

A Letter To My Family And Friends

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Dear family and friends, this is my heart to you. I may not have the chance to sit down with you but, if I did, this is what I'd say, all of it driven by the motives of pure love.

The reason I want to communicate this with you is the same reason Cornelius in Acts 10 invited his kinsmen and near friends (v.24) to be present on the occasion Peter came to his house. It is a natural emotion to care for the souls of loved ones, especially in salvation matters. You are my kinsmen and near friends. I want to live with my family and friends forever.

I wish to make this as short and concise as possible so I'll cut to the chase and begin somewhat bluntly. (I received this trait from my Dad and, logically, it makes the most sense to me.)

Most of what is accepted as Christianity in our world does not correctly teach the plan of salvation.

Besides salvation doctrine, I know there are many other things to be considered in a religious environment that are desirable and good. I am thankful for every good thing that faith in Jesus has generated in the broad realm of "Christianity". Many are highly virtuous and have made our world better. But bottom-line salvation—the essential born-again experience—is paramount and irreplaceable. It's at the top of the list. People can be very religious without it, but no amount of religious faith, devotion, or good works are a substitute for it (Matthew 7:13-14; 21-23; Luke 13:23-24).

Allow me to insert a bit of theology here to support that narrow claim.

There is only one plan of salvation for the Christian era(*1). There only ever has been one. That is not being judgmental, or unloving, or elitist, or exclusive. It is a theological fact. Jesus said it (John 3:5) and all the New Testament bears it out. See, for example, Ephesians 4:5; Galatians 1:8-9; Jude 3; 1Peter 1:23-25.

That's why there was effort in the Apostolic era to keep salvation doctrine pure. It is evident in Acts (e.g., Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-6) and is the theme of many Epistles (e.g., Galatians and 1John). That is why, later in Church history, there was a Reformation. Any honest theologian will admit that the Bible does not support multiple means of salvation. All persons who will be saved throughout the Christian era will be saved exactly the same way(*2). Salvation for one person is salvation for all. Again, that is a theological fact.

*1 For definition's sake, the *Christian era* is the period of time in redemptive history that we are living in. It began on the Day of Pentecost and will continue until the Rapture of the Church. It is commonly referred to as, *the Church age*.

*2 You may have caught the theological significance of this statement. Everyone must receive the same salvation that was presented on the Day of Pentecost, since it is the beginning of the Christian era. We will expand on this more later.

Does anyone care about the plan of salvation?

You may have noticed, as I have, that many believers, if not most, never consider more than superficially whether they have received correct salvation doctrine. They just assume they have, but often on insufficient grounds. Judging by what they see at the Church of their choice— a nice building, attendees, educated clergy — they assume the pastor and staff must be teaching the truth. And, likely, they are, in many other areas of biblical knowledge, making the particular truth about the correct plan of salvation all the more inconspicuous. But, of all biblical doctrines, salvation is the most important. If the house is complete with its many details, all the while the foundation is missing, there is no security (Matthew 7:24-27). For how does anything else ultimately matter if a person is not saved?

Jesus said you must be born again (John 3:5). Using a comparison in the natural realm, is there anything more important than being born? Can anything proceed without it? Sure, many other important things arise after birth, but, obviously, nothing does without it. Salvation doctrine imparts eternal life. No other aspect of faith does (John 8:31-32).

Perception matters less than reality.

When a false idea has prevailed long enough, it takes on the appearance of truth and the true thing it supplanted is marked as unorthodox. Ironically, due to the prevalence of false teaching in the area of salvation doctrine, the truth gets suspicioned more so than does falsehood. It takes a person with deeper and stronger intentions to be right with God to see through the mere perception of Christian salvation. If salvation is not the most important thing in one's heart, he will miss it or let it slip.

The proverbial fork in the road

Already, some of this may sound radical to you. It may be deemed as sufficient reason to discontinue reading. But true Christianity is undeniably radical. That's why it is so transformative to those who embrace it. It must be radical to change our natures and our eternal destinations.

I hope you read on. Following, I present four areas of study that easily and profoundly prove what the plan of salvation is for the Christian era. (There are

many others.) These four simple proofs are extremely important and highly theological, though not often understood by modern believers. They are all basic to Christianity. They are:

- 1/** The Great Commission
- 2/** The Day of Pentecost
- 3/** Covenant relationship with God
- 4/** The biblical examples of Christian salvation

If what you believe for salvation is not contained in all four of these areas, you cannot biblically claim salvation. Moreover, all four only present one plan of salvation for anyone who would be saved.

◆ **The Great Commission**

The words, The Great Commission, are usually met with universal acceptance on the part of believers. We generally understand that these words of Jesus mandate all of us to share our faith with others. What is less known is what actually constitutes the Great Commission. Let's look at it.

1/ The Great Commission is the initial charge Jesus gave His Apostles to take the Good News (Gospel) into the world. It still applies to us today. As mentioned, that fact is generally acknowledged and accepted.

2/ The Great Commission is Jesus' post-resurrection teaching that lasted 40 days, nearly six weeks. It began on the day of the resurrection and continued until the day of His ascension.

3/ In the Great Commission, Jesus prescribed the plan of salvation for the Christian era. It reveals the salvation tenets that were to be preached, beginning on the Day of Pentecost. They follow:

- **Repentance**

Luke 24:47

- **Water baptism in Jesus' name**

The Great Commission is largely a progressive revelation of the baptismal formula, culminating in the revelation to the Apostles to baptize *in the name of Jesus Christ*.

The relative Scriptures occur in chronological order as follows:

John 20:21-23 The day of the resurrection in Jerusalem

Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16 A later point in Galilee

Luke 24:47 Back in Jerusalem on the day of the ascension

Of course, the Apostles fulfilled Christ's order on the Day of Pentecost by announcing the imperative for souls to be baptized in the name Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). We see it carried out as well throughout the evangelism of Acts. (More on this in a later section)

- **The infilling of the Holy Ghost**

Christ's commission also incorporates the necessity of receiving the coming Spirit, which was an incessant theme of His early ministry (See John 3,4,7,14,20.).

Again, the chronological order is:

John 20:21-22 Jerusalem, the day of the resurrection.

Mark 16:15-17 A later point in Galilee. Here, receiving the Spirit is alluded to by the mention of speaking in new tongues.

Luke 24:49 Back in Jerusalem, the day of the ascension

And, once more, His commission was carried out by Peter on the Day of Pentecost when he said all were to receive the promise of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38-39).

Christ's commission aligned with what He had said in John 3:5, involving a new birth of water and Spirit. And on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached precisely what Christ had prescribed for the plan of salvation (Acts 2:38-39).

4/ The Great Commission governs what can be preached about salvation. As it sounds, it is the commission Christ gave to anyone who would be a witness of salvation in the Christian era. It literally reveals the plan of salvation for the Church age. Since this is what Christ has commissioned to the Church, only what is contained therein is authorized as salvation doctrine. No one has liberty to teach anything else because it is the sole commission of Christ to each of us.

Point: You must heed the Great Commission to be an authentic Christian. It teaches the tenets of Acts 2:38 exclusively for salvation. Jesus said nothing in the Great Commission of mere faith in Christ being the plan of salvation.

An honest theologian will tell you there is no authenticity of Christian faith outside the parameters of the Great Commission.

◆ **The Day of Pentecost**

The Day of Pentecost was the follow-up to the Great Commission. They are two sides of the same coin. The Great Commission was Jesus' charge to evangelize the world, including His instruction as to what to preach. The Day of Pentecost was the first day of Christian evangelism, the very fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In the Great Commission, the plan of salvation was revealed to the Apostles. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter revealed it to the world (Acts 2:38-39). It is the only place in Scripture where the Christian plan of salvation is directly announced publicly. Its revelation on the momentous Day of Pentecost establishes it as the plan of salvation for the Church age. This is clear in three ways:

1/ Revealed

It was revealed when the convicted hearers of Peter's preaching asked what they should do (Acts 2:37). Peter said to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (v.38).

Peter's answer was the precedent for salvation in the Christian era, making it the plan of salvation for the entire Church age. That's because it is subject to the theological rule that salvation for one is salvation for all, reducing salvation doctrine to just "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5).

Peter made that fact clear as well in verse 39 when he stated that God will save all souls by the same means. "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Two important and certain hypotheticals arise here:

1/ If you had been there and had asked the same question, you would have received the same answer.

2/ If you had been there as a faithful witness of the Gospel who was asked the same question, you would have given the same answer.

2/ Proved

The tenets of salvation announced by Peter were proven by him from the Old Testament prophecy of Joel (vv.14-21). This is how the Jews were able to accept what he preached.

3/ Accepted

Acts 2:38 was accepted as the plan of salvation by Peter's Jewish hearers.

Notice the flow of revelation that stems from the pertinent question of Acts 2:37, "What shall we do?"

Verse 38. The plan of salvation was announced.

Verse 39. It was declared to be the plan of salvation for the Church age.

Verse 40. After revealing the plan of salvation, Peter appropriately said, "save yourselves"— of course, meaning through the means just offered. He said this because that is what Jesus said about baptism in the Great Commission, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15-16).

Verse 41. Consequently, those who gladly received Peter's word were baptized. Three thousand souls were saved.

Verse 42 states, "...they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship...", which intimates that what was revealed by Peter became the basis for Apostolic doctrine and fellowship.

Acts 2:38-39 was never questioned or altered throughout the remainder of the New Testament writings. Everywhere in Acts and in the Epistles, Acts 2:38 is corroborated as the Christian plan of salvation.

It is a theological fact that the Day of Pentecost must reveal the plan of salvation.

The Day of Pentecost is a super context. That means, by the very nature of it being the first day of the Church, the plan of salvation must be evident. It is, in fact, highlighted and pinpointed by the inquiry of salvation by the convicted hearers. An honest theologian will confirm that, whatever the plan of salvation for the Christian era is, it must be revealed following that inquiry. When the hearers asked what they should do, Peter responded with the plan of salvation for the Church age: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38-39) The universal nature of it is evident in the imperative for it to be received by everyone.

Point: Whatever you believe is the plan of salvation, it must be evident on the Day of Pentecost and appear in verse 38. That is a theological fact.

Acts 2:38 is hereby clearly stated to be the plan of salvation for the entire Church age. But it is also implied by simple logic. How can something that has been

established on Day One change? When would it change? And by whom? Who would have the authority to change what was declared in Old Testament prophecy and prescribed by Jesus in His Great Commission? And who could change the theological maxim, *salvation for one is salvation for all*?

◆ **Covenant relationship with God**

Covenant relationship with God is different from mere *relationship* with God.

Everyone is familiar with the concept of relationship with God. It describes people who believe in God, pray, read His Word, go to Church, and try to represent Christ to their fellow man. Relationship is commonly presented as that which God seeks of us. But that is not altogether true. He actually seeks something more, namely, *covenant* relationship.

The difference between relationship with God and covenant relationship with Him is stark. To illustrate this point, consider an example on a human level. When you hear of a person involved in a relationship with someone, it can mean just about anything. You may draw an opinion about their degree of commitment and intimacy. But when you hear of someone in *covenant* relationship with another person, you know exactly what that means. It is the permanent and intimate bond of marriage that is meant to last while both parties are alive. The call to Christianity is the call to be the Bride of Christ. It is thoroughly covenantal.

Even on an earthly plane, covenants are a very essential part of life. They often take the form of contracts between parties. For example, a person taking out a loan enters into a contract with the lender. The two parties agree to terms of payment that are fixed. Once agreed upon, the agreement is permanent until fully satisfied. Paul referred to this common practice in Galatians 3:15. He makes the point that covenants are unalterable, even among fellow human beings, which emphasizes the fact that covenants initiated by God are even less alterable.

Overlooked by many, the principle of covenant is how God has dealt with the human race from the very beginning. When there was just one man on the earth, there was covenant relationship. God gave Adam a command regarding a certain fruit tree (Genesis 2:16-17). That command was covenantal and determined Adam's (and, later, Eve's) standing with God. Keeping the covenant meant eternal life. Breaking it meant separation from God and eternal death.

The concept of covenant in the Bible is profound. It cannot be over-emphasized. Divine covenants carried on throughout the entire Bible, though the significance of covenant is almost unknown by most believers. The Bible is so thoroughly covenantal that the two main divisions of writing are called the Old and New Testaments (Covenants).

We live in the time period of the New Covenant and are governed by it. A person may disregard or break the covenant but God will not. Nor will He disregard it. It remains the sole means by which we may be in right standing with God.

Theological fact: Christian salvation is covenantal.

The New Covenant began on the Day of Pentecost. Its saving terms were revealed on that day by Peter (Acts 2:38-39). They are:

1/ Repentance— This amounts to surrender, turning from sin and self-rule to Christ.

2/ Baptism in Jesus' name for the remission of sins.

3/ Receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.

The exploitation of covenantal terms by the devil

At the dawn of civilization, the devil desired to bring down the race that was made in God's image. There was only one way he could do this— get Adam and Eve to disobey their covenant with God. There was nothing else to focus on because that was the sole means by which the first pair stood in right relation with their Creator. The devil simply needed to fool them and get them to eat of the forbidden fruit. Through a strategy of deception, that proved to be an easy task.

Deception is still the devil's preferred method of attack today. And his primary strategy is to keep believers from covenant relationship with God, all the while professing faith in Christ profusely. He knows what they don't: There is no salvation apart from covenant. As Jonathan Edwards essentially once said, God has made no promise to save a soul but through His covenant of grace (*3).

People effectively rock themselves to sleep with their faith in God. They assume that relationship with Christ is equivalent to salvation. They rarely consider the validity of their faith from a covenantal standpoint. That's because, for the most part, they're not taught to. They're not informed of the significance of covenant relationship. They are not aware that failure to grasp and obey the terms of the New Covenant will result in failure to be saved.

By disobedience to covenantal terms, mankind fell. Through obedience to the terms the New Covenant (Acts 2:38), man is raised from the Fall— literally regenerated from corruption and condemnation. Establishing the New Covenant is precisely what Jesus came to do. His blood underwrites it (Matthew 28:26). His blood, therefore, is applied, and salvation is gained, only through covenantal terms.

Be certain, the devil is going to try to convince you that Acts 2:38 is not the plan of salvation simply because it is. He will substitute it with something else if he can. He has to in order to effectively reach his sinister goal to keep believers lost. Most people don't catch on because the substitutions still have a religious nature, sound like a valid expression of faith, or are another verse of Scripture, misused.

Some believers conclude glibly that everything is covered by grace, not knowing that Acts 2:38 *is* the grace of God.

(*3) Jonathan Edwards' 1741 sermon, *Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God*

◆ **Examples of Christian salvation**

It is a most reasonable thing to say that whatever the plan of salvation is, it must be highly evident in the many examples of conversion in the book of Acts, which is an inspired history of the early Church. In other words, whatever a person believes to be the plan of salvation, he must find many others in Acts who were saved in just the same way. Remember, salvation for one is salvation for all. On the flip side of this fact, whatever their salvation experience was in Acts, from the very Day of Pentecost forward, so must yours and mine be.

Fact:

All the examples of Christian salvation are in the book of Acts. And they are all consistent with Acts 2:38.

They involved the Jews in Acts 2, the Samaritans in Acts 8, and the Gentiles in Acts 10. That's every class of humanity on earth. It is God's strategic way of saying there is one salvation for all peoples of the earth, which is the very heart and essence of the Great Commission.

1/ The Jews (Acts 2)

We have already expounded on the Day of Pentecost. Now recall who was there to receive the Acts 2:38 experience:

- All the Apostles.
- Mary, the Mother of Jesus
Jesus gave this very salvation that He offers to you and I to His Own Mother.
- The Lord's brothers, two of which, at least, came to be leaders in the Church.
- Others who were close followers of Christ, filling up the number approximating 120 of those initially filled with the Holy Ghost.

- Add to that the three thousand charter members who received Peter's message and were saved that day.

Look at the company of special people saved on the Day of Pentecost with whom you will identify if you receive the Acts 2:38 salvation experience!

2/ The Samaritans (Acts 8)

The example of the Samaritans involved people who were experiencing great revival. Many miracles were taking place. There were many baptisms, and the baptisms were biblical— in Jesus' name. But the example stresses that, even with all of these great events, no tenet of Acts 2:38 could be omitted. They had not yet received the Holy Ghost (v.16). So, Peter and John came from Jerusalem so that the Samaritans might be filled.

3/ The Gentiles (Acts 10)

The example of the Gentiles is especially poignant. It involved a man named, Cornelius, who was very devout and good. That's a character assessment made by the Bible itself. See verses 1-4. His prayers and giving came up to God as a memorial in heaven. Most people of our day would have considered him saved. But he wasn't (Acts 11:14). There is more to salvation than being really good and devout. One day, he was visited by an angel to send for Peter, who would tell him how to be saved (Acts 10:5-6;11:14).

Why is this example of salvation significant? Answer: To let us know that relationship with God— even a vibrant one— is not salvation. Peter was sent to offer him *covenant* relationship with God. And, Cornelius received the terms of the New Covenant, Acts 2:38.

4/ The long-time believers in Christ at Ephesus (Acts 19)

There is even a chapter in Acts involving believers in Christ who had not yet learned about Acts 2:38. They had been believers for about twenty years. When the Apostle Paul encountered them, he informed them of baptism in Jesus' name and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, which they received (Acts 19:1-6).

Why is this example significant? Answer: Because it stresses that the imperative of Acts 2:38 is for "everyone", as Peter said— for unbeliever and believer alike. It emphasizes that there is only one way to be saved in the Christian era.

5/ The Apostle Paul (Acts 9,22)

Paul himself received this same salvation experience. It is recorded in Acts 9 and is recounted by him in Acts 22.

Why is Paul's example significant? Answer: Because it shows that Paul, too, who is often cited by false teachers as teaching the sufficiency of mere faith in Christ for salvation, received the Acts 2:38 experience. If you believe the theology of Paul, you must obey Acts 2:38. He did. (He taught it as well, as we saw in the previous example of Acts 19:1-6.)

The caption beneath these biblical examples could read:

Jesus offers you and I the same salvation experience He gave to His Own Mother and siblings (Acts 1-2).

You may be a believer baptized in Jesus' name, as in Acts 8. You still need to fulfill every tenet of Acts 2:38.

You may be a very devout person whose relationship with God is vibrant, on fire, as Cornelius in Acts 10. You still must receive Acts 2:38.

You may already be a long-time believer in Jesus, as those in Acts 19:1-6. You still need Acts 2:38.

You may have had a dramatic one-on-one encounter with Christ, like Paul himself, but you still need to obey Acts 2:38.

No matter your previous religious experience, you still need to fulfill Acts 2:38. It's a lingering covenantal imperative until it is fulfilled.

Conclusion

Paul desired that we all come to the unity of the faith (Ephesians 4:13). That was at a very early time in Church history when there wasn't even much disunity. How much more does the call for unity apply now!

The Apostles and early Christians never wavered from keeping the faith pure. Acts is full of examples of that (e.g., Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-6; etc.). Paul even admonished us who are believers to examine ourselves whether we're truly in the faith (2Corinthians 13:5). He expressed the divine desire for all persons to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1Timothy 2:4). All of this attention to precise biblical faith and truth testifies to the fact that salvation, while available to everyone, is by a narrow means. As someone said, "Salvation is graciously offered. We do well to heed the terms".

Honoring Christ's sacrifice

Some people would have us believe that pressing for correct salvation doctrine is trivial, as though there are more important matters to which we should direct our attention. But glossing over salvation doctrine, or approaching it but superficially, does not honor Christ, Who died to give it.

Taking care to have correct salvation doctrine is actually what honors Christ's sacrifice on the cross. That's precisely because the tenets of salvation are directly based on what He did.

Repentance has always been a requirement of fallen man in approaching God. But, in the Christian era, it specifically means turning from sin and falsehood to Christ.

Baptism in Jesus' name and the infilling of the Holy Ghost are unique to Christianity. Baptism is predicated upon Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, according to Paul (Romans 6:3-5). And Peter explained on the Day of Pentecost that receiving the Holy Ghost is possible because of Christ's resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:32-33).

Therefore, keeping these tenets honors the sacrifice that made them possible. It is the greatest way a person can truly honor Christ.

David once asked what he could render to the Lord for all that He has done. The answer most obvious to him was to take the cup of salvation that was offered (Psalms 116:12-13).

12 *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?*

13 *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.*

There is no greater way to honor Christ for what He has done for us on the cross than to accept the terms of salvation provided by it and extend them also to our fellow man (1Timothy 4:16). Above all, Christianity is about salvation.

These four simple points of study are presented to help us make our calling and election sure (2Peter 1:10) and to reach everyone we can before the soon coming of the Lord. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.