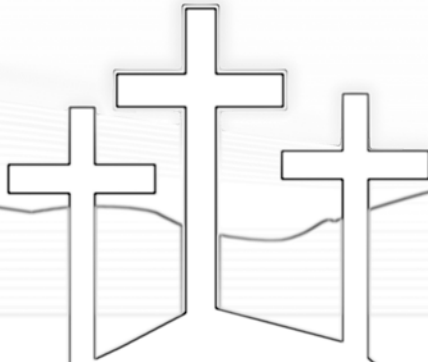


# THE GOSPEL



by  
Phil Enlow

# THE GOSPEL



By

Phil Enlow

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Copyright 2006

First Printing - October 2006

*Published by*

**Midnight Cry Ministries**

P.O. Box 685

Southern Pines, North Carolina 28388

USA

Website: [www.midnightcry.org](http://www.midnightcry.org)

## *Contents*

Introduction . . . . .	iv
Chapter One – The Gospel: Man’s Need . . . . .	5
Chapter Two – The Gospel: God’s Answer to Man’s Need . . . . .	16
Chapter Three – The Gospel: Coming to Faith . . . . .	32

## Introduction

To say that the gospel has been attacked, watered-down, confused, and compromised in our day would be a severe understatement. No other message is as greatly feared by the enemy of our souls as is the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He will do everything in his power to keep people from hearing it, understanding it, or believing it. I pray that the Lord of the harvest will raise up a new generation of men who are divinely enabled to preach an uncompromising gospel in this sin-darkened end of the age.

Still, it seems rather presumptuous to entitle a booklet, *The Gospel*. After all, the gospel is the summation of the entire message of scripture! So much has been written—and could be written—that it seems as if a small booklet could hardly do such a subject justice. Nevertheless I wrote with a burden to make the heart of the message as plain as I was enabled.

So much that passes for the gospel in our day never does bring divine light upon man's true need, let alone confront it with the gospel ultimatum. Just acknowledge a few facts and pray a little prayer and that's all it takes—they think. But the gulf between lost man and a holy God is much wider than that and it takes a lot more than a salvation "formula" to save people. It takes a divine miracle of grace.

I pray that if you have already experienced the miracle of the new birth that you will be blessed and gain a greater understanding of the gospel. But if you haven't, I pray that your heart will be moved to seek God until He comes with a witness of peace.

May God bless you as you read...

## *Chapter One*

### **The Gospel: Man's Need**

If there was one thing that got the Apostle Paul out of bed in the morning and filled his waking hours with a burning passion it was the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the risen and glorified Savior revealed Himself to Paul—then a young Pharisee known as Saul—on the road to Damascus the whole course of his life changed forever.

In a few short traumatic days young Saul was forced to abandon his deeply held belief that righteousness before God was to be obtained by keeping the law of Moses. He came to realize that, not only did God have a very different plan for making men righteous, but that he—Saul—had been chosen to be His ambassador, carrying God's message to—of all people—the Gentiles! What a revolution!

And so it was, many years later, he was moved to write to believers in Rome, believers he hoped soon to visit in person. He wrote out of a desire to see them established in the truth he had been commissioned to proclaim. In Romans 1:16-17 he wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

To Paul, the expression, "the gospel," which means "good news," uniquely identified the message that burned in his heart. He saw clearly the intimate connection between this message and the salvation that men so desperately needed.

He called it THE gospel because he knew in the depths of his soul that there was no other message that would avail. The world is full of

## The Gospel

religious opinions and messages but there is only one true gospel, only one message that brings salvation. There is no “Baptist gospel,” “Catholic gospel,” “Presbyterian gospel,” “Pentecostal gospel,” “social gospel,” or any other.

### **Satan’s Attack**

It did not take the devil long to mount a full-scale attack on the one message that he knew spelled his defeat. Even as Paul traveled from place to place, risking his life preaching God’s truth, Satan stirred up false ministers to corrupt and confuse the message. Paul was so incensed by this in the first chapter of Galatians that he actually pronounced a curse on such ministers! For him it was not merely an issue of differing opinions and interpretations. He saw a battle between truth and error with eternal consequences. It was bad enough when real believers were misdirected and hindered in their Christian walk. This kind of error caused men to miss salvation completely.

Galatians 1:6-8 says, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”

Why was Paul so sure? Listen to what he wrote in Galatians 1:11-12, “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” (I wonder how many could say that today. I wonder how many preach tradition handed down from other men and call it the gospel.) Many years later Paul was led to go to Jerusalem and share with Peter and the others what he had been doing and preaching and they recognized the call of God upon his life and the truth of the gospel he preached.

## The Gospel: Man's Need

Paul's concern over the issue of a corrupted gospel is plain in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough."

Listen to what Jude felt compelled to write in Jude 3, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." He saw, as did Paul, the influx of false brethren and false ministers corrupting the gospel.

What about today? If Jude felt the need to write as he did about contending for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints way back in the first century ought we not to do the same? In our day, virtually any minister who is considered to be "Christian" is said to be a "minister of the gospel." But what does that mean? What gospel is it that is preached? Just what is the gospel anyway? It is obvious that what is preached in the name of Christ varies tremendously.

If you believe—as I do—that Paul did indeed receive a direct commission from Jesus Christ to proclaim the one true gospel that brings salvation, ought we not to inquire as to what that is—and to preach it boldly without compromise? Or should we just blindly follow our traditions? I pray that God will raise up in every land ministers who will be able to preach with great clarity the same gospel Paul preached—the message that alone brings salvation.

And that is the object in view when the one true gospel is preached. It is the salvation of the hearers. The key words Paul used in Romans 1:16-17 have acquired many strange meanings over the years—words like "gospel," "power of God," "salvation," "righteousness," and "faith." But what did these words mean to Paul? That is the question.

# The Gospel

## What is Salvation?

Undoubtedly the word nearest to the heart of the gospel message is “salvation.” But what exactly is salvation? Who is it that needs saving and from what?

The word “salvation” implies several things. One implication is that there is a danger from which deliverance is needed. If there is no danger then why would anyone require “saving”?

Another implication of “salvation” is that one in need of saving cannot help himself. It is not salvation if someone merely points out a danger and tells us how to avoid it or how to escape it through self-effort. Salvation is not merely a “helping hand.” Nor is it spiritual “self-help.” Salvation means that the one in need is ensnared in some danger and has absolutely no hope in himself of escape.

There is a point beyond which a drowning man cannot help himself. In fact, if he persists in trying to help himself and does not surrender completely to the efforts of a capable rescuer it is very doubtful that he can be rescued at all. And that illustrates another implication: “salvation” requires a “savior,” one who is not himself ensnared by the danger and who also possesses the ability to rescue the one in danger.

## Defining the Danger

And so clearly defining the danger in which men find themselves is necessary if we are to begin to understand salvation and our need of it. That is precisely what Paul does in the passages following Romans 1:16-17.

He chronicles the descent of men from a knowledge of God into a depraved state of slavery to sinful lusts. This descent was marked by a willful rejection of truth and righteousness and a defiant choice to serve those lusts instead. Man is not an innocent victim but a deliberate rebel against his Creator. Even those who have only the light of creation are without excuse. Romans 1:20.

We human beings are very prone to comparing ourselves one with another. We imagine that among men there are both good and

## The Gospel: Man's Need

bad, righteous and wicked. And since we can always find plenty of evil men around us we suppose ourselves to be “good,” or, at least, better than most.

People were no different in Paul's day. The Pharisee who went into the temple to pray had convinced himself in his own mind, “I am not like other men.” Luke 18:11. He even went through the motions of thanking God for that supposed fact yet even his thanksgiving was merely part of the self-deception. He wasn't thankful. He was proud, proud of his own efforts to be righteous. But all he had was simply classic self-righteousness—and God was not impressed.

Paul spent some time in his letter discussing these outward differences among men. He spoke of those Jews who prided themselves on possessing the law and of Gentiles who did not possess the written law yet had a God-given conscience. His conclusion is clear: there is no difference. Not when it comes to the need of salvation.

Rom. 3:9-18 says, “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.’ ‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’ ‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’” In verse 22 he says specifically, “There is no difference.”

So, are you and I like everyone else? Yes, we are. As Romans 3:23 continues, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We have all sinned against our Creator and are in need of the same salvation as everyone else. No one is better than another. There are no “good” sinners and “bad” sinners; there are just sinners.

Have you ever told a lie? Then you are a liar. Have you ever taken

## The Gospel

something that didn't belong to you? Then you are a thief. Have you ever so much as entertained lustful thoughts concerning someone? Then, according to Jesus, you are an adulterer. Matthew 5:28. Have you ever hated someone? Then you are a murderer. 1 John 3:15.

Why? Because men only look on the outward appearance but God looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7. We are very good at putting on a front in order to appear well before others but in our hearts we are all the same. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment. He gave his answer in Matt. 22:37-40: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Who among men has measured up to that standard? Are not the greatest sinners those who break the greatest commandments? What about you?

### Judgment

Now if sin had no real consequence then none of this would matter. But God's word says, "...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." Hebrews 9:27. Sin matters.

Revelation 20:11-15 pictures this judgment. Books will be opened and men will be judged by what is written in those books. Heaven has a perfect and complete record, not only of every act of sin, but also of every evil thought and motive. The secret things hidden in men's hearts will no longer be secret on that day. What will heaven's record reveal about you? Measured by the standard of God's own holiness how will you fare?

And what can you do about it? Can you travel to heaven, find the books, and erase the record of your sins? Do you hope to convince God to overlook your sins on that day by promising to "do better," or by piling up enough "good deeds" to outweigh the bad? Will you blame someone else for your failures?

## The Gospel: Man's Need

No. The facts are inescapable. We are all sinners. Heaven has an accurate record of every thought, deed, and word. Death and judgment are appointments we will keep. We will not be able to say, "I don't believe I can come, Lord. Death and judgment just don't fit into my plans." All will be there, small and great. And there is not a man alive who has the power to erase the guilt of his own sins. That fact alone makes a savior necessary if we are to escape the hell we deserve.

### All Fall Short

But the danger doesn't stop there. Suppose just for a moment that we were somehow able to convince God to overlook our past sins in return for a promise to do better. How would that work? Not at all, I'm afraid.

When Paul wrote, "all have sinned," he was referring to acts of sin from the past. But when he added, "and fall short of the glory of God," he was referring, not to the past, but to an ongoing problem. All of our promises to "do better" are empty ones.

I have often written of the shocking lesson about which Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 7. There he learned—the hard way—that, no matter how sincere he was, no matter how hard he tried, he simply could not keep God's law. And God showed him why. God showed him that there was a law operating in him, the law of sin and death, that made living up to God's standard impossible.

He now saw sin not just as acts of disobedience against a lot of divine "rules" but as a terrible power that enslaved him. The very core of his natural being was hopelessly infected by this thing called "sin," a wicked principle that puts "self" at the center of everything. Paul really wanted to do right. His persistent failure caused him to cry out in anguish, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Romans 7:24. Paul realized his need of rescue.

There is no more destructive power in the universe than sin. It ruins and destroys all caught in its web. Even if you could somehow conform your behavior to righteous principles it wouldn't change

## The Gospel

your heart. We are not sinners because we commit sins; we commit sins because we are sinners. A salvation that only deals with what we do and not what we are is no salvation. God's eternal kingdom will not be populated by people who have learned how "to keep the lid on," to control their sinful inclinations. Citizens of that blessed kingdom will have been delivered—inside and out—from sin, period. Can you accomplish that for yourself?

And so, just as no one can cleanse himself from his past sins, we are all helpless to change our own hearts. If help does not come from outside ourselves then we are all doomed.

### **The Power of Satan**

It would be bad enough if all a man had to contend with was his own sinful heart. That fact alone makes his natural situation hopeless. But it is worse than that. This present world order is ruled over by Satan and literally hordes of demons. They are real. And the sin that dwells in the hearts of men gives Satan all the leverage he needs to rule over mankind without mercy. And so men are not merely slaves to the sin in their own hearts. They are also, because of that sin, slaves to wicked spirits whose only intent is to use, abuse, and destroy them in order to gratify their own evil natures.

I have met people who had the mistaken idea that they didn't have to serve either God or the devil, that they could somehow be "free" and do what **they** wanted to do. Apart from the divine miracle of salvation every member of the human race lives out his days under the dominion of Satan. If Satan cannot rule over a man one way, he will another whether the man is aware of it or not. Men are hopeless addicts of sin and all the power of Satan's kingdom is devoted to keeping them that way. And Satan knows which "buttons" to push.

In Acts 26:18 Paul recounts what happened when God "arrested" him on the Damascus road and called him to preach the gospel. His call concerning the Gentiles was "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God..." Remember in Romans 1:21 where Paul says that as a result of

## The Gospel: Man's Need

choosing sin over the knowledge of God, “their foolish hearts were darkened.” 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Listen to Paul's description of men in Ephesians 2:1-3: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” All of us!

Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Salvation is described in Colossians 1:13 in these words: “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”

God's servant is instructed in 2 Timothy 2:25-26, “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

1 John 5:19 tells us that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

And so, not only are men guilty, and powerless to change, but they are also helplessly under Satan's dominion—and blind to that fact.

### **It Gets Worse**

But it gets worse! The world of which we are a part has no future—at least not a long one—and it may be much shorter than people think. Both the flood of Noah's day and the fire and brimstone that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah are held forth as examples for

## The Gospel

us of what is coming. They remind us that God judges sin and does not allow it to go on indefinitely.

In 2 Peter 3:5-7 we read Peter's warning to scoffers: "But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

This day will come without warning for Peter goes on to say in verse 10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." As Paul also said in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, "...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." Pay close attention to that last part: "they will not escape."

Many other scriptures could be cited to demonstrate this truth, that this present world will have a sudden fiery end. Suppose it were to happen today? Would you be ready?

Back in the days of the Roman empire the Romans found a way to use condemned prisoners to serve their ends. If a man was condemned to die for crimes he had committed—and was strong and healthy—he might well be sentenced to be a galley slave. Along with others he would be chained to a bench in the lower parts of a ship and forced to row to help power the ship. Often these were war ships and the fate of the galley slaves was completely tied to the ship they rowed. If the ship survived the battle they lived to row another day. If it sank they sank with it. If one died another would take his place.

But this is not a bad picture of this present world. Because of sin men live under the power of Satan, rowing his "ship" until they die—or until the ship goes down, taking them with it. What a sad, meaningless existence. How far removed this is from God's purpose in creating man in the beginning. All of the proud accomplishments

## The Gospel: Man's Need

of men in this present world are destined to go up in smoke. And judgment lies beyond.

Put simply, men are in desperate trouble, blind to their danger, and completely unable to save themselves even if they were aware of their plight. This is what drove Paul to proclaim—at the risk of his own life—the one message able to bring salvation.

If help is to come it must come from God. The world, the devil, and man's own heart are allied together to bring about his destruction. But does he deserve God's help? Surely not! Every fiber of his being hates and resists the light that would expose his sinful condition. He is not an innocent victim but a defiant rebel. Why would not a God who has the power to fling the galaxies across the universe simply blot out mankind and put an end to his wickedness?

## *Chapter Two*

# **The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need**

It is against the backdrop of this awful sin and rebellion that the amazing love and grace of God shine like a great beacon of hope. As Romans 5:8 says, "...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God has not made a way of salvation for sinful man because he deserves it but because of His own character and purpose. Think of all of the vile, unspeakable, wickedness of this present world! Only divine love could hold back its utter destruction in order to offer hope.

God's answer to man's need is not mere religion. The best that religion can do is to prescribe things for man to believe and do—in the vain hope that the practice of that religion will meet his need. NO religion can do that—including much that is called "Christianity" but has become mere religion.

God's answer instead is a person, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The very name, Jesus, given by God to His Son, means "the LORD saves." But who is he and how can he help? What difference could a man who died 2000 years ago on a Roman cross possibly make to anyone today?

Though He lived among us as a man, Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. He did not begin His life in the womb of His earthly mother, Mary. Back in eternity, before there were angels, or men, or even creation itself, He was there with His Father. In fact, it was through His Son that the Father created all things. John 1:1-3. Hebrews 1:2. Colossians 1:16-17. So it is entirely proper to call Him our Creator.

What anguish of heart it must have caused as He saw His

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

creatures turn away from Him in sin and rebellion. We cannot imagine. And yet, in His great love, He was willing in obedience to His Father's plan, to leave all of the glory of heaven behind, to humble Himself to live among His fallen creatures. He tasted our sorrow and pain; He faced our temptations; He endured the opposition of wicked men. Yet through it all He remained untainted by sin. Where Adam failed, He did not.

It is amazing enough that He was willing to come down and live in such a world. But to endure the suffering of the cross—that defies understanding! Why would He do such a thing? Why would the Creator submit Himself into the hands of wicked men to torture and crucify Him?

Imagine, if you will, a courtroom. There you stand. The judge has read the law and has enumerated your crimes against that law. Your mouth has been shut. There is nothing that can be said in your defense. No excuses. No protestations. Nothing to do but to simply stand there in silence awaiting your just sentence. Your head is bowed. You see no way out. Hope is gone.

### **The Substitute**

But just before the judge passes sentence, into the courtroom steps the judge's son and says, "Father, may I approach the bench?" The judge says, "Yes," and motions him to come. The son steps forward and says, "Father, I know that by our law this man is guilty as charged. He is worthy of death. But I offer myself as a substitute. Charge me with his crimes. Let me take his punishment. I love him. Please let him go free."

Yet these simple words cannot begin to convey the enormity of what Jesus has done for us. Listen to the words of the prophet, Isaiah. "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

## The Gospel

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:3-6.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The death of God’s Son on the cross is His answer to the otherwise unsolvable problem of our guilt. He did not die for any crime He had committed. It was our sins—yours and mine—that nailed Him there, that caused Him to endure such indescribable suffering. And beyond the physical suffering was the awful weight of our sins on His holy soul. The sin of the world was heaped upon Him.

Yet He did it willingly, even joyfully, for He could see beyond the suffering of the cross, beyond the grave, beyond this world. He saw another world, peopled by an innumerable company of the redeemed of all ages, living forever in peace, love, joy, and fulfillment, free from every ill of this present evil world.

### **Sins Erased**

The first danger we listed from which men need saving is the guilt of sin. God’s answer is the cross. The blood that flowed from the broken tortured body of Jesus represented the life that He willingly gave for us. You and I have no power to erase our sins. But the blood that He so willingly shed has the power, not merely to cover up our sins, but to blot them out as if they had never happened! Hallelujah! That is freedom!

Someone may read this who has not merely hated someone. You have actually committed murder—or some other terrible crime. When you allow yourself to think about what you have done there is a terrible weight on your soul. You wonder if there is any hope. For someone else, maybe, but surely not you. But I tell you on the authority of God’s word that the blood of Jesus Christ—and ONLY

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

the blood of Jesus Christ—can make you as free and clean before God as if you had never even committed those crimes in the first place!

Let's return for a moment to Romans 3. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." Romans 3:22-25. The gospel does not only show us our need; it also shows us God's perfect remedy.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."

### **No More Guilt**

In Hebrews, chapter 9, we read of the old testament animal sacrifices, sacrifices that in themselves could not take away sin, but were meant to be temporary "stand-ins" for the one true sacrifice yet to come. At the proper time in God's plan He provided His own Lamb as a sin offering, a sacrifice that forever ended the need for any other.

The writer continues the comparison between Christ's death and the old testament sacrifices in Hebrews 9:14 by saying, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

You may feel as though God might forgive you yet you will always live under a cloud, weighed down by the guilt of what you have done. No! The blood of Christ not only erases the record of our sins; it frees the conscience so that even our sense of guilt is gone! That is salvation indeed!

But what of the second need, deliverance from the power of sin? What about our inability to live for God? Does God have a remedy for that?

# The Gospel

## Complete Salvation

Speaking of Jesus, Hebrews 7:25 says, "...he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." What a wonderful scripture! Here we see salvation not just as an "event" like being "saved" or "born again" as so many think of it. Here salvation is more of a process. We also see that the ability is His. At no point in salvation are we asked or expected to rely upon our own strength or ability. It is truly salvation from start to finish.

Philippians 1:6 says, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." Once again, we see salvation described as a "good work" that lasts until Jesus comes. What most people call "salvation" is really only the beginning. To God, salvation describes the entire process of taking lost hell-bound sinners and making them fit to live in another world to come, entirely free from sin. That's a big job! But it's not too big for Jesus. He is able to do a complete job.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Two things are particularly worth noting. One is that Paul refers to "us who **are being saved.**" That is not an event but a continuing process.

## God's Power

The second thing is Paul's reference to "the power of God." The gospel is much more than a simple formula by which our sins can be forgiven and we can go to heaven when we die. Salvation requires God's power. In fact the previous verse refers to Paul's calling "to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."

Remember that in Romans 1:16 Paul says that the gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." **If the power of God is not present and active in the proclamation of what is called the gospel, then it is not the gospel.**

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

That is what I see missing in so many places in our day. The words are OK. The facts are in order. The people are correctly told that Jesus died for their sins and that they need to believe in Him and be saved. But how often is the power of God present in the message to actually change people's lives at the heart level—or are they just converted to a doctrine about the new birth and to a religious way of life?

Sinners live their lives under the power of sin and Satan. It takes more than mere words to deliver them. It takes God's power, present by the anointing, convicting, revealing, ministering faith, drawing, and ultimately bringing people to the miracle of the new birth. Satan will not give up his victims willingly. He will only yield to a power greater than himself.

And there must be a source of power available to us greater than that of sin—or else we will remain, in a practical sense, under its power. Romans 5:20-21 tells us that the grace of God is greater than our sin. Grace is divine help that we do not deserve. Verse 17 speaks of “God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness” that enables us to “reign in life through the one man, Christ Jesus.”

The scriptures describe the result of the new birth in a number of ways. All of them are basically conveying the same truth. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Ezekiel 36:26 refers to a “new heart” and a “new spirit.” Colossians 1:27 refers to “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, “Christ lives in me.” Romans 8:9 refers to our having “the Spirit of God,” and “the Spirit of Christ.”

All of these expressions are referring to the same thing: a divine miracle that takes place in our hearts in which God's Spirit comes in to live and give us what we need to live for God. Without that all you have is someone “trying” to be a Christian. It doesn't work. And even when God comes in to live, the changes needed in our lives do not

## The Gospel

come automatically or instantly. But a saving work DOES begin, one that Christ not only begins but has promised to finish.

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This scripture reminds us that salvation is God’s work. We assume our proper role as the “clay” and He takes His place as the “Potter,” fashioning us according to His plan. Any truly “good” works are, therefore, the result of His prior workmanship and are never self-effort.

### Two Extremes

I have observed two extremes of teaching regarding the Christian life. One extreme actually teaches a place of sinless perfection attainable in this life, often as the result of an experience. If this were the case then Christ’s work in us would be over long before the day of Christ. After all, what can you add to sinless perfection? Surely any honest reading of the first chapter of 1 John should make it obvious that such a teaching is an unscriptural extreme. There are many scriptures that exhort believers to holy God-honoring living but none that place us beyond sin in this life.

The other extreme is often a reaction to the first extreme. You would almost get the impression that the only thing a Christian can realistically expect is to have his sins forgiven. He ought not to expect to gain any real measure of practical victory over sin. Great stress is laid on Paul’s profession in Romans 7 as though that was meant to describe the normal Christian life. Of course, Romans 7 is a pretty good description of what you can expect IF you are trying to produce godliness through self-effort.

I remember a couple of years ago hearing a famous preacher—now gone on to be with the Lord—make the following statement concerning the group of which he was a part: he said, “I wish to God we were as afraid of sin as we are of perfection!” It is easy to see what he was getting at. He had observed such a “knee-jerk” reaction against any suggestion regarding overcoming sin that many

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

had gone into the other ditch. People were so warned against "perfection" that sin became almost expected.

Surely there is a middle ground! Christ didn't come to save us IN our sins but FROM them. True, during this life we continue to inhabit bodies of sin but the progressive work of Christ from the inside out gives us the ability to grow up in Him and learn to more and more live for God anyway. What a sad "gospel" it would be if we had to tell a lost hell-bound drunk that, while he would always be a drunk, he could at least be a "forgiven" drunk! No! God has made provision for overcoming sin in a practical way. There is no place for complacency or feeling that we have "arrived" but we have every right by the grace of God to expect Him to help us and to deliver us as we rely upon Him.

The one extreme tends to produce delusion, hypocrisy, or frustration. The other tends to produce empty profession, worldliness, and complacency. The gospel of Jesus Christ, preached by the anointing of the Holy Spirit has the power to bring about a progressive work of salvation that takes a man all the way from the miry pit of sin to the purity of the halls of heaven. And the blood of Jesus Christ is available throughout that journey to cleanse us completely from all our failures and shortcomings along the way. 1 John 1:7-9.

The subject of victorious Christian living in spite of our flesh is quite a large one but for our present purposes let it suffice to say that God has made provision for us in the cross not only to be forgiven but also to live for him in this world. Of course, it is only by His strength; that is why it is called "salvation."

### **Jesus Versus Satan**

But what of Satan's power? What about the fact that we continue to live in the midst of a world system ruled over by the devil and all his demons? What of the god of this world? We are surely no match for Satan's power in ourselves. What has Christ done about this need?

The world into which Jesus was born was ruled by Satan, sin, and

## The Gospel

death. As Isaiah 60:2 says, "...darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples." At best, a small remnant of Israelites remained faithful to God, awaiting the promised Messiah. Luke 2:25-38.

When Jesus was still a young child wise men came from the east seeking the one who had been born to be "king of the Jews." When King Herod heard of this and learned where the child was he issued an order to kill every male infant under the age of two years in Bethlehem. But God warned Joseph and Mary through an angel in a dream and they escaped to Egypt before the slaughter.

We know from John's vision in Revelation 12 that the devil was fully aware of who Jesus was and sought to kill him. No doubt he was the inspiration behind Herod's attempt as well as the many other plots recorded in the gospels.

Immediately following the baptism and anointing of Jesus we see him led by the Spirit into the wilderness specifically to be tempted by the devil. Although just three particular temptations are recorded there is no doubt that in the wilderness—and throughout his ministry—the devil assaulted Jesus with every temptation he could devise—to no avail.

Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin." And so we see that, first of all, Jesus personally overcame every attempt of the devil to corrupt him through sin.

One of the notable characteristics of the ministry of Jesus was his authority over demons. Wherever he went he healed sick people and cast out devils. When some of the religious leaders accused him of being in league with the devil (Luke 11:15) Jesus said, "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?" Luke 11:17-18.

Then in Luke 11:21-22, he said, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.” Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God and clearly demonstrated its superiority in authority and power over Satan’s kingdom. His words on that occasion clearly prefigured God’s plan for the salvation of multitudes yet unborn. The devil is the “strong man,” and this world is “his own house.” For souls to be rescued from Satan’s house it was necessary that he first be overpowered and defeated. As Matthew 12:29 puts it, “he first ties up the strong man.”

### Victory

Shortly before it was time for Jesus to go to the cross he said in John 12:31-32, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” In Revelation 12:7-9, John’s vision continued, “And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

What a glorious picture of the battle of the ages fought at the cross! Jesus endured everything the devil and all his evil hosts could muster—and they were utterly defeated. And the devil couldn’t even kill him! He laid his own life down—willingly—for us! John 10:17-18.

Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

And so the proclamation was made in heaven: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” Revelation 12:10.

## The Gospel

In Ephesians 1:18-23 Paul said, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

All the powers of hell could not keep Jesus in the tomb. He rose in triumph with a life forever beyond the power of sin and death. It is this life that He offers to all who put their trust in Him. His victory was “for the church, which is his body.”

In Colossians 1:13-14 Paul says, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

There is a very definite connection between Christ’s victory and authority over Satan and the proclamation of the gospel. Listen to the words of Jesus shortly before he returned to heaven: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore** go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20.

One of the privileges of salvation is that those who have put their trust in Christ are given power to overcome the devil’s strong holds in their lives. The devil may at times wield a strong influence in the life of a Christian through intimidation or deceit but he has no **right** to do so. He is a liar. One of the things those who are being saved learn is to recognize and resist the devil even as Jesus did. We learn to believe and confess God’s word instead of Satan’s lies. God’s word is a

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

sword before which the devil cannot stand. Ephesians 6:17. James 4:7. 1 Peter 5:9. Luke 10:18-20.

### **An Eternal Kingdom**

But the authority given to Christ by His Father is not just for the defeat of Satan: it is for the establishment of God's kingdom. Listen to the wonderful prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

The foundation for this eternal kingdom was laid at the cross and confirmed by the empty tomb. On the day of Pentecost the church was born and from that day to this the work of calling out, sanctifying, and preparing a people to live in that great kingdom has continued despite all of Satan's efforts. As Jesus had declared in Matthew 16:18, "...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Before his crucifixion Jesus said many things to prepare his disciples for the traumatic events to come. In John 14:1-3 he said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

What a wonderful, simple declaration. The word "rooms," sometimes translated, "mansions," is literally "dwelling places" or "abodes." He was saying that where my Father lives there are plenty of places to live. Note that these are places to **live**, not merely visit. There is a sense of permanence and of rest conveyed by his words.

He then states four simple stages of God's plan: I am going; (I will)

## The Gospel

prepare a place for you; I will come back; (I will) take you to be with me. The end result is that you will be where I am. Consider, if you will, **when** these words were uttered. This was **before** the cross! Jesus knew that despite the agony he faced, his death was not the end but was, rather, a means to an end—and a glorious end at that! What Jesus declared in this scripture is God’s answer to the “sinking ship” of this world—for those who are saved.

Shortly before the day of Pentecost the disciples witnessed the first stage when Jesus suddenly began ascending upward until a cloud hid him from view. Then two men dressed in white appeared beside them: “Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’” Acts 1:11. The evidence that He arrived safely came a few days later with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost!

### At Home With The Lord

Of course, many believers have died physically since that day. What of them? Paul shares his hope in these simple words: “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:8.

Listen to his declaration in Philippians 1:21-24: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” There is a place right now where the redeemed who have gone on are “with Christ,” awaiting the glorious day to come.

Today, the promised return is drawing nearer and nearer. Why has it not happened? Why does God allow such evil things to happen in our world? 2 Peter 3:9 tells us, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." His work is not done.

Yet the day will soon come when it will be and opportunity will be gone. As it was in Noah's day, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever." Genesis 6:3. All heaven awaits the day when God says, "Enough! Go and bring my children home." What a day that will be!

### **When He Comes**

In 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 Paul comforted the persecuted Christians of Thessalonica with these words: "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." Judgment for the world; deliverance for the saints.

The wonderful words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 are often quoted at the funerals of believers: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." What an awesome hope!

## The Gospel

The words of 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 are also often used: “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

### **Everything Under His Control**

Philippians 3:20-21 says, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” How wonderful it will be when we no longer have to put up with these bodies of sin and death, our whole beings transformed by the grace of God into citizens of a holy and eternal kingdom!

### **A New Earth**

What is our final destination? 2 Peter 3:12-13 tells us, “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” In Ephesians 2:7 we are told that the amazingly gracious things God has done for us through Jesus Christ have been done “in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in

## The Gospel: God's Answer to Man's Need

Christ Jesus.” Coming “ages”—plural! “Incomparable riches”! What a great God we serve!

Truly, our Lord Jesus Christ “is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25. Our utter inability to help ourselves is no hindrance to his ability to save us. God's provision is far greater than our need. No wonder Paul was excited!

## *Chapter Three*

### **The Gospel: Coming to Faith**

Thus far we have sought to establish two critically important truths: man's overwhelming need with respect to sin and judgment; and God's ample provision for that need through Jesus Christ. What obviously follows is the question of how man benefits from that provision. Left to himself he will surely perish. Yet even an ample provision does a man no good unless he comes into personal possession of it.

Remember the words of Paul in Romans 1:16 in which he tells us that the gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Need and provision, then, are brought together in "everyone who believes."

#### **First For The Jew**

Lest it be a distraction to the discussion of our subject, I believe it would be in order to comment on the last part of Paul's statement, the part where he said, "first for the Jew." Why did Paul add that? Does this mean that God favors Jews above Gentiles when it comes to salvation?

We have already pointed out that with respect to the need of salvation there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, All are helpless sinners, whether Pharisees who boast in the law of Moses, or Gentile heathen who have never even heard of Moses. In fact, Paul explicitly said, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Romans 10:12-13.

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

Why, then, did Paul say, “first for the Jew”? It is obvious from the scriptures that, prior to Christ, God **did** indeed favor the nation of Israel, Abraham’s descendants through Isaac and Jacob, over the other nations of the world. In spite of the terrible record of apostasy and unbelief that characterized Israel as a whole there was always a faithful remnant of believers, preserved by God, within the nation. As the Lord told Elijah in his day, “I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.” 1 Kings 19:18.

It was to and through this remnant that God revealed Himself and foretold of the Savior to come. Generations of them lived and died believing in and waiting for the fulfillment of God’s wonderful promises. Hebrews 11:39-40. 1 Peter 1:10-12. Simeon and Anna were examples of these true Israelites who looked for the Savior. Luke 2:25-38.

In the parable of the great feast, recorded for us in Luke 14:16-23, the first call to the feast was to those who had already been invited. Note the timing. The invitation came first, then the preparation of the feast, then the call to “Come, for everything is now ready.” It was only after this call was refused that the command was given to “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” Luke 14:21.

Whom do you think Jesus meant by this parable? The feast itself is a wonderful picture of the gospel, the provision of God made ready through Christ. For centuries the prophets had given out the invitation of God to the coming feast. This invitation had been to Israel and so it was fitting that when the time finally came, the fulfillment of the prophetic message should be announced to the Jews first. After all, some of them were like Simeon and Anna. How strange it would have been for the Lord to have gone straight to the heathen nations without first telling them and others like them!

Even though Paul’s ministry was primarily to the Gentiles, it nonetheless reflected the order indicated in the parable. Everywhere he went where there was a synagogue Paul first went there to

## The Gospel

announce the fulfillment of the words of their prophets. Only when he had done this did he preach to the Gentiles. That is what “first to the Jew” meant. “First” had to do with the order in which the gospel began to be proclaimed. Beyond that, it is for “everyone who believes.”

### Done

I have often heard recounted an incident from the life of the famous evangelist, D.L. Moody. He had occasion one day to travel by train. During his journey he was seated next to a zealous practitioner of a particular religion. For some two hours the man talked, pressing his religious views upon Moody, who patiently listened. At the conclusion of the journey, as they stepped onto the station platform, Moody turned to the man and said simply, “There are only two letters difference between your religion and mine: yours is spelled ‘d-o’; mine is spelled ‘d-o-n-e.’”

What a wonderfully simple way to express the difference between “religion” and the gospel. I should hasten to define the way I use the word “religion,” since it differs from the way many in history have used it. To me, “religion” is any system of beliefs and practices by which man tries to save himself. The gospel reveals what God has done—“d-o-n-e”—for man. “Religion” is, then, man’s substitute for God’s true salvation.

Every religion in the earth has its own idea as to what man’s need is. Leaving aside the question as to whether that need is correctly identified or not, virtually all religions give man something he must **DO** in order to meet that need. It may be the offering of sacrifices or the performance of other acts of religious ritual and devotion. It may be the pursuit of special knowledge or the exercise of various kinds of self-discipline or adherence to certain creeds and codes of conduct. But regardless of the details, the hallmark of religion is “d-o.” It is basically up to the followers of the particular religion to save themselves, or to qualify for some sort of salvation through their own efforts.

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

But if man could save himself there would be no need of the gospel. Religion in all of its forms violates the very reason that Jesus went to the cross: that man is a helpless sinner. If man is truly helpless in the face of sin and judgment then there is nothing he **can** do—and all of his religious efforts are in vain.

Religion, no matter how sincere, denies both of the truths that we have thus far established. It does not see man's need the same way God sees it. In the view of religion, man may be misguided, but basically good, or a victim of ignorance, anything but a hopeless, helpless sinner against a holy God. As a result religion relies on a man's own ability to "DO" in order to save himself.

To Paul, all of the "doing" necessary for our full and complete salvation has already been done, once for all, by Jesus Christ. John 19:30. Colossians 2:9-10. Hebrews 10:10, 14. There are many things a Christian ought to do. However, not one of these things is done "to be saved." Titus 3:5. Romans 4:5. Ephesians 2:10.

### What is Faith?

Salvation, therefore, is not for those who "do," but for those who "believe." That is the key word. The meaning of the word "believe," as Paul understood it, is what I hope, as the Lord enables, to make clear. What is "faith"? What does it mean to "believe"? Before considering what faith **is**, let's first consider some of the things it is **not**.

### Not Intellectual Assent

Saving faith, first of all, is much more than mere intellectual assent. No one has ever been saved by simply embracing certain religious doctrines. It is true that God does not bypass our minds and there are truths of which we must be convinced but it is with the **heart** that man must believe if he is to be saved. Romans 10:9-10.

James warned those who thought of faith as simply a belief of the mind that such faith cannot save. He says, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2:17. Faith without resulting deeds is no better than the faith of demons, who believe in God—and

## The Gospel

shudder. James 2:19. And that is all that some people have – “demon faith”! It is a “faith” that makes no real difference in their lives. This kind of “faith” that James evidently encountered and wrote about is not at all what Paul meant by faith. To both James and Paul, works were the evidence of genuine faith.

Imagine yourself trapped in a place where destruction is certain. Then imagine that there is but one escape, a narrow bridge over a deep chasm. Intellectually, you could acknowledge the facts of your case but if that is as far as it went you would surely perish. Merely believing in the destruction to come and professing your belief in the bridge as a reliable way of escape is useless. You must take action, committing yourself to that bridge and leaving the place of destruction behind.

What an empty sham such faith is! It offers fine words and noble ideas yet withholds trust. It is self condescendingly seeking to accommodate God without surrender. It professes faith in God yet that profession makes no difference in the life. It is no better than that of the man who perishes while professing faith in a bridge he will not cross. Religious pride and self deception are the hallmarks of such “faith.” Trust is placed, not in a God Who saves unworthy sinners, but in self and religious profession.

### **Not a Feeling**

Another thing that faith is not is a religious feeling, emotion, or experience. Many people equate faith with a certain kind of feeling. This is why in many places religious services amount to little more than spiritual “pep rallies” designed to get the people excited. However, religious enthusiasm is not faith and has never saved anyone. Yet that is all many people have and their spiritual life consists of striving to seek out, work up, and maintain that special feeling that gives them a temporary sense of confidence towards God, however false that confidence may be.

Even where true faith is present it seldom corresponds to our emotional state. In fact, the greatest expressions of faith happen

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

when the emotions are most contrary. It wasn't emotion that carried Abraham through 25 long years between God's promise and the birth of Isaac.

### **Not a Human Ability**

Faith is not a human ability at all—not saving faith. None of us is born with it. So many struggle, looking down inside themselves, trying to find or “work up” faith—whatever that is. You will never find it there. Faith is, in fact, a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8. You will never have faith unless God gives it to you. To imagine otherwise is to violate the truth of man's helpless sinful state before God.

### **Not Religious Beliefs**

When many people speak of faith, what they mean is their religion with its various beliefs and practices. Their “faith” consists of what they believe and do and your faith, what you believe and do. One “faith” is as good as another—they think. How well that fits into a world that has rejected absolute truth!

Of course, some people do set “their” faith above others but that is not what we are talking about. There is a faith that was once entrusted to the saints. Jude 3. That faith is as different from what most people call faith as life is from death. I can just hear some reader thinking, “Oh, so you think you are the only ones, that your church, with its particular teachings and ways of doing things, has exclusive possession of the one true faith and everyone else is wrong.” Not at all. I certainly believe there are many doctrines that are true and that matter but that is not the faith once delivered to the saints.

### **The Origin of Unbelief**

Consider what was lost in the beginning. God created a perfect world with no sin, no suffering, and no death. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were given complete freedom to fellowship with God and to enjoy His beautiful creation—with one exception. There was

## The Gospel

one tree whose fruit they were forbidden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:16-17.

Along came Satan, expressing himself through the serpent. He approached Eve when she was alone. That fact by itself reveals a calculated attack on God's order. Why, if his wisdom was true and honorable, did he not first approach Adam?

Satan first raised the issue of God's command not to eat of that particular tree. When Eve stated what God had commanded Satan launched his attack. He first declared God's warning that disobedience would lead to death to be a lie. Then, after attacking God's truthfulness he attacked His character, His very motive for giving the command.

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5. Eve foolishly considered what Satan said, found both his lie and the fruit itself appealing, ate it, and gave some to her husband who also ate.

The disobedience of Eve and then Adam was no small thing. By believing Satan they were at the same time calling God an evil, selfish liar who could not be trusted. God became their enemy, His every command suspect. By their deed they declared that their highest welfare lay down the path of independence and rebellion. In their minds God had known what was best for them and had refused to tell them, lying to them instead.

All disobedience against God is really saying the same thing! We are saying that our wisdom is wiser than His, our motives are purer. Our interests are better served by self-will. Either He is evil and desires to use us for His own selfish purposes or else He really just doesn't understand what is best for us. Think about it!

Thus did the awful power of sin enter into their very hearts, corrupting them as well as the heart of every member of Adam's race. It is this heart-level enmity between man and God that must be overcome in true salvation.

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

### Real Faith

Consider Abraham, the father of all who believe (Romans 4:11). God gave Abram, as he was known at the time, an amazing promise that not only would he produce an heir from his own body but that his descendants would be like the stars of heaven, more than Abram could count. Genesis 15:6 says simply, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

It doesn't say, “Abram believed the promise,” but, “Abram believed the LORD.” There is a huge difference. It is one thing to believe a particular promise or statement someone makes. It is quite another to believe the **person** who makes that promise. Faith in the **person** results in believing **whatever** that person says because the person is judged to be truthful and reliable.

Much that is called faith is really just an issue by issue thing. The person involved is never really trusted. Rather, as each issue arises we consider it, evaluate it and decide if we are going to believe or disbelieve. We retain control. Our faith and trust is really in self and every issue is judged by its effect on self, its reasonableness to our natural minds, and so on. The Israelites in the wilderness were like that. They followed Moses out there but fell, one by one, because they never really believed or trusted the God Who had sent him. Hebrews 3:7-19.

Real faith is of a different sort. **It transfers confidence from self to God.** He is judged to be 100% truthful and trustworthy. We no longer judge what He says issue by issue. If He says it then it is true and reliable and we fully trust in it regardless of anything else that may seem to be contrary.

Faith enabled Abraham to wait those long 25 years for the son of promise, even when the answer became a biological impossibility. Did he waver? Certainly, and Ishmael was the result, but in the end faith prevailed and Isaac, the miracle child of the promise was born. As Hebrews 11:11 says, “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age — and Sarah herself was barren — was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the

## The Gospel

promise.” That’s it! Not just faith in the promise but in the faithfulness of the One making the promise. Notice that Abraham was “enabled.” The power involved was God’s alone.

Think about it: Adam and Eve walked and talked with God and lived in paradise. They had every reason to trust Him, but turned away. Abraham faced mountains of obstacles for years yet persevered in faith until the promise came.

The greatest test of faith came later when God told Him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Anything short of full unquestioning confidence in God would have resulted in failure. But Abraham passed the test, fully confident that whatever God told him to do was right and that all would be right in the end. After all, even if he killed his son, God could easily raise him from the dead! Hebrews 11:19. The test lasted until Abraham was standing over his bound son with the knife raised to kill him when God stopped him and provided a substitute sacrifice.

It’s hard to imagine a greater test. This was the very son of promise—his son, flesh of his flesh! Kill him? It didn’t make sense. Every natural consideration screamed out, “No way!” But God had spoken—a God he knew and loved and trusted. That was enough.

As a result God said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” Genesis 22:16-18. This promise is directly connected with the hope of the gospel. Galatians 3:6-9.

It was such faith that enabled Noah to withstand the ridicule of wicked men for 120 years as he preached, warned, and built an ocean-liner sized boat on dry land in anticipation of the coming flood of destruction. This, despite the fact that it had never rained before!

I recently illustrated for our people at the Bible Tabernacle the magnitude of Noah’s task. The Bible Tabernacle is 60 feet by 100 feet.

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

The ark that Noah built was approximately 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high with 3 levels. That means that the ark was higher and wider than the church and four and a half times as long! No wonder God gave him 120 years to build it!

It was faith that enabled Joshua to lead a nation against the city of Jericho following one of the most unusual battle plans of all times. As they marched and shouted in faith God brought the walls down. Faith enabled Gideon to send all but 300 out of 32,000 volunteers home when he faced the Midianite army. Faith enabled Hezekiah to send the choir out ahead of the soldiers to face an army of overwhelming size. In each case the God Whose word they unquestioningly believed gave great victories.

Faith enabled a young man named David armed with only a sling and 5 stones to **run** towards a fully-armed giant whose taunts had terrified a whole army.

### Faith is Childlike

In Luke 18:15-17, people were bringing their little children to Jesus to touch them. The disciples rebuked them but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

What we have been describing is childlike faith. A child simply believes because Daddy says so. If Daddy says, “Let’s get in the car and drive to such-and-such a place the child does not have to understand how a car works. He doesn’t worry about the price of gas, whether Daddy knows how to get there, whether he has checked the oil lately, and so forth. That’s Daddy’s responsibility. As far as the child is concerned, arriving at the destination is a certainty the moment Daddy says they are going.

Now the child will probably ask, “Are we there yet?” every five minutes! But notice that he doesn’t ask, “Are you sure that’s where we are going?” or, “Are you sure we will get there?” If the destination is

## The Gospel

Grandma's house the child doesn't worry about whether they will make it or not but rather spends his time in joyful anticipation of seeing Grandma. Why? He knows and implicitly trusts Daddy.

The difference can easily be illustrated by the incident where Jesus said, "Let us go over to the other side." Mark 4:35. Jesus was so certain of the destination that He went to sleep in the stern of the boat. When the storm came up the disciples forgot all about Jesus' words concerning "the other side" and woke Jesus up in a panic.

When He awoke He didn't say, "Oh, my God! I thought we were going to the other side but it looks like we are going to drown!" He first spoke to the winds and waves and said, "Quiet! Be still," and then simply said to the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Mark 4:39-40. The "faith" of the disciples was more in the storm than it was in the implied promise in Jesus' words before they set out. Jesus had a perfect confidence in His Father and the certainty of His plan.

To natural men God is an enemy Who cannot be trusted. To a man with saving faith God becomes a Father Who cannot lie. Therefore the gospel, its facts, its promises are fully embraced and relied upon. Why? He is faithful that promised!

### **The Road to Saving Faith**

For a man to be moved from stubborn unbelief to such childlike trust is nothing short of a divine miracle. It is a complete reversal of everything his life is about. It is not a little fine-tuning, or even an overhaul: it is a new engine.

No mere words, clever human persuasion, emotional appeal, or anything else that relies upon human ability can accomplish this. Only God, dealing directly with the heart of a man, can bring such a change about. Of course He employs the anointed proclamation of the gospel in the process but the real work is an inward one wrought by God.

Many people "try" to believe God, to embrace the hope of the gospel apart from that work of God but it doesn't work. They are told

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

that all they must do is to pray a little prayer and “receive” Jesus. Then they are told that they are saved so they begin to “try” to be Christians. They may struggle and doubt and wonder about the power the gospel is supposed to have. Then they look around, see others just like them and shrug their shoulders, figuring, “That’s just how it is.” Or they give up.

### **Unplowed Ground**

Jeremiah 4:3 says, “Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns.” This is a natural picture of what must happen in the heart. The gospel, with its hope of eternal life, is like seed. The heart is like soil. Sin has left the heart hard and rocky and choked with thorns and briars. For the gospel seed to spring up and flourish God must do a lot of weeding and plowing.

In Matthew 13:1-23 Jesus gave us both a parable about the preaching of the kingdom and its explanation. The seed is the message. It falls on several different types of soil. Some falls where the soil is trampled down and hard. The birds (Satan and his demons) steal the word before it has a chance to germinate. Another type of soil is rocky with very little earth. The seed springs up quickly but doesn’t last because there is no real root. Another type is choked with thorns and briars, representing the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. They choke out the word and no crop is produced. Only in the good ground is a crop produced.

The parallel between Jesus’ parable and Jeremiah 4:3 is obvious. There is no greater Gardener than the Lord and He knows what it takes to produce the fruit He is looking for. And He is patient because He knows that there is both a preparation and a process involved. Before the gospel seed can prosper the soil must be prepared. Let’s take a look at a number of aspects of the divine work of preparing a human heart and see what a prepared heart is like.

### **Conviction**

Fundamental to that preparation work is a thorough conviction

## The Gospel

of sin. Every natural instinct will cry out against and oppose the light that exposes the awful darkness of a human heart. Self will desperately seek to protect itself from the truth with every form of anger and denial.

And it is not enough merely to convince the mind of the fact of human depravity. The very heart itself must be confronted and brought to a thorough conviction of its corruption and of the justice of God's wrath against sin—not only against sin as a general principle, but also against the individual sinner. Every mouth must be stopped—nothing else to be said in defense of the heart.

A man who has been brought this far has come a long way, but not nearly far enough. Remember that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. Romans 2:4. Repentance is the goal as it must precede and accompany saving faith. Repentance is faith in action in response to conviction. It would make no sense for God to grant faith to a man who has no intention of giving up his sins.

The work of God in conviction must, as we have said, confront a man's very heart. Yet that conviction must result in more than mere acknowledgment or grudging admission. Many will **admit** that they are sinners—and deeply resent your bringing it up. They have no desire or intention of giving up their way and turning from sin. God will never grant saving faith to such a man. He is still an unrepentant rebel despite the conviction he may temporarily feel. And even when he feels it he runs **from** the light and not to it.

Another way men fall short at this point occurs when their motivation is simply fear of judgment and hell. Fear of judgment may well be a part of bringing a man to true repentance but the kind of man I'm describing acts purely out of self-interest. In his heart of hearts he would really prefer to continue in sin but the prospect of judgment motivates him to make some kind of religious effort. This is not salvation—not even close.

### Godly Sorrow

The conviction of God's Spirit in the heart is designed to bring

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

about far more than a grudging admission or a fear-driven religious effort. It is designed to produce a godly sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Godly sorrow is not being sorry you were caught. It is not being sorry the divine spotlight is exposing your sin and making you feel bad. It is not self-pity or sorrow that you can't have your sins and heaven too. It is not focused on self at all. Rather it is a heart sorrow concerning sin itself. That sorrow produces a deep shame, a sense of guilt, a self-loathing, a humble contrition. It is focused upon God and how wicked and contemptible we are in the face of His unsurpassed holiness and goodness. It is a total change of viewpoint. Instead of measuring ourselves against other men we see ourselves in a measure as God sees us—and we are heartbroken.

Consider Job's response to God's revelation of Himself: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:5-6. And we have Isaiah's exclamation at the vision of God's holiness: “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’” Isaiah 6:5. Each of these men was among the most godly men of their respective generations. But when God reveals Himself, it is a different story.

### **Self-Righteous Pride Destroyed**

One effect of such revelation is that it destroys all self-righteousness. The sinner is made to know with shocking clarity that if He is to find favor with God it will be because God chooses to act in mercy and grace towards him, and not because there is anything in him that deserves such favor. Pride, the wicked and deceptive product of sin, must be utterly destroyed. There will be no boasting on the day of judgment. The redeemed will fall on their faces amazed at God's goodness and mercy.

Part of the effect of God's work of conviction is the knowledge

## The Gospel

that only God can fix what is wrong. Salvation cannot even begin as long as we are striving to “save ourselves.” That is why the scripture says, “for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.” Hebrews 4:10. Human pride must utterly fall before the grace of God through which we become “God’s workmanship.” Ephesians 2:10. He is the divine Potter and we but the clay. Isaiah 64:8. We are no longer our own but rather bought with a price. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

### **A Heartcry**

Of course, the purpose of conviction is not to leave us wallowing in the mire of hopeless self-pity. It is designed to produce in the heart a genuine willingness to turn from sin, a deep heartcry for deliverance from both sin and self. It is one thing to see what we are; it is another to cry out to be changed. That is what God is looking for and He alone has the power to bring that change about.

There is a kind of desperate boldness that pleases God, that catches His ear and grabs His attention. I think of blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52 who sought healing from Jesus. When he heard that Jesus was passing by he cried out. When others tried to shut him up he only cried out louder. He was totally focused on one thing and would allow nothing to stand in his way. He didn’t care what anyone else did or what they thought of him. He did the one thing he could do: cry out to the One Who could help him until Jesus stopped and said, “Call Him.” Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” He replied simply, “Rabbi, I want to see.” Jesus told him to go, that his faith had healed him.

And so we see that faith is both belief and specific action. The man knew his need. He fully believed that Jesus could help him. That belief caused him to cry out from the depths of his soul—undeterred by the criticisms and discouragements he received from others—until he obtained what he sought. And a record of his faith has been preserved for us in holy scripture as an encouragement to us in our great need.

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

A man who only casually seeks God cannot expect to be heard. Do you want to be saved or not? Just how important is your soul? A sinner ought to cry out to God as if God must answer or he will die—because that is exactly the case: if God does not answer you will die. That is what is at stake.

### **A Radical Choice**

The gospel presents a radical choice between two worlds. It is the kingdom of God OR the world, God OR the devil, heaven OR hell. There is absolutely no middle ground, no way to have one without turning your back on the other. To have Christ is to reject the world and to fall down before Him, not just as Savior, but also as Lord.

Conviction destroys trust in self in order that trust may be returned to our Creator where it rightfully belongs. All of our strength and ability can only produce corruption and so we learn that henceforth our hope lies in His limitless strength and utter faithfulness. The ground of our hearts is plowed up and weeded and God reveals concerning His Son that, “he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25. We are divinely enabled to believe in Him. It is God’s loving gift to those who humble themselves when He deals with their hearts.

Our Heavenly Father paid a price to save us that we will never fully comprehend. No one was more dear, more precious to God than His Son. And yet, to open heaven’s door to us, wicked, vile, rebels that we are, He poured out all the wrath, the anger, the hatred, the fury of His holy nature against that very beloved Son. Why? Not because there was any sin in Him but because He stood in our place and bore our sins. God held nothing back that was needful and that is why Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

# The Gospel

## Costs Everything

This great salvation is, in one sense, given to us. We cannot earn it nor do we deserve it. Yet in another sense it costs us everything, our sins, our very life. In Matthew 13:44-45, Jesus gave us the parable of a merchant seeking fine pearls. He discovered one of great value, **sold everything he had**, and bought it. That is the value of this heavenly kingdom. It is worth everything. When we are enabled by God's grace to catch even a glimpse of that kingdom this world loses its beauty, its allure. Nothing is more important than serving God and being part of the world to come. As missionary martyr Jim Elliott said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Salvation is by faith: "for...everyone who believes." Romans 1:16. Faith is a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8-10. So how does God give that precious gift to those whose hearts have been prepared? Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Faith comes, not by looking inside and "trying," but rather by looking to God, hearing the glorious words of hope and promise that He Who cannot lie sows like a seed in a plowed heart. He makes Himself known to us by His Word, impregnated by His very life, ministered through those He has called and sent as messengers. In that life is the very power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

There is so very much more that could be said of the gospel—and yet it is in its essence so simple that even a child can grasp it. What about you? Have you entered into salvation? Have you discovered the "pearl of great value" and "sold everything" to possess it? Which world are you living for?

If what I have written has disturbed you or left you in doubt what should you do? If there is in you any inclination, any desire towards God I would counsel you to seek Him with all your heart. Cry out to Him to reveal Himself to you, to help you. Don't give up. Will He hear you? Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Remember, this is God’s word and is given to encourage any who would seek Him. And if there is such a desire in your heart, God put it there. You would never desire Him on your own. He put it there seeking a response from you.

It is not my job to tell you that you are saved. That is God’s job. It is between you and Him. Romans 8:16. He will meet with you through His Word if your heart is willing. When He has revealed to you the reality of what it means that you are a lost sinner, and also that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, there will come a time when you must act upon the Word He has revealed to you. You must step out in faith and confess Jesus as Savior and Lord, committing your soul into His keeping for time and eternity. Remember the words of Paul: “I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” 2 Timothy 1:12.

### **Now**

When that time comes do not hesitate or draw back. Hebrews 10:38 says, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” Now is when God says, “Now.” It is when He deals with the heart, pressing the claims of the gospel upon it. To say “No” at such a time is to risk everything.

To say, “Not now” is just as risky. To say “Not now” is to say, “I’d rather live in my sins awhile longer. I’m not through enjoying them yet. I would really rather go on in sin but my conscience is bothering me and I need to say something to make it stop.” To say, “Not now” is to say, “Let me first go and scourge your Son some more, pound in a few more nails, spit on Him, mock Him some more.” How do you know that “later” will come? How do you know He will ever deal with you again? If He does not then you are lost.

## The Gospel

You say, “He wouldn’t do that.” Oh yes, He would. John 6:44 says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him....” John 12:35-36 says, “...Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”

If you have experienced what I have been talking about then there is something on the inside that rejoices in the truth. If not, then I pray that you will be one of those who walks “while you have the light.” A great darkness is falling over planet earth. God’s last call is sounding forth and time is running out.

### **The Hope of the Gospel**

The following scriptures are great promises of God for those who believe. Many of them have become merely trite religious sayings having no real power. But remember that the gospel, “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” If these scriptures have not become that for you then I pray that you will seek God until they are. Their truth and power cannot be conveyed through mere human communication. God must reveal them—and Himself—to the heart.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” John 3:16-18.

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.” Romans 3:21-25.

“What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Romans 4:3-5.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” Romans 5:6-9.

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:3-7.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:8-10.

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

## The Gospel

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Romans 10:1-4.

“But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Romans 10:6-13.

“We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:9-13.

I would like to conclude with the words of a great old hymn by William R. Newell, “At Calvary.” I’m afraid that it is often sung without people paying too much attention to the real meaning of the words. I pray that you will consider the words now in the light of what I have shared about the gospel. Have you experienced what the hymn writer was writing about?

*Years I spent in vanity and pride,  
Caring not my Lord was crucified,  
Knowing not it was for me He died on Calvary.*

## The Gospel: Coming to Faith

### Chorus

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free;  
Pardon there was multiplied to me;  
There my burdened soul found liberty at Calvary.*

*By God's Word at last my sin I learned;  
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,  
Till my guilty soul imploring turned to Calvary.*

*Now I've given to Jesus everything,  
Now I gladly own Him as my King,  
Now my raptured soul can only sing of Calvary!*

*Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!  
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!  
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!*

## OTHER BOOKS

### **Delivered From Demons**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

The story of a young girl's deliverance from demon possession and also a collection of a number of other articles relating to Satan's kingdom and activity, specially as it relates to the end of this present age. Suggested Price - \$4.00.

### **How Do You Know You Are Right?** *by Phil Enlow*

A study in spiritual knowledge. How have we come to believe what we consider to be truth? Have we been taught of men by tradition or of God by the anointing? Can we know? If so, how? Suggested Price - \$2.00.

### **Immortality**, *by Phil Enlow*

The subject of immortality is one that has intrigued mankind down through the ages. What does the Bible actually teach on this important subject? What is the fate of the wicked? the hope of the believer? What about heaven and hell? What is everlasting life? What about the judgment? Suggested Price - \$3.00.

### **The Judgment of God**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

A study of God's judgment as it affects both believer and unbeliever. The word says that "His judgments are in all the earth." Psalm 105:7. Do you recognize them? How do they affect you personally? Suggested Price - \$1.00.

### **The Keys of the Kingdom**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

A clear study of the keys as they apply to us in today's world. Suggested Price - \$2.00.

**Light in This Present Darkness**, *by Phil Enlow*

From the series in MCM. Message for God's Remnant in the earth regarding the present hour of darkness. Suggested Price - \$4.00.

**Lying Signs and Wonders**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

A collection of articles concerning the end of the age exposing much deception as well as giving forth important truth needed by those who would be prepared for Christ's soon return. Suggested Price - \$4.00.

**The Midnight Cry**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

Contains two articles that set forth the truths concerning the midnight cry: what is it? who hears it? who makes it? what is its significance for us. A must for people who would understand this ministry. Suggested Price - \$1.00.

**Sex and Marriage in the Light of God's Word**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

From a series of articles covering a whole range of scriptural and practical truth designed to help God's people in this important area. Suggested Price - \$4.00.

**The Sure Foundation**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

A collection of four articles published in the early 1980's on the important subject of the foundation believers have in Christ. Suggested Price - \$3.00.

**Tongues: My Testimony**, *by C. Parker Thomas*

Contains the article by the same name as well as an article entitled "Tongues Should be Tested" by Gerald McGraw in which he recounts lessons learned from testing to discover the spirit enabling someone to speak in tongues. Startling! Suggested price - \$2.00.

**Your Adversary**, by C. Parker Thomas

Recently, while looking through some of our oldest issues of the MCM, we uncovered this timely gem, published in about 1960! Originally published in two parts, it is reprinted here in its entirety. There is a simple directness and clarity in this teaching that will help anyone who desires to walk with the Lord and overcome in this hour. I believe that many of you will be amazed at how something written that long ago could be so perfectly relevant to the present need of God's people! Suggested Price - \$1.00.

*Note: The prices listed above are suggested with the thought in mind of simply covering the costs of printing and mailing these materials. It is not our intention to become a "book-seller," selling books for profit. Our desire is to get out truth that can help set God's people free in this critical hour. Please write to us at:*

**Midnight Cry Messenger**

P.O. Box 685

Southern Pines, NC 28388

USA