (Heb. 3:7-19), continues to sin willfully (Heb. 10:26), and refuses to repent towards God (Acts 20:21), he may reach a point of no return where repentance and salvation is no longer possible (Heb. 6:4-6). This point of no return cannot be defined in advance. Hence, the only safeguard against the peril of ultimate apostasy is found in the admonition: “Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb. 3:7-8, 15; 4:7).

It must be emphasized that while apostasy is a danger for all who drift from the faith (Heb. 2:1-3) and fall away from God (Heb. 6:6), it is not made complete without constant and willful sinning against the voice of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31). Because of the possibility of self-deception, Paul exhorts all those claiming salvation to “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Cor. 13:5). Any person who becomes sincerely concerned about his own spiritual condition and finds in his heart the desire to return to God in repentance, has sure evidence he has not

committed unpardonable apostasy. The Scriptures clearly affirm that God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9; Isaiah 1:18-19; 55:6-7) and declares that God will receive all who come to Him in faith (2 Cor. 2:5-11; Luke 15:11-24; Rom. 11:23; James 5:19-20; Rev. 3:21). (The Full Life Study Bible, pgs. 524-525).

The Error of Ultimate Reconciliation

By Jim Richards

George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it!" Solomon, the wisest man in the world, once said, *"That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun"* (Eccl. 1:9). Sadly, those who don't know history are doomed to repeat the failures of the past.

Church history is one of those topics that the "hyper-spiritual" deem to have little value. Putting down the study of church history ranks right up there in the "ignorant Christian" poll with those who boldly declare, "I don't want to study theology or doctrine; I just want to read the Bible!" Jesus knew the history of His people and He knew the doctrines of the day, as did the Apostle Paul. It was their knowledge of these practical areas that made them so powerful in so many different cultural settings and doctrinal conflicts. This lack of knowledge is the doorway for error to cycle through the Church repeatedly and be welcomed by unsuspecting generations as "new revelation."

The prophet Isaiah boldly declared, *"Therefore my people have gone into captivity, Because they have no knowledge"* (Isa. 5:13). While the Spirit-filled movements have introduced incredible truth into the body of Christ, they have, as a whole, been very poor theologians. The inconsistency of doctrine is a major reason Spirit-filled believers can't get what they believe to actually work in real life. Our covenants are mixed, our doctrine is self contradictory, and we know nothing of how we got where we are! The 21st century church is a breeding ground for doctrinal error - not the kind that simply causes an argument between you and other believers; this is the type of error that could affect every part of your life!

Error, like all trends, tends to circulate every few years. When error emerges those who don't know history, specifically church history, think they have a revelation. They see it as a "scrumptious morsel," unaware of the damage it has wreaked in the past. In the race to have the next new revelation some preachers rush to their pulpits, or in the case of traveling preachers, they rush to your pulpit and create havoc in the hearts of believers.

One doctrine that emerges every few years is Ultimate Reconciliation, sometimes called Universalism. Regardless of the name it goes by, its message is the same: everyone is going to Heaven, whether they believe or not. This is an appealing message to people

who will not reconcile their life and beliefs with particular aspects of truth. What seems like a message of endless love is actually a message of death, deceit, and depravity.

Years ago I traveled with a man who began the slide into Universalism. At first it seemed as if he was only preaching a mildly irresponsible grace message. People approached me after our meetings and said, "When I hear you preach about grace I believe I can live godly and I'm inspired to godly living. When I hear him preach about grace I feel like it's just alright to sin." In time, he was openly declaring that sin had no effect and he began rejecting any portions of Scripture that promoted responsibility and godliness. Ultimately he succumbed to a battle with sin that he no longer chose to resist! The way we know when the message of grace, peace and faith righteousness has gone too far is when they inspire irresponsible living!

All deadly truth has an element of truth; however, that truth is extrapolated into something that is no longer true. Extrapolation is how Lucifer became Satan. He followed a flawed reasoning. (Ez. 28:17) Based on his brightness and splendor he began to build a logic that departed from reality. In the end, he felt he could overthrow the One who gave him his splendor. God has given us grace, love, mercy and the gift of righteousness so we can have the power to live a godly life, not to excuse us from godly living.

Extrapolation is the process of ultimate reconciliation. It starts with some basic truths. First, it capitalizes on God's unconditional love. It couples that with the fact (and it is a fact) that Jesus died for the sins of the entire world, not for the few. Add this with some humanistic logic that exalts man and his needs above God and His plan, and you have a recipe for devastating error.

Jesus died for the sins of the world, not just for those who would believe and receive, but also for those who would not. (1 John 2:2) God was proactive and preemptive in His limitless love. Because of Jesus becoming the sin of the world, all men were free from the wrath of God. No man in this life has experienced God's wrath. The apostle John said, *In this, the propitiation, we see the love of God*" (1 John 4:9-10). Many people respond to His expression of love with love and trust and many others see it as a free pass for irresponsible living.

Everything God offers us must be received, (lambano) taken hold of, by our trust (faith) in God. (Rom. 1:16) Everything of God is given freely, but our personal participation is a choice, thus the idea of free will. The Universalist denies free will and insists that everyone is saved whether they know it or not, whether they want it or not. By lifting a few Scriptures out of context and ignoring dozens more, personal responsibility is glossed over as a moot point!

You see, the Universalists, much like the Spirit-filled community, actually miss the ultimate point: Jesus came so we could know (experience, be intimate with) God. For some, God is just the One we run to when we have needs. We really have no desire to know Him or His ways; we simply want His benefits. It may be this corrupt version of

Christianity that creates such a breeding ground for an impersonal faith!

Extrapolation is based on a logic that creates non-existent formulas, "this equals that." When questioned about the basis of their process of reasoning, it usually comes back to, "That's what I believe" or "That's how I see it." It doesn't matter how we see it if it's not supported by the truth of God's Word. We are called to cast down vain imaginations and reasoning that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. (2 Cor. 10:4-5) This process is called 'subjective reasoning'. A reasoning that is based on how it makes you feel regardless of all the other facts. Subjective reasoning places "me" at the center of the equation. I fall prey to the original temptation to be as God and choose good and evil from my own judgments.

One of the well known modern day proponents of Universalism is Carlton Pearson. I met personally with Carlton when he first made his exit from the faith. According to our discussion, his subjective reasoning seemed to peak when he held his newborn baby in his arms and said, "I would never send my child to Hell if he did something wrong." That very statement, and the doctrine that Carlton had been preaching, made it clear he already had error in his theology. But even if God would do such a thing, who are we to say to the Potter, "You can't do it that way."

The Universalists are basically taking a stand that they are more righteous, more compassionate and more merciful than God. They, too, have exalted themselves above God by exalting their own logic and condemning His! It's in this very attitude that we may see the real root of the problem. We are called to **surrender** to Jesus as Lord. We are **compelled** to renew our minds and put on the mind of Christ. It seems that too many seek Jesus as Savior but not as Teacher and Lord.

Failure to cling to Jesus as Lord of our logic leads us down destructive, unfulfilling paths. In the absence of a meaningful relationship, we search for knowledge to give what is missing in our heart. Maybe it is, in fact, the lack of an intimate relationship with God that spills over into an incredible sense of lack and insecurity that spurs the desperate search for something to bring us the peace that only comes through relationship.

It was Mike Williams who introduced, or finally convinced, Carlton Pearson in the doctrine of Universalism. Mike was a long time friend and associate. He is a man I loved deeply and grieved for as he made his departure from the faith. Mike came from a life of homosexuality and at the time he turned to Ultimate Reconciliation, he had fallen back into an immoral lifestyle. As his life degenerated, his message grew more and more compromising.

As someone close to Mike said, "You always know what Mike is going through, he always preaches his life." And that's true; Mike's doctrine changed every time his life changed. When he couldn't get grace to work in his life, he simply changed his doctrine of grace. Like many, he developed circumstance theology that justified his own life. This

is a common tendency among those who lean toward permissive doctrine. They need a "revelation" that justifies their failing life!

In an interview with Allen Speegle, we discussed why grace preachers would be susceptible to the doctrine of Ultimate Reconciliation. It is my observation that there are three primary reasons for this.

1. First, most grace preachers simply embrace grace as a doctrine, not as a means to a more powerful life. This, of course, means they are not experiencing grace. Grace is God's power to live in righteousness, to live as it really should be. The doctrine is a sad replacement for the reality!

The power of grace is experienced to support the belief of faith righteousness. Faith righteousness began by Jesus obtaining righteousness by His faith; it is brought to fruition by us experiencing that righteousness by faith. As Romans 1:17 says, *"It is revealed from faith to faith."* If Jesus' righteousness is received by faith, then righteousness has to be the object of our faith.

This brings another basic theological flaw to the forefront. The primary reason for receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord is not just to save us from the penalty of our sin but to save us from the power of sin. We are set free from the power of sin to live a righteous life. It's in righteousness that we enjoy life as it was meant to be. When we forget the destruction of sin in our lives, we forget why we came to Jesus.

2. The second reason grace preachers may succumb to this error is that our life often facilitates the need for self-justification. When preachers don't reach the lost, when they don't make their churches relevant, when they are seeking to build a ministry before building people, they need a doctrine that justifies the departure from New Testament goals and agendas. You see, it's not the erroneous doctrine that leads to the compromised ministry and life. No! It's the compromised life that needs a doctrine to justify itself!
3. The third reason is all too common. People who are not experiencing the grace of God, those who do not believe the Gospel of Peace in a way that leads to an intimate love life with God, tend to miss the point. In the absence of a life experience, they think it's the new revelation that gets people excited about their ministry. They fail to realize the excitement isn't in the message; it's in the power of the message. In their shallow insecurity they think they need to be ever finding new revelation to preach to people with itching ears. (2 Tim. 4:3) The preacher who is trying to impress will always end up in error!

The church desperately needs the message of grace, peace and faith righteousness. But we need to live and model this message through our life, our character and our commitment to the true cause of Christ. It's those who misuse and misapply these cornerstone truths that give the legalists the opportunity to decry the message.

One of the greatest ways you can tell that grace, peace and faith righteousness are no more than a message is when the life doesn't change. Ultimate Reconciliation misses the point that we have a predestined purpose to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus. (Rom. 8:29) That is our destiny.

Being delivered from wrath and being unconditionally loved doesn't equate salvation and righteousness by faith; it does, however, facilitate the opportunity. In the absence of fear and in the presence of love we can come unafraid. When we know everything God does is for our good we have every reason to trust and follow Him. If we continue in the same sins as before we knew Jesus, they accomplish the same destruction. That destruction is not the product of God's wrath; it's the fruit of sin.

In my meeting with Carlton Pearson and in discussions with Mike Williams and many others who began to follow this erroneous path, I asked the question, "Do you not believe there is any benefit to living a godly life? Do you not see the destruction of sin? If so, then why is the focus of your message the permissiveness of sin?" Paul, Peter, James and John all echoed these sentiments in various terminologies: flee every type of sin, don't yield to the flesh, don't use your freedom as an excuse for sin, and don't suffer for unrighteousness. The message is clear: sin still kills. While the beginning of Ultimate Reconciliation is not a blanket invitation to a reckless life, in the end that is the fruit.

Churches that embrace even the slightest hint of this doctrine lose sight of biblical agendas and ultimately their purpose. The need for relevancy evaporates. The passion to win the lost becomes needless. The value for the most basic ministry needs disappear with the idea that all men are ultimately going to Heaven - so what's the urgency?

We live in a day when people need God's power working in them more than ever! The need for Spirit-empowered grace to take us to a life beyond our strength is imminent. We may be in what the Bible calls the "beginning of sorrows"; but whether we are or not, be assured we are living in difficult times, the likes of which the world has never seen. Our nation is disturbingly close to facing the horrors others nations have faced for generations. The church in America isn't ready! We are poised for a great falling away! The only cure is a Gospel that works - which will require leaders that experience it.

Fresh new revelation doesn't come because we discover what has never been seen. Revelation is when we look at a truth in a new way, a way that empowers us to live in victory. People don't need their lives complicated by a lot of new doctrines; they need to know how to get the doctrines we have to work. People need to be led into a relationship with Jesus. They need mentors and models. They don't need to hear a message of grace; they need to see a lifestyle of grace.

This righteousness of God is by faith from first to last. Jesus obtained it by faith; we take hold of it by faith; and it empowers our life by faith. Inspire people to a better life than they ever imagined - a life of knowing and experiencing God's love, grace, and

righteousness.

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