

Cliches

Which Confuse:

Terminology Which Corrupts the
Gospel Message

By Dan Lash

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Weston Street Bible Church

340 Weston Street

Rome City, IN 46784

(260) 854-3994

www.WestonSBC.org

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Introduction:

I have taken the title of this book from a work by the first AWANA missionary, Donald H. Bunge, entitled, What Happened to the Word Believe. Bunge's book contained a chapter entitled "Clichés That Confuse." This book will focus upon invitations to respond to Christ in a saving way which are unscriptural and will eventually leave those who have employed one of these methods in a state of uncertainty. These are clichés which have found wide acceptance throughout mainstream Christianity, so don't be surprised if you have heard a few of them yourself. I believe that, if the church will avoid using these clichés and stick to a Bible understanding of just what constitutes a saving response to the Gospel, we will find far fewer believers in our churches struggling in a state of uncertainty as to whether or not they have responded to the good news of Christ in a saving way.

I have met people who were in bondage to doubt their entire lives simply because they were trying to rest their eternal destiny upon a sincere, yet unbiblical, response to God. They tried to seal their hope for eternity on the fact that, at a particular point of time in their life, they attempted to settle once and for all their eternal destiny through the use of one of these unbiblical clichés. The purpose for this book is to sift through

some of those false clichés which confuse people about how to properly respond to God's provision for our salvation.

It is not my desire to be divisive over this issue; it is my desire that, when the gospel is proclaimed, there is no doubt as to how to respond to it in a saving way. I have found that people who are not clear about this issue do not possess a certain assurance of salvation; but are, rather, always harboring a nagging doubt in their souls concerning assurance. Such people never become completely rooted and grounded in the love of God and are, therefore, not able to progress towards maturity. If the devil cannot keep a person out of the kingdom, then he will keep him from experiencing assurance, paralyzing him with fear, thus making him useless for advancing grace.

I also don't mean to imply that that you are not saved if you employed one of these clichés when you appropriated God's provision for your salvation. I am sure that many people have been saved in spite of some of these clichés. The important thing is this: what was your understanding of God's offer when you responded? If you understood that God was offering you a free gift of an eternal relationship with Himself merited solely by Christ's intercession on your behalf then, most likely, you have passed from death unto life. However, if your understanding of God's offer was that there were some strings attached to going to heaven, which were in some way upon contingent upon your own abilities or obedience, then you have

not yet received salvation as a gift. Regardless of any clichéd responses, if what you understood to be meriting your standing before the Father was Christ your substitute, who died for your sins, you most likely passed from death unto life regardless of any cliché you employed.

The real problem behind some of these clichés is that, at their core, there is a misapprehension as to the terms upon which the Father grants an everlasting relationship with Himself. The core issue to being saved is discovering God's provision for you to have a righteous standing before Him, and embracing that provision for yourself. It is a gift, bought and paid for in the sacrifice of Christ for your sins and yours free through an act of non-meritorious appropriating faith.

Most people I know who have a degree of interest about where they are going to spend eternity will, nevertheless, when hearing about this book, choose not to read it. It has been my observation throughout my years of ministry that most people want to avoid the soul-unsettling event of examining the foundation of what they claim to believe. The gospel preacher will be a person to be avoided by the rank and file of religious folks in any given community, because his grasp on Scripture is more than just a little unsettling. Most people would rather risk eternity on a HOPE that they are going to go to heaven than to arrive at an absolute certainty which a genuine faith encounter with the Gospel will bring.

The song "Amazing Grace" contains a stanza that most people sing but will never genuinely experience:

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Here's a question I like to put forth to people: Have you ever experienced anxiety about where you are going to spend eternity which was displaced with joy and peace upon hearing and believing the gospel of grace?

Most people will, sadly, end up on the wrong side of eternity, because they chose not to allow their souls to experience the unsettling examination of their faith. They choose to avoid the soul-unsettling fear from the Holy Spirit which accompanies every challenge of one's faith. They would rather go through life with doubts than allow the Holy Spirit to do a necessary faith trial in their souls. They would rather encase their souls in worldly distractions than allow the Holy Spirit to break through their case-hardened hearts in preparation for an implantation of the life-giving gospel message of grace.

One tool that the devil has developed to allow people to go through life religious but unconverted is the implementation of man-made clichés. Man-made clichés such as "Ask Jesus into your heart," "Surrender to Christ" or "Ask for forgiveness" are

just a few of the many man-made clichés which people can perform, apart from the illuminating power of the gospel, upon which they believe they can hang the eternal destiny of their souls. They are things that people can DO, instead of hearing and believing the message of what the Lord Jesus has already DONE concerning their sins.

In considering the event which causes people to pass from death unto life, there is no substitute for the power of the gospel impacting a receptive human conscience to illuminate a person to the point of being able to believe unto life. No man-made clichéd response to God will EVER substitute for such an event in a person's life. It is only the illuminating power of a properly articulated gospel impacting a sinner's receptive conscience which can function as the illuminating power of God unto salvation.

The purpose of this book is to point out some of the unscriptural ways in which many who name the name of Christ attempt to lead a person to the point of saving faith. More specifically, this book is written to expose many of those often-used clichés which will result in counterfeit conversion experiences. Most of these clichés, when examined in the light of Scripture, have no Scriptural precedence at all. They are counterfeit gospel invitations which, if they are the only information about coming to God a person has ever received,

will leave the recipient of that invitation on the wrong side of eternity.

The gospel is a unique message which, as Paul stated, is "not according to man" (Gal. 1:11). That is, it is not a concept that man would have developed on his own. Every man-made religion of the world grants eternal bliss on the basis of personal performance. Only the Bible presents a relationship which has as its foundation the intercessory substitution of the Person of Christ. We do not enter into a relationship with God because of promises we make to God; we enter into a relationship with God because of the sacrifice Christ has made for us, and our faith in that sacrifice.

Man, when left to his own imagination, would never have come up with a relationship with God based upon the sacrifice of Christ. It takes special revelation from God (The Bible) to reveal to our sin-blinded hearts God's provision for our righteousness bought and paid for by the offering of Christ.

The free grace message goes absolutely contrary to man's natural deliberations concerning a relationship with God. A man-made relationship with God seeks to gain a home in heaven through personal performance. The Bible teaches us that Jesus has already secured the favor of God for us by allowing Himself to be punished for our sins.

1

COMPONENTS OF A GENUINE NEW BIRTH EXPERIENCE

Before we begin exploring some of the false clichés which are commonly used in Christendom, let's first of all acquaint ourselves with the components of a genuine new birth experience. Just as the best way to spot a counterfeit piece of currency is to master our acquaintance with the real thing, thus the best way to identify counterfeit evangelistic terminology is by a thorough understanding of the genuine.

The first component and prerequisite to a genuine new birth experience is an abandonment of any hope in one's personal integrity as that which can commend him in an everlasting way to the Lord. This negative self-assessment is usually brought about by a fear of the Lord coupled with recognizing one's continued lapses of personal righteousness. Over time, these lapses in personal integrity, when accompanied by a recognition of God's consistent integrity, will drive a sincere seeker of God to despair because of his continual failure to meet the approval of such a seeker's own conscience. This continued discouraging self-assessment is the prerequisite to saving faith. No genuine embracing of the imputed righteousness of Christ can occur until

the sinner reaches a point of despair concerning his lack of consistent personal righteousness before God.

This negative self-assessment is outlined for us in the following context:

Romans 3:9-20: What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

¹⁰ As it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ *There is none who understands;*

There is none who seeks after God.

¹² *They have all turned aside;*

They have together become unprofitable;

There is none who does good, no, not one."

¹³ *"Their throat is an open tomb;*

With their tongues they have practiced deceit";

"The poison of asps is under their lips";

¹⁴ *"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."*

¹⁵ *"Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

¹⁶ *Destruction and misery are in their ways;*

¹⁷ *And the way of peace they have not known."*

¹⁸ *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Notice what the conclusion of this universal self-assessment is to be: a verdict of self-condemnation by the one doing the assessment. "That every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God." The conclusion that every sinner needs to reach about himself as a prerequisite to saving faith is that he is under the dominion of an old sin nature which the Bible calls the flesh. No matter how hard the sinner tries to bring this flesh under the submission of the will of God, he is not able to do so. No amount of reformation, will power, human determination, or devotion to God can cause this fleshly frame of reference of the unsaved to fall in line under the will of God. As we read in Romans 8:7:

Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be: So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

If a person is not born again, the only frame of reference that he possesses before God is a fallen one. According to the above verses, it is not possible for this mind of the flesh to be brought into submission to the precepts of God.

This fact usually must be experientially discovered by the sinner. Once this is discovered and faced, this bad news creates within his conscience an anxiety which leads to a receptivity toward the grace message.

It is to this self-condemned conscience that the good news of the gospel is proclaimed. It is the gospel message which enlightens the sin-conquered conscience of the unsaved to the fact that God has Himself provided a righteousness of which the sinner may partake; a righteousness consisting of Christ's having satisfied the righteous demands of the Father against the sinner through the sacrifice of Himself. The satisfaction with which the Father views the perfect sacrifice of the Son is the basis of an eternally right relationship with the Father. The message that "Christ died for our sins," when apprehended by a conscience hungering and thirsting for righteousness, becomes the boast of the believing sinner.

It is this message of the cross which is the power of God unto salvation; for in that message is revealed to the sin-cursed conscience that God Himself has provided a righteousness in which the sinner may stand, a righteousness which has nothing to do with our ability to produce within ourselves God's standard of righteousness. The conscience, having been previously condemned by our continued falling short of God's glory, rejoices that the righteousness which is going to forever commend us to God is a righteousness outside of ourselves, a righteousness based upon Christ's sacrifice for us, a righteousness which is imputed to us when we, as an act of appropriating faith, rest the eternal destiny of our souls in that

satisfaction with which the Father views the offering of Christ in our behalf.

There is one prerequisite and two components of saving faith. The one prerequisite is a self-condemnation in which the sinner is convinced that he does not possess an inherent righteousness which could for any amount of time commend himself to a relationship with God.

Saving faith also has two components: one of illumination and one of volition. Saving faith is an act of the will which is only possible as the Holy Spirit illumines an anxious soul concerning the all-sufficient nature of the sacrifice of Christ. This is possible only when the sinner, who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, exposes his heart to teaching which addresses what was actually accomplished for him on the cross. As a hungry soul is exposed to the life-giving seed of the gospel of grace, understanding springs up within his conscience, an understanding which enables the individual to exercise positive volition towards the facts of the gospel. Exercising positive volition toward the facts of the gospel, specifically, a decision to rest the eternal destiny of one's soul upon the merits of Christ's finished work, is to commit the act of saving faith. But, before a person can commit that act of saving faith, his heart must have been illuminated by the power of that life-giving message: the message of the cross.

Here is the two-fold process through which the Father takes an individual in order that he might come to faith in Christ:

1. God leads a person to the internal conviction and persuasion that he does not, within himself, have the capacity to produce, within his person, a righteousness which can commend himself to God. As a result, the person abandons all hope in personal righteousness.
2. From that position of spiritual bankruptcy, a person discovers, through a properly articulated gospel, that God has already provided for his salvation through the finished work of Christ. Such a person is led to rest the eternal destiny of his soul in God's gift of righteousness, paid for by the sacrifice of Christ.

These are the necessary components of a genuine act of saving faith. The clichés which we will examine in the remainder of this book will be scrutinized in light of these components.

2

IS TURNING FROM SIN A PREREQUISITE TO BELIEVING?

A very common mistake which many make when trying to lead a person to faith is the insistence that turning from sin is a prerequisite or corequisite to saving faith. Such people imagine that the old sin nature somehow has the power to produce a degree of personal reformation which can help commend them to God. The reason that "turning from sin" as a prerequisite to saving faith is anathema to us free-grace believers is not that we are looking for license to sin. Rather, such an insistence constitutes an insertion of self-righteousness into that which Scriptures proclaim to be God's gift of righteousness.

The one insisting that "turning from sin" is the prerequisite to saving faith demonstrates that he himself has NOT experienced the TRUE prerequisite to saving faith, which is a self-assessment resulting in SELF-CONDEMNATION. The person who believes that forsaking sin is a prerequisite to saving faith has not yet discovered this indispensable truth about himself: No matter how hard he tries, he is unable to produce within his person the righteousness of God. He has yet to discover this indispensable truth: "FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD" (Romans 3:23.) This

really indicates that the one seeking to do the evangelizing needs himself to be evangelized because he has not yet himself experienced the self-debasing self-condemnation which prepares a person to be able to receive the free gift of righteousness. The person who has really come to grips with his own depravity does not boast of his own righteousness; to the contrary, his constant post-conversion testimony, is "O wretched man that I AM, who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24.)

When a person discovers that he himself is consistently unable to produce within himself the righteousness of God, he will stop boasting of his own righteousness, and throw himself entirely upon the mercy of God, embracing God's gift of righteousness, 100 percent bought and paid for by the sacrifice of Christ. At that point, the sacrifice of Christ becomes the sinner's righteousness before the Father. The sinner now stands before the Father complete in Christ because, by faith, the sacrifice of Christ has now become the sinner's righteous standing before God.

Once the sinner becomes a child of God through faith in Christ, NOW the indwelling Spirit of God goes to work on all those sins in his or her life. One by one, the Spirit of God, through assimilated truth and the experience of trials, begins to address those many sins. Now God is on the new believer's side against his sins, helping to transform him into a person whom HE can enjoy.

An interesting study is to see how many times the Apostle Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, mentions the topic of repentance from sin in justification contexts of Scripture. Nowhere does the Apostle Paul set forth in his evangelistic formula a separate act of turning from sin as a prerequisite or corequisite to saving faith. In every place where Paul sets forth the terms upon which the Father grants eternal life, the formula is "hear and believe." A few verses will suffice to make this point.

Ephesians 1:13: In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

1 Corinthians 1:21 - 23: For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

Likewise Peter gives the same salvation formula at the Jerusalem council in Acts chapter 15:

Acts 15:7 – 11: And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by

my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

⁸ "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us,

⁹ "and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

¹⁰ "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

¹¹ "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

From where much of the confusion can come concerning this topic of repentance is in failing to distinguish between repentance and the basis of condemnation of the sinner. The sinner does not stand condemned before the Father because he has a sin problem; the basis of condemnation in the Scriptures is light spurned. That is, when the sinner knows that God has dispensed light within the reach of the sinner, but the sinner takes no action in the direction of that light, that refusal of the light becomes the ultimate basis of eternal condemnation. Stated succinctly, a person is not condemned because he is in possession of an un-submitted flesh; on the contrary, a person is condemned because of a refusal to expose his conscience to the light. Several contexts can be brought to bear on this point.

John 3:18 – 21: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned

already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

¹⁹ "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

²¹ "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Romans 1:18 – 20: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

Luke 11:31: "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here."

We can see from the three above passages that the basis of condemnation is a refusal of the truth. God has made having a

relationship with Him as easy as hearing the word of the Gospel and believing it. The gospel is a message of God's complete provision for you, through the sacrifice of Christ, free for the believing, with no strings attached. When God has made salvation so easy and free, but yet a person refuses to give the message of His grace even a brief hearing, from God's perspective, that is unreasonable.

The average man in America will spend upwards of 2 million minutes of his life with his attention totally fixated on his sports viewing schedule. Yet, he will not devote 15 minutes of his time to give the preacher a hearing concerning the eternal destiny of his soul. From God's perspective, that is not just unreasonable, that is insane.

Another source of confusion on the topic of repentance is this: In the vast majority of verses in the New Testament where "repentance" is associated with coming to God, the word is used in a Jewish context. Repentance from a Jewish perspective was a transitioning away from the Law of Moses as the primary occupation of the saint and transitioning to Christ, who had offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice, once and for all settling the sin issue. The command to the Jews was to repent; that is, to transition from Moses to Christ.

John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. "The remission of sins" is the term the Scriptures use to reference the results of the finished work of Christ. The results of the finished work of Christ is that sin is

put away once and for all as the barrier to God's entering into a relationship with a person. "Repentance unto the remission of sins" is the change of mind the Jews were commanded to make, forsaking the sacrifices of the Law of Moses as the way to address their sins and transitioning to the perfect sacrifice of Christ as God's once and for all provision of sins. Baptism was simply the public testimony that the Jewish citizen had made the transition of faith.

So repentance, from the perspective of the Jew, was simply another way of referring to saving faith. That this is the case can be demonstrated from the following two contexts.

Acts 19:4: Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

Notice in this verse that the Apostle Paul states that John the Baptist's message of a baptism of repentance was an invitation to believe on Jesus.

Likewise, when Peter is recounting the conversion the household of Cornelius to a Jewish audience, they referred to the gentiles' coming to faith in terms of repentance.

Acts 11:17, 18: "If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

¹⁸ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Even though Peter, in his evangelistic message to Cornelius, never mentions "repentance" when the Jewish saints heard of his household's conversion, they referred to their faith as "repentance unto life." So, in many instances in the New Testament, repentance is same thing as believing. From the perspective of the Jew, coming to Christ was repenting away from the now obsolete Law of Moses to Christ and His perfect sacrifice. The Jew repented from dead works, that is, the now defunct Law of Moses, as the means of coming to God and embraced Christ and His sacrifice by faith.

Hebrews 6:1: Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

"Dead works" in the above verse are not sins; instead, "dead works" are the Old Testament sacrifices which have been rendered obsolete through the perfect offering of Christ.

The word "repent" in the original language of the New Testament literally means to "change your mind." To the Jew, this change of mind was a transition from the provisional means by which sin was addressed – the Law of Moses – to the eternal provision for their righteousness – the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

As far as this chapter of this book is concerned, the bottom line is this: To inject "turning from sin" into the salvation formula is to inject works into the saving response to the Gospel.

Ephesians 2:8, 9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,
⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

For a complete discussion on the word "repentance" read my book, Repentance, Transitioning to Grace.

3

ASK GOD TO FORGIVE YOUR SINS

Several years ago, the main stream media tried to disparage Donald Trump over whether or not he asked God for forgiveness. When they asked if he had ever asked God for forgiveness, he said that he did not know. He was kind of taken aback by that question. Quite frankly, when I heard the question put to him and then watched him stumble as he gave his answer, I was taken aback myself. I was surprised that there was such universal ignorance among those who named the name of Christ as to how a person comes to God. Quite frankly, Trump's answer was more Biblically sound than those trying to entrap him with the question.

There is a great myth among those who name the name of Christ today: salvation is all about asking God to forgive you of all your sins. "If I will just drop to my knees before I die and ask God to forgive all my sins, then I will be saved," as if somehow your prayer for leniency to God is what it takes to soften His heart toward you.

To beg God to be merciful toward your sins in order to be saved is to have failed to comprehend the truth of the gospel which has, at the core of its message, the fact that God has **ALREADY** been merciful toward you with reference to your

sins, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Jesus has already executed the mercy of God toward you when He allowed Himself to be delivered up and punished for your sins. To beg God for mercy, when God has already been merciful through the sacrifice of Christ, is a manifestation of unbelief in the mercy which He has already provided.

The mistaken understanding that asking God for mercy is a valid method of being made ready for eternity comes from seeking to embrace the following passage outside of the whole context of Scripture:

Luke 18:9 – 14: Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

¹² 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

¹³ "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

A key to understanding this exchange between the tax collector and God is the word "merciful." This prayer might have been better translated "God be propitiated to me the sinner." Propitiation speaks of the divine justice of God's being satisfied on the basis of substitutionary sacrifice. The tax collector was not asking for an exercise of the immediate mercy of God apart from sacrifice; instead, he was asking to enter into a relationship with God based upon a satisfaction for his sins having been accomplished by God's method of substitutionary sacrifice. Since the tax collector had come to grips with his own depravity, thus abandoning hope in his own righteousness, he was looking to God's provision for his righteousness on the basis of the substitutionary sacrifice of God. While the prayer of the tax collector did express all of the components of a saving faith, it was not the prayer that justified the tax collector, but His faith in God to provide for his justification based upon the justice of God being propitiated by sacrifice.

There is only one method of being accounted eternally righteous before the Father found in the Scriptures. That method is abandoning hope in a self-generated righteousness and embracing His gift of righteousness as provided by offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. A prayer may vocalize that act of faith, but praying for God to be merciful in light of the fact that He already has been merciful, in the offering of Christ, would manifest, at best, ignorance concerning the mercy already provided.

Instead of begging for forgiveness for all of one's sins, what the unsaved needs to do is to hear the message of the cross, in which it is revealed that mercy has already been shown, and embrace, by faith, the content of that message. Jesus has once and for all settled the sin issue as the barrier between God and man. All sin was placed on Christ, Jesus died under its penalty and put it away to the complete satisfaction of the Father. Now all people are free to have an everlasting relationship with God if they are willing to, for themselves, believe on Jesus as God's perfect solution for sin.

Hebrews 9:24 – 26: For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

²⁵ not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another

—
²⁶ He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Incidentally, not only is asking for forgiveness not the formula for becoming a child of God; but also asking God for forgiveness is not really the formula for the believer to be restored to fellowship. The believer is restored to fellowship by confession of sin. When the Spirit of God convicts the believer

of having strayed from a path of virtue, the pathway to restored fellowship is confession.

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

To "confess" means to say the same thing as God does about our sin. When the Holy Spirit of God reveals to us where we have stumbled in our walk, and we confess that, we experience a re-establishment of our communion with God. This re-establishment of communion is usually accompanied by joy and peace, a new power to serve the Lord, plus whatever other benefits that might accrue to us from a Father who is now once again excited about the direction of our lives. But confession is not begging for leniency from God. It is, rather, a reorientation to His truth which starts us back on the path towards conformity to Christ.

4

THE FALLACY OF THE GOSPEL OF TOTAL SURRENDER

Let's discuss the fallacy of the Gospel invitation which challenges the unsaved to be saved by making a total surrender to Christ.

By total surrender, it is meant that, at the point of saving faith, the candidate for salvation is making a commitment to the Lord Jesus to completely enthrone Him as the Lord of their life, promising obedience from that point forward. Many groups that name the name of Christ make this at least a step, if not the key element, in Christian conversion. In fact, when such people discuss the persistent backslidden condition of a confessing Christian, they usually assign the reason for the backslidden condition to the probability that the person did not totally surrender when they were saved and thus are not saved. Of course, this "total surrender" places the proponents of this salvation formula in an elite class; they assume, quite smugly, that most people in their sphere of influence are not really saved because they have yet to make that complete surrender.

This approach to the New Birth really misses some very key elements concerning salvation. The main issue revolves around the doctrine of depravity, which deals with our predisposition to fall short of God's moral excellence. The doctrine of depravity, briefly stated, is as follows:

Man is so depraved that he does not have the ability to produce, in his person, divine good. Men are born with a fallen frame of reference which is so unlike God that all of the actions which flow from that fallen frame of reference fall far short of God's glory. Man is not like God in his affections. Man is not like God in his responses to life's challenges. Man does not naturally see things from God's perspective; nor does man respond to people in the way that God would respond.

Those who believe that you could be saved by a total surrender have not yet come to grips with their own depravity. They have yet to discover a very sad truth about themselves: No matter how careful they attempt to be, they will never be able to bring their mind of the flesh into harmony with the will of God. As we read in the following verse:

Romans 8:7, 8: Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be:

⁸ and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

The mind of the flesh, even in the child of God, is never brought into a harmonious relation with God. Even though it is positionally put off through the miracle of the New Birth, it continues to grow corrupt, even in the believer.

Ephesians 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Notice here that the old man continues to grow corrupt, even after we are born again. The only hope for the sinner is not in bringing the mind of the flesh into submission to Christ; no, it is in the introduction of a new person into the heart of the sinner, through the miracle of the New Birth. It is through the miracle of the New Birth that a new person, created according to the image of God, is forever established within souls. It is this new person which becomes the believer's eternal identity before God.

To try to obtain salvation by promising to God to surrender to His Lordship over one's life is to attempt to be saved by a means which God says is impossible. It is a failure of the sinner to have experientially discovered the incurable depravity of his old

sin nature. Moreover, while God may be pleased that at least such a person desires a relationship with Him, to have concluded that the desired relationship can be obtained through a promise of obedience is to have failed to have rested in God's provision for the sinner's righteousness: the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

The tragedy for the individual who has tried to come to Christ through a total surrender is that such a person has failed to believe on Christ. He has failed to turn away from his own righteousness and to embrace God's provision for his righteousness, as set forth in the person and work of Christ. Read carefully the following passage.

Romans 10:1 – 3: Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

According to this context, it is possible for a person to have a zeal for God; but, if such a person has not given up on a self-established righteousness and submitted to God's provision for his righteousness, he is still among the ranks of the unjustified.

This is the real danger of the “total surrender” gospel. It leaves those who have fallen for this counterfeit on the wrong side of eternity. Such people may be zealous for many Godly things; but, if they die, having never embraced God’s gift of righteousness, tragically, they will end up on the wrong side of eternity.

5

ROMANS 10:13

Whenever we seek to analyze these confusing clichés, we must first ask ourselves this question: "Where do we see these methods employed in Scripture?" For example, we never see, in the New Testament, someone who is engaged in the ministry of reconciliation leading a person in a prayer in which they ask Jesus to save them. The formula for a genuine conversion experience in Scripture is always to hear the word of the gospel and believe. The primary verse in Scripture which appears to be the exception to this rule is Romans 10:13: "For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.' "

This verse seems to have become the capstone of evangelistic efforts in several major denominations. For many, it is the last step of the "Romans Road" evangelistic strategy which has been taught for years in many fundamental Bible colleges. But, since there are not two means by which God declares a sinner righteous, believe and/or call, we would do well to look more closely at the context in which this verse is found.

Expanding the context of the above verse introduces an additional tension to our free grace theology: the idea that publically confessing Christ is a step in being "saved."

Romans 10:9 – 13: That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

¹³ For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

The Apostle Paul immediately offers some clarification in verse 10: "With the heart one believes unto righteousness." He affirms that justification is by faith. So, whatever the "salvation" is to which Paul refers, it is in addition to justification by faith. This should be the first hint to us that this passage is not merely a context telling a person how to be eternally righteous before God,

Justification by faith IS the doctrine which relates to the core issues in evangelism. When seeking to lead a person to the point of saving faith, the truths of the gospel concerning the basis upon which a person can stand justified before God should be the focus of our testimony. In every dispensation, "justified" was the term used to designate a person as being in an eternally right relationship with God.

A great deal of confusion can be introduced into our evangelistic efforts if "being saved" is the focus of our discussion. This is because "saved" means something different in each dispensation of the Bible. To the Jew living during the time of Christ, "saved" meant surviving the great tribulation and physically arriving in the kingdom. In Noah's day, being "saved" meant surviving the flood. During the present dispensation, being "saved" means to become identified with Christ through faith; thus making a positive future home in heaven our certain destiny.

The verses under consideration in Romans chapter 10 are actually part of a larger context which discusses the Israelite's present status before God. Romans chapters 9 through 11 constitute a parenthetical discussion in the book of Romans concerning the present state of Israel in the greater context of God's eternal purpose for the nation. The context is an explanation as to how a gentile assembly of believers has come to be the special people of God. Because of the present unbelief of Israel, a new assembly of saints, comprised of both gentiles and Jews, has been assembled. Even though, at this present time, this gentile assembly of believers has been elevated to the status of special people of God instead of Israel, God has not set aside His purpose for the Israelites and still anticipates a future deliverance and exultation of the Jewish believers in His Kingdom.

As we have already pointed out from Romans 10:10, being "saved" in Romans 10 is more than just justification by faith. It is the restoration of an Israelite to the status of God's special people, complete with the blessings and responsibilities which accompany such a status. Israelites had been the special people of God. They WERE the priestly nation of God. They were His special people through whom God was to be glorified. However, Israelites have forfeited that status through their present state of unbelief. The Israelite, as an individual, can be restored to that status; not through a national restoration of Israel, but now by becoming a part of the "whosoever" people, comprised of Jews and gentiles, who call upon the name of the Lord. The Israelite who, as an individual, believes in Christ and is confessing him publically has been restored to that special person status.

Romans 10:13 is an Old Testament quotation of Joel 2:32, citing the universality of the deliverance of the Lord: "WHOSOEVER will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10:13 is not a path to being accounted to be in an eternally right relationship with God; but a statement on the universality of the invitation to experience the blessings of salvation. This is made obvious by the next verse in our context:

Romans 10:14: How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?

This is the second time in this passage that the Apostle Paul affirms that justification is by faith. People who do not believe in the One who died and rose again do not call upon His name. This calling upon the name of the One in whom they have already believed is not in order that they might be accounted righteous before God (they have already believed); rather, this calling on Him secures the riches of blessing associated with a relationship with God.

There is no distinction between Jew and gentile at this time (Romans 10:12.) All those who are calling upon the name of the Lord, that is, those who are accessing God through the merits of all that Christ is and all that He has done in their behalf, will be experiencing deliverance in their lives. Whether it is the deliverance of the Kingdom as mentioned in Joel 2:32 (which is in the Old Testament citation of Romans 10:13), or an individual experiencing the blessing of the present salvation of God, the Lord Jesus pours out His blessings upon all who approach Him to take advantage of all of His benefits as referenced in His name.

It is important to note that, in Romans 10:12, "calling" is a present tense verb.

Romans 10:12: For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call (are calling) upon Him.

If this were an invitation to experience the once and for all transferal from death unto life, it would more likely be an aorist verb. "All who are calling upon Him" is a reference to believers' continued accessing of the blessings of Christ and not the unbelievers' one time act of believing, which forever transfers him from death unto life. All those who are accessing the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, invoking His assistance in all that the titles of the second Person of the God-head represents, are experiencing deliverance from God.

Present day believers need to stop trying to ascribe one universal definition to the term "saved." The word is used many times in the New Testament to refer to all types of salvation. It refers to the restoration of the dignity of womanhood (I Tim. 2:15). It speaks of the results of the Judgment seat of Christ (I Cor. 3:15). It is used to reference the rapture of the church (Romans 5:9). It discusses surviving the great tribulation (Romans 9:27). So, we need not be surprised when the Bible uses the term "saved" to speak of deliverances other than being transferred out of death into life.

There are not two pathways to being accounted eternally righteous before God. To assign Romans 10:13 as the means of receiving the imputed righteousness of God is to confuse the "by grace through faith" way of salvation.

6

WHAT ABOUT SINCERITY?

There exists today much false information which passes for genuine gospel preaching. There are a myriad of counterfeit decisions being made for Christ, in the name of Christ, through which people believe they are being saved; which, nonetheless, are leaving people unsaved. Most people believe that it doesn't really matter under what salvation formula you got saved, just so long as you were sincere when you "made your decision for Christ."

If sincerity was what it was all about, one would think that several key figures in the book of Acts would not have needed any additional special revelation from God, because they were two of the most sincere God-seeking people anyone has ever seen. Let's consider two of these figures.

Acts 8:27 – 35: So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,

²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet

²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent, So He opened not His mouth.

³³ In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."

³⁴ So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

The Ethiopian treasurer was reading aloud the book of Isaiah. He not only was searching the scriptures for himself, but he was sharing it with his caravan returning to Ethiopia. He, as a sincere but discouraged seeker for truth, was sharing this truth with others the best that he could. How difficult it must have

been, attempting to minister to others when your own soul needed to discover the joy of God's salvation!

We see another sincere, but unsaved, seeker in Acts chapter 10.

Acts 10:1 – 6: There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

² a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

⁴ And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

⁵ "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.

⁶ "He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

Even though these two men both desperately wanted a relationship with God, that desire did not gain them that

relationship. All of the desire in the world to know God is no substitute for hearing and believing the gospel.

Human will is no substitute for a properly articulated and comprehended gospel presentation, a presentation which the Spirit can use to create faith. A desire to be saved does not make you saved; nor does asking Jesus to save you cause you to be saved. Salvation is, first and foremost, about having your understanding enlightened by a properly perceived, properly articulated message of God's grace.

From these two accounts in the book of Acts, those of the Ethiopian treasurer and of Cornelius's household, we can see that it is the pattern in Scripture that God obligates Himself to get additional light to those who are seeking that light; He places the light of gospel truth within the reach of the one in whom there is a sincere desire to be saved.

There are countless people who want to be saved; they truly don't want to spend eternity in Hell. Sadly, most preachers will teach such seekers to simply express to God their desire to be saved, or ask Jesus to save, in the form of a prayer and then trust that the Lord will answer that prayer.

Expressing to the Father a sincere desire to be saved does not automatically save an individual because that prayer does not constitute an act of saving faith. There is not contained, in that expressed desire, the power of a properly articulated gospel.

And, where there is not that message which the Holy Spirit can use to create comprehension in a hungry soul, there can be no genuine conversion experience. Every genuine conversion experience must include a Holy Spirit illumination of the conscience brought about by a comprehension of the message of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ and its value to the individual.

However, if it is a person's desire to be saved, God knows his heart and will respond with additional light. God will honor the spiritual hunger of that person who wants to be saved by going out of His way to place gospel information within his reach and will then call to his attention the source of that gospel information. At that point, it is the sincere seeker's responsibility to give it a hearing. There are no guarantees that the hungry soul will respond to that information. Quite often, the spiritually hungry individual never gives it a hearing because of the fear of the loss of other relationships in his or her life. As Jesus said in the following verse:

John 5:44: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God?"

The fear of what others might think is never an excuse to not give the gospel a hearing. Many a seeking soul will wind up on the wrong side of eternity because he feared what others might

think if he became a believer. King Agrippa and Festus, in the book of Acts, most likely fell into the category of those whose fear of man got in their way of committing an act of saving faith.

Salvation is all about exposing oneself to the light of the gospel and then believing that message once it has been understood. If you are not saved and want to be saved, or you are not sure you are saved and want to be sure, then expose your conscience to that message that God says leads to saving faith: the message of the Cross.

1 Corinthians 1:18 – 24: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

²⁰ Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

A genuine born again experience involves, first and foremost, an illumination of the conscience through the power of a properly articulated gospel, as we read in the following verse:

Romans 10:17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Saving faith has two components: a component of illumination, which occurs through the power of a properly articulated gospel, and a volitional component; that is, an act of believing which is possible once the gospel has illuminated the conscience concerning the gift of righteousness. Only the gospel of the grace of Christ can illumine one's conscience to the point where he is able to exercise an act of saving faith. Without that illumination, the only decision a person can make in the direction of God is a decision to hear the gospel.

No amount of sincerity, no fervent prayer, no act of contrition can substitute for the message of the cross to bring illumination to the conscience, enabling that person to pass from death unto life. Once that message has illumined the conscience, it is a simple act of faith which appropriates to oneself that gift of

righteousness as revealed in the gospel, resulting in the Father's forever transferring that person from death unto life.

7

Is Saving Faith "Trust"?

Believing the gospel is easy. The gospel is a very simple concept to understand. The gospel is a proclamation of the value to an individual of the finished work of Christ. Moreover, the saving response to that gospel, believing, is easy. Of course, by "believe" we mean a once and for all resting of one's hope for all eternity upon the facts presented in the gospel.

What takes effort is defending the integrity of that simple gospel message against those who might distort it. It also takes effort to rightly discern the word of truth in order that we might explain those contexts which, on the surface, seem to contradict that simple gospel message. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that saving faith is not "trust." Moreover, the terms "saving faith" and "trust" must be clearly distinguished from each other if we are to maintain the proper response to the simple gospel message.

If "saving faith" and "trust" are the same thing, then why is the word "trust" never employed in the Scriptures in those contexts which address saving faith, especially when there exist

already two Greek verbs which are often translated "trust": *πεπειθω* (pepeitho) and *Ελπίζω*, (elpizo) and those words have a common occurrence in Scripture?

The word "trust" does not properly communicate the saving response to the gospel. Trust is a confidence based upon familiarity with another. To trust someone is to risk or depend upon another to take care of a very important future circumstance. It presupposes a prior familiarity with the integrity of the person who is to be trusted. The reason we trust someone is because we are familiar with his or her character.

The unsaved, since they are not at all acquainted with Christ's faithfulness, do not possess any experience with the person of Christ to really exercise trust. Trusting Christ is something that believers are challenged to do with their future hopes and ambitions. Believers are called to die to self, set aside their selfish ambitions and trust Christ with the details of their lives. He, as a faithful Savior, indeed takes care of the details of the lives of those who know him.

But, that act of faith which forever transfers us from death unto life is not relying on Jesus to do something that He is going

to do in response to faith. It is, rather, relying upon something that Jesus has already done as sufficient to eternally commend us to the Father; namely, the Lord Jesus' having satisfied the righteous demands of the Father against our sins.

Saving faith is a one-time act of the will in which the sinner rests the eternal destiny of his soul upon the satisfactory payment, which the Lord Jesus has offered for his sins to God the Father in his behalf. When a sinner executes that one-time act of faith, God the Father declares that person to be eternally righteous, places that person in Christ, creates within that person through the agency of the Holy Spirit a new person made in His own image, and gives that believer the indwelling Holy Spirit as the resident Teacher and Comforter. After passing from death unto life, the Lord Jesus becomes the believer's Savior in many wonderful ways; but, until He becomes a person's Savior on the basis of His substitutionary sacrifice, to hope for salvation on any other basis is to hope in vain.

In his commentary on the book of Romans entitled Romans Verse by Verse, William R. Newell made this following distinction concerning faith and trust:

Faith is not trust, and must be carefully distinguished therefrom, if we would have a clear conception of the gospel. Faith is simply the acceptance for ourselves of the testimony of God as true. Such faith, indeed, brings one into a life of trust. But faith is not “trusting” or “expecting God to do something,” but relying on His testimony concerning the person of Christ as His Son, and the work of Christ for us on the cross. So faith is “the giving substance to things hoped for,” *After saving faith, the life of trust begins.* In a sense that will be readily perceived by the spiritual mind, trust is always looking forward to what God will do; but faith sees that what God says has been done, and believes God’s Word, having the conviction that it is true, and true for ourselves.

In saving faith, then, you do not trust God to do something for you: He *has* sent His Son, who *has* borne sin for you. You do not look to Christ to do something to save you: He *has done it* at the cross. You simply receive God’s testimony as true, setting your seal thereto. You rest in God’s Word regarding Christ and His work for you. You rest in Christ’s shed blood. (Italics added.)

The Lord Jesus is not the Savior because He has the creative power to regenerate a person with eternal life. The Lord Jesus

did not need to leave heaven to come to this earth to become one of us to gain the creative power to regenerate a believer. As the Creator, He has always possessed the power to create and re-create. It is the fact that He settled the issue of our sin to the Father's satisfaction which is His primary work in the believing sinner's passing out of death into life.

It was the unredeemed sin of the world which was the barrier between man and the redemptive desires of God. Once that barrier was conquered and removed through the offering of Christ, God is able to create us as His children through the miracle of the New Birth. When a person believes on Christ as God's perfect solution for their sin debt, God the Father, as the decreeing agent of the God-head, decrees that the believing sinner be transferred out of death into life.

Here are the parts which each member of the God-head plays in our passing from death unto life. The dynamics of the New Birth are as follows:

- 1: The sinner hears the word of the gospel and believes.

^{ASV} **Ephesians 1:13:** in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, -- in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

2. In response to that faith, God the Father sends forth the decree to regenerate that believer.

Ephesians 2:4 – 6: But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

1 Peter 1:3: Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

3. Simultaneously with this decree of the Father, the Father transfers the believing sinner out of the authority of the devil's

world into the Kingdom of Christ, with Christ Jesus as the Chief Shepherd of the believer's earthly existence.

Colossians 1:12, 13: giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

4. At this point, the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, creating a new man in the believer and transferring that believer's identity to that new man, so that the new man is now that person's eternal identity before God.

Titus 3:5: not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

The Lord Jesus's cross work for our sins is what makes all aspects of the new birth possible. However, it is not the immediate activities of the Lord Jesus which are at work in the regeneration of the believing sinner; His past activities on the

cross constitute the legal basis for the immediate work of the Father and the Spirit in the work of regeneration.

The work of both the Father and the Spirit in regeneration are made possible because of the satisfactory payment for sins already accomplished by Christ. Let's continue to consider our context of Titus chapter 3.

Titus 3:6, 7: whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

It is the past cross-work of Christ as the ground of our justification which makes possible the immediate work of the Father and of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration of the believing sinner.

Therefore, to speak of the new birth experiencing as being precipitated upon a person's "trusting Christ to save them," as if Jesus were functioning as the immediate Agent of regeneration, is confusing at best. When the Scriptures describe the activities

of the Father and of the Spirit in the immediate regeneration of the sinner, it is confusing to speak of those activities as the immediate action of the Lord Jesus. While the work of regeneration is founded upon the offering of Christ, it is primarily the immediate activities: the decree of the Father and the regenerating of the Holy Spirit at work in that event. So, if by the phrase, "trust Christ to save," one means to rely upon the sacrifice of Christ as that which merits his eternal standing before the Father and as that which makes the new birth possible, that phrase would be accurate (although a poor choice of words). However, if by "trust Christ to save," one means to depend upon Jesus to accomplish that immediate act of regeneration, using the term would be to confuse what part the other two members of the God-head play in that event. Moreover, since, as we have already discussed, the word "trust" speaks of depositing one into another's keep and refers to an important future aspect of one's life, it is best not to speak of the new birth as "trusting Jesus to save."

8

SAVED BY FAITH

There is a great need today to revisit the concept of faith. Many who name the name of Christ have transformed the act of believing into the object of saving faith. That is, they believe they are saved because they have committed an act of faith. Moreover, while it is true a person is saved when they believe in the offering of Christ for themselves, to attempt to believe without having first been illumined by the message of the cross would be to attempt to trust an act of faith. It would be to unwittingly ascribe merit to the act of believing. It is, therefore, necessary to revisit the nature of saving faith.

Saving faith has two components: A component of illumination and a volitional component.

Saving faith is an act of the will which is only possible as the Holy Spirit illumines an anxious soul concerning the all-sufficient nature of the sacrifice of Christ. This is possible only when the sinner, who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, exposes his heart to teaching addressing what was actually accomplished for him on the cross of Christ. As a hungry soul is exposed to the life-giving seed of the word of

God, understanding springs up in that person's conscience, an understanding which enables the individual to exercise positive volition towards the facts of the gospel. Exercising positive volition toward the facts of the gospel, specifically, a decision to rest the eternal destiny of one's soul upon the merits of Christ's finished work, is to commit the act of saving faith. But, before a person can commit that act of saving faith, his heart must have been illuminated by the power of that life-giving message: the message of the cross.

Of course, the prerequisite to a person's being able to come to saving faith is to recognize his own inability to produce within his person the righteousness of God.

Here is the two-fold process through which the Father takes an individual in order that he might come to faith in Christ:

3. God leads a person to the internal conviction and persuasion that he does not have the capacity to produce a righteousness which can commend him to God. As a result, the person abandons all hope in personal righteousness.
4. From that position of spiritual bankruptcy, a person discovers, through a properly articulated gospel, that God has already provided for his salvation through the finished work of Christ. Such a person is led to rest the eternal

destiny of his soul in God's gift of righteousness, the imputed righteousness made available through the sacrifice of Christ.

The satisfaction with which the Father views the offering of the Son becomes the basis of righteousness for the one who rests in that offering for himself. It is a once and for all decision to rest one's eternal destiny in that satisfactory offering of Christ which is an act of saving faith.

Saving faith is a non-meritorious act of believing which rests one's eternal destiny in that which does merit his standing before the Father: the once and for all sin-remitting payment of Christ. By non-meritorious, we mean that the sinner is not looking to faith itself as that which has made his peace with God. Instead, the believing sinner recognizes that Jesus on the cross, to God's satisfaction, has made our peace through the offering of Himself. Where there was tension in the Godhead over an unsettled sin debt, there is now peace, which Christ has made for all, through the blood of His cross. Faith is nothing more than a decision of the will to rest in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. It is, however, a decision that cannot be made until the sinner understands that indeed the work of the cross IS all-sufficient. It is in the proclamation of the gospel through which the sinner's conscience is illumined to that fact.

It is impossible to exercise a non-meritorious act of believing until, first of all, the sinner is made to comprehend the fact that the Lord Jesus, on the cross, has already made satisfactory payment for his sin. As we read in the following context:

Hebrews 10:1 – 14: For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

³ But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year.

⁴ For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

⁵ Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.

⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of Me -- To do Your will, O God.' "

⁸ Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law),

⁹ then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

¹⁰ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

¹¹ And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

¹² But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

¹³ from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Concerning sins, it was the will of God that a once and for all payment be made for sins. Jesus, in our behalf, accomplished that will of God. Saving faith understands and rests in the sufficiency of that payment. It is this once and for all sacrifice which gives the believing sinner a once and for all standing before the Father.

It is important to recognize that we recognize that we are justified through faith, not on the basis of faith.

Ephesians 2:8, 9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,

⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Notice here that we are justified through faith, not on the basis of faith. The basis of our standing before the Father is found in the following context.

Romans 3:24, 25: being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

The basis of our justification is the "in Christ Jesus redemption." This redemption is His once and for all settling of the sin debt for each and every member of the human race. He obtained this redemption for us on the cross.

Hebrews 9:12 – 15: Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,

¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

¹⁵ And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The redemption through which we are justified is the cancellation of our sin debt on His cross. Once sin was cancelled, He ascended to Heaven, entered God's Holy Place and, in our behalf, presented His blood to the Father. The Father is satisfied with that and will always remain so.

Our faith does not add to the satisfaction with which the Father views the offering of His Son. Faith apprehends and appropriates to itself the value of that satisfaction. Many today have exercised faith in the particular salvation formula prescribed by their particular sect, without the prerequisite illumination of the gospel and are counting on such an exercise to put them on the right side of eternity. All attempts at exercising saving faith without the prerequisite illumination of the gospel are futile. Such attempts are faith in faith; not faith in the all-sufficient substitutionary sacrifice.

A recent manifestation of the "faith in faith" gospel approach is the minimalist gospel; or, as some call it, promise-only; or, as others have called it, the crossless gospel. Those who hold this minimalist gospel position state that the message of the cross is not a necessary component of the gospel message. They would say that all you have to do to be saved is to believe the promise that Jesus will grant you eternal life if you trust him to do it. They would say Jesus is the guarantor of eternal life to all who trust him to grant to them eternal life. It is, at best, circular logic which will leave those who have embraced it confused, if not on the wrong side of eternity.

The problem with the minimalist position is that it transforms the act of believing into the **object** of saving faith. As Charles Hodge said in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,

The part assigned to faith in the work of our reconciliation to God is that of an instrument; it apprehends or appropriates the true meritorious ground of our acceptance before God the work or righteousness of Christ.

So, while, instrumentally, we are justified by faith, the object of that faith is the fact that the Lord Jesus has borne our sin to the Father's complete, total and final satisfaction. We are saved when we simply rest our hope for all eternity in that which Jesus has already accomplished in our behalf.

To leave out of the gospel presentation the fact that Jesus really and truly has already made the sinner's peace with God through the blood of His cross, to leave out of the gospel presentation the fact that Jesus really and truly once and for all settled the sin issue in behalf of the sinner, to leave out of the gospel presentation the fact that the Father has already accepted Christ's sacrifice on behalf of the sinner, is to leave out of the gospel presentation that truth which is to serve as the object of saving faith. And, when the object of saving faith is not presented, saving faith cannot be exercised.

The gospel is the good news of a work that Christ has finished on the cross for us sinners. Our faith does not add to the efficacy of that work; rather, our faith appropriates to itself the merits of that cross work of Christ, a work which Christ accomplished for ME (and you)!

According the minimalist gospel invitation, the object of saving faith is "Christ's promise of eternal life." A gospel proclamation that does not mention that which merits the gift of everlasting righteousness is problematic. To say that "Jesus guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it," without a proclamation of the price paid, is to leave the responder to that invitation with the impression that it is his faith

which has just gained for himself eternal life, and that is faith in faith. It is a circular faith. In effect it says, "I believe Jesus did save me because I believed Jesus would save me." It leaves the responder thinking, "I am saved on the basis of my faith" instead of the Christ-glorifying response of, "I am saved because of the sacrifice of Christ."

True saving faith is in that which **merits** an eternally right standing before God. Neither any promise that Christ has made, nor our faith in such a promise, merits eternal life. It is the finished work of that Divine Person on the cross in behalf of us sinners which alone merits our everlasting relationship with the Father.

9

INVITING JESUS INTO THE HEART

I debated on whether or not to include a chapter on this topic, since many others have written about it. However, since this cliché has gained widespread acceptance in Christendom, and this may be the only book that many may read on the topic, I thought it necessary to include it.

The evangelistic method of inviting Jesus into the heart has absolutely no example of use in Scripture. Moreover, while it may be a Godly desire to want Jesus to dwell within, there is no basis in Scripture to suggest that He comes in by invitation. The Scripture that most people attempt to cite as justifying this evangelistic approach is Revelation 3:20. It reads as follows:

Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Revelation 3:20 occurs in a context in which the Lord Jesus is inviting believers to be restored to fellowship with Christ by repenting of their "of this world" mindset. The Laodicean church was a wealthy assembly whose wealth was masking their true spiritual poverty. "Behold I stand at the door and knock" is the Lord saying that He is not part of the fellowship of these

world-temperature saints. Indeed, He is on the outside as far as fellowship goes. An individual believer can open the door by repenting of their worldliness (verse 19).

A distinction needs to be made between the terms by which God's children are restored to fellowship with Christ, and the terms by which the unbelieving are constituted children of God. Revelation 3:20 is talking about children being chastened and rebuked, not about unbelievers being converted. As Jesus says in the previous verse, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Chastening is something that the Lord does to His children not His present treatment of unbelievers.

"Asking Jesus into your heart" may indeed express the heartfelt desire of many who wish to become children of God; but nowhere in Scripture do we see Jesus coming in by invitation. Rather, Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit comes in as a result of hearing and believing the simple gospel message. As Paul said in Ephesians 1:13,

In Him you also, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

The Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts; not by invitation, but through hearing and believing the simple gospel message. When we hear and understand the message of the all-sufficient work of Christ, and believe that message for ourselves,

then Jesus enters our hearts in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Peter gave the same formula in Acts:

Acts 15:7 – 11: And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

⁸ "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us,

⁹ "and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

¹⁰ "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

¹¹ "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Literally, the last verse of this context reads as follows in the Greek: "But through the grace of our Lord we are believing to be saved." Once again, we see the pattern in Scripture is to hear and believe the gospel. Sincere as a person may be (see Chapter 6 of this book), justification is by faith, not by invitation.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I am sure that this book has angered many reading it. No doubt, many have scoffed at its pages, thinking that all that matters is sincerity when making one's peace with God.

For what it is worth, I was one of those people who fell victim to these clichés. I tried them all hundreds of times each, but had no peace. I cried out to the Lord, begging to be saved...no peace. I tried repenting of everything I could think of... no peace. I went forward in the church to be saved, called upon the name of the Lord, asking Him to save me probably a hundred times (no exaggeration)... still no peace. I had sought out Christian psychologists, cried in many a pastor's office about my lack of assurance...no peace. How embarrassing it was for me! My girlfriends were breaking up with me (except for the last one, whom I later married), believing me to be mentally unstable because I could not get my assurance nailed down. I thought I was never going to gain the assurance of my salvation. How terrible to go through life, wanting to go to heaven, but not certain that I was! Eternity was too long and Hell was too hot not to be one hundred percent certain.

Not until I heard and believed the gospel of grace did I experience from God the peace of a settled assurance. Even

after having believed the gospel of grace, it still took some time to weed out of my soul these unscriptural clichéd responses to God. It took the courage of being willing to admit that many respected Bible teachers and theologians were, nevertheless, confused concerning the clarity of the Gospel.

Maybe I went through this trial because the Lord wanted me to challenge others to be clear in their gospel presentation. I have spent thus far over 40 years rightly dividing the truth of Scripture to help others come to assurance. I have helped many find a settled peace.

Let me give you a final sobering thought. There are countless people today whose perceived relationship with God consists only of a quickened conscience, but who have not received the implantation of a New Spirit. Their assurance is based on nothing more than a recognition that they have followed the salvation formula as prescribed by their particular sect. They have experienced a degree of cleansing in their lives by virtue of their frequent exposure to practical Godly precepts. They have, as the Apostle Peter says, escaped the corruption of the world by the knowledge of Christ, but without ever having experienced the illuminating power of the Gospel. These are people who, if they never experience the illuminating power of the Gospel in their lives, and exercise faith in that message, will wake up on the wrong side of eternity. They will probably have become an eternal victim of a carelessly articulated Gospel which contained

only a false cliché, without the illuminating power which comes through the message of the cross. What a tragedy that will be!

Dan Lash, May 2019

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