

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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JESUS SAVES

The expression 'Jesus Saves' is, strictly speaking, not found in the Bible. Nonetheless we have all seen lighted signs, neon crosses and billboards all announcing that 'Jesus Saves'. The Bible does indeed teach that Jesus (who's name actually means 'He will save His people from their sins' (Matt 1:21), saves but left by itself, however, It could and has been interpreted to mean a lot of things other than that. Salvation from sin and its just deserts is what Jesus came to accomplish (1Tim. 1:15) – and this is exactly where the problem begins - with the whole concept of SIN. The word *sin* has undergone a dramatic make-over in our culture. It no longer has a theological import, but simply is used today to designate a social or personal short-coming. *Whatever Became of Sin?* This was the intriguing title of a book written in 1973 by noted psychologist Karl Menninger. He complained that the loss of the sense of sin was undermining all sense of moral responsibility. The last two decades have demonstrated that Menninger's concerns were well-founded. More recently Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. has perceptibly written that this same loss of the sinfulness of sin has permeated the church. Contrasting the older (and biblical) view of sin with the contemporary therapeutic one, he writes: "The newer language of Zion fudges: 'Let us confess our problem with human relational adjustment dynamics, and especially our feebleness in networking.' Or, 'I'd just like to share that we just need to target holiness as a growth area.' Where sin is concerned, people mumble now. Why should we speak up? Why retrieve the awareness of sin? Why restate the Christian doctrine of sin? The reason is that although traditional Christianity is true, its truth saws against the grain of much in contemporary culture and therefore needs constant sharpening. Christianity's major doctrines need regular restatement so that people may believe them, or believe them anew. Its classic awarenesses need to be evoked so that people may have them, or have them again. Recalling and confessing our sin is like taking out the garbage: once is not enough. But anyone who tries to recover the knowledge of sin these days must overcome long odds. To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage moral reproach; in particular, it does not encourage self-reproach. Preachers mumble about sin. The other traditional custodians of moral awareness often ignore, trivialize, or evade it."¹ Another Biblical concept and one closely associated with *sin* is *Hell*. The "seeker-sensitive" church growth crowd goes to great lengths to avoid the subject all together out of fear of offending the "seekers." The newly minted "Emergent" crowds are likewise *disturbed* and *embarrassed* by the doctrine. A recent very popular book by Lee Strobel in which he interviewed J. P. Moreland, a professor at Talbot School of Theology and a keynote speaker at the National Pastor's Conference (a conference I might add that highlights Emergent leaders like Brian McLaren), is a good indication of this concern. Strobel, who was on the staffs of both Bill Hybels's Willow Creek and Rick Warren's Saddleback churches, asked Moreland to address this Biblical "hot potato." Moreland begins by denying the literal flames of hell...he says they are figurative (p. 176). More revealing were his thoughts on hell with regard to human freedom. His decidedly Arminian view of human freedom is seen in the following quotes: "If you were to force people to do something [go to heaven] against their free choice, you would be dehumanizing them...If God has given people free will...then there's no guarantee that everybody's going to choose to cooperate with him. The option of forcing everyone to go to heaven is immoral, because it's dehumanizing; it strips them of the dignity of making their own decision" (p. 182-183). Moreland uses his Arminianism as a corset around the doctrine of Hell. He goes on to say, "When God allows people to say 'no' to him, he actually respects and dignifies them" (p. 183). He says, "I think people in heaven will realize that hell is a way of honoring people as intrinsically valuable creatures made in God's image" (p. 186). The statement that totally amazed me was this one found on p. 192. "Remember that hell will forever be a monument to human dignity and the

value of human choice.”² This is simply astounding, and moreover, distantly removed from what the Bible actually teaches³. We have noted the Apostle Paul’s repeated references in Romans 10: 1-13 to being “saved” (vv. 1, 9, 10, and 13). In Eph. 2: 1-3 the Apostle deals with this same theme and underscores exactly what it means to be “saved.”

I. **CONDITION OF MEN (v.1)**

Verse one opens with the conjunction KAI, translated “and.” It serves to connect this section with the preceding. The power that quickened Christ from the dead has quickened you who were likewise dead in the sphere of sin. NOTE: The words “hath he quickened” (as in the Kings James Version) are not in the Greek text at this point. The idea of “quickening” does not come into view until v. 5.

- A. **The Fact** - *Dead* (NEKROS, dead, lifeless, without life). The death spoken of here is not physical death (it will lead to physical death). Men are said to be “dead” in sin. They are dead while they live, because they live in sin (cf. Col. 2:13, 14). In Scripture the term “life” is often used to express union with God, while “death” expresses alienation from God with the accompanying conditions of corruption, misery and helplessness.
- B. **The Sphere** - *Transgressions* (PARAPTOMASIN) and *sins* (HAMARTIAS). The words are closely related in meaning, but there is a distinction. *Transgressions* refer to “falling” and may refer to overt actions of disobedience, while *sins* (the classic term) “to miss the mark” and may designate the sins of heart and thought and the inclination of the will (cf. Psalm 29:13,14 where both are used). Both terms are no doubt used to express the fullness of man’s rebellion against God. Each word carries the definite article which declares the strong awareness of personal wrong doing.

II. **THE CONVERSATION OF MEN (v.2a)**

I am resorting to the Old King James Version expression, “conversation,” to denote manner of life. Paul now describes more particularly the lifestyle of those who lived in transgressions and sins.

- A. **The Manner** - *You followed* (Greek PERIEPATOSATE, literally to walk about). It is used to denote a manner or course of life, that which characterizes a person’s behavior. Thus living and walking are synonymous. Unregenerate men literally are “death-walkers.”
- B. **The Pattern** - *The ways of the world* (TON AIONA TOU KOSMOU, literally the age of this world). The expression is Hebraic and is often found in Rabbinic writings where it stands in contrast to the glorious age to come (i.e., the Messiah’s advent). It is a favorite expression of the Apostle Paul (cf. Romans 12:2; Galatians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 7:31), and is used to express the evil and transitory nature of the present world.

III. **THE CONTROLLER OF MEN (v.2b)**

If things were not bad enough, what with man being dead in sin, we learn that the actual situation of man entails the active agency of the most wicked being in the entire universe: Satan.

- A. **His Domain** - *The ruler of the power of the air* (TON ARCHONTA TOS EXOUSIAS TOU AEROS). The picture presented here is that Satan is the ruler of the demons and other agencies of evil (cf. Colossians 1:13; Acts 26:18; Matthew 12:26; Mark 3:22; esp. Ephesians 6:12). Although not seen, Satan and his forces actively control and exert an evil influence on the lives of men, primarily in blinding men to the truth of the Word of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4).
- B. **His Function** - *He works* (ENERGOUNTOS, literally energizes) in the lives of men. “The phrase,” comments J. A. Robinson, “is carefully chosen so as to suggest that the world-power as a whole stands in sharp contrast to God. It is ‘a spirit,’ and it ‘worketh’ - the same forcible word which has been used twice already of the Divine working.”⁴
- C. **His Subjects** - *The sons of disobedience* (TOIS HUIOIS TOS APEITHEIAS). This also is a Hebraic expression indicating their chief characteristic. This disobedience is unbelief (cf. Hebrews 4:6, compare with 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

IV. **THE CONDEMNATION OF MEN (v.3)**

Not only are men dead in sin and under the controlling influence of Satan, but they are subject to the wrath of a holy God.

- A. **Man’s Habitation** - Paul declares that *all of us* (without exception) *lived* (ANESTRAPHOMEN, literally to conduct one’s life). The word has special reference to man’s social behavior, whereas the word used in verse 2, PERIPATEO, is used more of personal conduct.

- B. **Man's Actions** - Men live in the sphere of the flesh. They are controlled by *cravings of the flesh* (TAIS EPITHUMIAIS TΩS SARKOS). Men live according to the dictates of their nature; they are "sons of disobedience" and behave as such. Furthermore, their sinful impulses are geared in accordance with the evil desires of the *mind* (TΩN DIANOIΩN). Man's nature controls his thought patterns. An unregenerate person will only choose and think in harmony with his nature. He will not do otherwise. To expect him to do so is like expecting a tiger to choose to become a vegetarian.
- C. **Man's Dessert** - Men are *by nature children of wrath*. Paul declares that *all* are in this dilemma, elect as well as non-elect. It is only by grace that the elect are delivered from *wrath* (ORGΩS, a very strong word that declares God's just anger and judgment, compare with Romans 1:18ff.) and only because another has taken their place in receiving God's wrath.

CONCLUSION: "No man," said the saintly Robert Murray M'Cheyne, "ever yet knew the badness of his own heart. We are sailing over a sea the depths of which we have never fathomed."⁵ The Apostle's language here is not hyperbole. This is God's assessment of our natural condition, and it is one that renders every person hopelessly lost. We stand desperately in need of mercy (which we do not deserve). It is only by embracing the cross of Christ that we find mercy. It is because Christ underwent our judgment that we find mercy at the cross. This is the gospel and there is no other.⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ C. Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Eerdmans, 1996), p.x

² Lee Strobel, *The Case For Faith: A Journalist Investigates The Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Zondervan, 2002).

³ "How can God exact infinite punishment for a finite sin? First, because the person against whom all sin is committed is infinite. Crimes against the infinitely holy, infinitely kind, infinitely good, and infinitely supreme Ruler of the world deserve unending punishment. In addition to that, those condemned to hell will go on sinning for eternity. There is no repentance in hell. So the punishment will continue as long as the sinning does. The dreadfulness of hell deepens our grateful praise for the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. Hell is what we deserve. And hell is what He experienced on the cross in our place. Believing the truth about hell also motivates us to persuade people to be reconciled to God. By God's grace those of us who are trusting Christ have been rescued from this horrible destiny. How can we love people and refuse to speak plainly to them about the realities of eternal damnation and God's gracious provision of salvation? Clearer visions of hell will give us greater love for both God and people." Tom Ascol, "The Horror of Hell," *TableTalk*, October 2008, p. 55.

⁴ J.A. Robinson, *Commentary On Ephesians, Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979), p. 49.

⁵ *Sermons of Robert Murray McCheyne* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 34.

⁶ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Chap.XI, sec. III) says, "Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf."