

Challenging Christians to Pray



Prayergram[®]

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“FREE, BUT NOT CHEAP”

What has cost God the life of His Son couldn't be cheap for us!

Salvation is offered without cost; however, it necessitated an unimaginable sacrifice. **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8)**. Before I go any further, let me make it crystal clear that salvation is a gift from God through His sovereign grace and mercy, that it should be treated with utmost reverence and gratitude and should not be given away cheaply. The popular belief is that Christ died for me, therefore, I can do whatever I want, and go scot-free, is not a viable Biblical teaching. That is developed as a convenient theology to provide cover for carnal Christians who would love to dabble in ‘social and spiritual rationalization.’ Hair-splitting faith is not real faith, and genuine Christians do not leaf through the Bible looking for loopholes to heaven.

Faith without obedience is antagonism. “What we applaud is what we approve; what we approve is what we believe.” The divine purpose of God is to make us holy, not happy. If our Christian Walk has ceased to be serious about discipleship, then we have watered down the gospel into a ‘feel-good’ emotional lift which negates the costly grace of Calvary. Being born again by the spirit of God is more than **putting a couple of quarters in the slot-machine, pull down the handle and take salvation, and walk away with no affinity to the Lordship of Christ!** Today, in our desire to gain new converts, we entice them with alluring programs and entertainments without truly introducing them to the Shepherd, and consequently multitudes are sliding back into the world which seems to be an undeniable consequence of grace acquired cheaply.

We give away the gospel at cut price whether the recipient wants it or not, but the call to discipleship is seldom heard. We proclaim with great fervor Christ as Savior but condone practices which deny Him as Lord and Master. We’ve exchanged the ‘costly grace’ of God for the ‘cheap grace’ of a feel-good euphoria, which requires no repentance, or heartfelt conversion. The message of the early Church was one of power and purity, and no wonder they turned the world upside down; but today, the world turns us upside down. **Harnack, the German theologian and historian once said, “the church influenced the world most when it was most unlike the world.”** It’s like saying actions don’t matter if you just make a claim. It seems that we have made Christianity so palatable to accommodate a generation of unserious people who do not actually love God. Is it any wonder that the new Christianity is influenced by the ‘secular world’ rather than the Holy Spirit! The Church began to deteriorate, as **St. Augustine explains that holy days were combined with holidays to accommodate the arrival of new pagan members.** Vance Havner, an American evangelist and revivalist of the past was profound when he said, **“We have moved from the catacombs to the coliseums of America.” A.W. Tozer was even more**

perceptive when he said, “Most evangelicals no longer initiate; they simply imitate, and the world is their model.” Today, the trend within evangelical circle calls for advancement by modified preaching, clever techniques, and charming personalities, and compromising standards which will attract the masses and gain the favor of the secular world. The honor which comes from man is more sought after than the honor that comes from God.

Too many people have a false concept, a false interpretation of Christian liberty. Some even entertain the thought that regardless of what a Christian does, all is done under the banner of Christian liberty. Such freedom can lead to severe consequences if there are no boundaries or limitations in place. They see spiritual principles as human-made guidelines, adjusting them to fit their changing circumstances and preferences. Consequently, they indulge themselves in questionable amusements and pleasures, forgetting that the Bible teaches us to **“abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11)**. It is sad but true that many Christians have lost their joy and love for God because they have become enslaved again in the things of the flesh under the banner of Christian liberty. Freedom without moral responsibility is no freedom at all. Walking on the curb is unsafe and will likely cause you to slip. We must either progress or regress. There is no standing still in a religious life or in a secular life. Yet many Christians have chosen the life of regression rather than progression. Rationalization of sin has become the crowning mark of a backslidden person.

The following is a typical rationalization: The demand of the Christian life is too much and besides, no one is perfect, after all, everybody is flawed and what's the point of trying to be otherwise. Those who are engaged in such 'theological rationalization' are the ones who continue to trample the blood of Christ under their feet. It seems that the message of repentance is shunned as a matter of religious and political correctness. If we denigrate the message of redemption, we denigrate the foundation of our faith. Let's avoid using religious rationalization for not loving God! There is always more of Him to be known and understood. Winking and making allowance to rebellion and disobedience, we become complicit. True conversion delivers godliness if we are serious about it. Let us read the profound and heart-wrenching words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian martyr, **“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheap wares of a bargain huckster. The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing.”**

Yes, salvation is free, but the cost of discipleship is very high. The grace of God never obligates or draft anybody into His service. Our love for God must come from a willing and ready heart. The work of the Lord is accomplished through willing souls. When people are drawn closer to God, giving and receiving happen naturally without persuasion. Loving God should be looked upon as a privilege, not an obligation or duty. I believe every child of God should be thrilled at the privilege of walking with Him; not a grudging walk, but a pleasurable one, one that delights our heavenly Father. Are we convinced about Christ or just fascinated about Him? Disney World is fine to visit, but we cannot live there, can we? A man's most important responsibility on earth is to know and love God supremely. But in our topsy-turvy state of mind, we reject the authority of God and the inspiration of the Scriptures by preferring man's wisdom over God's wisdom. We may sense something has gone wrong, that our old-fashioned faith has been dissipated, our cherished Christian principles have tarnished, our sacred Christian way of life has shaken, and its moral and ethical code of values have diminished. As a result, we remain stuck in the middle of a confused and frustrated society, lacking spiritual fortitude and godly courage to change our direction.

Many are trying to paint a cozy picture on the outside, while the inside is in desperate need of a complete spiritual renovation. In our desperation to be important and noticeable in society, we create an atmosphere of artificial happiness, a superficial cordiality, a make-believe friendliness, a well-thought flattery, and thus, we become professing Christians rather than

possessing Christians. A glamorized Christianity has come to get everybody excited, but short-lived because it has no root or substance to maintain a closer walk with God. Dear friend, when we entrust all things to God, the price is never greater than what the cross signifies.

It does matter how we conduct ourselves as dear children of God in a world that is hostile to Christ and His message. When we are insulted and persecuted, we do not hit back or fight with conventional weapons or insist on our rights. Every time we promote or advance our rights, we only hurt the cause of our Master who teaches us the true meaning of forgiveness and grace. Was it not Charles Wesley who wrote, “Every moment, Lord, I need the merit of thy cleansing blood.” Jesus’ blood can cleanse anyone who comes to Him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. It is of paramount importance that we not only ‘believe’ on the Lord Jesus Christ but also ‘behave’ as dear children of God who embody our Savior in words as well as in deeds.

---**Matthew Skariah**

For more on the subject, see Matthew Skariah’s book FREE BUT NOT CHEAP, with a foreword by Dr. Donald B. Ruthenberg, former President of Columbia College, Columbia, MO

From the foreword...

“This book, which I am delighted to endorse, Free but Not Cheap, tears away the sense of façade and varnish which most of us put on our religious faith.”

WE ARE CHRISTIANS

When we speak about the Church, we do not speak in terms of mega-churches or country-churches. When we speak about Christians, we do not speak in terms of wealthy Christians, poor Christians—we are brothers and sisters in Christ, bound for heaven and united by a glorious faith that is sealed with the blood of the Lamb. The cross does not belong to one individual; it belongs to us all. Jesus is a Savior for the entire world in which we are part of. In sports, we’ve superstars, in politics, we’ve super politicians; in Hollywood, we’ve movie stars, but in Christianity we have followers of Christ. In fact, we don’t even use the word SUPER or MEGA when it comes to defining Christians and Christianity! Can you imagine, Christians walking around calling themselves super-Christians! That would be a contradiction in terms. Those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb are our brothers and sisters regardless of their color, race, social and economic status. Our kinship is spiritual, not biological. Some years ago, a dear brother of mine wrote the following words, “Our common denominator is Jesus Christ. Despite our varied backgrounds, professions, and families, our enduring love and respect for Jesus unites us. I am thankful that God has brought us together to be brothers and fellow soldiers in His army.”

The true Christian always maintains his faith in God and remains oblivious to all earthly fame and fortunes. He has a special affinity to Christ and an undying devotion to his Lord and Master. He is never shy or squeamish about standing up for his Savior no matter what the cost. He entrusts everything to God, confidently trusting in His wisdom and never hesitating. But on the other hand, the carnal man is impressed with his own impressions. The most influential people in the world are not those who clamor for attention, but those who practice unbridled humility in their daily lives as they follow Christ. What we have in Christ is something very special, sacred and divine! Let’s guard it with every fiber of our being! We are precious in His sight and protected by our Lord.

---**Matthew Skariah**

FAITH VS. PRESUMPTION

Real faith works most convincingly when there is no way out. Faith is trust without reservation. Pure faith honors God and God honors pure faith. Divine resources are plentiful, and the treasury is well provided for. George Muller was a devoted servant of God who inspired the lives of many the world over by his remarkable life of faith and his total dependency on God. May I say that reading about his life of 'faith and prayer' as a young man has deeply influenced my own life and ministry. Real faith connects our insufficiency to God's sufficiency. Many are concerned for the future and how they can survive in a world of uncertainties and rightfully so. Naturally, as mortals we would think of material things first and then grow into the knowledge of spiritual matters. Not so in God's kingdom! In fact, it is the very opposite! To achieve the natural, one must first pursue the spiritual by seeking "first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

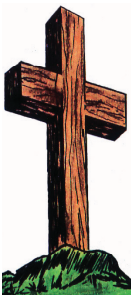
Do not limit God. He cares and provides for those who put their trust in Him. No door is too difficult for Him to open because He holds the key. Never doubt. Never fear. Never despair. Never lose faith. All is safe when God is with us, and He is on His throne! He supplies our needs, not grudgingly, but in full measure. Let's hand everything over to God, in complete trust and abiding faith!

---Matthew Skariah

VOICE FROM THE PAST ...

"...Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3b).

"The highest and most useful lesson is to truly know yourself and to think humbly of yourself. Making nothing of yourself and always having a good opinion of others is great wisdom and perfection." -- Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471), was a German and Dutch theologian and author, best known for his influential book, "The Imitation of Christ."

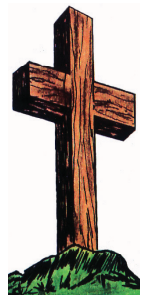


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PRAYER IS THE MIGHTIEST FORCE -- 2 Chronicles 7:14

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