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## **SIN IS THE PROBLEM**

I've been reading a book by Winkie Pratney titled "Revival" highlighting the times in the twenty centuries since the time of Jesus when God has brought revival to the earth. In each case it was a time of spiritual darkness, moral degradation, and government corruption. The church, in each case, had grown cold, formal, and compromised. They were times of hopelessness and despair. Then through one man or one small group of men and women a spark from God became a forest fire transforming communities, cities, nations, and sweeping multitudes into the Kingdom of God.

One of the things I saw in these mighty outpourings of the Spirit was that people became acutely aware of their sins. In the church today we focus almost entirely on the kindness of God, the love of God, the grace and mercy of God, but rarely balance our teaching with the severity of God, the wrath of God, so that we can hardly comprehend the meaning or necessity of repentance. In Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached to the multitude, he said to them, ....*that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* And so the church was born.

One example from America's early history: Jonathan Edwards (1703-1764) preached in New England and later became a president of Princeton. He is recognized today as one of the most original and creative native U.S. minds of all time. Here was a man who often studied 13 hours a day, whose writing and eyesight were so bad he had to screw his face down close to a sermon manuscript and read it in a monotone, and who inherited his Grandfather's church that was so dead he described it as "Dry Bones." (This is to point out that the revival that came was from God had nothing to do with the charisma of a man.) The congregations of his day were full of lost people who attended for the social or political influence membership conferred. Their children had a spiritual inheritance of discipline and the Puritan vision of divine destiny, but they assumed their salvation as secure no matter how they lived. They ignored their parents – who were likewise mired by land acquisition and affluence – partied all night, drank to drunkenness, and lived lewdly.

When Edwards preached his most famous (and much maligned) sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," the effect was awesome; people screamed aloud, clutched the backs of pews and the stone pillars of the church lest the

ground open and swallow them alive into hell. They repented deeply and genuinely ...and a revival of holy living, love for God and joy in the Holy Spirit came forth.

Edward's sermon was admittedly over the top and we can't imagine such a message being preached in our churches. But neither can we imagine what was common in every revival: people falling on the floors of their churches, weeping, agonizing over their sins, pleading with God for forgiveness, and then going forth to live transformed, holy, pure lives that glorified God.

Sin is the problem. Sin is a destroyer. It is self-destruction. The Bible reveals that when Adam and Eve sinned that God not only cursed mankind but he cursed the "ground," the very nature that sustains us...so that it bears thorns and thistles and weeds. (Revelation 3) Earthquakes are because of sin. Volcanic eruptions are because of sin. Hurricanes and tornadoes are because of sin. Fires and floods and droughts are because of sin. Paul writes: *Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* (Romans 8:19-22) This revelation to and through Paul could only have come from the Creator, for only He could know these things.

Personal afflictions are because of sin. Cancer is because of sin. Diabetes, immune disorders, heart attacks, blindness, insanity, parasites are because of sin. Death is because of sin. *The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins shall die.*

Sin is a destroyer. Unrestrained selfishness, pride, lust and greed destroy one's health, peace of mind, families and societies. Jesus said, *Everyone who sins (practices sinning, most agree) becomes a slave of sin.* (John 8:34) "A sin becomes a habit, becomes an addiction, becomes a bondage, becomes slavery." Just look around at what alcohol, drugs, pills, and sexual sin have done to your family and friends to see the reality of this declaration.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN: PERISH

John 3:16 is the greatest good news that ever was, but note the bad news, the warning, in the same verse: *For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not **PERISH** but have everlasting life.* "Perish" is not referring to physical death but to spiritual death, separation from God into an eternal torment of regret and suffering.

The most famous sermon in history was "The Sermon on the Mount," (Matthew 5-7). Jesus ended that sermon by saying, *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

If we believe that Jesus was Emmanuel, "God with us," as He claimed to be, and that He spoke words from God, then we must believe a harrowing truth: Most of the people we know are going to hell.

What if your accountant was such a kind person that he withheld the news from you that you were bankrupt and in the process of losing your home?

What if your doctor was such a nice man that he would not hurt you by telling you that he had discovered a terminal disease?

What if your attorney hid the hurtful news from you that were going to prison?

What if your preacher was such a sweet guy that he only preached positive, encouraging messages and was far too sensitive to mention that if you didn't repent of your sins and turn to Christ for salvation that you would spend an eternity in hell? Such a preacher would certainly be a lot "kinder" than Peter or Paul or John or Jesus. (Acts 2:38, Romans 2:4-9, 1 John 3:4-10, Matthew 4:17)

## THE TYPICAL "CONVERSION"

Following is John Bevere's rehearsal of a typical evangelistic service: The preacher preaches a "Come to Jesus and get blessed" message. He tells how Jesus will give us joy, peace, prosperity, happiness, health, and heaven. (This is all true in proper balance.) After the sales pitch, he gives an invitation to come forward and settle the matter today.

As the organ plays "Just As I Am," and the candidates come forward, the audience claps and smiles its encouragement. The minister asks them to bow their heads and repeat a prayer in which they confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior and thank God for making him their child. The audience cheers, the music plays, and the new "converts" go back to their seats, "just as they were." Except now they are deceived. Nothing has been said concerning repentance from disobedient lifestyles, denying their own desires in order to embrace the will of God, and losing their lives for the cause of Christ. They have confessed Jesus as their "Lord," but there has been no heart change.

The Bible says, *And He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* (2 Cor. 5:15) When we surrender to Christ, we must allow the Cross to slay our self-seeking life and make room for the new nature of Jesus to be formed within. This, of course, is a process, but most Christians don't understand the Biblical premise and are never exhorted to devote themselves to the process wholeheartedly.

In summary, John Bevere insists that the Christianity modeled, preached, and practiced in most American churches is deception! It is a form of institutionalized religion without the power, love, sacrifice, or benefits of the real thing. It is by its very nature lukewarm, how could it be anything else? And God, because of His love and justice, will spew it out of His mouth. (Rev. 3)

Am I saying that all the folks sitting in American churches are lukewarm and headed toward disaster? No, of course not. There are many amazing disciples among us. Some have come through the fire of suffering, loss, affliction, or they are living in the midst of that fire. And only God knows our hearts. There are surely many more than 7,000 among us who have never bowed their knees to Baal. But I will tell you on the basis of my own experience that it is a lot easier to make that original dedication to Christ than it is to stay surrendered to Him.

### **EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**

Romans 14:11 says: *As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue confess to God.* And Philippians 2:10: *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*

James MacDonald says that we have one mission in life: to figure out who is in charge. We can bow willingly now or unwillingly later. We don't make Him Lord. He is Lord. You and I just recognize and acknowledge that He is Lord.

You can have a moment of crisis when you do that; i.e., when you recognize and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. But ultimately it is not the crisis moment but the process of bowing to Him day after day that determines whether you really acknowledge Him as your Lord.

In those moments of frustration and anger toward your boss, or your mother-in-law, or your spouse, you don't spew out the vitriol on the tip of your tongue - - but you consider what your Master would have you say and do.

In those times of weariness and despair you don't go back to the substance or the habit that always gave you comfort - - but you bow before the One you have called Lord and look to Him for comfort.

In those moments of weakness and overpowering sexual temptation, you don't revert to the practices that were always a hidden part of your life - - but you submit to the One you have called Master and allow Him to have His way, His good way, in your life.

Friends, when I yield to my "natural" nature, the one I was born with, bad things always happen. Shame and dissolution are inevitably coming my way.

When I yield to Jesus Christ as Lord and deny myself, good things, blessings, always follow. We are free in this life to do whatever we want, but we are not free to avoid the consequences. *What a person plants he will also harvest.*

### **GOD'S GRACIOUS PROVISION FOR SIN: FORGIVENESS**

Remember that paralyzed man that was brought to Jesus, and the house was so full of people that his friends let him down through the roof? (Mark 2) *When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."* The scribes sitting there were deeply offended and accused Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. He has authority to forgive your sins and my sins. He is the only one who has such authority. Does that statement offend you? Do you consider it narrow minded and judgmental? Ask God about it, please. But first, read what the Bible says about it.

### **THE PAYMENT FOR SIN: CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE CROSS**

The Bible says that God does not forgive us because of His love for us, but that a payment was required, a Lamb: *The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.*

A Jewish lawyer in New York told this story about his life: As he grew older he started thinking more and more about dying and it troubled him greatly. He was especially troubled as he thought about his many sins and the people he had hurt. He had been a skeptic all his life, but he finally decided to ask God to forgive him for his sins. He composed himself and addressed God: "God, if you are really there, please forgive me for my sins." He expected to get a warm, fuzzy feeling, but he was terribly shocked to hear a strong, harsh word: "No!" He couldn't believe it, he had always heard that God was loving and forgiving. But then he heard more words in a different tone: "Only through my Son." He was shocked but deeply convicted. Of course he knew the story of Jesus Christ and had always rejected it. But he knew what he had heard, so he started searching out and talking to Christians and reading the New Testament and soon came to publicly confess his faith in Christ and be baptized.

In all aberrant religions we find people trying to earn their salvation: cutting themselves, flagellating themselves, taking journeys to holy places, giving alms to the poor. But they are never sure if they have done enough, prayed enough, given enough, to satisfy God. The Bible says, *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:6) We must simply repent of our sins, our selfishness, depending on our own goodness to make us acceptable to God, and humbly receive the gift of salvation and eternal life.

Then we must ask God for grace, again and again, daily, moment by moment, to surrender our life to Him and to live as if He is, indeed, our Lord and Master.

## **PRICELESS FILES**

As you may have observed, I have a file, actually several BIG files, in which I keep notes, articles, stories, sermons, observations, from past years. It is hard to put a price tag on these files, since they are priceless, but I feel I should pass them on to some worthy person when I go to heaven. (I heard some preacher say, "Christians don't die, they go to heaven." - which is scriptural: *To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*) I'm in good health, go to the gym three times a week, and hike about a mile on alternate days, but I will be 90 in two months and it is likely that at some point in the future (15 years? 20 years? More?) I will be checking out.

The point is that I don't know how to pick out the blessed person to whom I should leave these files. So I decided to have a lottery. If you want to inherit my files (and how could you not?), if you want your name to go into the box from which the winner will be drawn, just send me an index card with your name and address printed clearly on it, together with a check for \$500, and you may be the lucky person to hit the jackpot!

## **AGAINST ALL ODDS**

One of the pages from my Priceless Files is a page from Charisma Magazine, dated April, 1986, by the author Jamie Buckingham, which follows:

"Our other four children seemed normal. Their grades were above average; they had good health; they got along fine with their playmates.

Tim was different. He excelled in sports, was remarkably coordinated, and had a deep instinct for doing the right thing. He made friends with every kid in the neighborhood, especially those who were handicapped or had problems. And animals. He loved animals and they loved him.

But he couldn't read. We knew after his first year in school that something was wrong. We enrolled him in a Christian school where he repeated first grade. It was a disaster. He made no progress whatever. We had him tested by the school psychologist. Although he had a high IQ, we learned that he had dyslexia. It's a Latin word which means "can't read."

We put him under a reading specialist, had him tutored, sent him to expensive clinics and in corrective classes. We finally took him to a Kathryn Kuhlman healing service. Nothing seemed to be working. We put him back in public school but the teachers were not able to do much with him.

I remember the afternoon he came in from school and ran straight to his room. I followed him down the hall, entered his locked bedroom door with a key, and found him in bed with the bedspread pulled up under his chin. He lay staring at the ceiling, his eyes brimming with tears.

"I don't want to go back to school anymore, Daddy." He sobbed. "I can't read the stuff the teacher puts on the board and she fusses at me." I understood. How many times in my life, when I had been criticized for failure, had I wanted to do something like that.

When he was in the fourth grade I realized I could not depend on anyone else to help him. It was up to God. And me. My part was to pray. God's part was to heal. Gradually I came to realize that while God could heal him instantly, he had more in mind. He wanted to teach me how to pray for my son, and He wanted to do something in my son.

Talking was also important. I wanted him to know that regardless of his problem that his mom and dad and brother and sisters were proud of him. We did not blame him for his problem nor did we see him as different from the other children. In our eyes he was simply our son. If he had a bad day, or if we had to spank him for misbehavior, I encouraged him before he went to sleep. I wanted him to know he was loved, needed and appreciated in our family, and I wanted his last thoughts every night to be positive thoughts. But I know it was our prayers that eventually brought his healing.

He finally finished high school, thanks to a splendid teacher who took him on as a special project. Even so, he was only reading at a fourth grade level when he graduated. He got a job as a laborer and married his high school sweetheart. One evening he stopped by the house. "Dad, I'll always be a common laborer unless I go to college like the other kids in the family. I want to go to agriculture college and learn to work with animals."

All the odds were against him, but Jackie and I encouraged him. So did his wife, Kathie, who said she could read his book to him in the evenings. He picked the college and with Kathie's help filled out the application blanks. He needed a full year of remedial work before starting on credit subjects. It was a massive struggle, mastering difficult texts in horticulture, animal anatomy and farm management. But he persevered, and God answered prayer.

When he graduated last fall he was reading at college level. Today he holds a highly responsible job as a ranch manager in Forsyth, Georgia. When we visited him recently he took us through the pasture, pointing out various cattle, calling some by name. His two little boys, T.J. and Dusty, rode with us in the back of the station wagon, giving a running commentary on fertilizers, artificial insemination and feeding programs.

Tim is 26 this month. Proud of him? You bet! And we are grateful to a loving God who answers the prayers of parents for children.

## God Bless Glenn

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