

Regeneration vs Decisionism – DEEPER
Conference 2008 Breakout Session
(Living Waters & Way of the Master)

Living Waters

By Paul Washer

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Grace Community Church

P.O. Box 10608

San Antonio, TX 78210

Website: www.gccsatx.com

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...again our brother Paul Washer.

[applause]

Change of Voice:

I am going to begin with something of a lecture. Partially it is going to be read for the first several minutes. I just don't want to miss anything that I have put down here. I feel that it ought to be said.

I am going to be talking about the gospel, the gospel call, the gospel invitation.

First of all let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, I come before you in the name of your Son. I worship him, praise him. Lord, I know it is by grace that you know all things and if it was not for grace, Lord, who could stand before thee. Oh God, I pray that you would get glory for yourself, glory for your Christ and benefit for your Church. Help us, Lord, to understand and apply in Jesus' name. Amen.

First I want to talk to you about this. When we look at Romans 1:16 we understand that Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. That might seem something unusual to us that he has to make that statement, being an apostle, a principal carrier of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I want to tell you that Paul's flesh had every reason to be ashamed of the gospel because the gospel he preached contradicted everything that was believed to be true and everything that was believed to be sacred in his culture.

Now just really quick I want to say this. Paul makes no attempt to become relevant to his culture. He makes no attempt to make treaty with his culture, adapt his message to the culture, repackage the message or any of the other nonsense that has become so prominent in the evangelical community today.

To the Jew the gospel, Paul's gospel was the worst sort of blasphemy because it claimed that the Nazarene who died on that cross accursed was the Messiah and the Son of God. To the Greek it was the worst sort of absurdity because it claimed that this Jew from some out of the way place was actually God in the flesh. Therefore, Paul knew that whenever he opened his mouth to speak the gospel he would be utterly rejected and ridiculed to scorn unless the Holy Spirit intervened and moved upon the hearts and minds of his hearers.

Now this is what he knew. This is what you should know. If you are properly preaching the gospel, it will be scandalous and if you try to make it less of a scandal you no longer preach the gospel.

Now I just want to quote from a few contemporaries of primitive Christianity. Pliny the Younger writes, after examining the beliefs of two Christian slave girls under torture, he says, "I discovered nothing but a perverse and extravagant superstition."

In *The Dialogue* Octavius by Minucius Felix he derides the Christians saying, "Their ceremonies center on a man put to death for his crime and on the fatal wood of the cross." He goes on to say that Christians put forth sick delusions, a senseless and crazy superstition which leads to the destruction of all religion.

I know I may offend many on this, but most modern day church growth strategies used in evangelical churches, their main focus is to get around the very thing I just read.

An oracle of Apollo preserved in the writings of Augustine in response to a man's question about what he can do to turn his wife away from the Christian faith says this. "Let her continue as she pleases persisting in her vain delusions and lamenting song of God who died in delusions, who was condemned by judges, whose verdict was just and executed in the prime of life by the worst of death, a death bound with iron."

Lucian, he was basically the Voltaire of antiquity mocks Christians in his *De Morte Peregrini* as poor devils who deny the Greek gods and, instead, honor that crucified sophist and live according to his laws.

In Origen's work *Contra Celsus* Celsus declares, "What drunken old woman telling stories to lull a small child to sleep would not be ashamed of utterly such preposterous things."

Now in our day, the primitive gospel is no less offensive, for it still contradicts every tenet or ism in our culture: Relativism, Pluralism and Humanism. Now let's just look at these for just a moment.

We live in an age of Relativism, a belief system based on the absolute certainty that there are no absolute certainties. We hypocritically applaud men for seeking the truth, but call for the public execution of any man who believes he has found it. We live in a self imposed dark age. Why? The reason for this is clear. Natural man is a fallen creature. He is morally corrupt and he is hell bent on autonomy or self government. He hates God because God is righteous and he hates God's laws because they censor him and restrict his evil. He hates the truth because it exposes him for what he is and troubles what is left of his conscience. Therefore, fallen man seeks to push the truth, especially the truth about God as far from him as he can possibly remove it. He will go to any extent to suppress the truth even to the point of pretending that there is no such thing as truth or that if it does exist, it cannot be known or have any bearing on our lives.

Realize this about the gospel. It is never a case of a hiding God, but of hiding man. The problem is never the intellect, but the will. I do not believe that the Bible gives any room for Atheism. There are liars and God haters who push the truth out of their minds, but there are no such thing as Atheists. For although they knew him, you see, like a man who hides his head in the sand to avoid a charging rhino, modern man denies the truth of a righteous God and moral absolutes in hopes of quieting his conscience and putting out of his mind the judgment that he knows must come.

Now the Christian gospel is a scandal to the man involved in Relativism and his culture because the Christian gospel does the one thing that man most hopes to avoid. It awakens him from his self imposed slumber to the reality of his falseness and rebellion and calls him to reject autonomy, self government and submit to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Now we also live in an age of Pluralism, a belief system that puts an end to truth by declaring everything to be true.

Now do you understand what I am saying? When everything is true, when contradictory statements that are diametrically opposed, when both of them are labeled as true, you have the death of truth.

Now it may be difficult for contemporary Christians to understand what I am about to say, but the Christians living in the first few centuries of the Christian faith were marked and persecuted as Atheists and you will be, too. If a revival doesn't break out in this country, this is one of the reasons you are going to go to jail.

Now, the culture surrounding the Christian was immersed in Theism. The world was filled with images of deities and religion was a booming business. Men not only tolerated one another's deities, but they swapped them and shared them like baseball cards. The entire religious world was going on just fine until the Christians showed up and declared

that he gods made with hands are no gods at all. They denied the Caesars the homage they demanded, refused to bend their knee to all other so-called gods and the confessed Jesus alone to be Lord of all. And, therefore, they were labeled Atheists.

The entire world looked on such draw dropping arrogance and reacted with fury against the Christian's intolerable intolerance to tolerance.

Now I want you to look at something. Look at these words. Jaw dropping arrogance. The same scenario abounds in our world today. Against all logic we are told that all views regarding religion and morality are true no matter how radically different they are or contradictory they may be.

The most overwhelming aspect of all of this is that through the tireless efforts of the media and the academic world, this has quickly become the majority view. However, pluralism does not address the issue or cure the malady. It only anesthetizes the patient so that he no longer feels or thinks.

Now the gospel is a scandal because it awakens man from his slumber and refuses to let him rest on such an illogical footing. It forces him to come to some conclusion. How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him and if Baal, follow him. The true gospel is radically exclusive.

I never thought I would have to say this in front of a bunch of evangelicals. I never thought there would come a day when I would have to say such a thing to evangelicals that the gospel is radically exclusive. I never thought that we would begin to lose Christ as the only way.

Now listen. The true gospel is radically exclusive. Jesus is not a way, but the way and all other ways are no way at all. Now listen to this very carefully, because this is what is happening today. If Christianity would only move one small step toward a more tolerant ecumenicalism and change the definite article "the" in "the Savior" for the indefinite article "a" or "a Savior" the scandal would be removed and the world and Christianity could become friends. Do you realize that? If we would simply say that Yahweh is a god we would have no persecution on our hands. If we would simply say that Jesus is a savior, I would be on the Oprah Winfrey show. Do you realize that? All the scandal would remove if we just said he is our savior. You have yours, we will have ours. We are not going to impose anything upon you. We are not going to wrangle in dialog. Nothing. If that is your way, you go with that way and I will go with mine.

If we would only do that, we would never be persecuted. But if we do that, Christianity ceases to be Christianity, we cease to be Christian, Christ is denied and the word is without a Savior.

We live in an age of Humanism. Over the last several decades man has fought to purge God from his conscience and his culture. He has torn down every visible altar to the one true God and has erected monuments to himself with the zeal of a religious fanatic. This

is not Secularism against religious mind thinking. Don't think that, because the secularist has a religion. And often times he is much more fanatical in his religion than any Christian ever pretended to be.

Man has managed to make himself the center measure and end of all things. He praises his own inherent worth, demands homage to his self esteem and promotes his own self fulfillment or self realization as the greatest good.

Now if you don't think that hasn't crept into Christianity, then you have not read the book *Your Best Life Now*, because that is exactly what that is about.

He explains away his gnawing conscience. You see, you can't get rid of that. It is there to stay. He explains away his gnawing conscience as the remnants of an antiquated religion of guilt, Christianity, and he excuses himself from any responsibility for the moral chaos surrounding him by blaming society or at least that part of society that has not yet attained to his enlightenment.

Any suggestion that his conscience might be right in its testimony against him or that he might be responsible for the almost infinite variations of maladies in the world is unthinkable. For this reason the gospel is a scandal to fallen man because it exposes his delusion about himself, it convicts him of his fallenness and guilt. This is the essential first work of the gospel and this is why the world so loathes true gospel preaching, because the true gospel ruins man's party, rains on his parade, exposes his make believe and points out that the emperor has no clothes.

Now the Scriptures recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a stumbling block and foolishness to all men of every age. And I am going to say this later. It is not just a scandal. It is supposed to be.

Who was one of the older revivalists that said, "How could the world not get along with the holiest man who ever walked on the planet, but it can get along with us?"

We are supposed to be a scandal. Now we don't have to live like a bunch of fanatics. We don't have to do a whole bunch of crazy things to be a scandal, just be faithful to this one proclamation. Jesus is Lord of all.

Now to seek to remove the scandal from the message is to make void the cross of Christ and its saving power. We must understand that the gospel is not only scandalous, but it is supposed to be. Though the foolishness of the gospel God has ordained to destroy the wisdom of the wise, frustrate the intelligence of the greatest minds and humble the pride of all men to the end that no flesh may boast in his presence, but just as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Paul's gospel not only contradicted the religion, philosophy and culture of the day, but it also declared war on them. Not a political war, not a military war, but a spiritual war of truth.

It refused truce or treaty with they world and would settle for nothing less than culture's absolute surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Even to every thought of our mind being held captive to Christ. We would do well to follow Paul's example. We must be careful to shun every temptation to conform our gospel to the trends of the day or the desires of carnal men.

One of the things about missions. There is all kinds of missions in this world. We don't need more missions. It is just most of them aren't biblical missions. Let me share with you something, those of you who are budding missionaries. Missions is to be defined by the exegete and the theologian, the student of Scripture, not by the anthropologist, sociologist and those who are experts in the new cultural trend. We do missions and evangelism according to the sacred writings of Scripture and we need no help from Wall Street. We have no right to water down the gospel's offense of civilize its radical demands in order to make it more appealing to a fallen world or carnal church members. Our churches are filled with strategies to make them more seeker friendly by repackaging the gospel, removing the stumbling block and taking the edge off the blade so it might be more acceptable to carnal men. We ought to be seeker friendly, but we ought to realize that there is only one seeker and he is God. If we are striving to make our church and our message accommodating, let us make them accommodating to him.

If we are striving to build a church or ministry, let us build it on a passion to glorify God and a desire not to offend his majesty.

To the wind with what the world thinks about us. We are not to seek the honor of earth, but the honors of heaven.

Now another thing I want to point out before we go to the preaching. Our message is not only scandalous, it is unbelievable. I want you to know that. It is an unbelievable message. As we have argued, Paul's flesh was not or Paul's flesh had every reason to be ashamed of the gospel he preached. Yet there is still another reason for fleshly shame. The gospel is an absolutely unbelievable message, a ludicrous word to the wise of the world. As Christians we sometimes fail to realize how utterly astounding it is when anyone believes our message.

In a sense, the gospel is so far fetched that its spread throughout the Roman Empire is proof of its supernatural nature. What could ever bring a Gentile, completely unaware of Old Testament Scriptures and rooted in either Greek philosophy or pagan superstition to believe a message, such a message about a man named Jesus? He was born under questionable circumstances to a poor family in one of the most despised regions of the Roman Empire and yet the gospel claimed that he was the eternal Son of God who was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin. He was a carpenter by trade, an itinerant religious teacher with no official training and yet the gospel claims that he surpassed the combined wisdom of the Greek philosopher and the Roman sages of antiquity. He was poor and had no place to lay his head and yet the gospel claims that for

three years he fed thousands by a word, healed every manner of illness among me and even raised the dead.

He was crucified outside of Jerusalem as a blasphemer and an enemy of the state and yet the gospel claims that his death as the pivotal event in all of human history and the only means of salvation from sin and reconciliation to God. He was placed in a borrowed tomb, yet the gospel claims that on the third day he arose from the dead and presented himself to many of his followers and 40 days later ascended up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of majesty on high.

Thus, the gospel claims that a poor Jewish carpenter who was rejected as a lunatic and a blasphemer by his own people and crucified by the state is now the Savior of the world the Lord of lords and the King of kings and at his name every knee will bow including Caesar's.

Now do you have any idea how impossible it is for anyone in Paul's time to believe this message? It is impossible. Who could have ever believed such a message except by the power of God? There is no other explanation. The gospel would have never made its way out of Jerusalem, let alone the Roman Empire and into every nation of the world except that God had ordained to work through it. The message would have died at its birth had it depended upon the organizational abilities, eloquence or apologetic powers of its preachers. All the missionary strategies in the world and all the clever marketing schemes borrowed from Wall Street could have never advanced the gospel, the foolish stumbling block of the gospel.

Martin Pengel writes on the ancient scandal of the cross, "To believe that the one preexistent Son of the one true God, the Mediator at creation and the Redeemer of the world had appeared in very recent times in out of the way Galilee as a member of the obscure people of the Jews and, even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sheer sign of madness."

Now this truth brings both encouragement and warning to those of us who preach the gospel. First, it is an encouragement to know that the simple faithful proclamation of the gospel will ensure its continued advance in the world.

Secondly, it is a warning to us that we not succumb to the lie that we can advance the gospel through brilliance, eloquence or clever church growth strategy. Such things have no power to bring about the impossible conversion of men. We must cast ourselves with hopeful desperation upon the only biblical means of advancing the gospel, the bold and clear proclamation of a message about which we are not only not ashamed, but we believe in and glory in because it is the power of God until salvation for everyone who believes.

Now I want to finish by saying this. We live in an unbelieving and skeptical age. Our faith is ridiculed as a hopeless myth and we are portrayed as either narrow minded bigots or weak minded victims of a religious rouse. Such an attack often puts us on the

defensive and we attempt to fight back and prove our position and relevancy with apologetics.

I want to say this. I agree with apologetics. Although some forms of this discipline are quite helpful and necessary, we must realize that the power still lies in the proclamation of the gospel. We cannot convince a man to believe any more than we can raise the dead. Such things are the work of God's Spirit. Men are brought to faith only through the supernatural working of God and he has promised to work not through human wisdom or intellectual expertise, but the preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead.

We must come to grips with the fact that our gospel is an unbelievable message. We should not expect anyone to give us a hearing, let alone believe apart from a gracious and powerful working of God's Spirit.

How very hopeless is all our preaching apart from God's power. How very dependent is the preaching upon God. All our evangelism is nothing more than a fool's errand unless God moves upon the hearts of men. However, he has promised to do just that if we faithfully preach the gospel.

Now I want us to go to Ezekiel 37 verse one.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'" "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.¹

I have just described the conversion of men. When you go out to preach, as we look at this text, you are always an Ezekiel and you are always standing in a valley of dead bones. And, behold, they are very dry.

¹ Ezekiel 37:1-10.

Now certainly at the time of Ezekiel there was no technique to bring life into lifeless bone. The marrow had completely dried out of these skeletons. They were nothing but dust. There was no technique. There was no persuasion. There was no power. There was nothing humanly speaking that could be done to bring these bones to life. That is evangelism. And you do well to learn it now. That is evangelism.

Men are dead in their trespasses and sins. They are not only dead, they are in bondage to sin. What life they have is only life to follow the prince of this air. They are haters of God. They are enemies of God. They are blind. They do everything in their power to restrict and restrain every bit of knowledge that they already possess about God. They work with all their might to close down their conscience so it will no longer speak to them. They would rather suffer in a devil's hell throughout all eternity than bow the knee and repent and believe in your God.

Now go try to learn an evangelism technique to bring them to life. Give long drawn out altar calls. Tell all sorts of soupy stories. Manipulate their passions, their emotions. And the only thing you will have is a group of two fold sons of hell.

For men to be saved there is only one way and that is for one man like Ezekiel to step out in the midst of that valley and preach the only message God has promised to bless and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[applause]

When we are looking for missionaries or when we are interviewing candidates we want one thing: a man who knows that the ministry is an impossibility, that men cannot be converted any more than the dead can be raised and worlds can be brought out of nothing. A man who realizes that he only has a few weapons of warfare, but they are powerful, the preaching of the gospel, intercessory prayer and sacrificial dying to self love.

Give me men and women like that, we will see the gospel advance in this world.

But the more you depend upon the arm of the flesh, the more churches attempt to grow not by being biblical, but finding the latest thing to appeal to the greatest number of people, as long as we are doing that, we will never see the power of God and the Church in its desire to become relevant makes itself look like a fool in the midst of its enemies.

The Church today in America looks like a six flags over Jesus, because if you draw people using carnal means, you will have to keep people using carnal means.

[applause]

Now I want to take the rest of the time that we have and I want us to look at the basic invitation for men to come to Christ that is most prominent in America today. A standard,

contemporary invitation, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Do you know you are a sinner? Do you want to go to heaven? Do you want to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart? Did he come in when you prayed? Were you sincere? You are now a Christian. Welcome to the family of God.”

This is such a sacred calf, a golden calf in the evangelical community today that I am more attacked of this than anything else. But I assure you, this is not biblical language. And it is not found in the greater part of Christian history. This method that we cannot do evangelism without, is neither biblical nor historical and has led us to exactly what we are complaining about. The greater part of the United States of America claims to be born again. And they are not. The greatest field of evangelism today is found in church buildings.

I don't want to say is found in the Church, because everyone in the Church is truly converted. But in church buildings.

You say, “Oh, we have a lot of churches, brother Paul.”

No. We have a really ... we have a large group of nice brick buildings on beautiful yards. But the glory of God has since departed from them and Ichabod has been written across the door.

Now let's look at this invitation.

“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

Many times this is accompanied by an explanation of all that Jesus can do for the person: fix their life, their marriage, their finances, their self esteem.

So you walk up to what we know about a sinner. He is self centered. He is autonomous. He wants to do this own thing. He has his own dreams and he is in love with himself.

So you walk up to this man and you say, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

And he goes, “What? God loves me? That is fantastic. I love me, too. Well, this is wonderful. And you are even saying that he loves me more than I love me. Now that sounds impossible. How could anyone have such a great love? And God has a wonderful plan for my life? Oh, I have a wonderful plan for my life, too. And you are telling me that if I accept this Jesus, he will help me with all my wonderful plans and I can have my best life now?”

Yes.

“Well, then I will take a god like that. Have you got two of them?”

Do you see that?

Now you say, "Brother Paul, it is... we don't mean it that way. That is a..."

But that is the way it is coming out.

Now you are saying, "Paul, you are being very hard, full of satire."

Yes, I am. I am. But, look, everybody is lamenting the fact that this country believes it is saved when it is no more saved than... It is as lost, as they say in Alabama, as a ball in tall grass.

But no one wants to point to what the problem is. And the problem is even when we preach the gospel correctly, then we go to this thing of how to invite men that is not biblical or historical. We get them to jump through a few evangelical hoops and say yes to the appropriate questions and we popishly pronounce them to be saved. And when they believe that false religious lie given by a religious authority, then when someone comes later and tries to preach the gospel to them because they are living in the world, they won't listen, because a religious lie has so much power.

Then the next question. Do you know you are a sinner?

And often times it is really not given too seriously. It is kind of like, hey, you know, we are all sinners, don't you?

And if the person says, "Yes, I know I am a sinner," then the question is, "Do you want to go to heaven?"

Yeah. I do.

Then would you like to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart? It will only take five minutes.

Only five minutes?

Yes, because the Bible says, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God even to those who believe on his name. If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with me. So would you like to receive Jesus? Because that is what the Bible says."

Only take five minutes?

Only five minutes.

Sure.

And then afterwards, often after a person prays or is led in a prayer by the evangelist, he or she is assured that if they were sincere then Jesus has definitely come into their heart because he promised he would and if he didn't come in he is a liar because they were sincere.

How many people do you know believe they are going to heaven because they are not trusting so much in Christ as they are the sincerity of the decision they made a long time ago.

Often times after a few minute of counseling they are immediately presented before the church and welcomed into the family of God.

Now you tell me I am wrong.

They come down front. I have seen it so many times. They are given over to a counselor who has been trained in a package counseling form. They are talked to for about five or 10 minutes while the invitation rolls on and then immediately they are presented before the church, our new brother and sister in Christ.

And that is the last most of them will ever, ever hear of conversion counseling. And then what will happen? If they never grow or if they doubt their salvation they are taken again back to that day when they prayed and questioned regarding the sincerity of their decision. If they ever come to the pastor again doubting their salvation he will take them back to that day again and say, "Well, did you ever pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart?"

Yes.

Were you sincere?

I think so.

Then it is just the devil bothering you.

If they never grow in the things of God, their lack of growth is attributed to the lack of discipleship or the belief in the doctrine of the carnal Christian. One convention that I know of came to the conclusion that 60 percent of all its converts never attended church and their answer for that malady was we have to do a better job in discipleship.

No. Jesus his sheep, they hear his voice and they follow him whether you disciple them or not.

Now we ought to do discipleship. My friend, back in the 70s discipleship became the big

thing, personal discipleship. We have just as many people leaving the back door of the church as entering into the front door of the church because we are not doing personal discipleship.

No. It is because we are not preaching the gospel correctly and we are pronouncing people converted who are not converted and they went out from us because they never were of us.

Now you have got to understand this. We deal five minutes with a person their conversion and then spend 50 years trying to disciple a goat into a sheep.

I am not saying this because I am an angry person. I am saying this because I am angry because countless people are deceived. The problem is not liberal politicians. It is evangelical preachers.

If they are ever challenged regarding their conversion because of a lack of fruit or overwhelming worldliness, they defend their hope of salvation by, once again, affirming the sincerity of their prayer and the confirmation of their religious leaders. If any counseling is done, a person is usually admonished to turn from his or her backsliding and to begin serving the Lord again. However, the validity of their conversion is never examined or ever challenged.

So many people, for example, children evangelism. I would not let my child attend 98 percent of the Sunday school classes and vacation Bible schools in this country and I will tell you why. A bunch of children are brought in and they are told wonderful stories about Jesus and then how many of you children love Jesus?

I mean, except for the kid in the back with the leather jacket and the sign on his back that have been imprinted by a cultic, you know, satanic cult, every other kid in that class is going to stand up and go, "I love Jesus."

Well, how many of you want to go to heaven?

Oh, I do.

How many of you want to pray this prayer?

I will.

And then they are marched off to baptism and at the time the baptismal is dressed up like some kind of a happy party time with graffiti so that they really enjoy it. And then when they are old enough to rebel against their parents they do and they live in gross immorality and sin and then when they are about 25 or 30 after college they decide they need to straighten things out because morality is really a better way to go, so they rededicate their life and they continue attending church once a week having just enough morality to dim their conscience and send them straight to hell.

That is what is going on. And when little Johnny wanders off the path and begins sleeping with his girlfriend, taking drugs, selling drugs, doing everything else, his mother and his father and his pastor goes to him and says, “You are a Christian, so you need to stop living that way,” Instead of saying this. “You made the profession of faith in Christ. You were baptized in his name and for a while it seemed that you did walk with him, but now you have turned away from the faith and you have proved, possibly, that you never knew him and you have been reprobate from the beginning. Repent and believe the gospel. Flee from the wrath to come.”

That is the difference.

[applause]

I have got to get a different group. They used to throw rocks. I am beginning to worry.

Now I want to give you a biblical alternative. God loves me and I, you know, if God loves you and has a wonderful plan for you life, what about instead this modern mantra should be replaced by a proclamation of who God is.

He is the Creator, the Sustainer and Lord of all things and he is worthy of your honor and obedience.

Now I want you to just listen to this. In Exodus God’s proclamation.

“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.”²

One of the greatest revelations of God in the Old Testament. Everyone knows that. Moses hid in the cleft of a rock. God proclaims his glory to Moses and look at Moses’ response.

“Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.”³

So instead of saying, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for you life,” tell them who God is, because if you give them a God made in their image I guarantee you they will accept it. But he won’t be the God who saves.

You tell them who God is. You exalt God before them and tell them that everything in their life is going to have to bend towards his will. He is not like you, old man. Repent and believe.

Now does our gospel presentation make men excited about what God can do for them on this earth or about who God is?

² Exodus 34:6-7.

³ Exodus 34:8.

Now let's go to our questions. Do you know you are a sinner?

My dear friend, the question is not do you know you are a sinner. The question is this. As you have heard me preach the gospel, has God so worked in your life that the sin you once you loved you now hate?

You go up to the devil and ask him if he knows he is a sinner. He will say, "Oh, yes, I am. And mighty fine one at that."

Someone says, "Yes, I know I am a sinner."

Do they know what that means? That is like someone says, "I have accepted God." But when you begin to hear their definition of the god they have accepted you realize it is not the God of the Bible.

In the same way a person says, "I am a sinner."

That could mean anything. I don't have enough love for myself.

You must use the Scriptures to teach them. The Holy Spirit using the sword to penetrate their heart and to show them what it truly means.

I was preaching years ago and they had counselors all prepared and everything and there was this lady leading up the counseling group and she did not like me at all. And so one night I was preaching and there began a move of God. People over towards the left started weeping and then they just went and started going across the auditorium and people were weeping, some almost convulsing. And I hadn't even finished the sermon and a girl ran up and was just laying across the steps and another person. They started weeping and I looked up at the counselors and the leader looked at me like... and I went... And I kept preaching. And finally after I got through preaching she took a step forward and I realized she is going to bolt on me. And so I went down there and I stood beside her and she goes... And I said... and finally she just looked at me and took a step and I put my hand on her shoulder and I said, "Sister, don't touch the ark of God."

It is the God of Israel who is wounding these people with regard to their sin. Do not comfort the soul that God is breaking. Leave them alone to God.

[applause]

So, you see, the question is not simply do you know you are a sinner. Dear friend, do you know what it means and has God so begun to work in your heart that you are beginning to see sin as God sees sin? Are there seeds of an attitude, a divine attitude of hating sin as God hates it? You are boasting over sin, has it turned to shame? Is God doing something?

Now do you want to go to heaven? That is the question? Do you want to go to heaven?

Have you ever had anyone say, “Well, no. I would rather go to hell”?

I have had a few people do that. But most of the part says, “Yes, I would like to go to heaven.”

My dear friend, understand this. Everyone wants to go to heaven. They just don’t want God to be there when they get there.

The question is not: Do you want to go to heaven? The question is: Do you want God?

Political theory. This next election, it is all about a utopia. It is all about making a wonderful place for men to live. Even godless men want a place where they get everything they want. But the question to the sinner to whom you are witnessing is: Has God done anything in your life? Is there any treasuring of Christ? Can... are you ashamed of the way that throughout the history of your life you have ignored him, hated him, been apathetic toward him? Is there a new desire to follow him, seek him, know him, delight in him?

Now let’s look at some of these texts, because if someone answers all the questions yes then they are asked: Do you want to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart?

We have all done it. Does it bother anyone that this formula or language is not found in the New Testament? I mean, we don’t have, you know, Mark chapter one Jesus coming to Israel and saying, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Now who would like to accept me into their heart?”

We don’t see on the day of Pentecost, “Ok, I see that hand. How many of you want to come forward now?”

Get them all forward. Everyone sees you. You can’t go back to your seat. Now pray this prayer with me.

You say, “Brother Paul, you are making a mockery.”

Yes, I am. I am. I don’t know any other way to say it.

You say, “But I got saved that way.”

You got saved in spite of that way, not because of that way.

[applause]

“But, brother Paul, we have all these wonderful texts.”

Ok, let's look at them.

“But as many as received Him...”⁴

Do you honestly believe that means the sinner's prayer? Do you honestly believe that means if you don't feel comfortable praying repeat this after me? Is that what that means? I mean look at it. Where do you get that?

One evangelist said to a guy who didn't even want to follow him in a prayer he said, “Ok, I will tell you this. I will say the words and if it is what you want to say to God, squeeze my hand. Behold the power of God.”

To receive him I believe should be interpreted within the context of the theology of John. It means to open up one's life to ongoing fellowship or communion with the risen Christ.

John 17:3.

To receive Christ or feed upon him as the sustenance of one's life.

John 6:53... “...unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood...”

You see, a man is saved only by faith, believing what God has said about God, about himself about the atoning work of Christ, the person of Christ. They are saved. But in that moment of salvation, of belief, they are opening their lives to the person of Jesus. And just because they prayed a prayer with a certain degree of sincerity is not true evidence because the heart is deceitfully wicked. How can you define the degree of sincerity in your own heart.

You see, the evidence throughout all the New Testament it is this. You believe unto salvation and the evidence you believed is this. You are saved only by faith in Christ, but if you believe in Christ your life will be open more and more to communion and fellowship with him.

It is not this flu shot mentality of an invitation of the gospel. We call men to repent and believe. And if they repent and believe truly in that moment they are saved in that moment, but the evidence is more than just the sincerity of a prayer. It is a continuation of the working of God in their life through sanctification.

Now, Romans 10:9-10:

...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.⁵

⁴ John 1:12.

⁵ Romans 10:9-10.

First we must say something about the heart. It represents the core essence of what a man is. It is the seat of his intellect, mind, emotions and will. Therefore it is absurd to think a man can believe in Christ with his heart and it not have a radical effect on the rest of his life.

Let's look at the language.

Would you like to receive Jesus in your heart?

What does that mean?

Have you ever thought about that?

Believe in your heart. But we have changed it to: Would you like to ask him to come into your heart?

Believe in your heart means to believe with the very core, the very essence of who you are. It doesn't mean you open up some secret chamber and ask him to come in.

It is the testimony of Scripture and the interpretation of all sound evangelical scholars that we are saved by faith alone. So why does Paul seem to add confession as a requirement of genuine conversion.

Let's look at the text again.

"...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."⁶

Paul throughout the entire book of Romans has said, "Salvation only by faith." So why is he now adding confession? Paul is not contradicting the doctrine of faith alone, but is teaching that our public confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ is the evidence of believing in the heart. If someone is truly converted, they will publicly confess Christ in word and deed. That does not mean the same thing as presenting themselves before the church the night of their supposed conversion.

If someone is truly converted, they will publicly confess Christ in word and deed. Why do I add word and deed? Because Matthew 7:21 says:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."⁷

Now I am not saying that we are saved by faith and works, not at all. I am a grace preacher. What I am saying is that salvation involves a lost doctrine. It is called

⁶ Romans 10:9.

⁷ Matthew 7:21.

regeneration and that when God saves a man he is regenerating his heart, turns him into a new creature and the evidence is this. He will live like a new creature. And he will confess Christ. That is, the man who has truly believed in his heart, his life will be marked by a biblical confession of Christ in word and deed. You will be able to see with his ... hear with his mouth and see with his life that his faith is a genuine saving faith.

Now I want to give you... I want to put this really quickly in a cultural perspective.

Let's say that we are all at church about 20 people first century Roman Empire. You know from the epistle of the Romans that these Christians are being put to death, some of them. They are dying like sheep.

All right. Now let's say that we have a... we are 20 of us and we all work construction. So we are working on some kind of a building there in Rome, construction, no problem. Beautiful day. It is lunch time. We are taking a break, spring, we are laying out in the grass, having a good time, resting.

And all of the sudden, though, we hear this. We hear drums. We look up and we see soldiers coming. And they are carrying a little altar and on that altar is a little bowl of incense and a little fire built and we become terrified. As all the construction guys come to their feet, most of them unbelievers and there we are a little church in the midst of them the soldiers rally us all together and they say, "Come forth. Pay homage to Caesar."

And so the first guy, unbeliever, goes up there and gets a little bit of incense, throws it in the fire and says, "Caesar is lord," walks off as happy as he can be.

The next one and the next one and finally it comes to the first of us, the Christians and one of us walk up, the soldier prods him with the spear. "Pay homage to Caesar."

"Jesus is Lord," and he dies. And the next one of us, "Jesus is Lord," and he dies. And the next one of us. And we have taken that truth that Paul is teaching right here that if you truly believe you will confess Christ even though it cost you your life. We have taken that beautiful truth and reduced it down. If you pray a little prayer before a bunch of people in a church in America you can be guaranteed you are saved if you think you were sincere.

That is not what it is talking about. Again, the moment a person calls upon Christ in faith they are saved, but the evidence of salvation is not that one time in their life they were sincere when they prayed a prayer. The evidence of their salvation is, is there genuine repentance? Is there faith? And do those both evangelical graces continue on in their life and grow?

In other words, the evidence of justification by faith is the ongoing work of sanctification through the Holy Spirit.

Now let's look at Revelation 3:20.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”⁸

First of all, this is not given in the context of a gospel invitation. Do you realize that? Christ is not knocking on the door of a sinner’s heart. Nowhere does it say that. But he is knocking on the door of a wayward church. That is the context.

This ought to raise some red flags for us.

I said that to an evangelist one time and he said, “Yeah, I know, brother Paul, but it works.”

Secondly, I find it interesting that we use this text to give sinners the assurance that if they open up their hearts Jesus will come in even though this text does not specifically or primarily address conversion or the opening of a heart. On the other hand, we do not use Acts 16:14 which specifically and primarily speaks about both conversion and the opening of a heart.

“A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”⁹

Why don’t we ever use that text?

Thirdly, instead of merely inviting the sinner to open up their lives, would it not also be appropriate to lovingly aid the sinner in self examination to evaluate what the Lord might be doing at that moment?

Do you have any sense that God is working in your heart this evening? Has there been an increase in your understanding of the gospel and the things of God? Are you more and more open to the person of Christ and the truth of Scripture and the demands of discipleship? Do you have a desire to respond to the things about which you have heard, to forsake confidence in self, in your life of sin and trust in Christ alone?

Fourthly, if we take this text, even if we do take it and use it for evangelism, if someone has opened the door of their life to Christ, notice this. The evidence will, once again, be ongoing fellowship, because he said, “If I come in, I will come in to dine with them.”

The evidence that a person has truly opened their life to Christ is continued fellowship with Christ. But is it not true—and don’t tell me it is not. Countless millions of people because of our preaching walk around. They have no fellowship with Christ, no desire of godliness, no seeking of God, but they believe themselves converted because one time in one of our churches they prayed and asked Jesus to come in. That is true.

⁸ Revelation 3:20.

⁹ Acts 16:14.

Now let me share with you. I have 45 seconds left. One of the greatest moments of my life as a few clicks south of Alaska. Some of you may have heard this story, but a man as soon as I got up in the pulpit got 25 people, a man walked in, a giant of a man, saddest human being I have ever seen in my life and he came and sat down in the front row. I immediately just stopped and started preaching the gospel.

After I finished I went down. I said, "Sir, what is wrong with you? What is wrong?"

He pulled out a manila envelope and he just showed it to me and he said, "I just came from the doctor. I am going to die in three weeks." He said, "I have lived out in the bush working on a working cattle ranch all my life. You can only get there by riding over the mountains or taking a float plane or something like that." He said, "I have never been to a church in my life. I have never read a Bible. One time I heard someone talking about a guy named Jesus and I do believe there is a God. I have never been afraid of anything in my life and I am afraid because I am going to die and I don't know what to do."

Now I said, "Sir, for the last 45 minutes I have preached the gospel to you, the good news of what God has done for sinners in Jesus Christ. Did you understand it?"

He said, "Yes."

Now what would have most evangelists done at that moment?

Would you like to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart?

But this is what he said.

"Brother Paul, I understood it. I mean, anybody could have understood it. But is that it? I understand it now and I pray a prayer and that is it?"

And I went and started explaining repentance and faith. And after several minutes he looked at me and he says, "I just don't get it."

I said, "Look, you have three weeks to live. I have to leave tomorrow morning. I will cancel my plane ticket and I will stay with you for three weeks until you die, either you are saved or you die and go to hell. So let's begin."

Listen to me. If you are thinking about being an evangelist, don't think you are going to preach to a whole bunch of people when they come forward you pawn them off on everyone else to do the counseling and you go to Denny's to eat and glory in all the decisions most of which were just decisions and no one got converted because most of those people won't come back to church next Sunday.

Now you understand like Leonard Ravenhill used to say. Now you understand why I preach in a lot of churches once.

But I looked at that man and I said, “Sir, faith cometh by hearing. Let’s go through Scripture.”

We went through Scripture for over an hour, every promise, Old Testament, New Testament on and on, just laboring until Christ be formed.

We prayed some more. We read some more, another hour goes on. It is getting late. I said, “We are staying here. This man is dying.”

And then after I don’t know how long we got back to one of my favorite verses in the Bible, John 3:16. And I said, “Sir...”

I will never forget because he had that Bible on his legs, my Bible and those big old hands of his. And I said, “Sir, let’s just read through this again.”

He said, “We have read through it so much.”

I said, “Sir, your life depends on it.”

And so he looked down, that big old man and he goes, “Ok.”

“For God so loved the world, that He gave...”¹⁰

Oh, oh. I am saved. I am saved. All my sins are gone. I have... my hands are clean. I have eternal life. Oh, my. I am going to heaven.

I said, “Sir, how do you know?”

He said, “Haven’t you ever read this verse before?”

[applause]

Do you see the difference?

People say, “Are you against evangelism?”

I say, “Yes and no. I am against your kind of evangelism. I hate it.”

That run men through, grab a little ticket just like you were waiting at some government office for them to renew your license, grab a ticket and go to heaven.

We will be responsible. We are called upon. When I preach in meetings and people ... this is what I do. I don’t give big altar calls and stuff. I say, “Look, it is over. If God is dealing with your heart, you come to me. We will sit here all night.”

¹⁰ John 3:16.

And if someone professes faith in Christ then what do I do? I don't go, "Oh, you are saved. You are saved."

I tell them this. I say, "Listen. If tonight you have truly repented and believed in Jesus Christ, you have become a child of God, but this is going to be the evidence. If you have truly repented unto salvation you will continue repenting unto salvation and growing in repentance. And if you have truly believed, you will continue believing. None of this flu shot stuff."

I don't want someone walking up to that person 10 years later, they are living an ungodly life and someone witnessed to them and they say, "Oh, don't worry about me. I done did that," because that is what most people do in the South, isn't it? "Don't worry about me, preacher. I done did that."

You done did what?

I got my flu shot.

Yeah, but you didn't get Jesus.

You labor with them. Let everyone else go out to eat. You labor. You pray. Counsel them with many gospel promises and many gospel warnings.

I have declared war. It is like a little mite beating his head against a world of granite, but I don't care. I am sick and tired of people being led into a decision with very little knowledge of the gospel, trusting in a decision rather than looking unto Christ, living in ungodliness and believing they are saved because some religious authority in the evangelical community told them they were and they are almost completely insulated now from hearing the true gospel.

Stop it. Stop it.

[applause]