

Salvation

themes

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The unconventional punctuation styles you will see are related to the way these studies were originally intended for the e-mail audience, using plain text to keep file sizes smaller for bulk mailing; creatively 'formatting' with punctuation, for various kinds of emphases, in the absence of formatting the actual type. You may find occasional misspellings, and the more rare cases of a Scripture reference going to a wrong passage; those will be 'typos', not intentional. With this type of POD (Print On Demand) publishing, it seems simplest, and the most prudent use of time, to not completely go through and revamp everything, but to just leave things as they are. Please accept this book, warts and all; but rather, please pay attention to, and receive God's Truth presented herein.

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Twelve Kinds of People © 1997

At VW we often talk about "pretend christians" and "false prophets." Personal correspondence will often include people's accounts of their own times of wandering from God and coming back. Sometimes there is confusion about the distinction between "wandering Christians" and those who have never received Christ as Redeemer. If a person wandered, and then hears that "once saved-always saved" is not Scriptural, they worry that their wanderings may have made them 'permanently' condemned.

In order to clarify some of the misgivings, it seemed good to assemble a list describing the various kinds of people there are at any given time, showing Scriptural basis for each. We should keep in mind that "God knows [the] heart."(Lk16:15) And while "man looks on the outward appearance, God looks at the heart"(1Sam16:7) the "Lord knows those who are His."(2Tim2:19)

Twelve Kinds of People:

1) Christian -grown to full maturity and fruitfulness

"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (Eph4:13)

The ultimate goal. To be "hundredfold" Christians.(Mt13:23) To be Christlike. Of course, 100% fulfillment won't be realized until we are with Him, and we see Him as He is, and are, thus, fully "like Him."(1Jn3:2)

2) Christian -growing towards maturity.

When sin or immaturity is discovered, confesses & actively strives to correct the problem

"I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal..of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."(Phil3:13-14) And part of Paul's methodology to accomplish this was, "temperance in all things" as he "disciplined [his] body" to bring it "into subjection" so that he might be "qualified." (1Cor9:24-)

And as there is sin, of which all Christians are guilty from time to time (1Jn1:8), he confesses (1:9) and receives cleansing because of Christ's advocacy.(2:1-2)

3) Christian -passive.

Just "sits" there. A nice person. Nothing drastically bad. But nothing noteworthy, either. Has a hint of the Laodicean syndrome.(Rev3:14~) Not hot, not cold. When the works are tested, they likely get singed pretty good, or even totalled. But, he is saved.(1Cor3:15)

4) Christian -carnal.

Is truly saved, but also has one foot in the world. Fear and/or lust keeps from full commitment.

Here we have the Corinthian syndrome. Is characterized by immorality (1Cor5) greed, fraud, fighting (6) pride (1) idolatry (8,10) spiritual abuses (11-14).

Paul writes to them, "I could not speak to you as spiritual but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it...for where there are envy, strife and divisions...are you not carnal and behaving like [mere] men?"(1Cor3:1-3)

The Christian's calling is a "heavenly calling."(Heb3:1) Our citizenship is in heaven.(Phil3:20) Thus, our conduct should not be like sinful man. However, this group is saved. Paul refers to them as "my brethren."(1:11)

5) Christian -backslidden.

From all outward appearances seems to be unregenerate. Sometimes this condition will last for years. But possesses a spark of Life; is saved. Like prodigal, can return in repentance.

First of all, please don't misunderstand the choice of the word "spark." This is not the unregenerate's notion of the "divine spark" within. But rather a term to illustrate John's word "seed" (1Jn3:9). The fact that we are "born" of God. While this person is so fully committed (at the moment) to living for self and the world, he truly does have the Holy Spirit, and from James' thoughts (ch3), it would only take a spark to be ignited into full flame. And that spark is still there. Albeit, dormant at the moment.

Luke 15 best illustrates this person. The prodigal asks the father for the "portion of goods" that is due him.(vs12) He is not walking away, leaving all behind. But he is taking with him what is "his." He goes and squanders everything, behaving lasciviously. But God hedges up his way (Hos2:6). And he is humbled into doing things he would never have dreamed; a Jew feeding swine.(vs15)

But then, he "came to himself."(vs17) And he remembers his "father." He is still part of the "family." Returns in repentance, and receives full restoration and fellowship. While he was "lost"(vs24), he was still in the family. He is still a Christian.

The sheep (not goat) was lost, until the shepherd went out and found him,(vs4) half fallen off a cliff and in tatters. Always remained a "sheep" but was wandering away. As the little toddler who decides to run off and "explore" and must be brought back to safety. Or the little one who decides to "leave home" and packs up the suitcase. But then, lunch time and/or nightfall arrives...and he remembers where "home" is.

6) Christian -backslidden.

Turned over to Satan for destruction of the flesh. Sin unto [physical] death. But, saved nonetheless.

Of the church Paul called, "my brethren" he said, "for this reason (abuses regarding the Lord's Supper) many are weak and sick among you, and many [have died]. (1Cor11:30) Of the "brother" who was in immorality, he says, "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."(5:5) John writes, "If anyone sees his brother sinning...There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that."(1Jn5:16)

In each of these cases the guilty one is called a "brother." A Christian. But they are guilty of sin for which the Lord (in 2 cases) removed them from the earth. But the death is not eternal.

What, exactly, is this sin? We are not told. In one case it was immorality. In another, abuse at the Lord's Table. The Lord knows each of His children, and disciplines each as is needed.(Heb12:6-11)

7) Unregenerate -thinks they are saved.

Have gone forward, active in the church. Never truly repented. Deceived.

"..even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things."(1Jn2:18b-20) The Spiritual Christian will know/perceive/recognize this person.

That they were "from us" indicates that the person was "part of" the congregation. They were intermingled just like the "wheat and tares."(Mt13:25)

Until many weeds grow to full maturity they are scarcely distinguishable from the plants intended to be in the garden/field. But once grown to maturity, their fruit is apparent. When they are small, a person often lets the weeds grow, lest he uproot the genuine plant by mistake. In the same way the farmer said to his servants, "No, [don't weed them out yet] lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'first gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'"(Mt13:29-30)

Many of these wither up and fall by the wayside. And people will think they "lost their salvation." When actually, they were never saved in the first place. Others will continue on to the end, playing the part, and will plead with Christ, "Lord, Lord, did we not in Your name...[do all sorts of wonderful Christian service]?" And He will declare, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."(Mt7:22-23)

8) Unregenerate -acts like Christian, knowing they are not.

False prophets...wolves in sheeps clothing

"... after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch..." (Acts20:29-31)

This group is also "part of" the congregation. They are in the church/s, serving in ministry. But they are not deceived. Many of them actually knowingly worship satan. Have purposely infiltrated the church IN ORDER TO wreak havoc. Their whole design is to PURPOSELY PRETEND to be Christians, while knowingly subtly distorting Truth. Many of them have come in as "former" rock musicians, bringing demons with them directly into the Church. Do we have any Scriptural precedence for this kind of thing?

In 1Kgs22 God had a conversation, and asked, "who will persuade Ahab to go...[be killed in battle]?"(vs20) And a spirit came forward, volunteering to be a "lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets."(vs22) Since we know who the "father of lies" is(Jn8:44), we know this had to be a demon. But the prophets all appeared to be "regular" prophets.

And yet, as we are told to "test the spirits" Jehoshaphat discerned their source and asked, "Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of him?"(vs7)

Of this group we are exhorted, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."(Eph5:11)

9) Unregenerate -has heard gospel but rejected.

"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'There sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" (Rom10:16-18)

10) Unregenerate -has not heard gospel.

"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law...for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them..in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. (Rom2:12-16)

11) Saved - Fall away purposely, permanently.

- cannot be saved (again)
- better if they had not been born
- better if they had not known the Truth
- how much worse their punishment?

"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die. (Ez18:24)

Some will retort, "That's Old Testament!" OK then, try this out... "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation. Anyone [in the Old Testament] dies without mercy...of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the

covenant...a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ...now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."(-Heb10:26-38)

This expression "draws back" means to "timidly retreat, to withdraw oneself, to turn back, to deny." What did Jesus say? "No one having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven."(Lk9:62) And further, "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Mt10:33) One of the accolades for Philadelphia was that they had not "denied" Jesus' name.(Rev3:8) The ones who draw back start following Christ, but decide the cost is too great (Lk14:28), and turn back.

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2Pt2:20-21) It says they "escaped" the world and have a "knowledge" of the Lord. They left the world to follow Christ. That's a definition of "repentance," which is how one is "saved."

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit...if they fall away, to renew them to repentance... since they crucify again...the Son of God." (Heb6:4-6) Since Jesus died "once." (9:28) Among other things, you notice they "partook" of the Holy Spirit. Again, a definition of a Christian...one who has the Holy Spirit.(Rom8:9)

This is the sorriest state for a person to be in. Not only is he worthy of the worst punishment...he is the only category of living humanity that cannot [is IMPOSSIBLE] be saved.

Our goal, naturally, is to attain to #1. A fully mature Believer. Most "good" Christians would reside as #2. The great "men of God" and not-so-great "faithful" servants. Where the confusion sets in is the categories between #3 and #8. While, for convenience, we have listed 11 categories, and delineated the characteristics; the reality is that there is much overlapping of characteristics. The carnal Christian and the Natural man are so often hard to tell apart, because they are both functioning "in the flesh." And some people will combine some of these things together. Or will periodically shift from one to the other.

So, how many people are in each category? Only God knows. To be sure, the predominance of the world population fits into the unregenerate #9 and #10. They've not come to Christ, nor made any pretenses. The rest would

obviously fit into the small percentages that statistics label "christian." The sad part is the likelihood of the high percentage of those who fit #7. Deceived Pretend christians. The "sad" part is that most of them don't even realize they are not Christians! We have about two generations of church-goers who have not heard the gospel of repentance. All they have heard is "faith, love and grace." But as we know, Satan believes. And...what good is love and grace? ...without repentance? "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom10:17) We have a couple of generations of perverted translations of Scriptures that have been popularized. And while it is possible to be saved after reading them, the preachers have further watered down the Gospel by not teaching even that which is there at their disposal!!!

Thankfully, the Lord knows those who are His. He knows the heart. So we do not need to go around with this list, bashing people over the head. But as we are told to discern and relate to certain apostates Scripturally, perhaps this list will help us understand what it is we are observing. First of all, examining ourselves.(2Cor13:5) And then discerning and responding to those who infiltrate. (Acts20:29-31,1Jn4:1) And finally, "on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."(Jude22-23)

And then, there's the final category...

12) Christian -newborn, baby Christians

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."(1Pt2:1-2)

"but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."(Rom8:16)

Any of the unregenerate, originating in categories #7-10, can come to Christ. "The Lord is...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."(2Pt3:9)

Lest anyone think his sins are "too great" to find forgiveness, Paul wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief...because I persecuted the church of God." (1Tm1:15,1Cor15:9) If He could save Saul/Paul, He can save you!

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2Cor6:1-2)

Humility and Repentance © 1994

"...I'm worth it," purrs the sensuous model as she seductively slithers around, showing off the benefits of the beauty product.

A concerned person talks about how poorly a friend is handling life, wishing with all her being, "If he could only just 'feel good' about himself..."

People in general, discussing the ills of society, bemoan the fact that the cause for all the violence, crime and other bad things is that people don't have enough "self-esteem."

However, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it..." (Eph 5:29) Furthermore, in Scripture (including Ps 2) we are informed how man has lifted himself up against God. Man is following Lucifer who said "I will ascend into heaven...I will exalt my throne...I will be like the Most High." (Is 14:13-14) This is readily manifested in New Age. One of the primary doctrines of Satanism, daily indulged, is 'self-gratification.'

Jesus once told a story about a preacher and a child molester. (This is a paraphrase of His story in Luke 18, with characters He'd probably use if He were telling it today)

The preacher went to seminary, became a Dr.Divinity, grew a church that had thousands of members, eventually developed a TV ministry, and was living in the lap of luxury as everyone flocked to his meetings, watched his shows and sent in their money. Under the lights and cameras, his rings sparkle as he grips that microphone and moans and swoons his greatness and spirituality for all to see. He can get worked up to where the sweat and tears flow like Niagara Falls. He even performs magic as he slaps, tugs, pushes, blows on people who come to participate in his spotlight. And everyone is impressed!

While this 'show' is going on at the stadium, the child molester is sitting in his car at the edge of the woods. He is all dirty and bloody from the current victim he has just buried. In his heart he is not pleased with himself and what is in his heart, but he JUST CAN'T SEEM to help himself. As he is checking around to get rid of any further evidence, he spies the Gideon Bible that his victim grabbed back at the motel room in a futile attempt to defend herself. He picks it up and the pages fall open to Romans 5 and he reads "For when we were still without strength...Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As those words sink in, the pages flutter over to where Jesus Himself is talking and saying "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Mk 2:17) As the truth jolts him like lightning, he realizes his "problem" is SIN. The man slumps to the ground, writhing in agony clutching at the grass and weeds growing

nearby, his face wallowing in the dirt, crying out "God, be merciful to me, THE sinner."

Jesus said "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk 18:14)

To Humble oneself, one must place himself below anyone else in rank, quality or station. To be unpretentious...even willing to degrade himself. The word "humble" comes, ultimately, from the Latin "humus," (or ground). In more ancient cultures, the one humbling himself before someone of higher station, or with whom he was hoping to reconcile himself, would prostrate himself flat on the ground. Thus, the expression "Eat dirt."

The world says, "Look out for Number One." "And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8) The world says, "I'm worth it." "But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;" (Is 64:6)

So, how do we repent? It starts out with an abhorrence of self...and abhorrence of sin. Regret, remorse, self-reproach, contrition for sin. Again, the Latin origins of the word include the meanings "Creeping along the ground; prostrate." When Job was presented with God's glory, even though God had presented Job before Satan as an "upright" person (according to his works), Job responds, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6) "Godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation." (2Cor 7:10)

The other aspect of repentance is the change. Changing directions, changing thoughts, changing behavior. Zacchaeus promised, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything...by false accusation, I restore fourfold." (Lk 19:8) Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham."

Zacchaeus thought his WORKS were going to save him. But Jesus indicates a GIFT. "By grace you have been saved...it is a gift of God." (Eph 2:8)

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2Cor 5:17) In this verse we see repentance. The change.

But WHAT is the change? A NEW CREATION. That creation is the fact of being IN CHRIST. Gal 6:15 further states "In Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision (law, works, good deeds) avails anything, but a NEW CREATION."

The man in our story above found in Romans 5:6 that "when we were without strength...Christ died for the ungodly." No ability of our own could save us. Jesus likens repentance to a new birth (Jn 3:3). When a baby is born, the baby has nothing to do with coming into this world. The mother alone nurtures the strength at the time of birth. In the same way the Psalmist expresses "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness..."

Can we "slide" our way into Heaven...not really remembering the occasion? By definition, "NO." Can we philosophize or argue our way before God? "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 18:3)

"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. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (~Mt 7:13-23)

But..."the Lord...will beautify the humble with salvation." (Ps 149:4)

Amen!

Grace: Redemptive Grace © 1994

"...A GRACE and LOVE revolution!" So proclaims the pastor as he shares "deeds of grace" that someone did, as supposed examples of Eph 2:8, "For by grace are you saved.." People are really 'into' it....but their love and grace is something they SAY as they FEEL spiritual, holy, and Oh SO WONDERFUL. For a person who is "in the know" they swoon and have a warm fuzzy feeling as they piously purr "Graaeesss." It is the source, cause and solution for everything, from decisions about a parking spot, to choice of classes enrolled in school....invoking the word, "grace."

GRACE. It is the VERY ESSENCE of faith in Christ and of salvation... And yet, the topic causes church splits and divisions among so-called christians. It is that about which Paul wrote to the legalistic Galatians "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." (Gal 1:6) It is that which Jude warns regarding corruption by stealth, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Jude 4)

It is so important a doctrine that Paul issued a double curse (Gal 1:8-9) that any person who would pervert the doctrine, "let him be accursed." Those who pervert this doctrine are in jeopardy of eternal life!

WHAT IS GRACE? "Grace" is one of those words with multiple meanings. Going to the original words does not shed light as to which definition to use, as the Hebrew and Greek use one word for all their applications, and also have several definitions. Thus, context makes the determination.

While the O.T. is full of examples of God's grace, beginning in the Garden of Eden, and has been God's primary manner of relating to man throughout history; due to limited space, we will confine this discussion to the New Testament applications

In the N.T. there are two (2) essential definitions for 'grace.' The first indicates "joy, pleasure, sweetness, charm, loveliness." Such as: "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt.." (Col 4:6) Out of 120 incidents of the word 'grace' in the N.T., approximately six (6) fit this definition.

The predominant teaching on grace in the N.T. is "good will, loving-kindness, unmerited favor, merciful kindness. The recipient is unworthy to receive, and the giver is not required to give...but of His own accord the giver CHOOSES to give. In Scripture the "giver" is God, the "recipient" is sinful man."

Grace ORIGINATES with GOD and is the gift of God. "For by grace you have been saved...it is the gift of God." (Eph 2:8) "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom 3:24) Easily half of all references use terminology such as "Grace of God" or "Grace...of Jesus Christ."

Grace does NOT originate with man, and cannot. "...not of yourselves...not of works, lest anyone should boast." (~Eph 2:8-9) By definition, if we could do the works, it would not be grace. "...then it is no longer works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace.." (Rom 11:6)

God's grace also indicates His INFINITE LOVE..."God demonstrates His own love toward us, ...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8) "God SO LOVED the world that He gave His only Son"(~Jn 3:16)

We were floundering, unable to save ourselves, when Christ redeemed us "For when we were still without strength...Christ died for the ungodly." (~Rom 5:6)

It is God's grace which DECLARES sinful man "RIGHTEOUS." At the end of "Schindler's List" Mr. Schindler rants and raves, bemoaning the fact that he "should have" sold his car to save a few more Jews. "How many more" would the pawning of his gold Nazi collar pin have saved? As the survivors and descendants bestow honor on his grave with the rocks, the credits indicate that the Jewish commission had "declared" Schindler a "righteous person." (A moving moment!) Man bestowing grace upon another man. Forgiveness for some of the offenses that he, even, had committed. While forgiven, Schindler was dead...in the grave.

"Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him...having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life...through our Lord Jesus Christ...we have now received the reconciliation." (~Rom 5:9-11) "by Man (Christ) came the resurrection of the dead...in Christ all shall be made alive." (1Cor 15:21-22) In these passages the terms grace, reconciliation, and justification are all melded together to illustrate the saving and redemptive work of Christ.

It is UNFATHOMABLE GRACE. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Cor 2:9)

God's Grace has NO LIMITS. "As far as east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (Ps 103:12)

WITHOUT GRACE we cannot be saved. "O foolish Galatians!...are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ...only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (saved)...you who attempt to be justified by the law...have fallen from grace." (~Gal 3:1,3,7; 5:4)

DOES GOD'S WORD TEACH "deeds of grace" and matters of "being gracious?" Most emphatically, YES! We have already quoted earlier from Col 4:6 regarding gracious speech, "seasoned with salt." Eph 4:32 encourages us to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you." "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:35)

Dorcas, in Acts, is illustrated as a person of good deeds. The early disciples continually did 'deeds of grace' as they sold their assets and shared, all in common. James discusses the absurdity of claiming faith without the deeds which demonstrate that faith..."if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (James 2:15-16)

These brief examples barely scratch the surface of Scriptural teachings on "deeds of grace" and "graciousness." But, are these the Scriptural teachings on "Grace?" NO!

Christians must accurately hold to the teachings on each subject. Each is a legitimate concern, and of great importance. We must firmly stand against Satan's onslaughts to water down the gospel of God's RE-DEMPTIVE GRACE. We must differentiate between Eph 2:8 and Col 4:6.

A POINT TO PONDER: When God extends His GRACE, He does so 'graciously.' "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (~Mt11:28-30)

To fathom the full magnitude, a discussion of GRACE must also include an accurate understanding of SIN. Next month: "Grace: the Sin Question"

Amen!

Grace: the Sin Question © 1994

"Shamed-based" vs. "Grace-based" Churches. So goes the current controversy. In alarming numbers, people claiming the Name of Christ flock to the teachings of "the serpent" and listen to his lies. They participate in weekly video sessions of non-Christian pied pipers who teach concepts of "shame and dysfunction," and come away feeling like they have just received the most wonderful "Christian" teaching.

These students come away convinced that there is no Original Sin, that sin is something different than what Scripture teaches, that we are OK 'just as we are.' After all, "God don't make no junk."

Their concept of sin (in its very simplest form) is that it originates from lack of parental love that we think we deserve as babies. In trying to fill the void, we do things ("sin") to try to obtain that love. There is dysfunction in the parent/child relationship. Because of the parents' shame, received from their parents, they extend that shame to their children. "You are no good, you can't do anything right, etc."

If we could be released from the influence of our parents at birth, we would grow up in perfection, because, in actuality, we are all GOOD. Ultimately, sin, if it really exists, is the act of "not recognizing how wonderful we actually are." God's "grace" recognizes this goodness within us, and accepts us "just as we are." That's "graaaaaeesss."

These concepts of "grace" are used as license (Jude 4) and "forgiveness" for homosexual desires; for basic laziness called "ADS" that allows a person to feel good about themselves even though they won't hold a job and work. Because of "grace" children are not required to learn responsibility and obedience to parents, and can behave like basic hoodlums. And the list goes on. ANYTHING BUT SIN!

SCRIPTURAL TEACHING of sin begins in Genesis 3. The basic ingredients of Sin are Lust, Lies, Rebellion, Judgment, Provision.

"You will be LIKE God.." "You will have knowledge that God is 'withholding' from you," purrs the serpent. "God didn't give you enough to be a 'fulfilled' person. You REALLY SHOULD have this. If you have this, you will be a god." The tree was "desirable to make one wise." "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires (lust) and enticed." (Jas 1:14) Satan certainly guides a willing subject, but it is OUR OWN lust which carries sin to fulfillment. We cannot hide behind the adage, "The Devil made me do it."

The "father of lies" goes on, "You will not surely die." He directly contradicts God's promise "You shall surely die." (Gen 2:17) But, again, the door was open for him to do so. Eve had already lied. God had only

said, "you shall not eat." Eve added, "nor shall you touch it." So, once God's Word had been perverted/distorted by Eve, Satan easily carried it the next step- total denial.

Eve took the fruit. Adam then also partook. Total rebellion. God had said, "Don't." They said, "We will." And did. "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;" (Is 53:6) God promised "You shall surely die." Ezek 18:4 reminds us "The soul who sins shall die." Even though the guilty parties tried to pass the buck down the line, God the Righteous Judge passed judgment according to the individual offense. Death and suffering has been the result throughout history, and the lake of fire is the ultimate reward.(Rev 20:14)

SIN PASSED UPON ALL MEN "..through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned-" (Rom 5:12) "There is none righteous, no, not one;" (Rom 3:10) Completing the all-inclusive, and hereditary nature of sin, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (Ps 51:5)

How does God view sin? "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags:" (Is 64:6) "God said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.'" (Ex 33:20) Man's view of his own sinful state is best described after he sees God in His glory. Isaiah wails "Woe is me, for I am undone." Job repents, "I abhor myself." Gideon fears for his life, "Alas, O Lord God!" John, the one "whom Jesus loved," "Fell at His feet as dead."

GOD'S GRACE can probably best be described by Ezek 16:3-14 in His grace towards Israel. Israel is pictured as a grotesque newborn who has not been nurtured in the birth process...not a pretty sight. "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood,'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'" (Ez 16:6)

In God's mercy "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities." (Ps 103:10 "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." (Lam 3:22)

God's power for the redemptive process is compared by His creative "fingers" and His saving "arm." "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him..." (Ps8:3-4) "The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." (Is 52:10) God's "arm" was manifested in Jesus Christ as John quotes "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Is 53:1)

MAN'S RESPONSE must be... "God be merciful to me, the sinner." (Lk 18:13) "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am

chief." (1Tim 2:15) "I am not worthy to be called an apostle...but by the grace of God I am what I am." (1Cor 15:9-10)

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

If you are not a sinner, Christ did not come to save you. YOU HAVE NO PART IN CHRIST! Jesus taught, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Lk 5:31-32) To Peter He said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." (Jn 13:8)

The further the depths of sin, the greater is the extent of God's grace. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." (Lk 7:47) "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." (Rom 5:20) "I was formerly a [rotten sinner]; but I obtained mercy...and the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant." (~1Tim 1:13-14)

Realizing the expanse of God's grace makes me realize HOW SINFUL I am. And, on the flip side, realizing fully my sinfulness and utter worthlessness to God, His grace becomes SO PRECIOUS.

"You were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy. Oh, the depth of the riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and his ways past finding out! For of and through and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory forever. Amen." (~Rom 11:30-36)

Amen.

Accepting Christ? © 1995

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Mt7:21-23)

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain..."(Jn15:16)

"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph 1:5-6)

What utterly HORRIFYING WORDS to hear from the Savior's mouth! "I never knew you; Depart from Me..." Jesus said that "MANY" will be in this camp of the unbeliever.

Why is this the case? Look how many churches there are, and church members. Observe how many people, if asked, claim to possess eternal life. If asked "how" they came to faith in Christ, will respond, "God saw something good in me, all my worth, and loved me. As a result, by grace, I accepted Jesus into my heart."

There is a song that states, "I find no fault in Him." The song goes on to list all the various aspects of Jesus suffering, dying, being raised again. And then concludes, "I find no fault in Him." Let's think for a moment about the relative 'stations' of the fault-finder and the findee. If a person is finding fault, it must mean that they have no faults of their own, they are perfect, they are ABOVE the one being judged. So the logic continues, "Jesus did all these things, He is perfect, therefore it's OK for me to 'accept' Him." Does anybody see anything wrong with this logic? Better yet, can a Scriptural basis for it be found?

A modern popular "christian" psychologist (JD), who has been mesmerizing the Christian community for the past 20-30 years with his books, seminars, radio and TV programs was recently reported to have made this statement in the context of forgiving those who have wronged us, "I am suggesting that some of us need to forgive God for those heartaches that are charged to His account." What blaspheme! "O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'"(Rom9:20)

GOD "WRONGED" US? "They refused to repent..because of their own counsels. My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call on the Most High, none at all exalt Him." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags." (~Hos 11:5-7,Is 53:6,Rom 3:23,Is 64:6)

It is WE who have wronged God! We cannot come to God in our righteousness. WE HAVE NONE! New Age looks with introspection for that "goodness within." "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?" "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemes. These are the things which defile a man.." (Jer 17:9, Mt 15:19-20)

We are deserving of punishment. "That every mouth be stopped, and all the world...guilty before God... The wages of sin is death...The soul who sins shall die"(Rom3:19,6:23,Ez 18:4)

BUT... (such a beautiful word!) "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."(Rom 6:23b)

Jesus did not come to this world, looking for righteous people. "God so loved the world, that He gave His Son...that...should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn3:16) It was a RESCUE mission when Jesus came. Jesus further states, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Lk 5:32)

GOD DOES EVERYTHING related to salvation. "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."(Rom 8:29) He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..having predestined us.. made us accepted in the Beloved." (~Eph 1:4-6)

GOD KNOWS US..past, present and future. Having known us, God decreed from eternity, appointed, predetermined our eternal life. So, when in the course of history it is our time to be born, at the right time Jesus chooses us...because He foreknew us.

THE GIFT IS GIVEN. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...not of yourselves; it's a gift."(Eph1:7,2:8)

HE CHOOSES US. "I have chosen you." Even when he chose Judas to betray him, it says that He knew "all things." He DELIBERATELY chose Judas for the 'dirty deed,' because He knew Judas beforehand.

HE IS READY TO FORGIVE."For You Lord are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." (Ps 86:5) "If you seek Him, He will be (will "let you") found by you." (2Chr15:2)

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE? "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you doubleminded. Lament & mourn & weep! Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (~Jas4:8-10)

The tax collector (worse than dirt to a Jew) came to God, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Lk 18:13) Job responds to God's revelation to him, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6) Isaiah laments, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Is 6:5) "They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter.. 'what shall we do?'" Peter responded, "Repent." (~Acts 2:37-38)

SOME COMMON THREADS: Realization of utter worthlessness before God, and Absolute Sinfulness. God is holy. We cannot measure up to His standard. But we also take note of His love and mercy. So, we come in humility, knowing we deserve punishment, seeking his infinite mercy, realizing we have no merits to make any demands of God, and have no rights. And ask God, "Is there any possible way that You, a holy and just God can accept me, a worthless sinner, who is not even worthy to make this request."

"Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'you are our gods.' For in You the fatherless finds mercy.'" (Hos 14:2-3)

He knows those who will come to Him and promises, "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (Jn 6:37) The thief requested, "Lord, remember me (I deserve to be on this cross, but You don't).." and Jesus responded, "Assuredly...you will be with Me.." (Lk 23:42-43)

Let's stop urging people to "make a decision for" or "to accept" Christ, thus perverting the Gospel. Rather, let's invite them to the foot of the cross. "For many are called... but few are chosen." (Mt 22:14)

Amen!

Personal Relationship (with Jesus)? ©2004

READER QUESTION:

Question regarding the famous phrase "personal relationship". I'm not sure I like the term anymore. At the moment it almost seems self serving--as if we've done something to be part of the salvation process. What's your take?

VW ANSWER:

This, along with that other related famous phrase, "Accepting Christ" We did not choose Christ, but He chose us: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you.." (Jn15:16) And when He chose us, He made us "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph4:4-6)

(While you're right 'here' at the moment, and you've just freshly read it, please re-read and note the grammar in that last verse, of the word "accepted". It's not a verb. We'll address the significance in a bit.)

Some may think this is a wrangling about words, after all, isn't "accept" and "receive" the same thing? If a person "receives" a gift, are they not also synonymously "accepting" it? We are told that, to become children of God, we must "receive" Jesus Christ. (Jn1:12)

However, the term "accept" also includes an aspect of "judgment" as to "suitability". Is the thing "accept-ABLE"? Does it meet the necessary standards? Does it measure 'up' to the high standards of the one doing the accepting?

The sinner has no position of loftiness whereby to -presume- to judge God, or Jesus' 'suitability'. It is -we- who must somehow attain to suitability and "acceptability" -TO- GOD! It is not we who accept Christ, but we come to God and plead: "Will You PLEASE ACCEPT ME!" based on the cleansing work of Jesus on the cross

[VW: In case any of you think I'm straining at gnats here, making this all up, pulling this stuff out of thin air to create a straw man to huff at: please understand that charismania (one of the entities that claim god-hood for themselves these days) used to actually have the song: "I Find No Fault in Him" !! :VW]

Today's 'famous' theology has this exactly BACKWARDS. And as such, "many" on the "broad way [to] destruction" are in for quite a shocker when they will hear, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work out lawlessness!" (Mt7:13-23)

Which, finally, brings us to your question. If Jesus declares (in that day), "I never knew you"...what happened to that so-called "personal relationship" everybody basks in as they are also "spirit-filled"?

I don't know for sure what this expression originally meant to those who first started using it. I know what it meant to me when I started hearing it. I suspect its origins were out of a legitimate effort to distinguish True Faith in Christ from the stuffy liturgical idolatry of the so-called main-line denominations and religions, where the perceived "salvation" was a product of works, penances, masses, church membership, baptisms, soul-winning campaigns, altar calls, etc. The need for a person to not merely perform the rituals of "THE CHURCH", but to "know" Jesus Christ (Php3:10), to be included in the group of those Jesus calls His "friends". (Jn15:14)

Trouble is, wherever this expression may have had its start, today it has become a matter of desiring to "[lean] on [Jesus'] breast" (Jn21:20); with a total disregard for Jesus as the "Alpha and Omega", the One with "eyes like a flame of fire", at whose feet John fell down in a faint "as dead". (Rev1:8-17)

Today's so-called gospel of graaeesss, that has God accepting the sinner "just as we are" (with no changes/repentance), also sees Jesus as our "buddy", our "pal"; like the Hollywood-esque renditions of the rebellious hippy who frolics and wrestles around in the dirt with sinners; but does not acknowledge the "Revelation" of -who- Jesus Christ truly is, the majestic, all-powerful "Son of the Most High God". (Lk1:32)

Thus, today's concept of "personal relationship" has people going forward to: shake hands with Jesus (How do you do), add Jesus into their rolodex and cell phone pre-sets along with all their other acquaintances (and if He's 'lucky' they even give Him the #1 preset), to call Jesus up once in awhile when they 'need' something, dream and swoon about sunset walks barefoot-in-the-sand along the beach hand-in-hand with Jesus (as their lover), call up Jesus as they are about to embark in some direction and ask: I'm going to do X, Y or Z, so won't You come along and join me, so we can go along side-by-side in this venture I have planned. To them, Jesus is just merely another 'person' just like themselves; who is at their beck-and-call. After all, didn't Jesus say: "...whatever you ask in My name, that I will do..." (Jn14:13) ??

Well, here is what God says about that: "These things you have done, and I have kept silent; YOU THOUGHT THAT I WAS LIKE YOURSELF; but I will rebuke you, and set in order before your eyes." (Ps50:21)

As we progress to the next question, indeed, the Believer in Jesus Christ has a 'personal' relationship, as we are called the "bride" of Christ. But how do we get to that place?

Here again, western society has it all backwards. In the beginning God brought Eve -to- Adam to be his "helper to complement him". (Gen1:18) The 'head' of that relationship being the 'man'. (1Co11:3)

Lately there's been a sickening plethora of these bachelor, bachelorette, ordinary joe, meet my folks, etc so-called "reality" TV where the males and females mix-it-up, swap around, and in the end the hope is that a compatible "match" is found, and a wedding results. I don't watch them, but have seen enough of passing glimpses and promos, to realize how disgusting they are. But in them... as well as traditionally in society... when a proposal of marriage is given, who does what? Who says what? What is the station of each of the parties involved, in relationship to each other?

Typically: The female is on her 'throne', sitting there goddess-like, all (supposedly) 'wonderful' and beautiful. The male comes in subservience to her, doing homage on bended knee, seeking the 'favor' of his 'exalted' queen. So the question everybody holds their breath to know: How will she respond? Will she 'accept' his proposal? (See? There's that word "accept" again!) Does he (the one God placed as "head") measure up to her (the one God placed in "submission" Eph5:22)? And he promises to "be pleasing" -to- her for the rest of their lives together (not the dther way around).

I don't recall the last time (if ever?) I've heard the female express, as Abigail did at David's marriage proposal, where it says: "And she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, Behold, your handmaid, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." (1Sa25:41)

This-all is a recent 'observation' that has just dawned on me within the past couple of weeks (perhaps a nauseaion over all the recent Valentine commercials?), that society has marriage all backwards. And in similar fashion they have our relationship with Jesus Christ all backwards. In the case of earthly marriage, it is merely about inter-spousal relationships. But in the case of Jesus Christ, it becomes a question of Eternal Life. With certain animal species, there is a certain mating ritual which, if one of them gets something wrong, they get killed and eaten, as being an extra-species imposter. In the case of our eternal souls, the result of getting it "wrong" (being an imposter) is eternal damnation! "...how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. And the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mt22:12-13)

In that day when we stand before the "...great white throne and Him who [sits] on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away" (Rev20:11) "...this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is IN HIS SON." (1Jn5:11)

Do we sit piously, self-righteously, waiting for Jesus to bend-the-knee to us with diamond-in-hand; or do we come prostrate to Him, "God be merciful to me the sinner" (Lk18:13) and in tears (Ja4:9), "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" (Mk9:24)

And yet, for all of man's sinful self-piety and pride, Jesus pleads: "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." (Rev3:20)
Thus "..His hand (of mercy) is stretched out still." (Is5:25, 9:12, etc)

Witnessing - Soul-winning? © 2002

INTRODUCTION:

The following is a couple of exchanges with a subscriber. When I became somewhat verbose in my first reply, suggesting that I was also answering in a 'public' way for a mailing, they replied: "By the way feel free to use it in an upcoming newsletter, anything that can help others to grow." So... I have taken elements out of the exchanges, and edited and re-arranged them into a somewhat conversational-exchange format here, to flow as a topic; and have also added a few more thoughts that didn't get written to the person privately.

READER QUESTION:

I am confused now. Here you wrote...

(in "Accepting Christ?")

"Let's stop urging people to "make a decision for" or "to accept" Christ, thus perverting the Gospel. Rather, let's invite them to the foot of the cross. "For many are called... but few are chosen."(Mt 22:14)" . And here you wrote, "God does not run you through the "check-list" formula or "four laws", recite the "prayer" and declare you a "Christian", like these "soul-winners" and Campus Crusade do. They "justify [themselves] before men" with these things "but God knows your hearts" (Lk16:15) He reaches into the "division of your soul and spirit". He knows the "thoughts and intents" of your heart; and He makes known TO YOU your -own- heart (Heb4:12-13); to which your -heart- responds to Him. And in the 'quiet' of the moment, individually, personally, He reminds you of "all things [sins], whatever [you] did" (Jn4:29) and then -reasons- with you... "

I am currently attending a baptist church and trying to learn how to effectively witness to someone. I understand that my life is also a witness but when it comes to "talking" with someone or "witnessing" I thought that telling them the gospel message of the sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection accompanying repentance was the message to tell them...

VW ANSWER:

Exactly.

READER:

and following that, obviously there has to be a "way" of getting their response so asking them if they understand and accept that Jesus is sufficient and the ONLY way to have eternal life you would have to have them pray the sinner's prayer.

VW:

Contrary to "soul winner" mentality, we are -NOT- "salesmen". In Bible school, class on "Personal Evangelism" I think it was, if I remember

correctly, they would teach us salesmanship type tactics...and usually the final step of such a procedure is to "close-the-deal". Salesmen speak of, Doing a "sell job" and then make the "close".

I don't find such tactics in Scripture anywhere. Typically those preaching were doing everything -contrary- to "inviting" people. John the immerser would say, "who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt3:7) Peter proclaimed, -YOU- are the ones who crucified Jesus. (Acts2:36) When Nicodemus came to Jesus, Jesus did not "invite" him, but started out saying, "..you can't get to Heaven..." (Jn3:3) When they came to Christ it was when they were "pierced to the heart" (Acts2:37) as the Holy Spirit was convicting.

When the Ethiopian was immersed, -he- was the one asking to be immersed. (Acts8) When Philip asks his testimony, he "confesses with the mouth the Lord Jesus" (Rom10:9) The Philippian jailer is the one who comes asking "how to" be saved. (Acts6:30) When Paul proclaims on Areopagus (Acts17) he does not close his "to the unknown god" message with an invitation. He proclaims the Gospel, and the call to repentance...and then leaves. Those who believe do so of their own hearts and follow him. (vs34)

The reason this is so is because we are -NOT- the ones who do the saving. We do not know the person's heart as Jesus does. (Heb4:12-13) Salvation for a person does not happen without the drawing of the Father. (Jn6:44) We can preach and argue with someone until we are blue-in-the-face and the cows come home, but unless the person is hearing the conviction of the Holy Spirit (Jn16:8), they are not going to be saved.

To suggest that, just because -I- have preached to someone, and have ascertained that they 'understand' what's been said, now it is -my- duty to know their heart, to know that they are 'ready' to receive Christ...or, for that matter, are even the slightest bit 'inclined' towards God...is somewhat approaching ultimacy in pride. Taking upon ourselves that which is God's domain. God through Jesus Christ is the one Who saves. He is the One who draws. The Holy Spirit convicts. He communicates to the individual's heart. The matter of salvation is between -God- and that person.

And...-what- is the "sinner's prayer"? I've heard and read a lot that aren't. Salvation does not come about from "repeat-after-me" these words that some -person- has labeled the "sinner's prayer". The real sinner's prayer is found in Lk18:13. And that person was not being given a sell-job by another person. It was between that person (alone) and God.

Abraham, Jacob, Daniel, etc. did not require other -people- to "close" with them. God spoke to Abraham, and Abraham believed God, and it was "accounted to him for righteousness". When God wanted Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc to know Him, He made Himself known to them...-directly-.

Yes...witness to people. Give them the Gospel. But then, leave them in God's capable hands to take that Word you have given them, so that they can 'meditate' on what they've heard. Preferably...give them the Gospel, and then, give them some Scripture to go home and read. Give them the Gospel and then 'shut-up' and let the Holy Spirit speak to their heart. If you gave them Scripture, God's Word does not return void. (Is55:11) If they are -really- going to be saved, they will do so based on hearing God's Word (Rom10:17), not somebody's salesmanship.

READER:

If this is not correct (and I don't know if it is or not, hence the reason I am writing you) how do you go about getting an answer or commitment from them?

VW:

Hopefully, now, this is clearer? We don't...necessarily. They are not answerable to -us-. They answer to God. The effectiveness of our witnessing is not judged by the rest of the people from the 'church' group that decided to go out for "visitation night". Our "faithfulness" (1Cor4:2) is to God. If we said to any given person what the Holy Spirit put into our mouths, then, we "done good".

READER:

Or is it even for us to know what they decide in their heart b/c like you said, we don't put a notch on our belt for it.

VW:

Exactly.

READER:

But then again, how would we know if we don't ask whether they need discipling or not, you have to know if they were saved or not first, right?

VW:

If they do get saved, and they need 'your' discipling, don't you think the same God who saved them, will also bring you back together?

READER:

What do you ask them to do if not pray the sinner's prayer?

VW:

"Praying" does not save. Repentance does. Paul reviewed the essentials for salvation as being "repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts20:21) He does not say, "Repentance, Faith and Prayer". When Jesus commissions the disciples He says that "repentance and remission of sins be preached..." (Lk24:47) He does not say, Repentance and remission of sins after you have them repeat-after-you the 'sinner's prayer'.

See how easily these questions are answered if we see what's -actually- in Scripture?

"Soul winning" tactics certainly increase the numbers of "baptists" and what-have-you. But they don't necessarily increase the number of those whose names are found in the Lamb's Book of Life. Soul -winners- certainly do a lot of "winning" of "souls"...but the big question is: To -WHAT- have they been won? To Christ and His Kingdom...or to that "membership" where they then are expected to come through the doors every time they have meetings...otherwise they are considered "backslidden"..?

When the Ethiopian was immersed subsequent to his "confession-of-faith", Philip then vanished from his sight. (Acts8:39) He did not become a member of the "First Baptist Church of Jerusalem". He continued on his way back home...alone...with the Scriptures. Those who were saved at Pentecost, once the (Jewish) Pentecost celebrations were over, they went back home...individually. When the Philippian jailer was saved, Paul and Silas did not introduce them to the local "Baptist" church...they left town.

When the church in Jerusalem was getting a bit too comfortable in all their unity and communal living, God allowed persecution, which "scattered" them away from each other. But where they went, they went, "preaching the Word". (Acts8:4)

Paul exhorts Timothy, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2Tim4:2) Preach the Word, and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

I do not see anywhere in Scripture where any "sinner's prayer" or "prayer-for-salvation" is taught. Salvation does not come from any human 'incantation' of words -towards- God. Salvation comes when God "draws", and the sinner "responds" to God. Unless God is drawing, the sinner is "going astray" like sheep. (Is53:6) It is not in man to "reach-out-to-God". Man can only -respond- to God's call. When Adam and Eve sinned, they went and hid. It was God who called out, "Adam...where are you?" (Gen3:9)

We've got to get rid of this thinking that CCC "Four Laws" teaches, that all men are reaching out for God. They are not. They are running away. We've also got to get rid of the thinking that assumes that spiritual matters are done with the world's methods. They are not. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God..." (2Cor10:4)

READER:

I received your reply and it really helped clear it up for me. I was thinking the same things you did regarding "salesman tactics" but when I asked the pastor about it in the past he said that you are not selling them, you are giving away a free gift.

VW:

You know how many times I get that reply when sales people come into my store, where the front door has a sign posted "No Solicitors"? 95% of the time. And if I then tell them they are lying, they deny it. They are soooo brainwashed into their salesmanship, that they don't even see that they are lying.

And when this pastor says "you" are giving away a free gift, well, what does Scripture say? From -WHOM- is the gift of salvation? "It is a gift of God" (Eph2:8) -GOD- is the one who gave His Son. (Jn3:16) We are merely messengers.

But in truth, these that are called "soul-winners" are -NOT- giving away a "free" gift at all. When they have "nabbed" their "converts", when they lead in the "repeat-after-me" ritual, they then expect the new convert to come and join 'their' church, and to attend 'their' church regularly, and to contribute to 'their' offerings, and follow in the party line. (Of course, they do this with Scripture to legitimize it) And considering that a repeat-after-me ritual does NOT save, in actuality they have 'bound' the person in fetters of a worst kind of lostness that is well-nigh impossible to be freed from; because they 'think' they are saved because they have performed the ritual, and are amongst other fellow-cult members who give them 'affirmation' of 'belonging'. Sad thing is...the only thing they 'belong' to, is that particular congregation. Their names are not written in the Lamb's Book-of-Life.

Yes...it's a big "con" and "sell-job". But it is not evangelism on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.

READER:

What I am asking since that sounded confusing is this, I have prayed in the past and asked God if I should approach my family members and give them the Good News and have never received a "yes" reply in the form of a conviction to me by the Holy Spirit that yes, this is what I need to do, then if no one else feels convicted either, how will they learn of the Good News? What I have ended up doing is "preaching" to them and turning them off of my own volition, not the Spirit's direction. I guess I just don't understand who and when we should witness to. I know that God wishes that none should perish and I am a willing and able bodied participant.

VW:

If a Believer is in communion with God, the words will come out at the right time. God is often answering our prayer of "should I?" even before we know we need to. "...before they call, I will answer" (Is65:24) So, it is not necessarily something where you will receive a "bright light" and "hear a voice" telling you, "speak to these people". If you are being "in the way" the Lord will "lead" you. (Gen24:27)

However...often, "family" is the last person other family members will hear. Jesus noted that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country, and around family. (Mt13:57) Notice that Peter says to believing wives, to 'live a life' before their unsaved husbands, so that they might be won "without a word". (1Pet3:1) Wives, don't preach and nag at your husbands, nor gossip about them at -prayer- "share" times! Be good wives before them in your behavior.

READER:

So my next question that is really probably at the heart of all this is, do I only witness when the Holy Spirit really convicts me to?

VW:

Indeed... understanding that often, also, a Believer is 'automatically' doing what the Lord wants, because they are in fellowship with the Lord. But yes...there are times the Lord does -NOT- want us to speak. When Paul (and company) were travelling in their missionary journeys, it says, "...they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them." (Acts16:7) Ezekiel was a prophet sent to Israel...and yet, for periods of time God shut his mouth, such that he was not able to speak, until the Lord opened his mouth. (Ezek3:26-27)

READER:

If so, this would mean that the visitation nights that you referred to would be for the most part fruitless unless the Spirit specifically directed you to one person or another.

VW:

Exactly!

READER:

Considering that some people go door to door, unless the Holy Spirit led them to that particular door so-to-speak then again it would be fruitless b/c the Father would not be drawing them, is that right?

VW:

Exactly!

READER:

If this is so, then like I was asking earlier, should you only share with those whom the Spirit lays it on your heart to share with? What if you are willing and able and He never convicts you to share with anyone?

VW:

If He doesn't say "speak" ...then, keep still. Somebody recently unsubscribed, explaining 'why'...that they were of the opinion that salvation is not about doctrine, but love. I soooo wanted to write some things to them, and my heart yearned for their blindness...but I also knew the Lord did NOT want me to write. They had been on the mailing list for quite a

long time. If they were making the decision they did, they had turned their back on the Lord. Nothing more I might say would make a difference. The Lord "knows those who are His" (2Tim2:19) ... and He also knows those who have crossed the line such that the verdict is, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still..." (Rev22:11)

READER:

Last question: How does the Holy Spirit communicate with you? I have been told that He convicts you that you should do such-n-such and that the way you know He is communicating to you is that you feel an undeniable urging? If this is not correct, how?

VW:

You will know. You will know in your spirit. The Holy Spirit "bears witness with" our spirits. (Rom8:16) Quite likely you won't be consciously thinking to yourself "the Spirit is saying to do this" ...if you are in fellowship with the Lord... when the moment comes, you will act appropriately... and when the event is past, you will think back on it and realize how it was the Holy Spirit who directed the event. It's like Jesus said, "The Spirit breathes where He wishes, and you hear His voice, but do not know where He comes from and where He goes. So is everyone who is born from the Spirit." (Jn3:8) (See why that verse isn't talking about "wind"?)

Belief in the Bible Necessary for Salvation? ©2002

READER QUESTION:

I have tried to share my belief recently with a work colleague and it all seems to hinge upon that the un-believer has to accept that the bible is the word of God. If someone states that they do not believe in the bible, for want of a better way of putting it, any move you make towards showing them is redundant. Your opinion would be welcomed, esp. if you can shed any light on how to help another? Maybe, before I can tell people about our Lord, I need to be a better believer. I know that its by faith and grace....but I still find it all a bit of an enigma as to how to start...

VW ANSWER:

First of all, you need to keep in mind the sad fact that -most- people are going down the "broad way" to destruction. (Mt7:13) Also remember that the Lord "knows those who are His" (2Tm2:19), and that no one comes to Jesus Christ unless the Father "draws him". (Jn6:44) And His drawing of anybody is based on His "foreknowledge" of their heart. (Rom8:29) That is one of the things that makes God unique from all other beings in creation, He knows "the end from the beginning". (Is46:10)

So, just because you witness to somebody, does not guarantee that they will come to the Lord in Saving Faith.

Yes, Scripture is the Foundation for salvation: "So then faith is of hearing, and hearing through the Word of God." (Rom10:17)

Even if the person will 'eventually' come to the Lord, do not assume that 'one' conversation will "do-the-trick". If we each look at our own lives, how much coaxing did it take on the part of God's Holy Spirit before He finally got through to us? Do not try to save the person, but be a "faithful" servant (1Cor4:2), and speak 'when' the Lord says speak. And the rest of the time, show your own life to be a "Believer"...because be sure of one thing...now that you've opened up the subject in conversation, you can be sure they will be 'watching' your life, to see of what sort you are. If they won't acknowledge the Scriptures, perhaps they will see "Christ in you, the hope of glory". (Col1:27) They need to see that you are "with Jesus". (Acts4:13)

Just be a faithful servant, and let God worry about the results. He knows the ultimate outcome.

Righteous or Sinner? © 1996

In a recent communication with someone on the internet, I asked the question. Quote: "You speak of following the Lord. I would assume that you would call yourself a 'Christian?' So, for definition of terms, how would you describe a 'Christian?' What is a Christian? What does it take to become one?"

The response came...

"I define a Christian, generally, as a disciple of Christ...someone who follows his [sic] teachings..his [sic] example. More specifically...living a certain life-style. ...I apply the principles of Christ in my everyday life. A principle I have had to work on is loving my neighbor as myself. The problem seems to be that I had it a bit twisted... I could not easily love MOST of my neighbors, and I sure had a hard time loving myself. I knew that I could never truly be of service to those around me until I learned to love myself... to see what was lovable about me...I know who my Source is...I know that I'm loved beyond belief!!!"

Typical of how MOST today would respond, it is preached from the pulpits. Proclaimed by psychology, it is the basis for most New Age beliefs. Includes the name "Christ." It talks of following Christ. Putting faith into action, proclaiming the Second Greatest Commandment... "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk12:31) One is loved by an ill-defined "Source." (a "higher power") One can now love one's SELF.

Perhaps this is how YOU view Christianity? Perhaps this is what has been preached to you?

Dear Reader, let me ask you a very serious question: ...Have you ever heard the Gospel of Salvation?

Have you heard Jesus came to die for "sinners?" Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." (1Tim1:15)

Modern New Age Psychology has infiltrated the "church" and changed the doctrine of salvation to where people are "feeling good about themselves." But the prophet Isaiah said, "We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.." (Isa64:6)

Paul writes about the "Christian" ..."if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." (2Cor5:17)

To be "in Christ" means, among other things, to agree with what Jesus taught. Jesus made the claim, "Those who are well do not need a

physician, but those who are sick...I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Lk5:31-32) And to Peter he said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." (Jn13:8)

In other words...if a person is ALREADY "lovable" and wonderful, they don't need to be cleansed by Jesus' blood...and thus, are not "saved." Are not "in Christ." And will not be invited into the "place" He is "preparing for them."(Jn 14:3)

Let's look at John 3:36 a moment: "He who believes in the son...[that He died for sinners when we were "without ability to save ourselves"(Rom5:6)] ...has everlasting life; And he who does not believe the Son...[he thinks he's already wonderful and full of worth and loveliness..and doesn't need saving] ...shall not see life, but the Wrath of God abides on him."

SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNTS of people Being Saved usually involved the person seeing God and Jesus for Who they are. Righteous, holy, awesome, powerful, unapproachable light.(Isa6:1-4,Rev1:12-16,Acts9:3)

Then, they saw themselves in their nothingness. Isaiah wails, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." John, the disciple "whom Jesus loved," who "was leaning on Jesus' bosom" at the Last Supper, "fell at His feet as dead" when he saw Jesus in His glory.

In recognizing his guilt, Saul, the persecutor, received Jesus' reprimand, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." As Peter preached at Pentecost, illustrating the sin of his audience by reminding them that THEY had crucified Jesus, the Lord and Christ; "they were cut to the heart, and said...what shall we do?" (Acts2:37) They were instructed to "repent."

Possibly the most appropriate illustration of the difference between modern "feel good" theology and true "Biblical Salvation" is the story Jesus told almost 2000 years ago. It is found in Luke 18:9-14.

A Pharisee and tax collector both went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee was the "elite" spiritual leader. He was a "good man." Knew all the verses to all the songs. Knew just how to pray in "King James'ese." Was politically correct in all he preached. And most of all, he REALLY LOVED HIMSELF... and was PROUD of it. He was assured of his "Rightful Place" in heaven because he was "Worth It."

The tax collector was the "scum of the earth." Looked down upon by all. Was rather crude and coarse...and the words out of his mouth were vile. And, coming to "God's presence" he bows to the dirt, beats his breast, and cries out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner. I don't have any right to expect that You, a holy God would even pay any attention to me. I don't deserve your grace. But, if You could see to it somehow...I know that

Jesus came to die for the sins of the world. I'm a sinner. Would it be possible for some of that blood to be accounted to me?"

Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

Man says, "I'm full of goodness and of great value." God says, "Your goodness is like a [dirty rotten smelling] rag, when compared to My holiness." Man says, "I have learned to Love Myself, because I am lovable." Jesus said, "He who loves his life will lose it." (Jn12:25)

People say they "follow Jesus' teachings." Jesus taught, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mt16:24)

To "deny" one's self is the opposite of "self-worth" and "loving self." To "take up his cross" is to lay his life on the line. Those who are "worth" so much, seek self-preservation. Confronted with God's glory, Job uttered in despair, "I ABHOR myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6)

If you are ALREADY "righteous" remember Jesus' words to Peter, "You have no part with Me." Many will say, "Lord, Lord didn't we in Your Name...?" And He promised He will respond, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Mt7:23)

If you want Jesus to "receive you to" Himself (Jn14:3), you must let Jesus wash you, because you are "dirty" ...with sin. "...according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Tit 3:5)

The first question you must ask of yourself... Are you Right- eous? ..or a Sinner? Remember; you cannot become righteous until you have FIRST been a sinner.

The promise: "...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1Jn1:7)

Amen!

Who/What Goes to Heaven? © 1998

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal...immortality. (1Cor15:50-53)

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1Jn3:2)

The plain fact of the matter is, that no human reading this right now is going to heaven. Ok, I can hear the exclamations, "What!?! Didn't Jesus promise to come and 'receive us to Himself?'" (Jn14:3) '..where He is, there we would be? What do you mean, 'We don't go to heaven?'"

Paul teaches us "flesh and blood CANNOT inherit the kingdom of God." What is "flesh and blood?" These human BODIES. God "formed man from the dust of the ground... & man became a living soul." (Gen2:7) We are "of the earth, of dust." (1Cor15:47) When a dead body is committed back to the ground, it is common practice to recite, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Then, it rots.

What kind of things can enter heaven? Well, we know by the opposite of what CANNOT enter. "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie.." (Rev21:27) Paul bewails, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom7:24) This is the same man who wrote most of the Church doctrine. He writes of the "blessed hope and glorious appearing" of Jesus Christ. (Tit2:13)

You see, our bodies are merely our "earthly tent." (2Pt1:14) The "covering" in which we dwell. We do not take them with us. These bodies are all disease-ridden. Subject to mortality. They are the source of all sorts of lusts, and because of fulfilling their pleasures, we commit sin. People dress up their bodies, use the latest beauty products, and critique each other based on "how well" they made their bodies appealing. Commercials, sit coms, business, socializing...all base their agendas on the BODY.

Even after the soul/spirit of the person becomes "new" in Christ (2Cor5:17), he is still in the corrupt "earthly" body. How can such corruption appear before a holy, righteous God? It cannot! Such as we are now, is NOT how we will appear before God when Christ receives us.

When we came to God in repentance, and received Jesus Christ as our Savior (Acts20:21,Jn1:12) because of Jesus' "one-time" sacrifice (Heb9:28), while our salvation was "secured" and "sealed" (Eph1:13); it was not "completed." Our salvation is fully completed when Jesus comes to "receive" us to Himself so that we are "with" Him.(Jn14:3) When we are next to that river of life, where God has wiped away tears, etc.(Rev21:4) But, it is obvious to any astute observer that we are not yet there. "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan...eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our BODY." (Rom8:22-23)

So, while we are saved "in the Spirit"(Rom8:9) and our minds are being "renewed" (Rom12:2); our "bodies" must yet be transformed before we can see the "kingdom of God."(1Cor15:50)

How will this happen? And what will be the nature of the new body? We do not fully know now. But we are given glimpses. Hints.

John says, "we shall be like him [Jesus]."(1Jn3:2) When Jesus came the first time, He came as "water and blood."(1Jn5:6) Since human bodies are over 90% water, this agrees with "flesh and blood."(Heb2:14) And the "life is in the blood."(Lev17:11) He came "physically constructed" just as any other human.(Phil2:7-8,1Jn4:2) As such, along with His "Deity", He was the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Then, when He died and rose again (1Cor15:4) He fulfilled the requirements as the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."(vs20) Jesus' resurrection is the "hope of eternal life,"(1Pt1:3) and is the basis of the Gospel(Acts4:2,1Co15:1)

Not only that, we are told "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." (Ps16:10) Here we have the basis for Christ also being the firstfruits of the "Rapture." If a body was dead four days, it had begun to decay.(Jn11:39) But Jesus was dead only three days.(Mt12:40) He did not undergo decay. So, His "change" also led the way for those who will be changed, without dying. (1Cor15:51,1Ths4:17)

How will the change occur? Instantly. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."(vs52) What do we do to effect the change? We don't. When it says, "we shall be changed," this is an action which will be done "to/upon" us.

What will we become? Well, this is part of the "mystery."(vs51) Paul had been discussing the various kinds of bodies and flesh. It will not be the same kind of flesh we now have.(vs39) Right now we are merely in the "seed" stage. (vs37)(1Jn3:9) While we humans tend to glorify the body; when the seed "dies"(vs36) it actually sprouts and becomes a comparatively large plant.(Mt13:31-32) Thus, too, the Believer will become

something SO MUCH MORE. From corruption to incorruption. Dishonor to glory. Weakness to power. Natural body to spiritual. Now we are like "Adam." Then, like the "Lord from heaven."(vs47,49)

Will we still "recognize" each other? Quite likely. Jesus' voice was recognized by Mary.(Jn20:16) The disciples in the closed room knew Him. And He even retained the scars from the crucifixion. (Jn20:20) However, there are some differences to consider. When He was showing Himself to the disciples He referred to His "flesh and bones."(Lk24:39) And later, Paul writes of the Church being part of His body, "his flesh and bones."(Eph5:30) And since humanity is "flesh and blood" the speculation is that Jesus' resurrected body does not have "blood." And as such, neither will ours. This mystery I prefer to "ponder in the heart."(Lk2:19) And then, what of His constant habit of simply appearing and disappearing.(Jn19,Lk24:31)

While we see these glimpses, "it has not yet been revealed [fully] what we shall be, but we know..we shall be like Him."

Seeing these little hints, what should be our attitudes? Spending our time rejoicing and speculating further as to what "we" will be like? And all the wonderful things in store for "us"? No!!!

"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."(1Jn3:3) Keeping "unspotted from the world."(Jas1:27) As we see the work of Christ in conquering corruption and mortality, as God "gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" we should "therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."(1Cor15:57-58)

Amen!

The church? Not Getting into Heaven © 1998

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ...A mixed multitude went up with them also... with most of them God was not well pleased...they were scattered in the wilderness. (~1Cor10:1-5, Ex12:38)

"..they could not enter in because of unbelief." (Heb3:19)

"For I know this, that... savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:29-30)

Here we see some characteristics of the "church" (small "c") which will keep its members from reaching God's presence in heaven.

Notice what Paul says about Israel; first of all remembering that Abraham had been specially chosen out of Ur to become the father of His special people.(Gen12:1-3) And later Israel would be called the "apple of His eye."(Deu32:10) God had delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. They had ALL passed through the Red Sea; typical of "baptism." (1Cor10:2) They had continual "communion," partaking of "Christ" (vs4) as they drank from the rock smitten for them, and ate "angel's food."(Ps78:25) They were "Personally" led by God with the pillar of cloud/fire. Here we have a group that MOST CERTAINLY has to be God's people. See..they even have a tabernacle, priests and sacrifices. Look what God is doing among them!

Today we see a "great move of god" in the world! Just look at the thousands and millions engaging in dialogue. Learning to love one another.(Jn13:35) And breaking down barriers and becoming "united." (Jn17) Eradicating animosities due to ethnic differences.(Gal3:28) Just look at all the "signs & wonders" being performed as people are "healed" and demon-possessed..uh! Sorry! "spirit-filled."(Joel2:28) We have great big huge buildings where people attend by the thousands. They sing the songs and hymns. Listen to their preachers. They go forward in tears of "commitment." They engage in campaigns to bind demon spirits and evangelize... Oh! Sorry! With the new ecumenism, evangelism (Mt28:19) is no longer needed, is it, because we are now "working out our differences" and becoming "one." See how "triumphant" the church has become!

"But with MOST OF [Israel] God was not well pleased."(vs5) The things written, were written as examples NOT TO be followed.(vs6)

Even as Moses was on the mountain receiving the law, Israel was bowing down to a golden calf and worshiping it, like the heathens around them.(vs7) Today that which is labeled "christian" jointly worships with heathens; catholic-baal, mother-earth animal-spirit guides, eastern mysticism. In heathen worship Israel engaged in sexual immorality. (vs8) One of the fastest growing male cults today engages in the teachings of ancient phallic worship; even claiming that Jesus was such a person! What about all the "little christs" running around, pretending to wield God's power.

As then, so today. With MOST OF THEM God is not well pleased. What happened to those with whom God was not well pleased? They were "scattered in the wilderness."(vs5) They did not get to go into the land of "promise." For Israel, their ultimate redemption out of Egypt was to take possession of the land which had been promised to their forefather, Abraham.(Gen13:15) And why did they not take possession? "Sin" and "unbelief." (Heb3:17,19)

When was the last time you heard a sermon from your pastor about "sin" and the need for "repentance"? When was the last time any well-known "famous" evangelist spoke on these topics? They no longer like to speak of these things, because they are "uncomfortable" to talk about. People will not flock to their meetings in droves. (Remember the "broad way" and the "MANY who go in by it." -Mt7:13) It is much more "pleasant" to talk about God's "love" and "mercy." But, without sin as the reference point, God's love, mercy and grace have no meaning. (Rom5:20) So people are invited to "believe and receive" a Jesus, of Whom they have no idea what He did, nor why. They preach "as many as received Him.."(Jn1:12), ignoring Christ's command to preach "repentance and remission of sins." (Lk24:47) ...without which, "receiving Him" is an impossibility. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, (Acts17:30)

What is the source of this false christianity? Israel had a "mixed multitude" that joined them out of Egypt. Often in Scripture, "Egypt" is a type of the "world." To "come out of" Egypt is like repentance. To "go to Egypt" a type of backsliding. So, the people of the world mixed in with Israel. They became a part of Israel, sharing in all the blessings God was showering upon His people.

Jesus spoke of the enemy scattering the wheat with tares. (Mt13:25) What happens in a garden or field in which weeds are allowed to proliferate? Either production is greatly reduced, or in severe cases, the weeds can completely overtake the desired plants. In similar fashion, we have a church that has engaged in recruiting the unsaved to participate, lead; and even teach and preach, before they were proven. (1Tm3:6,5:22) Just as a thistle never becomes a potato plant, and can, in fact, hinder the potatoes that are there; an unsaved person "ministering" will never become a Christian (capital "C"); but you can COUNT ON the True Believers

becoming compromised. As these "thistles" preach a watered down "gospel" nobody truly is saved. And it, thus, takes no time at all to end up with a "church" containing no Believers.

Wake up, Christian!! The "thistles" have been preaching for decades. Is it any wonder there are hardly any Believers in the pews!!

This leads to the other source. The men "from among yourselves." (Acts20:30) You see, the "apostasy" prophesied in 1Tm4:1~ and 2Tm3:1~ is not something which comes from "atheistic communism" or "persecuting Muslims." It has come FROM WITHIN the organized "church." If "thistles" have gained a foothold and are preaching, what do their messages produce? More thistles. Weeds. Not "wheat" (Christians). A non-Believer CANNOT PRODUCE a Believing Christian! Note this well! "...a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree..good fruit." (~Mt7:16-18)

What is the outcome for thistles? "At the time of harvest I will say, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them..."(Mt13:30) "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."(Mt7:19)

Are you "of" the church? Are you a product of Wheat, or thistles? Look at what happened to the majority in Israel, as an object lesson. Look at your heart and consider.. "...let him who thinks he stands [because of his church heritage] take heed lest he fall."(1Cor10:12) "If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever."(1Chr28:9)

Amen!

Good Church Member? but Not Saved! © 2000

Before the turn-of-year holidays somebody sent me an e-mail with the following communication:

"What do you think of Job? He didn't need to change his ways, Job 1:1, 1:8, but needed a change of heart, Job 42:6. No doubt Job would represent a person who was saved all along but the emphasis today seems to be on "you don't have to drink or gamble or do drugs, etc., anymore."

Right now I forget the context of this question. It was in response to something of a VW mailing not long ago. But, independently, it and my reply provide a good spring-board to address something briefly.

Job was "perfect and upright, and fearing God, and turning away from evil." (Job1:1) He also saw to his family; if the children did any partying, he would perform the rituals of "burnt sacrifices" on their behalf, 'just in case' they had sinned. (vs5)

Transplant him into today, Job was a 'good church member'. Why... he would have been right at home in the most conservative KJV-only Independent Baptist church. He had all the "appearances" (1Ths5:22) of shunning evil. When satan appears to give account of his comings and goings before God, God challenges satan, (plays 'devil's advocate' with him) Do you see Job...there is none like him in the earth... fearing God and turning away from evil?" He's a "great man of God!"

But Job was not saved.

Job was like VERY MANY people today. They go faithfully to church. They are church members. They teach Bible classes, sing in the choir, appear at every soul-winning "visitation" night. Any time the church doors are open, they're there. They don't wear cosmetics, don't drink, gamble, smoke, dance, go to movies...and they read their Bible and 'pray' every day. But they are not saved.

Job also -knew- his own righteousness. He would have argued his case like the best of the most conservative Baptists. Job rises up, "Truly, I would seek to God, and to God I would put my plea...Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue with God." (Job5:8,13:3)

Well...like all the self-righteous in today's churches, Job had never actually -MET- God!

Once Job and his 'comforters' are finished expending words, then it says, "And Jehovah answered Job out of the tempest and said, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like

a man, for I will question you; and you teach Me." (Job38:1-3) Ok, Job, you want to argue with Me...? Let's go to it! Show me what you got!!

After God speaks awhile He asks Job, "Shall a reprover contend with the Almighty? He who reproves God, let him answer it." And Job replies, "Behold, I am vile! What shall I answer You? I will put my hand to my mouth." (40:1-4) You see, when humanity truly sees Who and What God is, "every mouth" is stopped, and all come under God's judgment. (Rom3:19) God is in Heaven; we are but dust. Let your words be few. (Eccl 5:1-2)

God speaks some more, revealing Himself to Job. And then, the truth comes out. In all his (self)-wisdom Job, "declared, but did not understand things too wonderful for me; yea, I did not know." (42:3) And Job confesses about his past up to that point, "I have heard of You by hearing of the ear..." (42:5)

In all his rituals Job had only heard -OF- God. But had never actually "met" Him, like we read of Abraham, where after God reveals Himself to him, it says, "And he believed in Jehovah. And He counted it to him for righteousness. (Gen15:6)

So, now that Job has actually met God, what is his response? Frolicking and running up to God, jumping into His 'lap' and greeting Him with, "How'ya doin' big daddy?" Not hardly!!! [Ed: please pardon this blasphemous flippant expression. But we're making a point here! This is how many people view God!]

"..but now my eye has seen You; Therefore, I despise myself, and I have repented on dust and ashes." (vs5b-6)

Boldness to "come..to the throne of grace" (Heb4:16) is not possible until we have become humble, and then received the redemptive work of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. (vs14, Jn1:12)

It is not enough to know -OF- God's Law, and -OF- the Scriptures, and -OF- Jesus' death to redeem the sinner; having a wonderful Statement of Faith. One must actually MEET GOD. When such a meeting takes place, I have yet to find any Scriptural example where the person did not shudder in awe at God's holiness, and their own 'despicableness'. When we actually meet God, we are -NOT- "worth a lot to Him". We are worthless. And a person who has been "transformed by the renewing of the mind" (Rom12:2), will not rise up in self-righteous indignation to defend "self".

Dear Reader... HAVE YOU -MET- GOD?

Job wasn't saved? © 2000

Response to: Good Church Member? ..but not Saved!

QUESTION:

If Job didn't get saved until chapter 40 [Ed: ch42], how could he refer to his redeemer in chapter 19? 25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: 26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

And are you saying Job didn't trust in God? What about chapter 13:15? "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:"

Though Job wasn't a Baptist, he sounds pretty confident of his faith and trust in God. Why would God pick a man who belonged to Satan's kingdom as an example of righteousness; one that God declares "was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil"?

[Editor]:

There were other notes, too. One suggesting that Job's trials were used by God to bring him 'closer' to God.

ANSWER:

"Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Or do you not yourselves perceive that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are worthless ones?" (2Cor13:5)

For you "Bible-believing Christians" this may be one of the most profound studies we ever do. This study is likely not for the openly 'wolves' or other unbelievers. This is for you who think you are 'confident' in your Faith in Christ; to do as this opening verse says, "examine yourselves..." to BE SURE you are in the Faith. What will be presented here will include some things I have wrestled with in my own life. For you who have read my testimony, I mention being saved at age 5. But I don't remember that occasion being one of sorrow, humility and repentance as was the night when my unequal yoke left, when I was like Job in ch42, 'abhorring' myself. I have done a lot of soul-searching, wondering if I actually 'really was' saved at age 5, because what happened the night my ex left was of such a dramatic nature in my spirit and soul that what came after made that which was before seem like unregeneracy, by comparison.

While I might have only been 5 years old, when I have gone back in my memories, if we understand Paul's words "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God" because a Believer is one in whom "the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom8:16,9) that becomes the test of our 'savedness'. As Paul says, to "perceive that Jesus Christ is in you." In my case, while I don't remember every little detail about that evening at

age5, nor the -words- I prayed, I have concluded that I -was- saved back then. And the Lord's hand has certainly been on me throughout my life.

However, there are many Bible-believing "Christians" who, when they wrestle with this, cannot come to the same conclusion. They go to the churches with the correct names on the front doors, and are members. They know the correct doctrines, and can recite Scripture till the cows come home. But if they look within their own hearts, which is where Jesus looks (Heb4:12) they cannot discern Jesus' presence there. They don't know. They're never -quite- 'sure'. They continually ask "how do you know when the Holy Spirit is in you?" They have to ask, because they don't know what it is like. They don't have the Lord. And yet they are quite comfortable with Christian expressions, "Praise the Lord", "Lord willing", "Jesus and me", "I'm Heaven-bound", "I love Jesus", "Jesus loves me, this I know..." And they can quote Scripture and preach.

Many would have said, "Look at Billy Graham. Such a man of God. Do you see him? He preaches '...the Bible seeeez!!!'." But we have seen recently, in his own words, he's not sure if he's going to Heaven or not. He doesn't have the assurance of "being righteous" before God.

We already noted that Job expressed, "I have heard -OF- You.." (42:5) According to Paul's test, he did not "perceive that Jesus Christ was -IN-.." him. He only knew -OF- God. He was not yet a "friend of God" (Jas2:23,Jn15:15) He had not yet "believed -INTO- Jesus".(Jn12:11-LITV)

Also, please note the -kind- of "righteousness" Job had. He was "righteous in his -OWN- eyes." (32:1) Yes, he faithfully did the 'works' of sacrifices, and to all concerned, he -appeared- to be righteous. After all, just look at him... we are always seeing the smoke rising from his sacrifices over across the hills. But Romans is full of this discussion how God's Righteousness does not come about through law. "All these things have I kept from my youth..." (Mt19:20) But Job yet "lacked one thing". To be introduced to the Holy God, and to respond.

So, what about the opening question? After all, it was -God- who is saying to satan, "there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.." (1:8)

If I were to claim total understanding of this statement by God, I would be foolish. I wasn't there that day. But let us consider a likely scenario. Also let us realize that God and satan are having an argument. Satan, of course, is the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev12:10) Satan has been challenging God, "I will be like the Most High". (Is14:14) While satan always "seeks whom he may devour" (1Pt5:8), it seems in this instance that God, knowing it was about time for Job to be converted, is challenging satan. Perhaps in a similar way that Jesus challenged His disciples when He asked, "From where may we buy loaves that these may eat?" (Jn6:5) He asks the question to get them thinking and to be aroused to fully see

what is about to take place, and it says, "..He said this to test him, for He knew what He was about to do." (vs6) Satan, do your best to Job (take your best shot), but in the end when you're finished, see what I AM ABOUT TO DO with him.

You see, God "foreknew" and "predestined" those being saved. (Rom8:29) "..the foundation of God stands firm, having this seal, The Lord -knew- the ones being His.." (2Tm2:19) God already knew what Job's response would be, when faced with God's glory. But satan (and the other cloud of witnesses-Heb12:1) didn't know this yet. So God 'challenges' satan. You see Job there? See how wonderful ('righteous') he is? He is sacrificing all the time, and living a good life. Well, satan just cannot let the challenge go, without a counter-challenge. If he is to be "like the Most High", he needs to have a "go at" Job, to try to yank him away from God. But in the end, satan would fully understand, were God to say to him, 'Job is Mine, and there is nothing you can do to make things otherwise.'

And along these lines, one little "scare tactic" that many emotionalize during "altar calls". They say things like, "what if a truck runs over you before you get home, and you haven't been saved?" But you see, God puts limits on what is allowed in a person's life, when He knows they are His. He tells satan, "..but save his life." (Job2:6) If a person dies before they are saved, God already knew that they would never repent before Him. And repeated emotional appeals will make no difference! However, they certainly will be without excuse! (Rom1:20)

Recently somebody sent me an e-mail with a "study", which among other things, proclaimed that God is -not- "omniscient". When He asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac the claim is that He, God, didn't know what Abraham's response would be, thus He responds, "Now I know that you are a God-fearer..." (Gen22:12) But such a person clearly does not understand one of God's primary distinguishing features, when compared to any others that are called "gods". He is "declaring the end from the beginning and from the past things which were not done, saying, My purpose shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." (Is46:10)

You see, when it comes to those "whom He foreknew" and "predestined" (Rom8:29) we are told that He foreknew them "before the foundation of the world.." (Eph1:4) Before we were ever formed in the womb, everything about us -was- (already) written in God's "book". (Ps139:16) So, while Job had not yet come down off of his 'self-righteousness' and 'repented in dust and ashes', God knew what the results would be. Thus, He could proclaim Job as being "righteous". It's already -been- a "done deal" since before the creation. So, Satan, it might be a few more days or weeks yet before he is converted... but Job is Mine! God 'already' saw the end of Job's ordeal, and his salvation.

In Job's case, he was a person who appeared to already be righteous; but he needed to be saved. On the other hand, Saul/Paul was persecuting

Christians, a real scoundrel ("sinners of whom I am chief" 1Tm1:15), when Jesus stopped him up short. Remember how Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Lk5:32) And to Peter He says, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." (Jn13:8b) If Job was already so 'righteous' that he didn't need God's cleansing, he could never have been saved.

The account of Job -starts- with him being (supposedly) "righteous". But we know that all mankind is BORN in "iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (Ps51:5) That when God looked down from heaven, He saw that we've "all turned aside" (Ps14:3) We have no recorded account that Job was born any differently than anybody else. He was born of Esau's lineage. (Job1:1, Gen36:28, Lam4:21) In spite of all his self-righteous arguments, credos, testimonies and proclamations, Job was a sinner.

The savedness of a person is understood by looking into the heart. (Rom2:29, Jer17:9) It is not based on what a person was before God introduces Himself to them; whether they had appeared to be righteous (like Job), or were scoundrels (like Saul/Paul). Jesus sees into that place. He knows each one of us "soul and spirit".(Heb4:12)

Where is your heart? Who is your master? I know of a person not long ago who was falling in love with a "godly woman". All the outward signs were there that this person loves God. But when asked, if the Lord were to require it, would she "give her life for the Lord", she responded to him that she would "go through anything with the man she loved." While such a sentiment is noble, it begs the question.

Many people have died as "martyrs". Catholic martyrs died at the hands of Protestants. Protestant martyrs died at the hands of Catholics. But both Catholics and Protestants (many of those fathers of the Reformation, "great men of God") persecuted and martyred both Christians and Jews. When one reads Fox's 'Book of Martyrs', after about the first couple of centuries the martyrdoms become less and less "for Christ" and more and more "as Protestants". What good is it to "give my body to be burned" (1Cor13:3) if it is not out of loving Him, Jesus Christ?

If even somebody like Billy Graham is not saved, what about you? In the world of that day, Job would have appeared to be like Billy Graham. In Job's case, when met by God, he repented. What will become of Billy? His life is not yet over. He still has time to repent. Let us hope he does before it is eternally too late.

But you see, it is christendom full of "Jobs" who will be screaming and wailing to the Lord in that Day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name..and in Your name do many works of power?" (Mt7:22) We often cite this passage regarding charismania's 'signs and wonders' movement, but let us not also forget the 5 virgins without oil in their lamps. (Mt25) They

had "lamps". People could look at them with their beautiful lamps and say, "look at that wonderful Christian". But they were without oil. They did not have the Holy Spirit. (Rom8:9, Zech4:2-6) They are like my ex, who although she played the game of being a "Christian" (and was even baptized in a Baptist church), always saw the "darkness" within herself. (Mt6:23) They are always like the Pope and Billy Graham, doubtful of their eternal destiny. They do not "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, having been conformed to His death." (Phil3:10) They are not "living sacrifices" (Rom12:1) because they have not "died with Christ" (2Tim2:11, Rom6:2-8) They have only gone 'forward' and made 'commitments' to "do better...from now on". And once they've done that, they have learned the jargon, "I'm saved..I love Jesus..He is my Redeemer..I'm on my way to Heaven..He lives, Christ Jesus lives today, He walks with me, and talks with me, along life's narrow way" (just like Job -19:25) But they have not "been to Jesus for His cleansing power". They are not "washed in the blood of the Lamb". In their quiet moments, away from the loud happy singing of the crowd of people who are busy 'praising the Lord', they are not really -quite- sure if when "you ask me how I know He lives?" that He [actually] "lives within my heart" or not.

To the ones who only 'look like' Christians, because they have their "appearances" (1Th5:22-kjv), and are carrying their shiny lamps with no oil, Jesus will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me, those working lawlessness." (Mt7:23) The door will be "shut" and He will say, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." (Mt25:10-12)

Dear Reader: Has God approached you? Has He been "drawing" you? (Jn6:44) What have you responded? Have you given -everything- to Him? Well, unlike what the modern invitations would suggest, you have -nothing- TO 'give' Him! Modern invitations suggest you give to God everything you have, and let Him make you into something 'better'...to "fix" your life and "heal" you. But a response to such an invitation will not save you.

Rather... you need to DIE! Have you died? You cannot receive a "new birth" (Jn3:3) unless you "fall into the ground and die" (1Cor15:36, Jn12:24)

I dare say that most 'conversions' happen for people who want to make their lives "better". But they have never died. That's the scary part. When one dies "there is no memory...work, knowledge, planning" or -control- in death. (Ecc1:11,9:10) But without death, there is no resurrection with Christ unto Eternal Life. (Rom6:5)

The one beloved was asked, as a Christian, would they be willing to lay down their life for the Lord (because of persecution). But, to even become a Christian in the first place, you must die (spiritually). Die to self, die to sin, die to the world, die to family...yes, and even die to that closest of human relationships...your spouse. (Mt19:25-30)

Dear Reader: we already asked if you have "met God?" Now, a new question... HAVE YOU DIED?

Amen!

By the way....

Before this Q/A on Job was mailed, there's already been some upset people; accusing me of going off the deep end where Job is concerned. How can I 'disagree' with God when He said Job was "righteous" in ch1. Just a couple of thoughts, that didn't really fit into the accompanying Q/A, for you to mull over in your minds:

If Job was truly righteous (saved) in ch1, and it wasn't the case that God was using the expression (perfect & upright) to challenge satan (or something similar), as we suggested, Why? Why did Job -NEED- to "repent in dust and ashes" in ch42? Ones who are truly righteous and justified in God's sight do not need to repent. But Job did. His own heart and conscience told him he was vile (40:4) in God's sight. He 'needed' to repent. Just like Isaiah needed (and received) cleansing. (Is6:5-7)

If Job was a child of God, why did he not know God's presence in his dire circumstances? And yet he complains in bitterness, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" (23:3) I can tell you from personal experience, during the darkest time in my life 9 years ago, when I felt like everything else had crumbled around me, the ONE THING I -knew- was God's presence in my heart. I -knew- His love for me, even though, at the time, I was hurting soooo badly. Job did not have that.

If Job was saved, why are his first comments ones of "let the day perish in which I was born.." (3:3) If he was saved, a child of God, and had assurance of being in God's presence, why was he not rather crying out, "God take me to be with You!?" This is what Paul wished for as he had a "desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better..." (Phil1:23) But instead of pleading to go be with God, he is wishing he didn't exist. Again, he did not have a 'personal' relationship with God, -yet-. He was not yet like Abraham, a "friend of God". He didn't KNOW GOD... He only knew -OF- God. He could not say with David, "The Lord is my Shepherd" and have the assurance as he was at that moment in what seemed like the "valley of the shadow of death" that God was "with" him. (Ps23) He was not doing as David did when he was in dire straights, calling upon God and asking for His deliverance. Instead, the primary gist of all his discourses is regarding "how good" a person he, himself, was, and how he wanted to speak with God (if, only, he could find Him) about that fact, and get some "justice around here". The attitude that all this "just isn't fair".

Now, if you are still struggling about Job, perhaps it is because some of the same issues exist in your own heart? Perhaps you can't accept the fact

that Job was not saved; because if you accepted that, then you would have to conclude that you, too, yourself, are not saved..?

Remember, Job appeared to be righteous. And like we began, the Q/A was written with "Bible-believing christians" in mind. People who consider themselves to be saved...but you're not. When you pray, you feel like your communication goes into empty space...and you only wish you knew "where you could find Him". (When you look at things honestly) God is not your "Friend". If you were to stand face-to-face with Jesus, you could not "look Him in the eye" and say with the song, "Nothing between my soul and the Savior" because you know that "your iniquities have come between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, from hearing..." (Is59:2) You cannot stand before God with a "good conscience". (Acts23:1) Your conscience "accuses" you, (Rom2:15) and you don't want to stand before God because you know your "secrets" will be revealed. (2:16)

But you cannot hide from God. Everything about you is "naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb4:13)

Amen!

He did not know the Lord © 2005

"Now Samuel did not yet know Jehovah, nor was the Word of Jehovah yet revealed to him" (1Sam3:7)

What is the context of this verse? The familiar story of the little 'boy' Samuel, at night, sleeping next to the Ark of the covenant. (vs3) Wasn't only the high priest to be there, once a year? Well, this is what the passage says: "...where the ark of God was, where Samuel was lying down"

Samuel, as a boy, had been given back to God by his mother. She had been barren; and so when God answered her prayers to give her a child, she 'returned' the child, Samuel, to God's service. Samuel was working around the tabernacle, helping Eli the high priest. One of his chores was to "open the doors of the house of Jehovah" in the morning. (vs15)

It is God's intention to make of Samuel a prophet; the prophet who will eventually anoint David. Is not the one who anoints, greater than the one who is anointed? Just a little tidbit to chew on, there. We look at David, and read God's prophecies to/about him, and understand that David was the prophetic 'father' of the Messianic lineage. But who anointed David? As such, while we often think of Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel as having been 'great' prophets, which they were (and Daniel was even called "greatly beloved" Dan9:23,10:11,19), we often forget about Samuel. But at one point, for even as great as Samuel was to become, this passage says that he didn't 'yet' -know- the Lord.

Does this mean that, if he had died, he would not have gone to Heaven? Well, being of Godly parents, as Paul explains to us, he was "holy". (1Co7:14)

He was serving in God's tabernacle. What else was he doing? Whatever the case, he was not banned from sleeping next to the ark. He was next to the sacrifices, day-in, day-out. He learned every ritual that was ever performed, from the sacrifices for vows, sacrifices for cleansing of leprosy, circumcisions, bitter water of jealousy, etc. Somebody observing him in service would have assumed he knew the Lord.

But he did not know the Lord. That's what the passage tells us.

There's a great -many- 'christians' who do not know the Lord. In fact, -most- "christians" do not know the Lord. First of all, most [c]hristians are not true [C]hristians. They have come "some other way" (Jn10:1) But also, of those who are [C]hristians, having "remissions of sins" through repentance (Lk24:47), there are many like Samuel. They are in God's temple, serving God, doing ministry, going through all the rituals, going through all the motions... BUT THEY DO NOT KNOW the LORD.

As I explain from time to time, there is nothing I ever assert with strength, that I have not either been there, done it, experienced it or witnessed it. Of the matter of this lesson I have first-hand experience.

I was 'saved' at the age of five: that is, I prayed to receive Jesus "into my heart" as my Savior. This I did willingly (I was not coerced) in the faith of a 5-year old, not understanding complex doctrine. (What child does? Mt18:3-4) At the time I didn't know that 50 years later I would be questioning whether my father was even saved. But I can look back upon my life, and I -know- that I was saved, because the Holy Spirit was at work in my life. And like Samuel, I grew up -in- the 'ministry', as a missionary's kid, and then a pastor's kid. I also -did- everything that typically comprises ministry. Practically every form of music ministry... I've done it; and also preached, taught, did radio ministry, directed VBS and church Nativity programs. I've been in little tiny 10-15 person congregations, as well as done music in front of over 10,000 people in stadium-like settings. If I ever moved and found a new church, it did not take long at all for the Spirit to witness through me that I belonged to the Lord, and I would get roped into service of whatever nature.

But something was to happen to show me that, comparatively... I DID NOT KNOW THE LORD. If you've read my testimony, you know how I married an unequal yoke. After 15 years, she up-and-left one day; having prepared her departure to be sure I would feel the full 'guilt' for -her- departure. I -was- guilty, but not of what she was spreading the lies to everyone she knew. I was guilty, in that even though I had felt a tug that she was not a believer, I didn't listen to the Holy Spirit. I was guilty, in that I had allowed the world into my life. I was guilty, in that I had allowed myself to be persuaded to follow into the -ways- of apostasy. So, the Lord -met- me that night, and I saw 'clearly' many things. And by the time that night was complete with the Lord showing me a picture of myself as if in a mirror, and my confessions, in my spirit I also -knew- that, -NOW-, I was "ready" for service. Even though my whole life up to that point had been one in "ministry", I was only 'now' actually "ready". I was cleansed.

And the weeks/months that followed, I also -knew- the Lord. As He was teaching me things, there was another year that I did some more -traditional- 'ministry' service. But then after a couple of years, when I had fully "come out of" Babylon (Rev18:4) the Lord 'called' me to begin this ministry. And ever since VW has been going, I have not once done any of those old-style 'ministry' -things-.

There was a man, years prior, whose meeting I attended. In fact, I helped out with accompaniment with his music. But as he was speaking, he was narrating this one particular day he had... How he was driving to such-n-such place, and then "the Lord said to turn off this road", and this and that, and "the Lord said to do...blah, blah, blah". I had never before heard a present-day person speak in such a manner. And it was of a totally

different spirit from the charismatics who would pontificate, "The Lord told me to tell you! I have a word!" But this was a calm, matter-of-fact recounting of what was obviously 'truth'. It was the -nature- of what his life consisted.

You know, we read in the Bible how God would speak to people, and tell them things. If the passage didn't indicate that the person had seen a dream or vision, the question would be: "how?" did God speak to them? Did they hear a 'voice'. How? Through my early life I was like that. I was intrigued by those Biblical accounts of God "speaking" to someone. Even had discussions with others, as we would 'speculate' as to 'what' that was.

We DID NOT KNOW THE LORD.

It's like writing to the president: Dear Mr. President, %White House, Washington, DC. Perhaps a reply even comes, from So-n-so, secretary to the President: "On behalf of the president, I reply to your letter". So the person excitedly calls all their friends, "I got a letter from the president!" Perhaps they even frame it, so they can show it to all their friends, like my grandmother did when I was a kid. But they DO NOT KNOW the president.

A person might even study all -about- the president, learning every little factoid there is to know. But still, any reply comes: "on behalf of" the president....

Even, the Whitehouse switchboard operator may not KNOW the president. For any of you who have seen the movie "Air Force One", where the president's family and other officials have been taken hostage in mid-air, Harrison Ford (acting the part of the president) has slipped out of the escape pod before it was ejected, and he is now seeking about how to thwart the terrorists and rescue the hostages, and calls the Whitehouse with a cellphone; get's the switchboard operator and proclaims, "This is the president, transfer me to...blah, blah, blah" And the switchboard operator takes issue with him, as though it is a 'prank' call, "YaRight! and I'm the queen of England!" (or something to that effect) He tells her to check some specification that only the president and certain others would know about, and she then suddenly realizes it's -really- him, and patches him through. She did NOT KNOW him such as to recognize his voice.

There's many Christians who know 'specifications', but they do not know the Shepherd's 'voice'. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (Jn10:27)

There are a lot of people who have "prayed -the- prayer" but have never met the Lord. Many have walked the aisle, and prayed to receive Jesus, but have never talked to God, nor heard His voice. There are many people who read the Bible and pray, but never get direction from the Lord. Many people hold to "the faith", but in their heart it is like looking down a long tunnel, and they cannot see the other end; all they know is "specifications"

of the Christian life. Even though they speak of "faith", for them it -is- a "blind" faith, because they do not know the -reality- of the Most High. For as much as they might wish to psyche themselves up emotionally to simulate a 'spiritual' experience, coming away from a meeting at church and 'feeling' all warm-n-fuzzy inside, when they get home, in their room, in 'secret', the TRUTH is that God is not in their little room with them, because IN TRUTH, they do NOT "know" the Lord.

When somebody who truly -does- know the Lord speaks of "the Lord told me", they don't understand it, because they have never heard His voice; they think, 'Yeah right! Who does he think he is? Does he think he has a special pipeline to God?' (You see, the line between those who are truly saved, and those who are not, can be fuzzy to distinguish, when a person does not know the Lord) They have never been confronted by the Angel of the Lord with the flaming sword, such that their donkey collapses under them. They have never been blind, sitting by the side of the road calling out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" to then have the invitation, "The Master is calling for you." They've never been lurking around to -truly- find out who Jesus is, to have Him call to them, "Zacchaeus, come down from the tree...where you are hiding...I want to come to your house and get acquainted" They have never heard the knocking at the door, "Let me in...I want to have fellowship with you" (Rev3:20)

They don't understand Rom8:16, because they have never had the "witness" of the Holy Spirit; because in the case of those who are not saved, they do NOT have the Holy Spirit. (Rom8:9) From experience I can attest that a True Believer -can- know the Spirit's 'witness' in their own heart, life and ministry, even though they do not yet know the Lord. But most don't even have the Spirit's 'witness' in their lives. They may have had some emotional highs from time to time, and thought it was something 'spirit-UAL'...but then, when they come down off that high, and they feel agitated, they do not know the 'presence' of the Lord in their soul, the 'calm' that He brings, even if things around them are in turmoil.

They have never met the 'president' face-to-face, shaken hands, gone for a walk, met for lunch, come over for BBQ cook-out, played a round of golf together, spent a week-end at the cabin together going fishing, etc. They have only stood in line, filled out the forms, and gotten the certificate in the mail.

There was a man whom Jesus comes up to and asks: "Do you believe into the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I may believe into Him? And Jesus said to him, You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you. And he said, Lord, I believe! And he did homage to Him." (Jn9:35-38) At that moment, he -knew- the Lord. Prior to that, he had mud applied to his eyes, was told to go wash, gets his sight, and then after confrontation with the temple rulers where he testifies about the Lord and proclaims Him 'Lord', gets excommunicated. He has stepped

out in faith, and even suffered persecution for the Lord. But he had not yet 'met' the Lord. He did not yet 'know' the Lord.

"If you seek Him, He will be found by you" (2Ch15:2) Jesus said, "Seek, and you will find" (Mt7:7)

But in every example in Scripture, what we see is: God -seeking- out man. Job was challenging: "But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue with the Mighty God." (Job13:3) Let's talk man-to-man. So then God comes down and presents Himself to Job, and says, "...gird up your loins like a man...and you declare unto Me..." (Job38:3, 40:7) And when Job finally 'meets' God, what does he do? Whimpers away: "I have put my hand to my mouth" (40:4) and: "I despise myself, and have repented in dust and ashes." (42:6)

If it were up to us, well: "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, each one to his own way" (Is53:6) Adam, when he heard God approaching to visit, runs and hides; and God calls out: "Where are you?" (Gen3:9) God displays Himself to Moses from the burning bush, and when Moses turns aside to look, it is -God- who calls out to Moses to take off his sandals, "the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Ex3:5)

We cannot come to Jesus, except God "draws" us to Him. (Jn6:44) When there is face-to-face fellowship with God, it is God who says, "I, Jehovah, reveal Myself..." (Nu12:6)

I don't know... perhaps not 'all' Believers are meant to have this kind of relationship with the Lord? After all, in this last passage God is talking about how He calls His 'prophets'... His forthtellers, His preachers. However, I have known some 'ordinary' people (non-ministers) who testify of this same sort of KNOWING of the Lord.

I don't know what other believers have with the Lord. I can only testify to "what great things the Lord has done for me" (Mk5:19) I cannot "judge another's servant" (Rom14:4) After I 'met' the Lord; or rather, was met 'by' Him; the occasion was as dramatic as though it had been a 'salvation' experience. Thus, I spent quite a bit of time remembering back throughout my life to sort it all out: Had I not really been saved all those years? But concluded, remembering all the many times of the Holy Spirit's "witness" with my spirit over the years, that I indeed -had- been saved. But by comparison, I DID NOT KNOW the Lord all those years. I knew the Word, I knew doctrine, and my heart yearned to serve Him 'more' than I was. That is surely not the witness of an unsaved person. And the persecution I received from the apostasy was certainly unfitting, if I wasn't saved all those years.

Thus, should you, dear Believing reader, 'know' the Lord? Paul's prayer was, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death," (Ph3:10) Have

you submitted to the 'fellowship' of His sufferings? Are you conformed to His death? Unless you do, you likely won't. Most who call themselves "christian" today are too busy chasing after the world: its wealth, its entertainment, its enticements, its lusts. Have you desired, like Paul, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss because of Christ. But no, rather, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, that I may gain Christ" (Php3:7-8) ??

Has the Lord tried to get your attention? What have you been looking for in God's voice? Have you recognized His voice when you heard it, and responded? In your knowledge of the Lord are you looking for something Great and Fantastic? Are you busy -PRAYING- 'to' Him...jabbering off at the mouth? Or have you been to the place of Cleansing, Purifying, Lamentation and Weeping, with Shame and Humility? (Ja4:8-10)

Elijah had just finished a 'Great' campaign. At his command there had been drought for over three years. Then in a mighty display of grandeur he had been the instrument of God's fire consuming a water-drenched sacrifice, where he had also prayed that the people would know "that I am Your servant" (1Ki18:36) But now the 'great' prophet is despondent. Lord, I've been very zealous for You, but now they want to kill me. They don't appreciate me and my zeal for them on Your behalf. God sends some more 'great' things: wind, earthquake and fire. But nothing. Then, the "whisper of a small voice". (1Ki19:12) -THAT- is where Elijah and God had some face-to-face time.

I dare say there's a lot of well-intentioned folk out there, who love the Lord sincerely; but their Christianity consists of living their lives and talking -to- God. They are like Martha, bustling around, bothered with many 'things' (Lk10:41); making a lot of clanging noises (1Co13:1) with the pots and pans: See everybody? See what I'm doing! How 'busy' I am for the Lord!

The 'preacher' gives this exhortation: "Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be hasty to say a word before God. For God is in Heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ec5:2)

How did Samuel meet the Lord? The Lord calls to him, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel's response: "Speak, for your servant is listening"

Amen!

Give your life To Jesus? © 2001

Perhaps we now understand why so many people who 'go forward' so often at altar calls are never saved. They are invited to "give your life to Jesus". Trouble is, they are not told that they are "dead" (Eph2:1) They have NOTHING -TO- 'give', other than a grotesque dirty "menstruation cloth" (Is64:6 LIT); remember, the man is not to receive the woman's impurity of menstrual blood (Lev18:19), the same way God does not countenance sin (Is59:2). A dead person does NOT have any life -to- give! This is why Scripture says, "But as many as RECEIVED Him..." (Jn1:12) This "RECEIVING" is the reception of Jesus' life [nephesh], to become "children of God" through believing "in His name".

Perhaps this is why somebody like Dave Hunt is so "confused" about Repentance? (TBC Q/A Jan,2000) When he eventually spoke of repentance in (May,2000) while "[acknowledging] that we are vile sinners" and speaks of "turning from sin", in the next paragraph where he defines repentance he says, "...if we do not repent by turning to Christ through believing in Him.." he displays that he does not understand Biblical repentance which says, "God BE MERCIFUL to me, the sinner". (Lk18:13) That which says, "help my unbelief". (Mk9:24) He essentially equates Repentance as being synonymous with Faith. But they are not the same.

Repentance -realizes- that we are squirming "in [our] own blood", not being cared for, because satan "as our father" (Jn8:44 LIT) abandoned us when we were born "in sin". (Ps51:5) He aborted us, just like the menstruation of the 'morning after' pill. We were "without hope and without God". (Eph2:12) In this scenario, if repentance is the same as "turning to Christ" (as Hunt says), then, this explains why so many are confused into thinking that "repentance is a work". Salvation, and even our faith, is a "gift" of God, subsequent to His "grace" being bestowed when we cried out for mercy. (Eph2:8) Repentance is the realization and acknowledgement that we are in the toilet, about to be flushed down... that we are in that bag, abandoned in the dumpster. And God, "in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph2:7) comes along and sees us "squirming" (LIT) in the blood and says, "'Live! Yes, [He says] to you in your blood, 'LIVE!'" (Eze16:6)

It is God's -pronouncement- of 'Life' upon us. It is "imputed" to us (Rom4:24) Invitations are given to come "Just as I am..." and "Christ receiveth sinful men". But remember that when Jesus invited "come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden" He took the sin -AWAY- "in His own body on the [cross]" (1Pt2:24), and our transgressions are "-REMOVED-..far..from us..as far as east is from west" (Ps103:12), because God does -NOT- receive sinful men!! When we are yet in sin His verdict is, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Mt7:23) "...take him away, and cast him into outer darkness.." (Mt22:13) Jesus' invitation was not to come in order to have fellowship with us and become our friend in our state of "just as I am", but He says, "-I- will -GIVE- you rest". (Mt11:28)

Many invitations for 'salvation' include the song, "is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?" Trouble is, we have nothing to give! The animals of sacrifice were to be "without blemish". (Ex12:5,29:1,etc) We are ravaged by the 'impurities' of sin. We are not 'fit' for sacrifice! Our sacrifice of ourselves is rejected by God, just as Cain's offering of works was. (Gen4:5) Only Jesus was "without blemish and without spot". (1Pt1:19) Only He, Jesus, could "give" anything. Only Jesus could "give His life a ransom". (Mt20:28)

We cannot give ourselves to Jesus. He "has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." (Eph5:2)

You see, as we observed recently from Ephesians ch2, the Faith with which we believed is the "faith -of- Christ" (Gal2:16), which was a "gift" (Eph2:8) -to- us. The Holiness of which we "partake" is "-His- holiness". (Heb12:10) And the "everlasting life" (Jn3:16) we receive is the Life - Jesus- "gave" (Mt20:28) because "Christ lives in me" (Gal2:20). "Christ..- is- our life" (Col3:4) Again, we have come full-circle. Just as the wife 'submits' to her husband and takes on his [nephesh] as he loves her (Eph5:22,25) and she becomes "suited to" him (Gen2:20), this human relationship exemplifies how Jesus "loved the church and gave Himself for it" in order that the church might be "presented to Himself" (vs25-27) It is all "..in Christ.." (2Cor5:17)

His Faith
His Holiness
His Life

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom11:36)

Praying 'the' Prayer © 1998

Oh, the heartache for the Believer who has family members who are unregenerate! The heartache, knowing that in their present condition, they are doomed to an eternity of separation and judgment from God. For those who have already left this mortality, there can be a "pit" in one's stomach of the "finality" of their fate. They have crossed the line where God has decreed, "he who is unjust, let him be unjust still.."(Rev22:11) We may shed some tears, and be in a state of sorrow regarding them for a time; and eventually the Lord gives His "peace" so that we are able to say, "Even so, Amen." (Rev1:7)

A great burden is the one for the Believer who wishes to witness to the unsaved relatives. There are family gatherings/reunions, and the Believer goes, in the hopes of being some small "light" to the siblings. The siblings might see the "change" in the Believer, and long for "some- thing" they-know-not-what. The Believer knows the work God has done in their own life, and aches for the unregenerate. "How" can I "get through" to them?

Of greater burden is relatives and close friends who think they are Saved; but to the Believer, their fruits are obvious...that they are yet lost. They can usually point to an occasion where they "prayed the prayer" while in the company of some supposed "Believer" or at some church function or crusade. But based on their life and heart, it is obvious they don't "know the Lord."

As I was discussing this with a friend recently, he responded back, "Sharing is bad enough, but when that person thinks they know The Lord and they clearly don't is extremely difficult indeed." And to be sure, these relatives are not going to be sweetness and sunshine, but will attack the Believer angrily; as we remember Jesus' words, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." (Mk6:4) As the people of His home town, Nazareth, tried to throw Him off a cliff.(Lk4:29)

But these people have "prayed the prayer!" About which, this friend said further, "I should think that 'prayer' has caused more harm than it ever has done any good."

What is this "prayer" we're talking about? It comes in many forms. Each evangelist has his own variation. People come forward, and are congregated around the platform, and somebody on the platform leads them in a "prayer" which the respondents repeat. Now, having said this "prayer" ...they are told they are now "saved" ...supposedly.

One such "prayer" can be found in Campus Crusade for Christ's "Four Spiritual Laws."

"...The following explains how you can receive Christ: ...the following is a [suggested] prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, I invite you to pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life..."

This particular "prayer" is not being singled out. It is representative of many. But this one is used by many, as I remember we had to memorize it for a Bible School class in "Personal Evangelism."

Before we speak of the ritual of "praying the prayer" let's take a brief look at THIS "prayer." Is it a "good" prayer? Is it doctrinally correct? Do we "need" God? Yes. Should we "thank" Jesus for dying on the cross? Doesn't hurt. Do we "receive" Jesus? Certainly. (Jn1:12) Should we be "thankful" for the salvation, once received? Of course. (Col3:15,Lk7:47) Do we surrender control of our lives to Him? That's what a "slave" is all about.(Rom6:18)

But, if you had been reading along in this tract prior to this "prayer", you would have read a claim that we are all trying to reach to God. Whereas Scripture says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way."(Is53:6) And did you notice what's "missing" from the "prayer?" The Pharisee prayed, "thanking God" (like this prayer), telling God how good and wonderful he was.(Lk18:11) But then, the lowly tax collector (sinner) would hardly dare to lift his eyes towards heaven but instead beat on his breast and said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."(vs13) And Jesus' verdict as to "who" just "got saved" (justified) was...the one who came in humility and repentance.

This CCC "prayer" says nothing of repentance. It "thanks" God for a "forgiveness" when there was no "repentance." The Godly pattern is "repentance" and THEN "forgiveness."(Lk17:4) The message the early Church preached was "repentance...and forgiveness of sins." (Acts5:31) Rather than ever striving to "reach God and the abundant life", mankind is in darkness. The work of salvation "open[s] their eyes, in order to turn [repentance] them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' (Acts26:18) And there is no mention of "believing" in Jesus Christ. (Acts 8:37,16:31) If all a person "prays" is THIS "prayer" HE IS NOT SAVED.

We have a whole generation of unsaved who have "prayed the prayer" similar to this one, assuming that they are now "Christians."

How does Salvation "make its way" to a person? First of all, just as salvation is not by "works..which we have done"(Tit3:5) it is also not by the wooing, salesmanship tactics, emotional appeals of other Human Beings; no matter how "spiritual" or "men of God" they may be, nor how "clever" the tactics. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the FATHER who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by GOD.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned FROM the FATHER comes to Me." (Jn6:44-45) He does this through the Holy Spirit Who "convict[s] the world of sin.." (Jn16:8) Salvation comes about from the person realizing their sinfulness. Realizing that we deserve the "due reward of our deeds" (Lk23:41) as Jesus Christ "pierc[es] even to the division of soul and spirit..and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" as we are all "naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we give account."(Heb4:12-13)

When we truly "meet" God, we see ourselves as "woe is me, for I am undone"(Is6:5) "..now my eye sees You [God]. Therefore I abhor myself and repent.."(Job42:5) When we have met God in this fashion, we can only respond with, "God be merciful to me..."(Lk18:13) That is the true "prayer" to pray, not merely a "suggestion." After such humility, THEN...He promises to "lift you up"(Jas4:10)

If a person has TRULY met God in such a fashion, and is now "coming forward," forget the "ritual prayer." They're ALREADY just "saved." Rejoice with them, and lead them in growth into God's Word. "..as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby," (1Pt2:2)

Amen!

Meeting Jesus © 2004

"Jesus heard that they had driven [the blind man whom Jesus healed] out [of the temple]; and when He had found him, He said to him, Do you believe into the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I may believe into Him? And Jesus said to him, You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you. And he said, Lord, I believe! And he did homage to Him." (~Jn9:35-38)

What does it take to become a disciple of Jesus Christ? A follower of God? We speak much of all the various Scriptural doctrines related to atonement (Ex30:15), propitiation (1Jn2:2), redemption (Eph1:7), Jesus dying on the cross, shedding His blood, rising from the dead (1Cor15:3-4); and man's response in repentance and faith (Ac20:21); and many other related terms.

But what is the actual activity/experience/event of meeting Jesus?

Before we go any further, please do not confuse this question with "works"; something to "do" on behalf of our salvation; because we know that salvation is "not of ourselves...not of works" (Eph2:8-9), it is "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, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Tit3:5-7)

But just as in life, people have their jobs/work that they do to earn a living, they have their 'work' around the house to keep things up. But then there are other times when a person is relaxing, recreating, visiting with family and friends. Activity which has nothing to do with survival...and yet they are "doing" things, "talking" with people. Just because they are not officially "working" does not mean that all activity stops.

Thus: While we know there is no righteous 'deed' a person can 'work' to gain or earn salvation, there is nevertheless some 'activity' involved. A meeting. Conversations. Thinking, pondering, considering, meditating, weighing the concepts, sorting truth from error, counting the cost, etc. (Lk14:28). All this activity is going on in the mind and heart.

So... What is the sequence-of-events by which a person becomes a child of God?

First of all, nobody can follow Christ unless the Father has been drawing (Jn8:44) through the Holy Spirit (Jn16:8-11) in our hearts. (Lk24:32)

But does the mere fact that the Father draws, guarantee the person's obedience to follow Jesus? Is -everyone- who is 'drawn' upon, "predestined...through foreknowledge"? (Rom8:29) God certainly

"foreknew" Israel, but He was "not well pleased" with "most" of them. (1Cor10:5) Because the truth is: that "...not all those of Israel are Israel" (Rom9:6) because of "unbelief". (Heb3:19) The Spirit of God was "striving" with -all- of mankind (Gen6:3), and yet only eight were spared judgment in the ark.

God meets Jacob, and Jacob makes a 'deal' with God: You protect me, and prosper me, and bring me back home in peace, and You will be my God. (Gen28:20-21)

God meets Isaiah, and asks, "Whom shall I send, and who shall go for Us?" and Isaiah replies, "Here am I! Send me" (Is6:8)

God meets Ezekiel, and carries him away into compliance, with Ezekiel dragging his heels in anger. (Ezek3:14)

Jesus meets Nicodemus and explains the "birth from above" (Jn3:3) and what is Nicodemus' response? We aren't told directly. But when they are plotting against Jesus, he raises his voice in defense. (Jn7:50-52) And after Jesus is crucified, he joins and helps Joseph to bury the body. (Jn19:38-40) Jesus had said, "you shall know them from their fruits" (Mt7:16)

Jesus meets the woman of Samaria, and not only does she believe into Him after being faced with her sin, but the whole town meets Jesus. (Jn4)

Jesus meets Zacchaeus, and the man's change-of-heart is announced through his promise to mend his life. (Lk19)

Jesus meets several other types of people: to one He explains the life of discomfort to follow Him; another excuses himself, 'let me wait till my father dies'; another wants to go have his last farewells first. Jesus explains: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk9:57-62) A simple desire to "be with Jesus" is not enough.

Jesus meets another who has been faithfully keeping the Law (today he would have been a fine active church member), telling him to sell all he has, give to the poor, and follow Him; and he declines due to his riches. (Lk18:22-25)

Jesus meets with the religious leaders, confronts them about their duplicity, dishonesty, pride and hypocrisy; declaring "woe" upon them (Lk11); and they crucify Him. (Jn18:24, Mt26:65-66, 27:12,20)

If you read throughout the Scriptures, it is chalk-full of people's experiences when God met them (Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David, Solomon, S/Paul, etc), and they responded in one of two ways: obedience or disobedience.

When Jesus invited the rich man, he went away. The rich man rejected Jesus. (Mk10:22) But when God called Isaiah, he replied: Here...send me. (Is6:8) Unlike those who wanted to excuse themselves to take care of "business" back home first, and 'wait' till a more "convenient time" (Ac24:25), when Jesus called the disciples, it says, "...and IMMEDIATELY they left the boat and their father, and followed Him." (Mt4:22) After all, this is what Jesus taught, that unless a person is willing to leave -ALL- (family, wife, children, etc) "he CANNOT BE My disciple" (Lk14:26)

You see, Salvation into Jesus Christ is called "obedience". Paul calls it the "obedience of faith". (Rom1:5)

Indeed, salvation is "by grace through -FAITH-" (Eph2:8) But when a person disbelieves, the judgment and condemnation is because a person is -disobedient-. "The one believing into the Son has eternal life; but the one DISOBEYING the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (Jn3:36) Jesus invites, Come, follow Me; but the person says, No, I won't.

We've looked at only a few examples here. Scripture is full of others. However, to those who believe in that reformation doctrine called "irresistable grace", do you begin to see the fallacy of that doctrine?

Please notice that Jesus was inviting/calling both those who obeyed, as well as those who did not. Man has a 'choice' whether or not to follow God. He has a 'choice' whether to repent and receive Christ, or to reject Him.

If God's grace were truly "irresistable"...what a cruel thing Jesus was doing, to invite those who rejected!! As such, to suggest that His invitation to those who rejected wasn't -real-?? God does not do like adolescent pranksters do, pretending to help a person with their chair, only to pull it out from under them at the last minute, to have them fall on the floor. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning." (Ja1:17) Jesus doesn't invite, "Come to Me", only to turn around and say, 'Awe, I was just kidding...you aren't one of the "chosen/appointed" ones!' "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, he will not give him a stone, will he? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a serpent instead of a fish, will he? Or if he asks for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." (Lk11:11-13)

Jesus invited the multitudes. He is talking to "this generation" (the people) (Mt11:16) and invites: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (vs28-30)

But obviously, -most- of those who heard His invitation rejected. Notice, Jesus 'invited'. He did not -demand- compliance. That was His nature. God does not FORCE a person against their will to be His follower. Jesus is a "gentleman".

"Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare judgment to the Gentiles. He will not strive nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth judgment to victory; and in His name the Gentiles will hope." (Mt12:18-21)

So, back to our opening question: What is the individual experience of one who meets Jesus? We've given just a few examples. Scripture is full of others. For each person the meeting was different. No two snowflakes are the same. No two people are born alike; even so-called identical twins are not -exactly- alike (when you get to know them you can 'easily' tell them apart). And no two meetings between people are identical from one person to the next.

Thus, perhaps you begin to understand why that so-called "sinners prayer" is denounced here on a regular basis: the one the so-called 'soul-winners' tell their hearers to "repeat-after-me" and you will be saved. There is NO-SUCH-COMMAND in the Scriptures! I've given out the challenge before, for those who believe in this to show me chapter-n-verse where Scripture teaches it. I have yet to hear from any of them...because it does not exist.

The meeting between Jesus and the individual is a 'personal' matter between the Lord and that individual's heart. It is not something that happens by brow-beating in the emotional heat of the invitation hymn, nor by a person standing/sitting there pleading, "Won't you p'leeeeeease receive Jesus", like a salesman trying to 'close-the-deal'. The salvation of a sinner is not between the sinner and the 'soul-winner'. It is between the sinner and Jesus through the Holy Spirit. If God created the universe, was able to raise Jesus from the dead after He was crucified, and managed to get through to YOUR hard heart to SAVE YOU...do you think God has now suddenly become impotent regarding saving the person whose soul you are concerned about? Remember, on Judgment Day that sinner is not standing before you; they stand before God at the Great White Throne. (Rev20:11)

If Jesus is meeting their heart, do you want to 'get-in-the-way' by interrupting what God is calling to their heart? Maybe God knows that their heart isn't 'quite' ready yet, and that if you stand there trying to 'close-the-deal' instantly, so you can add their name to that 'list' back at church...you will actually drive them away? Yes, they will die in their sin...but how will you stand before God to "give account" of yourself before Him? (Rom14:12) Will their blood be on your hands? (Ezek33:6b)

So now, after all this, the question -still- has not been answered. Because for each individual it is 'personal' between them and the Lord.

It is like suggesting how a husband and wife love each other. As much as many people engage in the disgusting, and try to talk about it to their friends, it is really only the married couple's business; it is only 'their' relationship; the intimacy that is only between them, and no others'. As the sinner is wooed to Christ to become part of His bride, it is the same concept. (Eph5:23-32) We can each give testimony to one another as to what Christ has done in our lives, but the hearers simply cannot fathom its entirety, because they were not there. Just as the man has his "way with a virgin" (Pr30:19), so, too, Christ has His unique "Way" with the sinner, as He knows each of us at the level of "soul and spirit" and discerns our "thoughts and intents" (Heb4:12)

Thus, while this article began by posing a question: Hopefully it is now obvious why it will not be answered.

Amen!

One Way...Only? © 1996

-- Object Lesson --

Recently as a HomePage was developed, new technologies and procedures were discovered and learned. One of those procedures was "How to upload the Homepage files to the Internet Service Provider." As with many things on the Internet, "How-to" manuals are scarce; so, many things are learned by trial-and-error, after a few "basics" are ascertained from the "experts."

The primary need was to get into "my" directory at the Service Provider. However, no matter WHAT I tried, I could not get there. And, never having been there before, I wasn't sure what things should Look Like once I WAS there. I was reaching all kinds of different directories, but not "mine." A knowledgeable relative and the "experts" at the Service Provider all said the directory was there, but I could not get there.

Then, by chance, I spied a blank space on the FTP access menu; which the set-up software had not "filled-in," nor had the "experts" mentioned anything about. The "Destination Directory." When filled in correctly with "my" directory information, I was instantly connected to "my" directory, and the files were then easily uploaded. But, there was only ONE CORRECT PROCEDURE to get there.

I then thought of many discussions on the Cyber-Forums. Many different people of various backgrounds and beliefs...all believing, sincerely, that All Faiths will get to heaven...scoffing at Narrow-minded, Bible-thumpers who preach that there is only "One Way" to heaven.

In the realms of "Cyber-Intelligence" everyone knows that attempting to run a command such as "GETTHERE.EXE" will not execute if typed "GETHERE.EXE" It must be EXACT. Computers are not forgiving. But I never hear excuses and whining about the "narrow-minded" computer designers and software engineers requiring preciseness to execute their programs.

So...Why should it be considered preposterous for a Holy, Jealous God to indicate to Sinful Man that there is but ONE WAY into His presence? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (Jn 14:6)

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

the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:18-21)

"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 which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Mat 7:13-14)

Amen!