

Reconciled



Finding our way
back to Jesus

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Preface

After nearly two thousand years of history, one would expect that the Christian community could have settled upon a coherent definition for our own faith. But it seems to continually change with every conceivable wind, whether political, social, or philosophical. Christians have, as a group, seemed eager to dispense with even an attempt at a definition, coming now to the point of considering the very thought of such an effort to be unspiritual or regressive.

Not only this, but we have actually developed the habit of apologizing for being followers of Jesus, as if the study of His words is the very epitome of narrow-mindedness, the spreading of the gospel is the most vile hate speech, and standing on principle is an act of treason. We fawn over the real traitors among us and applaud them in their efforts to embrace every faith but the one they claim to possess. We truly are ashamed of Jesus, and as He said in Luke 9:26, He will be ashamed of us when He returns.

It used to be that Christian theologians and teachers were known for coherent, logical, reasoned discourse, and were respected for this approach to the scriptures, which have always been cited as authoritative since they are the words of God. But all of this is being renounced in favor of the mystical and the gnostic. Rationality has given way to experience, making “contending for the faith” (Jude 1:3) a sin and an embarrassment. Those who still cling to such outdated and unspiritual notions are mocked and hated by the very people who say it is wrong to be so negative.

At the same time, those who somehow retain the admiration of today’s Christians in spite of their education have become the vanguard of a fifth column which undermines people’s trust and confidence in the Bible. While it’s true that many discoveries in manuscripts and knowledge of ancient culture and language have shed better light on a number of deficiencies in our lexicons and translations, the conclusions scholars jump to are often heavily influenced by very low views of the scriptures.

For example, if similarities between scripture and earlier religious writings are noted, it is presumed that the writers of scripture borrowed or adapted the earlier writings. Yet regardless of when the words of scripture

were written, the time of their original utterance far predates any written documents. A much more likely scenario is that the original truths of God became corrupted over time, especially after the global destruction of the Flood. And as time passed, God saw to it that His truths were restored in writing.

But the new views win the day, and those with the credentials to challenge such views are not given the exposure or prestige that would bring their challenges to the attention of the greater Christian community. The meticulous scholarship of the past is forgotten, while any and every anti-western teaching is hailed as ancient wisdom or true Christianity rediscovered. And any new scholarship that supports or confirms the authenticity of the scriptures is dismissed or marginalized.

Now these claims I've made are sure to be challenged, and extensive documentation will be demanded. But I am only offering them as my personal observations from nearly fifty years of Bible study and debate. I've noticed an increasing hatred of any appeal to reason or knowledge, and a trend to call any disagreement with an arbitrary mystical worldview "sin". Vile and controlling overlords who call themselves "anointed" are followed slavishly, while those who would hold them to account and demand justice for the victims are shamed.

How did we come to this? How could we, as a group, take step after step for generations away from the freedom and simple faith we started with and move closer and closer to mere religion? With the prophet Jeremiah we can say, "The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way" (Jer. 5:31a). Like the world, we have abandoned reason and can no longer tolerate the meat of true spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:11–14).

It would take volumes to trace through all those steps, but we should note that if people had lost their taste for spiritual meat even in the first century, it should come as no surprise that the problem is much greater today. The ravenous wolves we were warned about in scripture (Mt. 7:15, Acts 20:28–30) have been tearing away at the Body of Christ all these centuries, so we have always needed to be on guard. But now, it seems, the wolves outnumber the sheep.

Today we see many people leaving the gleaming temples of materialism and religiosity, but they have nowhere to turn, so they read books and attend seminars by anyone who offers something new, something exciting, *anything* but dry religion. At first this might seem to be a good

thing, since they are running from the wolves. But where are they going?

The Holy Spirit still calls, and Jesus still knocks on the door (Rev. 3:20). Yet “how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:14–15a) People who have been in the churches are familiar with the words, and it might seem strange to quote this passage when discussing Christians. But what exactly *have* they believed? Why are they leaving the churches if the churches have been telling the Truth? If the churches *haven't* been dispensing dry religion from self-aggrandizing overlords, then what is it the people are thirsting for? Surely this mass exodus is proof enough that the traditional paradigm is about to fall. And we need to be prepared to help those who are running for safety to find it.

The purpose of this book is not to try and fix what is broken, but to start over. Rather than untangle the giant knot that Christianity has become, we need to cut the line and begin again. We need to study the scriptures and find out why Jesus really came. We need to discover again what He intended for us as His Body, His Bride. If we care at all about the health of that Body, we will dedicate ourselves to throwing off everything that weighs us down (Heb. 12:1). We must un-learn error and re-learn truth, and then live as the “light of the world” we were meant to be (Mt. 5:14).

Essentials of the Faith

Exactly what is required in order to be saved?

The Christian community today doesn't know what the essentials of the faith are. The definitions range from no requirements at all, to fashion and political views. And remember, we're talking about *essentials*, not disputable matters (Rom. 14:1). But we must learn to distinguish between that which is foundational and that which we personally believe flows logically or naturally from it. Personal convictions are not to be equated with divine edicts, regardless of which end of the spectrum they may fall on.

First let's list the pertinent scriptures:

- 1 Cor. 15:1–4 — Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and raised the third day, according to prophecy
- John 1:12 — to all who did receive him, to those who trusted in His name, He gave the right to become children of God
- 1 John 5:13, Acts 16:31 — those who so believe have eternal life
- Eph. 2:8–9, Rom. 4:4–5, 5:1–2 — we are justified through faith, not deeds, and have peace with God through Jesus
- 1 Pet. 1:3 — God has given us new birth through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
- John 3:16, 10:9, 14:6, Gal. 1:9 — whoever trusts in Jesus alone will have eternal life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him
- 2 Cor. 5:17–21 — God reconciled us to Himself in Jesus, and we must accept the offer

The Christian faith is grounded in one central fact: Jesus rose from the dead. To be saved, to really call ourselves “Christ followers”, we must first of all accept the facts about what Jesus did and who He is, because trusting or accepting His "name" means accepting all that is true about Him. And as these scriptures show, this means that we accept as facts

that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, was raised the third day, and that there is no other way to get to heaven.

Seeing that our faith must be in the Jesus that rose from the dead, and that this very Jesus said He is the **only** way, truth, and life, then it follows that any other “Jesus” is a fake, any other way is the wrong way, and any other life is really death. How many people have fulfilled hundreds of prophecies, including rising from the dead? How many other historical figures or events have so shaken the world that the calendar of the west still, to this day, reckons the “common era” from the time this Jesus walked the earth?

Some like to claim that Jesus never really existed and that Christianity is just another fable believed by the gullible. Yet they accept on far less evidence the historical reality of many lesser people and events, in spite of knowing that what they believe has little support. They are very selective in their “skepticism” and inconsistent in their standards.

Christians have long used the term “witnessing” to describe spreading the gospel, but they have forgotten or stopped believing what that word means. It means to testify in a court of law that something you saw or experienced happened. Jesus said that His disciples were to be **His** witnesses¹, and everyone since then has been required to accept that eyewitness testimony to be saved. This is the message we got from them, by hearing or reading their testimony, and the message we are to spread. The gospel, like it or not, is at least in part a legal claim, and when we “witness”, we are appealing to legal evidence.

So the first element in salvation, in the Christian faith, is the acceptance of certain facts about a certain Person, from the eyewitness testimony of those who have proved to be reliable witnesses by their actions as recorded in a very reliable historical document: the Bible. Yes, it is historically reliable, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this writing. Please check the recommended reading list in the Appendix for more. And if this were not true, it would be impossible to say that the Christian faith is anything but what we decide it is on any given day.

But we see another element in those passages at the beginning of this chapter, one that is largely ignored in gospel presentations: the motivation for coming to Jesus in faith is not fear of hell or a license to sin, but **reconciliation with God**. Salvation is the act of accepting

¹Mt. 10:18, Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8ff, 1 Cor. 15:15

God's offer of reconciliation, so anyone who does not come to Him with the intent of living to please Him is coming for the wrong reason—and may not be saved at all. As we are told in James 2:19, even the demons believe there is one God, but reconciliation is hardly their wish! They too would like to escape an eternity of suffering without bowing to God, so why would such a “faith” save any of us?

Now this is not to say that we have to find the power within ourselves to renounce all our sins before we are saved and receive the Holy Spirit,² because we simply do not have that power. And after all, Jesus died for us while we were still sinners. But we can, and must, be willing to please God in everything, and want to turn from all that displeases Him.³ This is the very definition of repentance (lit. “turning”) and the proof of reconciliation; we cannot claim to be reconciled with anyone we continually ignore or irritate. How many claiming to be Christians say one thing but live another?

This brings us to the most essential evidence of genuine faith: the truly saved will keep moving in the direction of holiness. The important thing is not that everyone is on the same page, progressing at the same rate, but that there is progression at all. The one who says “I was saved at age nine and baptized, so you have to consider me a Christian no matter what”, yet lives exactly like the world and gives little thought to God, is living in denial and should not be accepted into the community of believers.

We have seen in this chapter that the foundation of true Christian faith is to believe the facts about Jesus, to come to God through trust in only Jesus with the intent to be reconciled to God, and then to live out that new relationship by always seeking to please Him. Next we'll take a closer look at what a life of holiness is like, and how so many have fallen from it.

²John 14:26, 20:22, Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 6:19, Eph. 1:13, 4:30, 2 Tim. 1:14

³John 5:14, 8:11, Rom. 5:8, 1 Cor. 15:34, 2 Peter 2:14

Results of the Faith

What does genuine saving faith produce?

We cannot read the New Testament without being confronted with the high calling Jesus means for us to reach. And when we see so many repeated statements in practically every book therein about purity, holiness, compassion, and integrity, we can be sure that these are not options for Christian behavior, but requirements. Jesus told us to love even our enemies, to pray for our oppressors, to treat others as we want them to treat us, and to serve others instead of demanding they serve us.⁴ And His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–38) showed that there are no legal loopholes for failing to live out these principles.

Jesus likened salvation to being reborn, and birth is not the end of a life but the beginning. A healthy baby grows to maturity, and we are justifiably alarmed when this doesn't happen. The baby is alive and born into the family, but there is something terribly wrong and probably fatal if the baby either never grows or seems to regress after some growth, and so it is spiritually.⁵

But note that we're talking about behavior here, about attitudes and actions, *not* about an intellectual grasp of all the nuances of theology. Both do take time, but only someone considered a teacher or leader is required to have attained both. No believer is exempt from walking a path of increasing holiness, which is developing a habit of turning away from sin and toward the will of God. Every believer is expected to keep on struggling against sin, and to define sin as what God says it is, not what society or even a "church" says it is. As the apostle Paul put it, we have died to sin and cannot live in it any longer (Rom. 6, Col. 2), so it follows that anyone who lives in sin has not died to it.

But Christians today have developed a rather twisted and backwards view of sin, one that is the opposite of the Biblical model. While scripture requires more holiness and higher standards from leaders,⁶ today's so-called Christian leaders invent their own definitions of sin and then exempt themselves from them, as if they are above the law of love. They

⁴Mt. 5:44, 7:12, 20:25–28, Luke 6:35, 1 Cor. 13

⁵John 1:13, 3:3, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 3:9, 4:7, 5:1,18

⁶1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, James 3:1

want all the forgiveness and tolerance and grace to flow up and never down, and are often worse than unbelievers in their behavior, regardless of what they teach. Here are some examples (emphasis mine):

An Alabama evangelist who terrorized his family while impressing audiences at revivals was convicted Friday of murdering his wife and storing her body in a freezer for years. People who heard Anthony Hopkins' sermons in rural towns around the South sometimes called him a psychic or even a prophet. Yet a prosecutor told jurors that Anthony Hopkins terrorized his wife and young children, isolated them and **used the Bible to manipulate them.**

"He was the supreme commander of his own little army," said Assistant District Attorney Jill Phillips.

After deliberating for 1-1/2 hours, the jury in Mobile also found 39-year-old Anthony Hopkins guilty of rape, sodomy, incest and sexual abuse of a child between the ages of 12 and 16. Hopkins was arrested in 2008 while preaching at a revival on charges that he killed 36-year-old Arletha Hopkins. Authorities said they were led to the body of his wife by a teenage relative that Hopkins had abused and impregnated.

Investigators say Hopkins killed his wife in a violent fight in 2004 after she caught him having sex with the teenager. They said he then stuffed the wife's body into a freezer at the Mobile home he shared with her, the couple's six children and two of her children from a previous relationship.⁷

The crowd was starkly quiet as the 29-year-old minister confessed that he had sinned against God, his family and those who sat before him. He shoved aside a speech that had been prepared by Dr. Paige Patterson, his mentor and former teacher at Criswell College. "This book tells me what to do with my sin," Mr. Gilyard said, clutching a worn Bible.

"It has been with me everywhere. It's been in the various foster homes, it's been under the bridge with me. This is far

⁷<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/04/09/preacher-convicted-killing-wife-freezing-body/?test=latestnews>

more than a moment of tragedy and failure. It is a moment of triumph. I have walked away from yet another bridge, a bridge of triumph.”

What he didn't say was that for the fourth time in four years, he had been forced to walk away from a congregation. A growing number of women in the Richardson church said their pastor had sexually abused them. One said he had had sex with her in the pastor's study. Another said she received lewd phone calls and, most recently, a woman said he raped her.

Mr. Gilyard, unavailable for comment since his resignation, left behind a Baptist model, of sorts, for integrated membership and a reputation as one of the most widely sought black evangelists by predominantly white Baptist congregations. Both his home and mobile phone numbers have been changed.

The morning after the resignation, Dr. Patterson described Mr. Gilyard as one of the “most brilliant men in the pulpit.” Mr. Gilyard credited his appearances on the Old Time Gospel Hour, a weekly television program produced by evangelist Jerry Falwell. It was Mr. Falwell who promoted The Darrell Gilyard Story, a video biography of a young black orphan who rose to prominence after he had spent his teen-age years living under a bridge in Florida.

...

Though many of the women who say they were involved with Mr. Gilyard said they feel guilt over their participation, they are angry at church officials who, they said, did little to protect them. One woman who said she had had a long-term affair with Mr. Gilyard said her phone calls requesting a meeting with Dr. Patterson were not returned. “His secretary said unless I had proof, he wouldn't see me.” Others recall meetings with church officials at both Victory Baptist and First Baptist churches who drilled them with questions about their emotional stability and their relationships with other men.

First Baptist officials said they knew of the allegations of sexual misconduct, which began as long as four years ago when Mr. Gilyard was removed as assistant pastor of Concord Missionary Baptist Church in Oak Cliff. But they said they did not believe those allegations, and continued to recommend him. “We were dealing with a man of special gifts and talents,” Dr. Patterson said. “I was unwilling to call anyone guilty until I had demonstratable evidence that these allegations were true.” Dr. Patterson said that according to Scriptures, action cannot be taken against a minister accused of adultery unless there are two or more witnesses. He also asked for any other proof, such as photographs, videotapes or laboratory tests.⁸

What about abusive wives? I married a female Pentecostal minister and the psychological abuse she heaped on me was nothing less than Satanic. The lies, the deceptions, the unfaithfulness, the plain cruel hatefulness. . . And yet every “minister” told me I had to remain in that abusive relationship, and if she fooled around and gave me AIDS, too bad, because God hates divorce. However, through prayer I was convicted by the Holy Spirit that it was God’s Will to move on and let her go. He does hate divorce, but if you read the Bible, God is divorced— He divorced Israel (the ten northern tribes.) There are legitimate reasons for divorce!

After she left me for another man, I was immediately denounced by these same “ministers” as unfit for the ministry! Never mind she cheated on and left me, allegedly I was now tainted by the sin of divorce. I could make a comment here about how I’ve seen prostitutes, drug dealers and murderers get saved Tuesday night and Wednesday morning the pastor anoints them as assistant pastors in the church because of their “glorious testimony of how Christ delivered them”, but a faithful person who endures a divorce is denied ministry. Never mind that Paul said a novice should never be allowed to an elder. Neither did one of those same ministers deny her singing/ministering in their churches despite her living in

⁸<http://tinyurl.com/4nf7jz2>

sin with a man who wasn't even married to! It also came out she was bisexual and had a girlfriend— no matter! The “church” threw me out and embraced her. My argument: birds of a feather flock together. People who lie defend people who lie, people who steal defend people who steal. **And as the years went on almost every one of the ministers who took her side was exposed as being unfaithful to his/her spouses. No wonder they came to her defense; they wanted to hide their own sin!**⁹

While it is true that much of the content of the New Testament directs us to judge our own hearts,¹⁰ we are also clearly commanded to judge the behavior of all who call themselves believers.¹¹ This is vital when it comes to leaders and teachers, who are to be models for others to follow, and who are to be publicly reprimanded in proportion to their honor.¹²

But notice a very important thing when it comes to all this judging, specifically as stated in 1 Cor. 5: sinners are to judge sinners! We have been force-fed the lie that since all of us sin, then none of us can ever say a word about the sins of fellow believers. Yet after all Paul had said about the people of Corinth and their immaturity, their approval of worse sins than the pagans, and their petty divisions, he told those very people to throw out of their fellowship a man living in sin. And it was the whole congregation, not a small group of elders, who were to carry this out.

We all sin on occasion, but the dividing line is when someone claiming to be a believer wallows in a sin or refuses to acknowledge what God has called sin. The important thing is the attitude; if we do not agree with God or refuse to give a sin up, we sin even if we don't act upon it.¹³ If we are only concerned about how much we can get away with and still get to heaven, we reveal our true attitude toward God and deny the faith.

Yet we have to guard ourselves against swinging to the other extreme of legalism and rattling on each other for violations of the lists we make. It is common for those who want to excuse sin to deflect scrutiny away from themselves by accusing others of being legalists or Pharisees, but the

⁹<http://tinyurl.com/487htbc>

¹⁰e.g. Rom. 14:10, 1 Cor. 9:24, 11:31, James 2

¹¹1 Cor. 5, 6:1–5

¹²Heb. 13:7,17, 1 Tim. 1:3, 5:17–22, 2 Tim. 4:3, 2 Peter 2

¹³Mt. 12:34, 15:19, 18:9, James 4:1

charge is only true if we do in fact start nitpicking about every little thing that happens to irritate us personally. But if we are using God's standards and only trying to please Him, we won't need a list or a Talmud to tell us when something is sin, and we will be able to hold each other to account as Paul instructed.

Remember that Jesus said we must love God more than people, so we cannot use love for people as an excuse to tolerate sin against God; we cannot love others at God's expense! To love the world is treason against God,¹⁴ and the world is where hierarchy, abuse, and all kinds of self-indulgence come from. The world loves sin and cannot understand anyone who does not.

We have forgotten how to hate what God hates, how to love what God loves, how to tell sheep from wolves and occasional failings from willful habits. Study the scriptures to find out what God has said, and be sure to apply it to yourself. But be sure as well to hold anyone claiming leadership or "anointing" to an even higher standard of purity. "By their fruit you will know them", and by the scriptures you will know if they "proclaim another Jesus". Don't be intimidated by those who would demand no one criticize them, because they are the lowest servants, not the bosses.¹⁵

So what does genuine faith produce? First of all, love for God and His honor, then love for people, and then standards of conduct that show no favoritism. The Christian life is a life that continues to become more like Jesus and less like the world, and discerns between the victim and the oppressor, nurturing the former while restraining the latter. It is not lazy or thin-skinned, does not love sin, hates injustice, and will not stand idly by as one alleged believer abuses another. It does not seek the place of honor or the control of others, yet is not afraid to confront the popular or credentialed concerning sin.

Imagine a Christian community filled with such people. If you do, you will know what it must have been like when the Body of Christ was new. And we can have that again, if we all return to loyalty to God above all, and turn our backs on the world. This is true repentance, true revival. The kingdom of God is not the kingdom of this world. . . yet.

It should go without saying that such a community, including our most intimate relationships, would be without hierarchy or division. As

¹⁴Mt. 6:24, 10:37, 1 Peter 4:4, 1 John 2:15

¹⁵Mt. 7:20, Acts 17:11, 2 Cor. 11:4

things are and have always been, however, Jesus' statement "not so among you" has been trampled by ambition and control. But the scriptural indictment of this is a huge study, one that I undertook before and wrote about. Please refer to the book *Nicolaitan* in the recommended reading list in the Appendix.

Next we'll examine the cause for our need to be reconciled to God. Just as people who have long enjoyed political freedom need to be reminded of the price paid for their freedom, so also Christians need to remember the price Jesus paid for our salvation.

Roots of the Faith

Why did we need to be reconciled to God?

This is a huge topic, and one that Christians in general seem to be all over the map about. Not only have we become unable to identify sin among us, we cannot articulate it to the lost should they ask why Jesus had to die at all. And this general ignorance of how God defines sin and His attitude toward the lost has crippled our ability to witness, because we spend more time tearing other believers down than actually reaching out to the lost. Those who read scripture and see the volume of discourse on why Jesus came and what He accomplished are muzzled for being too negative. Here is a sample of this sort of confusion:

We didn't need forgiveness of sins, that is not why I read Christ came. His words are he is the life. We needed a new life, not forgiveness of our sins. Christ never mentions coming for our need of forgiveness of sins. He always talks about us needing a whole new life. In this new life, we still need forgiveness for sins. We still sin and will until we reach heaven. But what did he say he was? I am the Bread and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through me. Why would he mention this if we simply needed forgiveness of sins? And I do believe our motive is important. I sincerely do not mean to question yours. I question mine when I have told my husband or children in the past when I was angry or upset, that they needed to get Christ in their lives. Salvation. Why? So I could have things my way. The Christian way. My motives were all messed up. And God looks on the heart doesn't he? He knew my motive and guess what, they returned to whatever they were doing and laughed at me. Yep. They should have. It was ridiculous to use Christ as a weapon or[sic] salvation, but I sure did.

I might also add that Jesus himself said I came that you might have what? Life. You can not repent until you have this new life. That is what I read the Gospel to be.

...

I don't think we should avoid the subject of hell. The Bible speaks about it. For me personally, I do not speak of hell at all when I present the Gospel. Why? I can't bear to think of anyone going to hell.¹⁶

Among other things, we see in this example great confusion between the "good news" itself (that Jesus came to rescue us) and the *reason* it is "good news". Granted, many believers have turned people from Jesus by dangling them over the fires of hell. But the other extreme is no better, because it fails to warn people that there really *is* a hell where people will suffer forever. The discussion of why Jesus came answers the vital questions, "So what if Jesus rose from the dead? Why should that matter? And why are you so bent on converting me?" Failing to answer, and do so accurately, is like failing to warn people that a tornado is approaching or a bridge is out. This failure is itself a grave sin of omission. Our very loathing of hell is exactly why we **must** speak of it, and it is no more "negative" or hateful to warn the lost about hell than it is to warn the unsuspecting about impending disaster. Silence in both cases can cost lives, and God will hold us accountable.

To answer questions about sin and judgment, it is necessary to examine the entrance of sin into the world, the aftermath of that entry, and the specific things God did to deal with it. We have to be thorough to clear up all the confusion.

The Fall

In Genesis 3 we read of the serpent's temptation of Eve, her sin due to deception, and Adam's sin due to open and willful rebellion. There is much to study there, but details of how sin affected relationships between male and female are beyond the scope of this book. For that, again please refer to the book *Nicolaitan* in the recommended reading list in the Appendix. What I'd like to focus on here is how sin affected the whole world.

Note first of all that when God warned them not to eat fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, the only penalty He cited was "death".¹⁷ Secondly, note that whatever sort of death this was, the Tree of Life was the antidote, and "the man" (not "them"; the Hebrew refers repeatedly

¹⁶<http://tinyurl.com/4f5g7x9>

¹⁷Gen. 2:17, 3:1–24

only to the man in this passage) had to be driven out of the garden to keep him from eating of its fruit. Finally, note that neither Adam nor Eve was cursed directly as the serpent was, but only the ground, because that is what Adam was made from.

It seems reasonable to conclude from these facts that what God warned about eating the forbidden fruit came to pass immediately: Adam and Eve became mortal. Any mention of a change in nature or spirit is conspicuous by its absence, such that we should wonder why God would have remained silent about it through human history. What we actually see there is that along with physical mortality, the earth itself and the animals— neither of which were capable of sin against God since they were not made in His image— were subjected to mortality and decay just as people were, and this is confirmed by Paul in Rom. 8:21–22.

But even before this curse on nature was pronounced, we note in Gen.3:7 that as soon as they ate the fruit, Adam and Eve had their “eyes opened”, and then they ran and hid from God. Why? They were feeling guilt for their sin, and this put up a wall of separation between themselves and God. Thus **the relationship was marred, and reconciliation would be required**. Not one word is said about a “fallen nature” or irresistible bent toward sin, and we must resist the temptation to insert subsequent human history into the passage.

So mankind had become mortal and the earth and animals were cursed. And if people could sin in a pristine environment without prior experience with rebellion or temptation, then it should come as no surprise that people born in mortality and a cursed earth would all sin as well. This is the explanation for the downward spiral of human history, which in only a few thousand years would reach the point where God had to destroy all but eight people.¹⁸ And if mankind had acquired an irresistible force or nature that causes everyone to sin, surely God would not have reasoned with Cain to resist it, or held him responsible for giving in to it.

The Long March to Salvation

When He confronted Adam, Eve, and the serpent, God promised redemption for mankind through “the seed of the woman”. Redemption from what or whom? To redeem is to buy back, to regain someone or something in exchange for payment, to make restitution, to save or res-

¹⁸Gen. 4, 6:5–8

cue. This is the heart and soul of the gospel message. But there must be three parties to any such redemption: the captive, the buyer, and the seller. Who is the captive? Mankind. Who is the buyer? Jesus. But who is the seller?

The only third party mentioned in Genesis is the serpent. And while no connection is made between the serpent and Satan in Genesis, other passages do make it, and add that he is “the god of this age”, he is “the prince of the power of the air”, he has “taken them captive to do his will”, and he had the right to offer the cities of the world to Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness.¹⁹

Could the third party be sin itself? No, sin is not a sentient being or entity. Some would cite various passages to say otherwise, but we have to remember that inanimate things can be personified as a figure of speech, as is often the case throughout scripture. So could it be this corrupt world and our own mortality, where the “seller” is like a pit we fell into and we simply need to be lifted out of it? Possibly, but only partially, since we have to consider that not only rescue is made, but also payment. There is just no other candidate fitting *all* the criteria for the “seller” but Satan.

For reasons not explained to us, God did not immediately dispense this payment but let history play out. After the Flood, God instituted rudimentary government and then confused languages to slow the inevitable decay into global evil.²⁰ In the course of time He then chose Abram/Abraham to begin the separation of a people to Himself for the purpose of preparing the way for the Savior. And He made unilateral promises to him, meaning it was all of God because of faith.

It is to the people of Abraham through the line of Isaac and Jacob that God gave specific national and religious laws.²¹ Yet these laws were not the Savior but a “custodian” or guardian to watch over the people until they had come of age, so to speak. And as Gal. 3 and 4 shows, the Law and the Promise are two separate things. So when we read that “when the time had fully come, God sent His Son... to redeem those under law”, we need to remember that only Jews were ever under it, so only Jews needed to be redeemed from it. This means that there are at least two things Jesus redeemed people from: the general control

¹⁹Mt. 4:8–9, 2 Cor. 4:4, 11:3, Eph. 2:2, Rev. 12:9,14–15, 20:2

²⁰Gen. 9:4–6, 11:1–9, Gen. 12

²¹Gen. 50:24, Ex. 2:24, 3:6,15, Gal. 3:19,23

of Satan over mankind, and the “curse of the law” over the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Regarding the Promise, this explains why there had to be a particular time in history for Jesus to come. And as the writer of Hebrews explained, it’s like a Last Will and Testament which cannot be enacted until the death of the testator has been established.²² This highlights another critical element of sin and salvation: **Since there was a Will and Testament involved, there had to be the death of the One who made it.** We simply **must** understand this, because one of the most common objections to the gospel (coming even from within the “churches” today!) is that God is somehow bloodthirsty and cruel, demanding the death penalty for the smallest crimes. We need to counter such charges with this fact about the Promise. The price for redemption had to be death because this was the only way the Promise could be delivered.

Paid In Full!

Why was it that only God in human flesh could redeem us? Because only Jesus could represent both parties in the dispute: God and mankind.²³ It really is that simple, and explains why no other Way to God is possible. This is not God being arbitrarily narrow but God being compassionate because only He could pay this price, though He was under no obligation. There truly was no other way. And in redeeming us, Jesus also canceled the legal document of debt that stood against us and displayed it publicly by nailing it where all could see; that is the sense of the Greek.

In so doing, Jesus paid every last penny of our alienation from God and our committed sins. So then the question arises, “Why are we still held accountable for sins? Why are we to be judged according to what we did in this life, if Jesus paid it all?”²⁴

The answer is: because salvation is a gift and rewards are payments for earned wages. We could not begin to pay the price for our reconciliation to God, but we are individually responsible for our actions. Reconciliation must be voluntary, and that means God could only do His part; He could not force us to agree to it or it would not be genuine, and

²²Heb. 9:16–28

²³Col. 1:15–22, 2:9–15

²⁴Acts 10:42, 17:31, Rom. 2:12,16, 1 Cor. 3:10–15, 6:2–3, 2 Tim. 4:1,8, Heb. 10:30, 12:23, 13:4, 1 Peter 4:5, Jude 1:15, Rev. 6:10, 20:12–13

nothing less would be worthy of the honor of God. So when we agree to be reconciled, we are simply accepting a gift, not earning a wage, and the price for our freedom was paid to make that possible. Our actions, good or bad, are earning us spiritual wages, and that is the whole purpose of judgment for both the saved and the lost.

Think about it: what other reason could there be for judgment, since our entry into either heaven or hell is decided by faith alone? Our deeds cannot have anything to do with our eternal destination, or salvation would not be a gift at all. People will be sent one place or the other simply on the basis of whether or not their names are written in the book of life. But there are two separate judgments: the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne,²⁵ the former being for believers and the latter for unbelievers. And as the scriptures so plainly state, it is our actions that are judged. The righteous will be rewarded (paid!) on that basis, while the unrighteous will be given a degree of punishment on that basis (or there would be no point in judging them at all; if all suffer equally in the Lake of Fire, then judgment for deeds is a waste of time).

In summary, there was much more Jesus did than most people realize. Not every scripture is for Jews and Gentiles alike, and not every sin is treated alike. Every sin does mar our relationship with God, but even we fallible humans know the difference between an accident and a deliberate, premeditated crime. Both must make restitution but only one requires additional penalty. God can do no less, being the ultimate Fair and Just Judge. And He does not disown us on the occasion of every sin, but judges on the basis of habit and attitude. We are reconciled by faith alone, which was made necessary by sin and made possible by the death and resurrection of the only God-Man, Jesus.

²⁵2 Cor. 5:10, Phil. 4:3, Rev. 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:11,15, 21:27

Practice of the Faith

What do we do now?

If you recall the accounts of abuse in *Results of the Faith*, it should be obvious that the denial of real sins, as opposed to the definitions from the abusers, has spread through the Body of Christ like an aggressive cancer. People seem unable to think clearly anymore, as if they have lost their sight and hearing. The sort of teachings that used to be the hallmark of bizarre and obscure cults are considered “orthodox” now, and behavior that the world knows is twisted and evil is considered “spiritual”.

But it is the design and system of “church” itself, with its inherent hierarchy and culture of shame, which fosters this madness. It allows the aberrant teaching of a few subversives to spread and multiply, replacing good with evil and light with darkness.²⁶ Even at its best, it teaches the divine right of Pastors or Elders, encourages most people to be passive and uncritical of teachers, and steers them into a “visit God on Sundays” mentality. In short, it is religion, not relationship. . . and remember that relationships between people are not to take precedence over each person’s relationship with God.

As Paul incredulously asked the people of Galatia (ch. 3),

You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Right before your eyes Jesus the Anointed was clearly presented as crucified, so I’d like to learn just one thing from you: Was it by your legal performance that you received the Spirit, or by believing what you heard? Are you really so senseless as to think you would start with the Spirit and finish with the flesh? Was all your suffering for nothing? Really?? Did the One who supplied you with the Spirit do powerful works among you because you followed the Law, or because you believed what you heard?

We usually quote this passage when dealing with the matter of legalistic control over behavior by a few, but it applies equally to the traditional model of Christian religious practice. As Paul went on to say in ch. 5, it

²⁶Isaiah 5:20

only takes a tiny bit of falsehood to enslave the whole group. We have been set free from all the old religious performances, and we need to take this seriously. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the time had come for people to worship God “in spirit and in truth” instead of in a particular place, and Paul said that the new Temple is not a building of stone but the bodies of the saved.²⁷

Some try to claim that since the first believers sometimes met in the Temple, then that is justification for us meeting in sacred buildings. But the Temple was simply a building, a place to accommodate them, a public area and not a sacred place for Christians. And there is no record of any kind of “worship service” going on, either there or in people’s homes. In fact, the detailed prescriptions we would expect to see, if there were such rules to follow, are completely absent from the pages of the New Testament. The closest thing we have is something mentioned in passing when Paul was trying to combat the chaos going on in Corinth.²⁸ The point was not to establish a liturgy but to see to it that whatever the people did, they did in a coherent and controlled way.

What is cultural is not necessarily bad, yet neither is it divinely commanded. But when people read that there is no liturgy, place, or style of worship prescribed for Christians, they may become defensive and think this is an attack upon their spirituality. But in fact this really is an attack—on the System, not the people. How can a religious ritual be compatible with that which was never meant to be just another form of worship but a family, a Body, a life to live? Our worship is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus, to visit the grieving in their distress, and to control ourselves.²⁹

In other words, there is no prescribed method of worship, no place or time or frequency we must meet, no membership rolls or fashion police, no sacred furniture or vestments, no pulpits, pews, or professionals.³⁰ The Christian life is exactly that: a life. It is the air we breathe and the blood pumping through our veins. It is not a place to go but an entity to be.

People love experiences and spiritual thrills; they love to be entertained while calling it worship; they are inspired by talented orators and

²⁷ John 4:23–24, 1 Cor. 3:16–17, 6:19

²⁸ 1 Cor. 14:26

²⁹ Rom. 12:1–2, Gal. 5:22–26, James 1:26–2:9

³⁰ Heb. 10:23–25

polished sermons in three-point alliterated outlines. They love to show off their fine clothing and other forms of wealth;³¹ they fawn over the rich and despise the poor; they love to be called “Pastor” or to be one of the privileged few. They love religion.

But God has not called us to this. We are called to be the salt and light of the world, which means going out and living, bringing the gospel with us in word and deed. Christianity is not a once- or twice-a-week activity but a 24/7/365 life. We meet together to build each other up, to teach and be taught and share our spiritual gifts, to sympathize and lend a hand, to care for each other. In stark contrast to this is the typical “church” meeting where near strangers sit in chairs or pews facing the few who actually do some building up. Again, we see in this a system which works against the true unity of the faith.

What do we do now? Go and live the Christian life. Be free of religion and man-made control. Be free of committees and seminars. Be free of spiritual abuse and peer pressure and religious fads. Be free of everything that would come between you and your Savior. Jesus came to heal the sick and oppressed, not pamper the influential and oppressive. He did not come to put on a show for us but to transform us, and that happens by the continual renewing of our minds via the study of scripture and listening to the quiet voice of the Spirit.

You have been reconciled to God and set free from the power of sin. Live like it!

³¹Mt. 23:7, James 2:1-11

Appendix

Recommended Reading

- on the reliability of the Bible: [The Case for Christ](#), Lee Strobel
- on church history: [The Reformers and Their Stepchildren](#), Leonard Verduin
- on hierarchy in Christianity: [You Are All One](#), Paula Fether
- on spiritual and domestic abuse among Christians: [This Little Light](#), Christa Brown