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THE LAMB OF GOD

When John the Baptist was at the River Jordan baptizing the multitudes of people who came to him, he saw his cousin, Jesus, approaching him, and an amazing thing happened. The heavens seemed to open and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove and rested on Jesus. *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'* (John 1:29) Wow! Is that beautiful or what!

You remember when God used Moses as His “savior” to rescue the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt, God had every Jewish family take a “lamb without blemish,” and kill it at twilight (the exact time when Jesus would die on the cross), and sprinkle some of its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their homes, and when the angel of death saw the blood it would “pass over” that home. (Exodus 12) This, of course, was a prophetic action pointing to the One who would come 1,500 years in the future and shed His blood to save His people (all those who trusted in His shed blood) from eternal death.

When a Jewish man committed a sin, he was required by the sacrificial system to bring a lamb to the priest to be sacrificed for him. The priest carefully examined the lamb to see if it was acceptable. He carefully looked at its eyes, ears, teeth, and feet. He ran his hands through its wool, looking for blemishes. The lamb had to be perfect. Note: the priest never examined the man, he examined the lamb!

Some folks think their sins have been so bad that they are unforgivable. Friends, the question is not whether you and I are good enough to be forgiven. We are not. The question is whether the Lamb is perfect and worthy before a holy God. Jesus, the Lamb of God, passed the test. Look to Him.

ARE ALL SINS EQUAL TO GOD?

Do you believe that all sins are equal to God? There are some Scriptures that seem to say so, but we need to look at them in context to figure out the point God is making. One of those Scriptures is found in the book of James, *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.* (James 2:10-11)

The footnote in the NIV Study Bible explains this Scripture as follows: “The law is the expression of the character and will of God; therefore to violate one part of the law is to violate God’s will and thus his whole law.”

Jesus elaborates further on this matter in the Sermon on the Mount: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.....Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven...* (Matt. 5:17, 19)

Jesus was saying that the Law of God given to Moses starting at Exodus 20 was the good and perfect will of God for man and that we can’t pick and choose which laws to follow. It was later, after Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection, that God revealed to the Apostle Paul the rest of the story: that in our fallen condition we can’t obey the Law perfectly, and that God has mercifully provided a substitute, a Lamb, to take our place.

But let’s consider again whether all sins are the same before God:

- The Jewish legal system required various penalties for the lawbreakers who came before it, ranging from death by stoning, to being lashed so many times with rods, to repaying four times the amount that was stolen, etc. To atone to God for sins, the cost ran from the sacrifice of grain, to a pigeon, to a lamb, to a bull. In other words, in the Law itself certain sins were considered worse than others and called for a more severe penalty.

- Jesus himself said that a certain sin was beyond the pale, it was unforgivable: *I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin. He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.'* (Mark 3)
- Apparently the Apostle John was also referring to the unforgivable sin when he questioned whether we should even pray for some people: *If you see a Christian brother or sister sinning in a way that does not lead to death, you should pray, and God will give that person life. But there is a sin that leads to death, and I am not saying you should pray for those who commit it. All wicked actions are sin, but not every sin leads to death.* (1 John 5:16-17 NLT) The footnote in the NKJV explains these verses most clearly: “**A sin leading to death:** these are the ones who, like the false teachers, have manifested the spirit of the Antichrist (1 John 2:18) in denying the Father and the Son (2:22-23). They reveal themselves as “children of the devil” (3:10) and they forfeit eternal life by rejecting Christ (5:12).
- God apparently regards the sin of rich people who oppress the poor as worthy of special judgment: *Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. Your gold and silver are corroded, their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.* (Some teachers believe this will literally happen in hell.)
- In Psalm 139 David asks God to “*Search my heart and reveal any wicked way in me.*” He is saying that we don’t know our own hearts, we don’t perceive the junk hidden inside (resentment, bitterness, jealousy, greed) that might be driving us in ungodly directions. This is a good way for us to pray if we are serious about having a clean heart and life. David recognized that it is the junk in our hearts that is of more importance to God than the outward actions.
- And in Psalm 19, David contrasts “errors, secret faults, and presumptuous sins.” He is saying that some people sin through error or ignorance or weakness, but a worse category is willful, presumptuous sins, when people know they are disobeying God but continue anyway. The Bible warns many times against allowing our hearts and consciences to become so hardened that we willfully, knowingly proceed to sin. This is called “sinning with a high hand.”
- Unbelief, according to the Bible, is not just a condition that “is,” like being right-handed or left-handed, but is a condition that is chosen. Romans 1 states that God makes himself known to every human being through the evidence of creation and through inner intuition, so that, *When people stand before God in judgment they will be without excuse.*
- But do you know what the Bible says is worse than unbelief? 1 Timothy 5:8 says, *If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* I believe that providing for our family has implications beyond the material.
- Do you know what the Bible teaches is worse for a person than sinning? It is when he leads other people into sin. There are many, many teachings that warn against false apostles, false prophets, false pastors and teachers, and false brethren who lead others to destruction. (Mt. 7:15, Mk. 13:22, 2 Cor. 11, Gal. 2, 2 Thes. 2, 2 Pe. 2, 1 Jn. 4, Rev. 16) It is a terrible thing when cults and false religions lead people to worship false gods and idols, or teach that man is God or is becoming God. It is far worse when men or women stand in the pulpits of Christian churches and deceitfully teach the same kind of nonsense, denying the Christ of the New Testament and leading many gullible people to destruction.

WHAT JESUS REQUIRES OF DISCIPLES

(There have been a lot of books out recently about what Jesus requires of people who want to be His disciples. Many of the teachings point to an extreme dedication that leaves people feeling guilty and hopeless. Larry Osborne, a pastor at North Coast Fellowship in San Diego, has written a book, Accidental Pharisees, that tries to bring some balance to the subject, and it is worthy of our serious reflection. I have mixed some of my thoughts in with his, using parentheses, because I suffer the delusion that I can always improve what someone else has written.)

“What constitutes a genuine disciple? Did Jesus come to let the riffraff in or to drive the lukewarm out? The politically correct answer changes every few decades. For a while there’s a huge emphasis on evangelism. The goal is to get people saved. The dream is to fill up heaven. There is not much attention given to discipleship.

“That’s followed by a pendulum swing toward discipleship and bringing people to maturity. The dream is a church full of on-fire disciples. There is not much patience for the struggling. Those who are fearful, hesitant, or not yet fully convinced may be asked, in a subtle way, to leave.

“That’s the stage we’re in today. Conferences, books, and keynote speakers emphasize giving it all to Jesus. In some circles, it’s almost a contest to see who’s willing to give up the most to follow Jesus. A booklet that recently came across my desk put it this way: ‘Plainly put, a relationship with Jesus requires absolute, undivided, exclusive affection.’ (*The Radical Question*, David Platt) “I read that and thought, ‘Really?’ So there is no relationship with Jesus unless he has our **absolute, undivided, exclusive** affection? If that’s true, there’s going to be a lot of Christians in hell. An awful lot. I might be there.

“There’s no question that Jesus sets a high standard. He told a rich young ruler to sell all he had. He told Peter and John and Matthew to quit their jobs and follow Him. He told his followers to expect hatred and death. But he also said and did some things that no one talks much about these days.

“For instance, he healed a fearful woman who tried to sneak in and touch His robe without anyone seeing her despite her obvious timidity. He knew Peter would deny him, but he kept him around anyway. He went out of his way to show himself to a doubting Thomas. He didn’t show up to kick him off the team, He showed up to help him overcome his doubt.

“And let’s remember that Jesus encouraged crowds of weary and spiritually burdened people to come to him for rest: *Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.* (Matt. 11:28-30 NLT)

“There is no denying that Jesus demands and deserves our absolute allegiance. If He is God in the flesh, anything less is not acceptable. But it’s a huge mistake to interpret his strongest and harshest statements in a vacuum. To understand what Jesus wants from us, we must include all of his sayings and all of his actions. And we can’t leave out the writings of the Apostles, whose inspired writings tell us how to interpret and apply Jesus’ teachings.

“A careful reading of the Gospels reveals that Jesus asked only a few specific individuals to leave everything behind and follow him. He actually told some who wanted to join him to stay behind. When Jesus cast demons out of a man in Gadara and set him free, the man wanted to follow Jesus. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, *Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.* (Mark 5:19) He never asked the crowds to pack up and follow him from town to town. At the end of the day, he sent them home.”

(Larry Osborne is making the point that we are to obey the Lord and do what He calls us individually to do, and that it is a mistake to assume He is calling everyone to go to Africa or the Middle East to be a missionary. Ephesians 4 states that, *Christ gave/assigned to the church some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.* It is not for you and me to presume these roles without a particular calling from the Lord. Similarly, just because Jesus invited Peter to walk to Him on the water, it would be a mistake for us to assume that His invitation was to everyone.)

“In addition, not one of the writers of the New Testament epistles exhorts his readers to head out to the mission field or to join Paul and Peter in planting churches. In fact, quite the opposite. Consider Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians (11:17): *Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you.* And his instructions to the believers in Thessalonica (1 Th. 4:11): *Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others.*

(Paul, likewise, did not command every rich person to give away everything and follow Jesus, but he instructs Timothy in 1 Tim. 6:17ff): *Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always ready to share with others....)*

“Sometimes I wonder if in our quest to purify the church, we’ve become more like Pharisees than like Jesus. When it comes to bruised reeds, smoldering wicks, and the weary saints, Pharisees have no patience. They pile on heavy burdens and lots of guilt. Not so with Jesus. The bruised reed he will not break, the smoldering wick he will not snuff out, and to the weary and heavily burdened he offers rest, a light load, and an easy yoke. As long as the wick smolders, there is always hope. In our attitude toward the struggling brethren around us, we can be like Jesus and fan the flame brighter.”

WE CAN’T LOOK UPON GOD’S FACE

In Exodus 33, Moses asked God, *Please, show me your glory.* God’s response established an eternal principle. He told Moses that He would permit him to experience God’s goodness and would allow him to see God’s back, but He said to Moses, *No man shall see me (or see my face) and live.*

John 1:18 says, *No one has ever seen God, but (Jesus Christ), who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

Then how is it that sometimes in the Old Testament people are said to have seen God? For instance, in Ex. 24:9-11 – *Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the 70 elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel....* And in Numbers 12, God rebukes Aaron and Miriam and tells them, *I speak to Moses face to face, and he sees the form of the Lord.*

The answer must be that in certain rare cases God permitted certain ones to see a little peek at some small aspect of Himself. Thus, Moses was allowed to see God's "back," and Moses was allowed to see the "form of the Lord."

I watched a show about stars awhile back that helped me to comprehend this. The astronomer said that the earth receives only 1/800th of the light and heat of the sun. In other words, at our distance of 93 million miles, it would take 800 earths to form a solid orb around the sun and receive all of its light and heat. At our distance from God, the Creator of the sun, He can only allow certain ones a brief glimpse of His glory or they would be instantly incinerated. And I am not speaking metaphorically.

There is an experience called, "falling" or "being slain in the Spirit," when people fall to the floor when exposed to the presence or power of the Holy Spirit. Before I received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in 1973, I saw some people at a Benny Hinn meeting on TV falling down when he prayed for them, and I thought it was ridiculous. I thought it was either faked or those weak-minded people were falling through suggestion. Later I went to a crusade where an evangelist was doing that "act" with people he prayed for. Then he came over to our row of people. I decided he wasn't going to push me down, so I braced my legs. He lightly touched my forehead and down I went like a sack of potatoes.

I believe there is some correlation between "seeing God" and losing all human strength during the manifestation of His presence. When Jesus was "transfigured" while on a mountain with Peter, James and John (Matt. 17, Mark 9), at one point they fell to the ground in terror. I'm not sure that was an example of being "slain in the Spirit," but I suspect it might be. I have read testimonies of people who were allowed to come near to God, and they thought they would surely die. This is the God before whom you and I will stand at the end of our days and give an account of our lives. We in the American church need a serious revelation of the fear of the Lord. Amen?

QUOTES & OBSERVATIONS

- *God made two great lights – the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night* (Gen. 1:16) Why does the Bible use the terms, larger and smaller lights rather than calling them the sun and moon? Because, scholars tell us, the sun and moon were worshiped by the surrounding pagan cultures as deities and not using their names may have reminded Israel that they were not gods.
- "We are going to run down to Vegas and spend a few days." I have heard Christian men and women say words to that effect many, many times, and it turns my stomach. As my daughter has developed an on-line ministry to some of the victims of the gambling industry, we have learned about the many lives that are devastated and destroyed by that dehumanizing trap. Friends, we have no business supporting this demonic "industry." Please go on my website to my newsletter of December, 2013, titled Freedom From the Slavery of Addictions --- Focus on Gambling, and read the insights from the book, Addiction by Design by Natasha Dow Schull. Please.
- HUMILITY: (by George Wood, AG General Supt.) "Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by saying *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:3) I am told that in the Greek text Matthew could have chosen a different word for "poor." One kind of poverty is that of a person just getting by. The other kind describes a destitute person who will die unless someone gives them food, shelter and clothing. It is this second meaning that is used here – *Blessed are the destitute-poor*. The poor in spirit get the kingdom. It's nothing in our hands we bring. As Mother Teresa once said, 'God wants to show His greatness by using nothingness...It is His work. I am like a little pencil in His hand. That is all. He does the thinking. He does the writing. The pencil has nothing to do with it. In human terms, the success of our work should not have happened.' Humility makes us totally dependent on the Lord. We remember His words that without Him we can do nothing."



God Bless Glenn

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