***Saving Faith

Colossians 1:21-23

COL-185***

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Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

2 Peter 1:19: "So, we have the prophetic word made more sure to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. But know this first of all; that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

1 Corinthians 3:19-20: "For the wisdom of the world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness.' And gain, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.'"

Our subject this morning is "The Reconciliation of the Colossians," number 30. Our text is Colossians 1:21-23.

The apostle Paul has concluded this section of our study of the letter to the Colossians by expressing his confidence that the Colossian Christians will not abandon their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Therefore, they will realize all the magnificent things that are in store for a believer in the future. Christ, he has pointed out, is their firm foundation for eternal life, and on this firm foundation, they can build a godly life; fulfill their divine mission; and, secure eternal rewards for their service to God.

Now, Paul rejoices in the attitude toward the gospel of the grace of God as the hope that they have of being reconciled with God, with the gift of absolute righteousness through justification. Paul claims that he has a special responsibility to them, as gentiles. It is his call to the gentile world by God (he was especially chosen), and he described himself as a minister of God. Today, this divine gospel of the grace of God is horribly, horribly disfigured. It is disfigured by religious people, and by unbelievers alike everywhere under heaven. And it just struck me recently how odd it is indeed that the people most responsible for disfiguring (distorting) the gospel, so that it doesn't work, are religious and church groups. It is church groups, by and large, who disfigure the gospel by putting in a little twist (that Satan leads them in their sophistication, and their human viewpoint, superior wisdom), to interject, such that, suddenly, the gospel won't work. It undermines the system that God has designed of a gift from God with no human works interjected to spoil the gift process.

So, it is very strange. Yet, how clever of Satan, of all things – just use the churches themselves to keep people out of heaven. What smarter deal could it be than that?

**The Gospel of Salvation**

So, this morning, ground that is not altogether unfamiliar to you, but one which you need to have well in mind, so that you do not fall into that category of being an agent of Satan, as a Christian, that actually presents a contaminated gospel, that keeps people from being saved – the gospel of salvation.

**Saving Faith**

First of all, thinking about the gospel of salvation, there is the issue of what is saving faith. People have all kinds of ideas and attitudes toward how to go to heaven. But step number one is faith that saves. Faith has no value in itself. The only value of faith is the object of that faith. And if your faith is in something other than Christ, faith is useless. It will never take you to heaven. That is the point at which Satan comes in, and disfigures and contaminates the gospel.

**Trusting in Church Organizations**

Many people who claim to have faith in Jesus Christ for salvation are actually trusting in their church organization. This is basically what a Roman Catholic does. His confidence is that his church is going to take him to heaven.

We took the kids on the campout down to the Rio Grande, at the Rio Grande Village, where we could walk down to the river. And across the river was the little Mexican town of Boquillas. And the Mexican men there have boats. You piled into the boat, and they row you across the Rio Grande, and you can walk into town. It's about a mile. Or you can ride a bureau if you want to spend the money. But it's always an experience to go to that town. And I told the youngsters: "You'll be on your own. You meet me back here at a certain time," and I gave them the time. And I said, "I want you to go down the end of the street where the Catholic Church is. And I want you to just walk through there and see that system: stations of the cross on the wall; up at the front, Mary is prominent with Jesus in her hands; and, in the hands of the Lord Jesus are dangling two little medals, indicating that you get these from the priest with his blessing. There is a certain saint’s medal, such that if you are wearing it, and you die on Saturday, you get out of purgatory free – completely. And there is purgatory down in one place: people being pulled out of purgatory; and, others in their agony. I mean, it's the whole scene on this one picture. There is poverty like you haven't seen poverty – all over the town. It was an education in itself just to walk through it, and for the kids to see the contrast from one side of the Rio Grande to the other.

As I pointed out to them, here in this little church, this little town is poor in material things. They are very poor. Children were coming up to us, trying to sell us their little trinkets. And this church represents how poor they are, spiritually. They are spiritually blind, and in material poverty. That is a terrible combination. Yet, those people are confident that eventually they will get to heaven, because their faith is in their church, not Jesus Christ. The only image of Christ there, of course, was a crucifix – a dead Christ.

Others who think they have saving faith are really trusting in some religious rituals. They perform certain rituals, and those rituals, as penance, for example, provide the works that are necessary to add to the merits of Christ so that they may go to heaven. Or, for most people, they just have faith that everything's going to turn out OK. They're going to hope for the best. They're going to just hope it'll all work out, or they just take it in a very blasé way.

When I was a youngster, there was a sportscaster named Harry Carey. I remember listening to him on the radio, calling the baseball Cubs' games and athletic events. And Harry Carey was well known in sports circles. Somebody asked him something spiritually not so long ago. I don't remember all the background, but he said, "I think I'm going to the lower place. I think that's where I'll go, but I'll know more people there than I will in the other place. And he died. And that sounds like hey probably did go to the lower place. But Harry Carey doesn't realize what a nightmare he was going to go to. And when he meets those old sports friends, and one thing and another, in that group of people, they're not going to enjoy each other's company. It's not going to be any fun. It's not going to be: "Hey, are you guys here, too? Yeah. Well, let's have a ball." It's going to be weeping and wailing and teeth grinding, because of the agony and the pain of paying for your own sins that you refuse to let Christ pay for in your stead.

So, this business of saving faith is the key to understanding what it is to go to heaven. I was very gratified on the bus. My official seat is the front right seat. Jason was driving, and one of the boys came up and began having a discussion of spiritual things, and it led into salvation. Pretty soon, Mr. Short came a little later, and I'm lying there with my eyes closed, and listening this conversation, and this kid's questions. And it was really impressive to me that both these men went right to the heart of the gospel. The kid needed to have questions resolved between him and God. He didn't have any rinky-tink answers given to him; no playing to his emotions; and, no playing around the edges. They just went right to the heart of the matter: "This is what it is between you and God, and now you can go and do with it what you wish.

This happened to be the same kid who met me in the washroom over at the bar. And he said, "You mean you're never, in high school, go out on a date? I mean, you just never date? To him, it was inconceivable. I said, "You think it's terrible to think of that. It's inconceivable to you, because you need to change your attitude. You need to find out what dating will do to you, and how many wrong people are drawn into marriage because of dating." I could see that here was a kid struggling with a spiritual concept, and all the world was against him (all of his peers). As I told our youngsters, I said, "If you accept this difficult position and the implications, all the blessings that this will bring to you – to save that dating to that little window of opportunity before you say, 'I do,' you will be swimming upstream like the proverbial salmon against the current. You're going to have to be prepared – be prepared to stand alone."

It's the same thing in salvation. Unless you reject the world system idea of faith, you're never going to get to heaven. But then that's what Jesus said: "The gate is small, and the way is narrow, and few there be that find it to eternal life."

Now, you and I make believe what is revealed in the Bible about Jesus Christ, and consider that is true, and yet you may not be saved. A lot of people have the attitude, "Yeah, the Bible is true." And they treat it as such. But that is not saving faith, just because you believe the Bible is telling the truth.

**Three Primary Elements of Saving Faith**

Saving faith, which results in your personal regeneration and eternal life, will include three primary elements. If you're going to talk to somebody about going to heaven, you better get these elements in there.

1. **Knowledge**

The first one is knowledge. Before a person can be saved, he has to have knowledge. A lost sinner must be told the gospel about Jesus Christ. You cannot believe in Jesus Christ until you know something about Him. The Bible places hearing the information about Christ before believing in Him. If you don't hear about Him, you won't believe in Him.

For example, Acts 15:7: "And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days, God made a choice among you; that by my mouth, the gentiles should hear the Word of the gospel, and believe." They should hear the Word of the gospel and believe – not believe, and then hear the Word of the gospel. Somebody has to give you information to believe about Christ.

Acts 18:8 points out the same thing: "And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, when they heard, were believing and being baptized. When they heard, that's when they believed. And that's when they received Holy Spirit baptism. And that's when they symbolized that with water baptism.

In the epistles, Ephesians 1:13 demonstrates this same principle: hearing before believing: "In him you also, after listening to the message of truth (the gospel) of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise. That couldn't be more clear. First, I have to hear the gospel – what it is that I'm supposed to believe about Christ, and then I can believe Him. Then I can believe this about Him. Until I have the knowledge to be saved, I can't be saved.

The knowledge of salvation – what I need to believe is what is summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. Paul says, "For, I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received – that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He was buried; that He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures; and, that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the 12. The gospel is that the Lord Jesus Christ took my place in death, and paid for my moral guilt by His death in my behalf: "The wages of sin is death."

This is not a Jesus Christ who was created by human opinion, but one which is revealed in the Bible. He is revealed as God, in John 20:31. He is revealed as true humanity in 1 John 4:2. So, Jesus Christ, as the God-Man, died to pay the penalty of death for the sins of all mankind.

Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." So, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who bore the sins of the world; arose from the dead; and, thereby, by that resurrection, demonstrated the acceptance of God the Father of His payment for the moral guilt of all mankind. If Christ had not risen from the dead, we wouldn't have known whether the death had really been paid.

Romans 4:25 puts it this way: "He (Christ) Who was delivered up on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our justifications." He died because of bearing our moral guilt. He was raised because our moral guilt had been forgiven by His Own death.

So, the lost sinner has to know this, which we call the gospel, in order to be saved. It is the good news of moral guilt being removed for us by God. And a Christian messenger needs to transmit the knowledge of the gospel to the lost. He should not contaminate that message with all kinds of things that churches and Christians like to contaminate the simple basic information of the gospel.

Romans 10:14-15: "How then shall they call upon Him, in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things.'"

Standing in that Roman Catholic Church in Boquillas, it was so depressive – knowing the ritual, and the ceremony, and the uselessness, and the meaninglessness of what is happening at this very moment there on a Sunday morning Mass, and all to naught. Faith in a religious system is not going to work, while they look upon a dead Christ hanging on a cross, and hope that somehow their church is going to get them in.

1. **Mental Ascent**

The next thing for a person to go to heaven that they must have in saving faith involves mental assent – mental assent, because the gospel about Jesus Christ has to be accepted as the truth. Those who do not believe that the gospel is the truth cannot be saved. They have to look upon the Bible as an inerrant book from God. And if they don't look upon the Bible that way, they will not feel compelled to accept it as true, and the gospel, which is proclaimed, as being the mind of God. What will they do then? They will create their own ideas about how to get to heaven. And those ideas always involve human works, or following other religious leaders. The contempt for what God has done, over against what other religious leaders do, is enormous.

I had to reprimand the kids on the campout several times, when I would hear some of them pick up a phrase, which I know they picked up off of television, because it's cutesy-pooh out there now for these lowlife people who seek to entertain us, to use the expression, "Oh, God!" And all of a sudden, the kids were playing a game or something, and they would say, "Oh, God!" And those who have a little intimidation say, "Oh, gosh!" So, I said, "This is a violation of a commandment of the Word of God, in trivializing the name of God. If you must have some expression, just say, "Oh, Buddha; Oh, Muhammad; Oh, Joseph Smith;" or, "Oh, Geronimo." But don't say, "Oh, God!" That is a very serious matter.

Do you know what, after that? I kept hearing him do it. It was so ingrained; so trivialized; and, so indifferent toward God, like God was just somebody out there, but nothing special. This is the attitude of those who do not have a mental confirmation conviction toward the truth of the gospel. And if they do not accept that gospel as being the absolute truth of God, then they will not accept it.

This mental ascent is more than understanding the gospel. It is giving us something upon which we can depend. It is something that we can trust. And saving faith is a matter of trust.

There are two Greek words in the Bible that tell us what we have to do with the Word of God. First of all, we have to have knowledge. Then we have to have mental assent.

1. **Trust**

So, the third thing that we must have is trust. The two words that describe trust in the Bible is the word "faith" and the word "believe." Both of these words mean "to depend upon." When we say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," the Bible means: "Depend upon Him to take you to heaven: depend upon Him alone." That's it. Nothing else. And depend upon Him by faith alone, with nothing added to that. "Trusting" means "to cast yourself upon the object of your trust:" (the object of your faith). So, if that object fails you, there's nothing else that will carry you through. One can have knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he may accept it as being true (he has no conflict with it – no problem with that), but still, he may not commit himself to it for salvation. He doesn't really trust Jesus Christ.

That is what, in John 1:12, is described as "receiving Him." And "receiving" means: "even to those who believe on His name:" To as many as received Him, to them gave He the power (the authority) to become the Sons of God (the children of God), even to those who believe on His name – even to those who depend upon Jesus Christ in terms of everything that He stands for in His name, the God-Man, the Son of God.

So, the Bible clarifies the object of our trust for salvation by adding a preposition after the words "believe" and "faith." It tells us where to put that faith (that belief). In the familiar John 3:16, that is illustrated: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes (now a preposition: in, to direct us where to believe) in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

John 3:36 does the same thing: He who believes *in* the Son (it directs us where to believe) has eternal life, but he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him."

So, saving faith involves trusting in Jesus Christ in terms of His payment for our sins on the cross. Therefore, we depend upon Christ alone, without any human works added. John 14:6 says, "Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes unto the Father, but by Me." He says, "By Him." Faith in itself does not save, but faith in Jesus Christ, in the sense of trusting Him to take you into heaven (He is the object of trust), that does save you.

So, saving faith consists of knowing the biblical gospel (of the grace of God) about Jesus Christ; accepting that gospel as being true (not a fairy tale); and trusting in Jesus Christ for personal salvation from the lake of fire through receiving the forgiveness of one's sins and through the imputation of God's righteousness to your credit. knowledge; mental ascent; and, trust – this is what you should pray that people will do to whom you witness: that you will present a clear gospel: Christ died for your sins; that you will present that this is what you must believe, because the Bible tells us that this is true, and that this is God's word; and, that you must trust in the person of Jesus Christ – not your religion; not your denomination; not your church; and, certainly not your preacher that might impress you in one way or another, so that his word rises above the words of Scripture Itself.

**A Sinking Ship**

Here's the illustration you've heard before, but I think it is a good one that illustrates the business of saving faith – faith against faith which does nothing. The analogy is with a sinking ship, and on board that ship is a lifeboat that can save the people on that ship from death. The Titanic is on everybody's mind today, and we have a great vivid historical example there of what happens on a sinking ship when there's a lifeboat, and people get into it. We have a vivid example there of what happens when there is no lifeboat – nothing for people to get into; or, from people who haven't taken this seriously, and don't want to get into the lifeboat.

So, here you have a ship. Imagine a ship with four people aboard. It's sinking. It's in the middle of the ocean. There are four different responses to the fact that there is a lifeboat aboard. This lifeboat, which is the instrument, potentially, of their salvation. One man doesn't know there's a lifeboat aboard. He lacks the knowledge. He doesn't even know that there's a lifeboat over there. Therefore, he has no knowledge of the gospel, in our analogy, and he goes down with the ship. He is lost.

Another man knows about the lifeboat being available, but he does not believe it'll work. He doesn't believe that the craft is seaworthy, and that it will save him at sea. So, he has no mental assent. He doesn't believe that it's true that that lifeboat will float and save him. Therefore, he rejects the gospel in the analogy, and he is lost.

The third man knows about the lifeboat; believes that it can save it; but, for some reason, he refuses to get into the boat. So, he is lost at sea. He has no trust in the gospel in our analogy. And therefore, he doesn't get aboard, and he is lost at sea.

However, there's the last man. This man knows that there's a lifeboat on board. He believes that the craft is seaworthy, and that it can save him from death. So, he climbs aboard; he trusts in it; and, he is indeed saved from death at sea. He has knowledge; he has mental assent; and, he has trust for the person of Jesus Christ and the good news of the gospel. And the result is that he is saved.

Now, everybody that you speak to about the gospel is going to respond in one of these ways. Inevitably, without a question, they will go bit-by-bit in just this way.

**Presenting the Gospel**

Now, presenting the gospel: the Christian has been given the responsibility of explaining the gospel to the lost, so they may receive from God the gift of eternal life in heaven. And people who have this gospel, and who have understood, and have gone through this series: they have the knowledge; they accept the gospel as being the truth (not a lie); and, they trust themselves to it, they know that they're going to heaven. You might ask somebody, "Are you going to heaven?" If that question should come up, and they say, "I hope so," or "I'm doing my best" – even if they just say, "I hope so" in all sincerity, you can almost count on it that they're not, because "I hope so" tells you that they think that they are not sure whether they have qualified themselves by something that they are doing to go to heaven. They're interjecting works.

Therefore, the gospel has to be presented in such a way that people know that God has a way (one way, and only one). You cannot contaminate it, and He'll still proceed to keep His promise to save you. Do not deny Him the ground upon which to do it. But all of us as Christians have been given the responsibility of explaining the gospel to the lost, so that they may receive the gift of eternal life in heaven.

In Mark 16:15, we read, "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to all creation." That is a message to you and me. So, right away, we must know that it's not talking just to the preachers, and not just the evangelists, and not just the missionary. This is Joe Blow and Josephine Blow, the Christians, as they have opportunity to be prepared to present a clear gospel, and say, "Here's how it happens." At least no one in this room now could not hand out one of the evangelism brochures that covers all of this territory, and have made a proper testimony to an individual who needs to know how to be saved.

Luke 24:46-48: "And He (Jesus) said to them, 'Thus it is written that Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in the name of all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things." He is speaking to those apostles: "You have seen Me die. You have seen Me be raised from the grave. The message that you carry now is the message that will get people into heaven. You know that it is true. And when he says to them that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed, He's telling them that there is repentance (a change of mind) that is possible about their sin. How do you do that? You believe. Repentance is not something that you do, apart from believing. You can't repent unless you believe. When you believe in Christ, you've repented from your own way of life, and your commitment to sin, and you change your focus to God.

I once picked up a gospel tract. The title was "15 Steps to Salvation." There's only one step to Salvation, and that's: believe: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." And who do you think put out the tract? Some church group. Satan uses churches to contaminate the gospel above everyone else. When people are having a lot of exciting, wonderful times (little kicky times), they think they're really close to God.

When we were at our adventure with the one-match salvation we had for our lunch, a couple of girls were sitting on the bench next to me there, while the cooks were getting things ready. And this girl began speaking about how, at their youth group, they had been fasting. And we began talking about their using the money (from what they didn't eat) to give to the missionaries. So, they said, "We all came with a good breakfast, and then we fasted all day, as we played games and had activities. Then at night, just before the end of the day, before we went home, we learned about the missionaries and the mission things, we had pizza to break their fast. So, we just fasted all day." I said, "How about 20 days of fasting in a row, with no food? They said, "That would be too much." I said, "Jesus did 40." I've done 20 myself, and I mean that's no food. It does make your mind sharper. It does make you more alert. And it takes off your weight. But she thought this was so wonderful. And I said to her, "You could have taken the money for the meal and given it to the missionaries, and had a good meal yourself, too." She said, "Well, yeah, that's right. You could do that." Well, I didn't want to upset her too much, but I knew exactly what was going on. She was going to some cutesy-pooh youth program at her church, and they spend all their time having this little experience of not eating all day, probably because they weren't hungry, and then feeling that they had prayed for the missionaries, and they accomplished something great.

This is the deception that is so easy for Satan to interject, instead of spending the day teaching those kids the Word of God, and giving them doctrinal principles, and telling them how they should not contaminate and injure their life by a dating routine of approach to romance, and the whole bit that they need to know in our evil age. Instead, they're playing little games with them.

Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, 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, now we're going to present the gospel. We've looked at it in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. There is a very simple way to do it. Present the gospel by telling people what the bad news is first. First, you get the bad news. And you tell a person, "Let me tell you two things the Bible tells us. God says that there are two bad things you should know. The first piece of bad news is that you are a sinner. You have broken God's moral code. You have broken His laws. You are under His judgment and condemnation. Then you turn to Romans 3:23, and you read, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." And you explain to these people that what Romans 3:23 is saying is that everybody has sinned. Everybody has deliberately violated the moral codes of God, someplace along the line, and you have fallen short of what it requires to go to heaven, which is the glory of God, which is another word for absolute perfection. You have to be absolutely perfect to go to heaven. Everyone has violated God's standard of moral conduct. We're all sinners. Some people are better than others, but nobody matches up to God's absolute righteousness. We have mental and overt sins.

This is compared, for example, to trying to swim from California to Hawaii. Some people make it further than others, but nobody makes it to Hawaii. Or, it is like trying to throw a rock from Texas to Minnesota. Some people throw it further, but nobody ever hits Minnesota with the rock. You all come short of the goal. Everyone misses the mark. The Greek word is "hamartia" (sin). And that's what sin means – missing the mark. So, all miss God's glorious standard of absolute righteousness. No one is as perfect as God is, because all have sinned.

Also, for your own understanding, you might add the background of Romans 3:10, which says, "There is none righteous, not even one." Romans 3:12 says, “All have turned aside. Together, they have become useless. There is none who does good. There's none, not even one." So, no matter how good you may be, you're not good by God's standard. And no matter how hard you may try, you can never be as righteous as God is. So, therefore you're excluded from heaven. You lack absolute righteousness. And there's no way you can get it. That's bad news.

The second thing you need to point out to a person, so you don't get bogged down with all kinds of things that you can discuss with them, that would only muddy up the waters, is that the divine penalty for sin is death. Because of sin, you're going to die. And what that means is you're going to be separated from God for all eternity. And that's what Romans 6:23 says. So, you show the person the first part of Romans 6:23, which says, "For the wages of sin is death." If we hire ourselves out to work for someone, the pay that we receive for our services is something that we have earned, and we've got it coming to us. That is our wages. The Bible says that anyone who has sinned against God's laws has earned the wages of death, and it will be paid to you. You will collect. "The wages of death" means eternal separation from God in a conscious state in the lake of fire.

For your own understanding, the background is Revelation 20:11-15, that tell us that that's exactly what's going to happen. People who don't believe that people are going to suffer forever in the lake of fire for their sins are up against this fact of the Bible.

I have discovered one thing. It hit me recently, about people who talk about the Christian right, and who gang up, and beat up on those of us who are simply following biblical principles, is that they're telling us, when somebody condemns you, for not having compassion, or for political or social idea that you hold, they're telling you that you are out of the will of God. Do you understand that? The next time somebody calls you the Christian right, understand that they're saying, "Look at me, I'm in the will of God, and you're out of the will of God. Otherwise, you'd agree with what I'm saying." There we have the devil again, taking the Bible to distort the truth.

I have had many people tell me: "Well, you go ahead and believe that if you want to – that God is going to punish people in such a place forever, but that's not for me."

Revelation 20:11-15: "And I saw a great white throne, and Him who sat upon it, from Whose presence earth and heaven fled away. No place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the Dead were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it. And death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them. And they were judged, every one of them, according to their deeds" – not the deeds of Christ. They didn't have that to their credit. So, their own deeds. The result: "Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death: the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

So, "whosoever" is written (like in John 3:16) in the book of life goes to the new Jerusalem. There's another "whosoever." Whosoever is found not written in the book of life goes to the lake of fire. It's very explicit, and it's very clear. That is what happens. There's no way that a lost person can come to God on his own, to escape receiving the wages of death. This is inevitable. So, once a person dies physically, in his moral guilt, his eternal destiny is irreversible. It'll be separation from God in the lake of fire. There is no second chance. The Mormons are lying. There is no second chance. That's the bad news. That's what you tell a person.

Now you say, "However, I'm glad to tell you that there's some good news. There are two things I want to tell you. It's all you need to know. This is what's taking you into the lake of fire forever. Now here's something which is good news. First of all, the good news is that Christ died for you. Since we, as sinners, cannot come to God with anything that will secure salvation, God decided to come to us with salvation as a free gift." Romans 6:23b: you show this verse to the person (the last part): "But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Christ died to pay the penalty of death for your sins. You're happy to be able to tell a person that that is the case.

The illustration is that you have a health problem. You find you have deadly cancer. And good health is comparable to God's absolute righteousness. Cancer is comparable to sin. You want God's absolute righteousness – good health. You don't want the ill health of cancer. Jesus Christ took on Himself our sin of cancer, and He suffered death on the cross to pay the penalty of that cancer while we receive His good health of absolute righteousness in exchange. That's the glorious statement of 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For He (God the Father) made Him (God the Son), Who knew no sin (to be sin on our behalf – to take our sin upon Himself, that we might become the righteousness (the absolute righteousness) of God in Him." The Lord Jesus Christ swaps His good health with absolute righteousness for our moral guilt of cancerous sin. After paying for our sins with His own death on the cross, Jesus Christ rose from the dead as proof that the justice of God the Father was satisfied with the payment of our sins, as we saw in Romans 4:25. So, that's the first bit of good news. Christ has died. He has paid for my sins.

Then you tell the person, "There's a second thing: you can be saved, and escape the lake of fire through faith in Christ. Turn to the Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. That out of yourselves – it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, that no man should boast." Since Jesus Christ has paid for our sins, God the Father can give us eternal life in heaven as a free gift. We receive this gift by trusting in Christ as our personal Savior. Faith means to believe in Christ so as to depend upon Him alone for your salvation. Trust means to cast yourself upon Jesus Christ in total confidence, as one does when you sit upon a chair that you believe will hold you.

You must warn the person that if we add anything to trusting in Christ as Savior, such as water baptism; church membership; a moral lifestyle; good works; or, the Lord's Supper, we have neutralized the gift basis of salvation. God then is not free to save us.

For your own background, you should be aware of Romans 4:4-5: "Now, to the one who works, his wages is not written as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." It's a non-work operation.

Then the nail in the coffin, in Romans 11:6, about those who want to add something to salvation: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace." That verse says that you can't say, "I believe in Christ as my Savior, and here's my penance of good works. Here's my Lord’s supper. Here's my water baptism."

One of our young men on the bus, as we were driving along, had a friend in the Church of Christ school here in the state of Texas, a prominent school. And the Bible professor at the school told the students that no one will go to heaven who is not a member of the Church of Christ. And the reason for that is because the Church of Christ requires water baptism for eternal life. Without water baptism, you cannot have eternal life. Now, here is somebody who is a professor of Bible in a big university (a religious school). And who's contaminating the gospel? Who's distorting it? Who's disfiguring it? Right there at the heart of the religious leadership. That's exactly what Romans 11:6 says is *not* true. If you add a human work, it is no longer faith.

I've told you before that one time I was skiing alone at Winter Park, and I got on a lift. A man got on with me, and found he was a preacher in the Church of God, which is a kissin' cousin of the Church of Christ. The Church of Christ won't allow pianos or instruments in the church service, but the Church of God will. I asked him, "Well, do you believe that salvation is by faith in Christ alone as a grace gift?" He said, "Oh, yes." I said, "Well, if you believe that, does it give you a problem that the Church of Christ and the Church of God requires water baptism for regeneration, and you're interjecting a work, because baptism is a human work?" We were getting down near to the end of the lift where we were about ready to get off. And he said, "Well, faith is a work." I said, "Well, if that's the case, then you really don't believe in salvation by grace as a free gift. You do believe in salvation by works, don't you?" And he got off the list, and skied down the mountain, and never spoke to me again – and that made me feel very bad. He trapped himself by saying that faith was a work. He had just said, "I don't believe you can go to heaven by works." There's the consistency that can only come with being true to the Word of God. But if you have some do-do who is teaching you the Word of God, and who is not rightly defining the Word of truth, as Scripture requires, that's the kind of thinking you will end up with.

So, you tell this person that God only gives salvation from the lake of fire as a gift to the lost – the person who does nothing more than trust in Christ, Who has paid for our sins, and Who rose from the dead to pay for them. You may summarize it by asking that person to turn to John 5:24. Knowing that you're saved (that you're born again spiritually, and going to heaven) is based upon facts which have been revealed in God's inerrant book, the Bible – not how you feel about it. This verse gives you the basis for knowing that you're going to go to heaven. John 5:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My Word, and believes Him Who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but is passed out of death into life:" "Truly, truly, I say to you, who hears My Word, that is, who hears the gospel of the grace of God and believes Him (believes what God has said about Jesus Christ as Savior has eternal life (a statement of actual condition now), and he does not (speaking about the future) come into judgment. (He will never face the lake of fire). He is passed out of death into life." . . . He has nothing to worry about. Death is behind him. Eternal life is permanently before him.

That's it: "I have two things to tell you that are bad, and here are two verses." You're a sinner. You're going to die, and be separated from God. God has good news for you. Christ died for you. Your faith in Christ will give you eternal life. Then here's John 5:24 to give you assurance that this is true.

I close with giving you a caution not to confuse the lost by adding to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul told the Philippian jailer, in Acts 16:31, "Believe on Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." So, when you talk to people about what to do with the gospel, Doctor Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Seminary said that to witness to person, you must do two things. One: you must tell them the gospel; and, two: you must tell them what to do with it. You must tell them the gospel of the grace of God. You must tell them to believe it and trust in Christ. Therefore you must tell them to believe it.

So, do not use words like "Give your heart to Jesus." Do not use phrases like "Give your life to God." Do not say, "Invite Christ into your heart." Do not say, "Would you like to pray to receive Christ?" Don't even say, "Accept Christ," or "Receive Christ." Those are meaningless words to the unbeliever. The biblical word is "believe."

Now, Paul would come right to the heart of using the Greek words that mean to trust and depend on somebody. Who are willing who come along and use these pop Christianity modern phrases which are meaningless to people? And the result is that people do not understand that they are trusting in Someone else Who has done it for them to carry them through. Please don't make that mistake.

Dear God, we thank You for this time in the Word. And we ask You to help us to realize that Your truth has been spoken in Christ's name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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