***Presenting the Gospel

Colossians 1:3-8

COL-042***

We are studying Colossians 1:3-8. Our subject is "Thanksgiving for the Colossians," number 20.

**Lot**

We have seen that the Colossian Christians were very much aware of the fact that they would live with God in eternal joy in heaven someday with joy forever. Therefore, the Colossian believers lived, as befits the future inhabitants of heaven, in obedience to doctrine, and in mental attitude goodwill and love toward all mankind. The Colossians, in contrast to Abraham's nephew, Lot, took seriously living in separation from the world: in their conduct; in their ways; and, in their thinking. They separated themselves from Satan's world system. Lot did not do this. He chose instead to rear his family in the degrading culture of Sodom and Gomorrah, which hated God, and hated His laws. Lot chose, rather, the prosperity that he could find in Sodom and Gomorrah, and the prestige by the fact that they accepted him as a judge. So he sat at the gate as a judge in Sodom and Gomorrah.

However, 2 Peter 2 tells us how things were on the inside of Lot when he did this compromise with the world, and failed to separate from the system. 2 Peter 2:6-8: "And if He (that is, God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter." And a specific ungodliness here was homosexuality, which is one of the sins that receives the specific title of abomination. Extremely loathsome things to God are labeled as abominations: "And if he rescued righteous Lot." It's important to realize that this was not some person who was not saved. Lot was a born-again person. He was just like you and I. He was a person who knew God, and who was going to heaven. That was his eternal destiny. But he went for the prosperity, and he went for the prestige. And he was oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men.

Now, you know what that is, to have to live where your employment takes you around evil people: where you have to listen to their evil talk; where you have to listen to their evil ways; and, where you have to go home and read the Bible to try to wash yourself off spiritually, because your employment puts you in the presence of people like that. It's degrading; it's tiresome; and, it's extremely offensive.

Now, Lot didn't have to do this. That's what he chose to do. He chose to be there. And verse 8 says, "For by what he saw and heard, that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day-after-day with their lawless deeds." So, he brought upon himself a very tragic consequence, because he reared his family under that influence, and it was extremely corrosive on them.

However, because of Abraham, God rescued Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He rescued him and his daughters. The wife could not keep from looking back longingly. And the angel had said, "Don't do that. Don't have any regrets of looking back." Consequently, she was turned into a pillar of salt. The future sons-in-laws (the fiancés of the daughters) thought that Lot was crazy. So, they didn't pay any attention. They stayed behind and got burned up.

In the end, the failure to separate from Satan's world cost Lot all of his possessions that he was so carefully accumulating. And, through his daughters, became the father of Israel's great enemies (two of the great enemies of Israel): the Moabites and the Ammonites. God is righteous, and God is love, and that is better than Satan, who is wickedness, and who is hatred.

**Saving Faith**

We tried to show you that saving faith is the faith that'll get you into heaven. People have all kinds of faith. Faith is useless in itself. It has to be in a proper object, or it's meaningless. And faith that saves has three elements that are required. First of all, it requires knowledge of the gospel. You have to know the gospel of the grace of God. If you don't know the gospel, you're not going to ever go to heaven. Secondly, you have to have a mental ascent that the gospel is true. You have to agree that it is true. Now, that doesn't mean that you're going to accept this Savior. There are plenty of people who don't debate the fact that what the Bible presents as the gospel of the grace of God is truth, but they don't want that for themselves. They think that having somebody die in your place is a butcher religion. They think that is offensive. They think that they are people of culture and refinement, and that they have acceptance with God on that basis. That is not true. That is not enough to take you to heaven. You have to know the gospel. You have to admit that it's the truth. And then you have to take the final step. You have to take the step of trust (faith) that now becomes meaningful because its object is Christ.

You can have the first two, and hell is filled with people who have that. It requires the third for you to have a faith that saves. Mr. Gitchel tried to figure out a way this morning that he could remember this little progression that is needed. So, he came up with K-Mart: Knowledge, Mental Attitude, and Trust. You'll have to figure out what the "R" is for. Maybe: K-Mart, Knowledge, Mental Attitude, Reality, and Trust. So, maybe that'll help you to remember that, because this is the way that the gospel has to be presented.

**Presenting the Gospel**

So, we're going to talk about presenting the gospel today. There's a lot of resentment about this. You should understand that most of the religious world says, "No, this is not right." This is pure Bible now, but they have interpreted it in a different way. And this is, of course, the result of the work of Satan, so that people by the carloads end up going into the lake of fire.

First of all, Christians (you and I) have been given the responsibility of explaining the gospel to the lost so that they may receive from God the gift of eternal life in heaven. It is our responsibility to see that people have the first element which is necessary for salvation: the knowledge of the gospel. This is indicated in a variety of Scriptures.

Mark 16:15: "And He said to them, 'Go unto all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.'" This is the gospel of the grace of God.

In the book of Luke, at the very end of the book, Luke 24:46-48 says: "And He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." To the disciples, who were the forerunners of all the rest of us representing Christ on this earth, was given the commission that they were to witness to the gospel information. They are the ones who must tell people these things. And what they're to tell people is that they must repent (which means that they have to change their mind) about Jesus Christ, and about their sin, and about their need of a Savior. They have to change their mind, and the way they do that is by believing the gospel.

Then there is, just before Jesus ascended to heaven, His final admonition to this effect, in Acts 1:8: Jesus says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (that is, on the day of Pentecost), and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." So, here you have a scripture that says that you are the witnesses of Christ in the immediate city in which you live, and in the immediate context of the circle of people in which you move. And then you go from beyond that city to the state, and beyond that state to the country, and beyond that country to all the world.

**Bad News and Good News**

Now, here's a good approach to presenting the gospel. We're going to be beginning a series of studies in our Academy chapels, where we are going to teach the children this technique of presenting the gospel. They're going to learn how to tell a person to go to heaven without any confusion, and without any misrepresentation. And this can be divided into two sections. One is to tell people the bad news. The second is to tell people the good news. There's always bad news and good news, and sometimes you say, "Which do you want first?" Well, in this case, you give the bad news first.

**The Bad News**

There are two points to the bad news. This is bad news relative to a person's relationship to God, and his eternal destiny.

**Everybody is a Sinner**

The first point of the bad news about every person has to do with the fact that everybody is a sinner. That would seem very obvious to us, but it is not. There are a lot of people that compare themselves to other people, and they find that they're a lot better than people they associate with. So, they presume that they have a leg up on them in merit with God. But that is not true. And our guideline for that (the Scripture you should have in mind there) is Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Now, that verse should be explained to people – that "all" means everybody born into the human race. They've all sinned. And without getting too complicated at this point, you should understand that all have sinned because we all bear Adam's guilt. Adam was our representative before God. And when he sinned – that's what the Scripture means when it says, "In Adam, all sinned." So, we bear it because he is our federal head. He acted in our behalf. And we bear his moral guilt. We also confirm that we have a natural propensity for evil in the way of a sin nature which has been passed down to us from our first parents. Consequently, we have all sinned in our own right. We have all been guilty of sin ourselves. So, we have inherent sin, from Adam, that we are guilty of; and, we have our own sin that we have performed ourselves. Therefore, we fall short of the glory of God. And the glory of God refers to the absolute righteousness of God. Nobody can be in heaven who falls short of the righteousness of God. Nobody can enter heaven who is not as good as Jesus Christ: meaning absolute perfection.

Now, the result is that everybody has violated God's standard of right conduct in his own experience, so, therefore, he's a sinner. It's true that some people are better than others, but no one matches up to the perfect moral standard of God in terms of mental and external sins. This is like trying to swim from California to Hawaii, or to throw a rock from Texas to Minnesota. Everybody can try it, but nobody makes it. Everybody falls short. But some people do better than others. So, all have missed God's glorious standard of absolute righteousness. No one is as perfect as God is, and because all have sinned in Adam, it is a terrible tragic condition that comes upon everyone.

So, no matter how good you may be, by human standards, or how hard you may try to be good, you can never be as good as God is, which is absolute perfection. And if you're not absolutely perfect, you can't go to heaven.

Now if somebody can finally grasp that, that is a big hurdle for the average person to get across. The average person thinks about going to heaven on the basis of how good they are; how far they fall short; how much they have to make up; or, how much they have to do to be able to qualify. And the point of this first point of bad news is that nobody qualifies.

**The Death Penalty**

Now, the second point of bad news to be presented is the death penalty. The divine penalty for sin is death. Now, you drop down to Roman 6:23, and you point out this fact from God. Roman 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death." And that's it. There is no exception. If we hire ourselves out to work for someone, the pay we receive for our services is something which we have earned. We have it coming to us. This is our wages. This is not a gift. And what we have earned by our personal sins, and our being born under the guilt of Adam, is eternity in the lake of fire. We have earned it ourselves. And the Bible says that anyone who has sinned has earned this wage of eternal death. And remember that death means separation. And this is separation eternally from God. It does not mean, as the Jehovah's Witnesses say, that you'll be oblivious; unconscious; and, wiped out of existence. You'll be fully conscious of the fact that you are separated from God. You'll be completely aware as much as you are now.

The wages of death means the eternal separation from God in a conscious state in the lake of fire. There is no way a human being can come to God on his own to escape receiving the wages of death. That's the problem. You can't do a thing about this. Point number one is that everybody is guilty. Secondly, the penalty for that guilt is death. And you can't do a thing about it.

Furthermore, once you die physically, there is no return. The judgment is then forever sealed. Hebrews 9:27 points this out, when it says, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment." You die once, and when you have died physically, comes the judgment. It comes, in fact the execution – the carrying out of the judgment, because you determine that judgment beforehand.

**The Good News**

Now having presented the bad news, you now can say, but I have some good news to tell you, and you'll be happy to hear this.

**Christ Died for Us**

The first part of first point of the good news is that Christ died for the individual. Christ died for you. This is taught us in Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His Own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Since we, as sinners, cannot come to God with anything that will secure salvation, God, because of His mercy and His love, decided to come to us with salvation, and just give it to us. There is no way that we could earn it, and no way that we could qualify to earn it. He can just give it to us. And Christ died to pay the penalty of death for your sins.

You may illustrate this to the person by saying, "This is very much like finding yourself in a physical condition, where you have a deadly disease, and there is, therefore, upon you now the kiss of death. You cannot reverse it. You cannot change it. You can't do a thing about it. You're doomed by this disease (by this condition). Someone else comes along, who's in perfect health; in perfect strength; and, in perfect vitality, and is able to swap his good health for your bad health. He will take the cancer, and He will give you salvation from death. That's what Christ has done for us. He exchanged His righteousness for our sinfulness. Jesus took upon Himself our sin cancer, and He suffered death on the cross, while we in return received His good health – the good health of absolute righteousness.

This has taught us in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Now, that Scripture verse is making it very clear that salvation is entirely a work of God. The sinner has no part in it, except to be the recipient (the beneficiary) of what God has already done to cover sin through Christ. He (God the Father) made Him (God the Son), who knew no sin (because He was sinless), to be sin on our behalf" – to bear our sin, and to bear our guilt. From 12 o'clock noon to 3 o'clock in the afternoon, He bore the sins of all mankind: past; present; and, future. And that's what He was crying out in such agony, "My God, My God", addressing the Father and the Holy Spirit: "Why have You forsaken me?" At that point, Christ was experiencing spiritual death, for God the Father and God the Holy Spirit had separated Themselves from Him as He bore the sins of the world. God the Father made God the Son, who was sinless, to bear our sins in our behalf, so that we might become the absolute righteousness of God in Him.

After paying for our sins with His own death on the cross, Jesus Christ demonstrated that the job had been done properly: that God the Father's justice and His righteousness had been satisfied. His holiness had been met. And the result was demonstrated by the fact that Christ arose from the dead. The payment for sin had been made, and it had been accepted.

**You Can be Saved**

The second piece of good news, now that there is a way out, is that you can be saved. It is possible for you to go to heaven, by a plan that God has devised. That has told us in Ephesians 2:8-9. You can be saved, and the way is through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace (a free gift – an absolutely free gift) you have been saved through faith" – a faith which was placed in Christ by believing the gospel: "And that." What does the word "that" refer to? It's important for you to understand this verse – that you know what the proper antecedent is for the word "that." The word "that" refers to "saved" – "that salvation: "For by grace you have been saved (or received salvation) and that salvation is not of yourself (it is not of something that you've done). It is the gift of God."

Now, you all should listen carefully to this presentation, because when do you think you might have to do this (quickly). You're just a kid. And all of a sudden, you need to tell somebody the gospel that may be on the verge of death. And what are you going to do? How are you going to stumble around? You get this in your mind: "I'm sorry to tell you that there is some bad news. One: you're a sinner. Two: you're under the penalty of eternal death from God. However, I'm happy to tell you that there's some good news. Jesus Christ died for our sins, so that sin is no longer an issue."

Don't ever talk to people about their sins. It's not an issue. All sins have already been cared for. They've all been cleansed by the blood of Christ. Justice has been satisfied. The issue is that you can be saved. Well how? By believing this message of the gospel: "It is the gift of God, not as the result of works, that no one should boast." Since Jesus Christ has paid for our sins, God the Father can righteously give us eternal life in heaven as a free gift. Until Christ died, He could not give you eternal life and maintain His own holiness and His own righteousness. And that's why Paul, in the book of Romans, says that God gave us salvation on credit. All those Old Testament people – they were all saved on credit. And until Christ was resurrected from the dead, until the penalty had been paid, everybody was saved on credit. After that, the payment has been made in advance for us all.

**Faith in Jesus Christ**

We receive this gift by faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. This is what is expressed in Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." faith means to place your trust in Jesus Christ, so that you depend upon Him, and Him alone, for your salvation – only Christ for your eternal life – only Jesus to take you into heaven. John 3:16 is the famous verse, "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son." That means the Only Son like that: "That whoever believes in Him (trusts in Him – they're the same word) should not perish, but have eternal life." "Trust" means "to cast yourself upon Christ in total confidence," just as one does when you sit down on a chair.

However, we have this caution. If we add anything to trusting in Jesus Christ, such as water baptism; church membership; a moral lifestyle; or, good works, we have neutralized the gift bases of salvation, so that then we deny God the basis for being able to save us, and to give us eternal life on the basis of grace – on the basis of a gift. If you insist on paying somebody for something, to any degree whatsoever that they want to give you as a gift, it is no longer a gift, and cannot be a gift.

Now we have this on good basis in Scripture itself. Romans 4:4-5: "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what he is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." Now that's just plain, ordinary, everyday English. And there isn't anybody here, young and old alike, who cannot understand that. Those verses are clear. If you work for somebody, they owe you wages. And when they give you your wages, it's not a gift. You deserved it. You merited it. You earned it. You can't do that with salvation. In salvation, it has to be by grace. So the opposite is true – that anybody who doesn't work, and yet receives a gift without deserving it (and not only without deserving it, but deserving just the opposite in this case – deserving the lake of fire, and yet he gets heaven), his faith is now reckoned as righteousness, because he has trusted in Christ. Okay, that makes it very clear, along with Ephesians 2:8-9 that we read, that salvation is entirely a work of God's grace.

Now, with those two passages, we add Romans 11:6: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace." Now, that should shoot a chill through your heart, if you have any sensitivity for the vast number of human beings in church circles and in religious circles who have not grasped the doctrine of verse 6. If salvation has to be by grace, and it cannot be on the basis of any human doing or works, or else it's not going to be grace, that's telling you that grace and works are mutually exclusive. You can't have grace and a little bit of works. You can't have works and a little bit of grace. You have one or the other.

So, dare I name a religious denomination that says you cannot be saved without water baptism? What have they done? Yes, I believe Christ is the Savior. I believe He died for my sins. I'm trusting in Him, and I have received water baptism." It is amazing how, when you speak to those people and ask them if they are you going to heaven, they will almost always say, "I sure hope so." That is because they have interjected a human work of water baptism, and this passage, without their understanding it, says that because they put water baptism and they offer that along with their trust in Christ, they're not going to heaven. The whole denomination kit and kaboodle is going to go to the lake of fire. That is because grace cannot be contaminated by works; otherwise, it is no longer grace. Once you introduce some aspect of works, the next step is that you're not sure of salvation. It's not a permanent deal, because, from the work of water baptism, the next thing these people run into is behaving themselves.

They bring works in before salvation, and now they bring works in after salvation to maintain that salvation. Now they've denied grace again on the other side, to try to maintain it by their works. Now where have you come? Which works are going to pull you out of salvation?

Some of these pompous Christians we have, in the circle of our acquaintance, who can be very heavy handed upon the shortcomings and the failures of other people – other Christians, are so shot through with mental attitude pride and sins themselves, that they're pathetic. But they don't think they're sinners. They don't think that there's anything wrong with them. They don't put themselves in the classification of what they call "gross sins." So, they stand up with great condemnation of any Christian who is falling short of the standard that is befitting him as a saved person. But like the prodigal son, he's a son to the end. Like the prodigal son, he never ceases being his father's son, no matter how great his failure may be.

You cannot add something to the grace of God, in the way of a work, and still receive eternal life. So, the good news is that you can be saved. But the warning is it has to be a work of God. And you take it as a free gift. Salvation is absolutely free.

God not only saves you from hell as a gift to you as a believing sinner, but you do nothing more than trust in Christ as Savior, who paid for our sins. He then rose again from the dead. That's the only basis upon which He will give you salvation as a gift – knowing that you are saved (that you are born-again spiritually – that you are no longer spiritually dead).

When you take your first breath as a baby, you're dead spiritually. And the only thing that keeps you (preserves you) from the lake of fire at that point is that you have not come to an age where you have mental ascent capability of recognizing (of understanding) intellectually that you are a sinner, and that you are guilty before God. When you come to that point, at some point where you develop the capacity to be able to speak, probably, you are now suddenly held guilty before God, and you are then not only spiritually dead, but spiritually responsible, and headed for the lake of fire. You no longer are under the common grace of God.

So, knowing that you're saved means that you are now spiritually alive. And you're going to heaven. This is based on facts which have been revealed in God's inerrant Bible – not on how you feel at any particular moment. And that's why we follow this good little pattern here of bad news and good news, and the Scripture verses that are the bases of your beliefs. It is not how you feel about something, or how your denomination feels about it.

John 5:24 sum summarizes it for us: "'Truly, truly,' Jesus says, 'I say to you. He who hears My word, and he believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but is passed out of death into life.'" It's very simple. The book of John was written, John says, to tell you how to go to heaven. He does that repeatedly in this book. Here's one of them: "He who hears My word (the doctrine of salvation by grace), and he who believes in Christ (believes that gospel, and thereby believes that God is telling him the truth, and that the Father is not lying – and he accepts Christ as Savior, he has eternal life."

How long is eternal life? Do we have somebody with kind of a high IQ here that can tell us what the word "eternal" means? Would you say eternal life is five minutes? How about an hour? How about 10 hours? How about forever? Little Samuel is nodding his head, "Yes." We finally got somebody with some IQ in here. "Eternal" means "forever." There isn't any turning back. There's no undermining. There's no taking it back. He does not come into judgment, because he has passed once and all. Bingo! He has passed from death into life. Notice what that verse says. He hears the gospel: God's Word. He believes what God the Father said about Jesus Christ, so he trusts in Christ as Savior. He believes in him. He has eternal life. He has eternal life now. He does not come into judgment. He is never faced with the lake of fire under any circumstance. And He has passed out of death into life, which means that He no longer has to worry of ever dying again. Will Jesus ever die again? No. When you are saved, you are in Christ. You can never die spiritually again. You will bear the fruits of the sin that is in us. That sin has created deterioration in our physical structure, so that death is inevitable. But you will never fall back into spiritual death again.

**Pop Christianity Phrases**

Now what you should not do is confuse lost people by using non-biblical phrases in telling them what to do with the gospel. Acts 16:31 tells you what to do with the gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." One of the phrases that pop Christianity people like to use is the phrase, "Give your heart to Jesus." Now even Samuel Cross could not figure that out. He doesn't know what that means. Or you get to a smart kid like Nicholas. He doesn't know beans about what it means to "give your heart to Jesus." Nicholas has been studying about the Mayans in Mexico who used to cut people's hearts out. He thinks maybe that's what it means to give your heart to Jesus. Get a little heart operation, and say, "Jesus, here's my heart. It's still beating." I mean, how crazy can you get? Now if you are an unsaved person? Put yourself in that person's place. Suppose that someone asks him, "Do you want to go to heaven?" And he responds, "I sure do." And you say, "Give your heart to Jesus." And he says, "Yeah, it's still there. Do you want me to give my heart to Jesus?" It's a meaningless phrase. And it's confusing.

Colossians 2:10, however, says this, "And in Him you have been made complete. And He is the head over all rule and authority." Instead of you giving your heart to Jesus, Christ has given you something into your heart. He has made you complete. In Him, you have been made complete. He has filled your heart with all the consequences of eternal life.

How about "Give your life to God?" This is so common: "Give your life to Jesus for you to be saved." But 1 John 5:11 says, "And the witness is this: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." It's just the opposite. He gives us his life. We don't give him our life to be saved. How can you even do that? And why would you want to give Him that dirty life? It's filthy. It's a garbage bin until you're saved, and until He has cleansed you. Why would He want that from you? What good would that do to get you saved?

Or how about this favorite one? "Invite Jesus into your heart." And they have a Scripture verse for that one. You know where it is? Revelation 3:20: "'Behold,' Jesus says, 'I stand at the door and knock (at the heart's door). If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." Coming in and having a meal is a sign of fellowship. Jesus is knocking at the door. If you'll just open it, and say, "Come in, Jesus," He will come in, and you will be saved. If you keep it closed, He can't come in.

Now, how do you open your heart's door to Jesus? You have to be a surgeon to know how to do these things. What does that mean to someone – to open your heart's door? Well, first of all, does this Scripture apply to unsaved people? No, this Scripture applies to believers. This is the Scripture that's part of the message to the Laodicean church. The Laodicean church were a bunch of bummers spiritually. They were not poor. They were very rich, which is what helped them become bummers. They had everything that they needed, and they considered themselves to be very sophisticated people. In fact, they were so well off that they didn't have any compunction about saying that they didn't need anything. I love to say that myself. People, come to me when my birthday is coming up, and they say, "What would you like?" Well, it's pretty hard to give something to someone's who has everything. They want to know: "What would you like for Christmas?" Well, when you have everything, it's hard to say: "I really don't need anything." Then they press you, and you say, "Well, if you insist, maybe a box of Russell Stover's Dark Chocolates – not the light ones (no light ones) – just the dark ones." And you have everything. It's nice to let people think you are right up there at the top.

What Jesus is doing here is knocking at the door of a Christian who is out of fellowship. And the Laodicean Christians were shutting the door against Christ in their lives. He was not permitted, through the Holy Spirit, to rule and to guide them. Though He was their Savior, they were refusing to make Him their Lord. They would not confess; admit their evil; and, change their ways. What He is asking is for you to permit Him to come back into the inner circle of temporal fellowship.

Then there's this one: "Would you like to pray to receive Christ?" And I hear people giving their testimonies, and saying, "One day I prayed to receive Christ as my Savior." Well, I hope they're saved. I hope that somehow in the process they've finally learned to trust Him. But their prayer for Him to become their Savior is not going to make it. That is so false, and so misleading. And people all over religious radio and religious TV are telling people to pray that Jesus would become their Savior. What does John 3:36 tell us? It's quite the contrast: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." It is not he who asks Christ to give him eternal life. You'll never get eternal life by asking Him. You'll get it by believing His claim that He has covered your sins, and He'll give you the gift of eternal life. And you'll come alive spiritually.

John 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son (does not believe), shall not see life. But the wrath of God abides in him." What is the will of God? This is the will of God, Scripture says: "To believe in Him whom the Father has sent." That is the will of God.

Then there's the phrase: "To receive Christ as your Savior." I heard a very famous evangelist one time, presenting the gospel at the end of the meeting, and he was one of these who was shy of the biblical word "believe." He was the upbeat, pop-Christianity type, and he did not want to use the word "believe." That's a word which is degraded, which I'll have to tell you about next time – the degrading of the concept of faith as the means of salvation. So, as he closed his meeting, he read to the audience John 1:12. And I listened carefully as he quoted the passage, and he said, "It's not enough to simply believe in Jesus Christ. You must receive Him. You have to receive Christ." And that was the word he came down on: "If you don't receive Him." That's another variation of this thing called "Lordship salvation" that I hope some people won't attend next Sunday morning, because they're going to really vibrate and hyperventilate, because we're going to touch on that once more. This idea that of: how do I know I'm a Christian? They say, "Well, it's because of how I act. I made Him My Lord and Savior." They don't even get it in the right order. And they connect what cannot be connected, even in the right order of "Savior and Lord."

So the evangelists proceeded to say (and all the people are holding their breath because of his famous voice and words): "The Bible says, 'But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God." And then he said it again: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave (as the King James says) the power (or the authority) to become the children of God." And he said, "That's how you become a Christian – by receiving Christ as your Savior." But I knew the rest of the verse, and I said, "Wait a minute. You're not serious. Why did you stop there?" That is because the rest of the verse is extremely important. It tells you how to receive Him: "The right to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name."

I was appalled. Here's a very famous person. Everybody kneels and kisses his ring, and here he is telling people how to be saved. And that's his business. He's an evangelist. And what does he do? He says, "Receive Christ. That's what's important – not believism. Then he quotes a verse which contradicts exactly what he says: "As many as received Him." The people who receive Christ – those are the ones who have the authority from God to become the children of God. And those who receive Him are those who have believed in His name." So don't be tricked by these foolish phrases that we hear all the time.

Years ago, I showed us a movie one Sunday night made by a group that was warning people about this very thing – confusing the gospel by directing people to do something that wasn't biblical. And I'm sorry that I didn't record that movie. And I have repeatedly tried to find the film. And worse yet, there was a printout sheet that had about a dozen false invitations such as this, and an excellent paragraph or two on each one – why they are biblically wrong. And for some reason I've never been able to find them in my file. So, if any of you old-timers save any of these things that are printed out that we give you, and you have such a file on evangelism, you might find it. But there were about a dozen false invitations to the gospel, which indeed keep people from being saved.

So here's what we've learned. Saving faith requires the K-Mart order. You have to have the knowledge of the gospel presented. The person has to be told that he must believe that this is the truth of God. He must mentally accept this as the truth because it comes from the Bible. Then he has to decide that this is his way of going to heaven, because it is God's way. It's the only way. He's not going to come up with some other intellectual way of his own – something that he considers more sophisticated. He will then trust in Christ as Savior. He has to be told this via the bad news / good news. The bad news is that you're a sinner (Romans 3:23). The best of people are sinners. You are a sinner by birth. You are a sinner by practice. The result of being a sinner is a judgment from God, which is eternal death (Romans 6:23) – separation from Him in the lake of fire. But there is good news, and that is, since you could not do something to save yourself, Jesus Christ did it for you. He died in your place, burying your sins on the cross (Romans 5:8). He did this when you were in the depths of your corruption of sin. And you can be saved now by benefiting from what He has done by simply believing His claim that your sins have been forgiven. Don't try to add baptism; add membership; add your good conduct (oh, boy, that's going to make some people mad); add your offerings; or, anything else. There is just one thing: you can be saved by grace. And grace has to be absolutely free: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." That is our message as ambassadors of the most high God. God forbid that we should confuse people and misdirect them. Our Heavenly Father, we are grateful to Thee for this time together. And we pray that the truths that we know so well will be reinforced. . .

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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