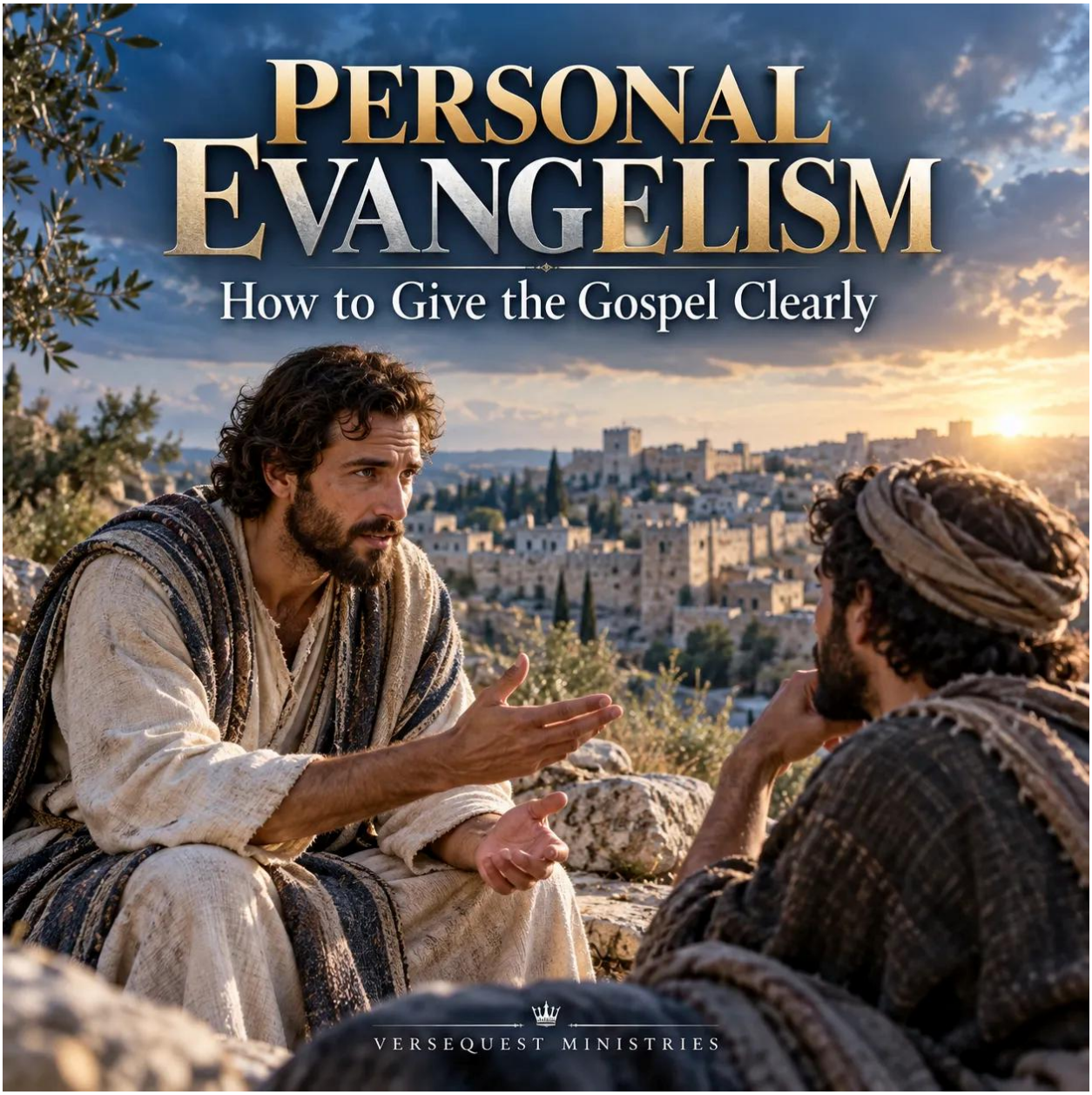
Personal Evangelism
How to Give the Gospel Clearly

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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PERSONAL EVANGELISM
How to Give the Gospel Clearly

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This book has been prepared for biblical education, personal study, Christian discipleship, and the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to equip believers to understand and communicate salvation by grace through faith according to the Scriptures.

The biblical exposition and doctrinal teaching reflect the dispensational, King James Bible-centered convictions of VerseQuest Ministries, with particular emphasis on rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

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VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES

Teaching the Word of God, Rightly Divided.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

— Romans 1:16 (KJV)

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

How to Give the Gospel Clearly

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Personal Evangelism — How to Give the Gospel Clearly

Introduction — The Greatest Message a Christian Can Give

There is something terribly wrong with modern Christianity when a man can be saved for twenty or thirty years, attend thousands of church services, accumulate a library of Bibles and commentaries, discuss the latest prophetic developments, identify every false teacher within a five-hundred-mile radius, and still be unable to explain to an unsaved person how to receive eternal life. He can tell you what is wrong with Washington, what is wrong with the churches, what is wrong with the schools, what is wrong with the younger generation, and what is wrong with practically everybody except himself. But ask him when he last explained the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to a lost sinner, and suddenly the conversation becomes remarkably quiet. Now I believe in sound doctrine. I believe in studying the King James Bible, rightly dividing the word of truth, exposing false teaching, and defending what God has written. But somewhere along the way, Christians have managed to become experts at discussing Christianity while neglecting one of the most important responsibilities that follows salvation: telling somebody else how to be saved. **A Christian who knows how to identify every counterfeit gospel but never presents the true Gospel has developed a remarkable talent for inspecting the battlefield without ever entering the fight.**

The Apostle Paul declared in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Notice what Paul identified as the power of God unto salvation. It was not the preacher's personality, the size of the congregation, the popularity of the ministry, the emotional atmosphere of the meeting, or the ingenuity of the evangelistic presentation. It was the Gospel of Christ. That ought to settle the matter before we go another inch. God has already provided the saving message. Our responsibility is to understand it, believe it, preserve it, and communicate it faithfully. We do not need to manufacture a new gospel for a new generation. We do not need to modernize redemption until it becomes indistinguishable from a motivational seminar. We do not need to apologize because the Bible speaks about sin, judgment, Hell, the blood of Christ, and salvation by grace. **The Gospel was powerful before the first microphone was invented, before the first television preacher appeared, and before anybody discovered how to turn a church service into a professionally managed production.**

This ten-part series, *Personal Evangelism — How to Give the Gospel Clearly*, is intended to bring us back to the actual business of communicating God's saving message to people who need it. We are going to examine what the Gospel is, why sinners need salvation, who Jesus Christ really is, what He accomplished through His finished work, and how eternal

life is received through faith in Him. We are also going to examine the practical side of witnessing: opening conversations, recognizing opportunities, answering objections, explaining repentance without adding works to grace, inviting someone to believe on Christ without manipulating a decision, and continuing the work after the Gospel has been presented. These matters are not reserved for ordained ministers, missionaries, professional evangelists, or men with advanced theological degrees. Every born-again Christian should understand the message by which he was saved. You may never preach before a thousand people, establish a Bible college, or travel to a foreign mission field, but you can tell somebody that Jesus Christ died for sinners and rose again. **You do not need to know everything in the Bible to explain the Gospel, but you had better know the Gospel before you attempt to explain everything else.**

The first matter we must settle is that personal evangelism is not the same thing as making people religious. That distinction is desperately needed because religion has produced an extraordinary collection of substitutes for salvation. One crowd believes that getting an unsaved person into a church building is practically equivalent to getting him into heaven. Another believes that water baptism settles the matter. Another points to communion, confirmation, confession to a priest, sacramental observance, or membership in the correct denomination. Still another believes that a sinner must promise to stop sinning, surrender every area of his life, and demonstrate a sufficient degree of personal reformation before God will consider saving him. Meanwhile, the Apostle Paul declares in Ephesians 2:8–9, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” You would think those words might simplify matters. Unfortunately, religious men have spent centuries attempting to add conditions to a gift while continuing to advertise it as free. **If the sinner must contribute his performance to complete Christ's redemption, somebody has just handed him an invoice for a debt the Saviour already paid.**

Before a sinner can properly understand salvation, he must understand why he needs it. Romans 3:23 declares, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” That includes the respectable businessman, the devoted mother, the decorated military veteran, the successful physician, the religious grandmother, the churchgoing neighbor, and the fellow sitting in the county jail. Human beings are remarkably skilled at comparing themselves with somebody worse. The honest man compares himself with the thief, the faithful husband with the adulterer, and the respectable church member with the drunkard lying in the gutter. Everybody can find somebody whose conduct makes his own appearance more favorable. But God does not measure righteousness by comparing one sinner with another. His standard is His own holiness, and the only man who ever walked this earth without committing a single sin was the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 6:23

declares, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” **The Gospel does not begin with the announcement that mankind possesses unlimited potential. It begins with the declaration that mankind possesses a sin problem that no amount of human potential can solve.**

We must also understand that the Jesus Christ we proclaim is not merely an inspiring religious teacher, a social reformer, a moral example, or a convenient figure who can be redesigned to accommodate modern opinions. John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 14 announces that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” First Timothy 3:16 identifies the mystery of godliness: “God was manifest in the flesh.” Here is the eternal Son of God, born of a virgin, genuinely human, completely sinless, and uniquely qualified to accomplish redemption. A created being could not provide the eternal divine Saviour revealed in Scripture. A sinful man could not offer himself as a spotless sacrifice for other sinners. A dead religious philosopher could not provide everlasting life. **The identity of Jesus Christ is not an interesting theological accessory attached to the Gospel. Without the biblical Christ, there is no biblical salvation.** When we tell somebody to believe on Jesus Christ, we must make certain we are presenting the Saviour revealed in God's Word rather than one of the counterfeits manufactured by religious tradition.

And then we come to the very heart of the matter: the finished work of Christ. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Those words contain the central historical facts of the Gospel Paul preached. Notice particularly the expression “for our sins.” Christ did not merely die because wicked men conspired against Him. He did not die simply to furnish humanity with an inspiring illustration of sacrificial love. He died as the sinless substitute for guilty sinners. Second Corinthians 5:21 declares, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” His blood accomplished redemption. His burial established the reality of His death. His bodily resurrection demonstrated the victory of the living Saviour. **The Gospel is not God offering mankind another opportunity to save itself. It is God announcing that Jesus Christ has accomplished what mankind could never accomplish, paid what mankind could never pay, and conquered what mankind could never conquer.**

This is where we must draw a line against every religious system that attempts to add man's works to Christ's finished sacrifice. Romans 4:5 declares, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Notice that God justifies the ungodly. He does not wait until the sinner has transformed

himself into a sufficiently obedient candidate for divine acceptance. The sinner receives righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Good works are important, and Ephesians 2:10 establishes that saved people are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. But those works follow salvation; they do not purchase it. We will therefore examine the confusion surrounding repentance, Lordship Salvation, baptismal regeneration, and the various religious arrangements that tell a sinner Christ has completed redemption while quietly demanding that he contribute something to make the transaction effective. **A salvation message that begins with Christ's finished work and ends with the sinner's promised obedience has changed foundations halfway through the sermon. The first foundation is grace; the second is human performance. You cannot stand on both and call the arrangement the Gospel.**

Now understand something else. Personal evangelism is not merely knowing the correct passages and waiting for an unsaved person to knock on your front door requesting a comprehensive explanation of justification by faith. Most people do not begin conversations that way. They talk about their families, their employment, their difficulties, their future, their religious upbringing, the death of a loved one, or questions they have never been able to answer. Sometimes a direct question about salvation is appropriate. At other times, a natural conversation provides a better opening. Colossians 4:5–6 instructs believers to walk in wisdom toward those who are without and to let their speech be “alway with grace, seasoned with salt.” Wisdom does not mean cowardice, and boldness does not require foolishness. Some Christians never mention Christ because they are afraid of appearing intrusive. Others seem determined to make themselves unnecessarily offensive and then congratulate themselves when somebody refuses to listen. **There is a difference between being rejected because you preached the Gospel and being rejected because you behaved like a religious bulldozer with a Bible under its front bumper.**

The Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated remarkable wisdom in His conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. He began with a request for water and brought the discussion to the subject of everlasting life. Philip approached the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and began with the Scripture the man was already reading. Paul reasoned with Jews from the Scriptures and addressed pagan philosophers by confronting their idolatry and proclaiming the true God. Different circumstances required different openings, but the truth remained the truth. We will examine how to recognize genuine opportunities without manipulating people, how to answer questions without turning every exchange into a religious argument, and how to use personal testimony and sound Gospel literature without allowing either to replace the Word of God. A Christian should pray for opportunities to witness and prepare himself to use them. **It is difficult to complain that God never opens a door when you have spent twenty years refusing to turn the doorknob.**

Another obstacle appears when the unsaved person begins asking questions. Some questions are sincere and deserve careful answers. Others are little more than escape routes from the subject of salvation. Mention Jesus Christ, and suddenly somebody wants to discuss the hypocritical preacher who stole money, the church that mistreated his family, the various denominations, the reliability of the Bible, evolution, human suffering, or whether all religions ultimately lead to God. We should answer genuine objections honestly, and we should never pretend to know something we have not studied. But we must remember the central issue. The Lord Jesus declared in John 5:39–40 that the Scriptures testified of Him, yet His religious opponents would not come to Him for life. A man can accumulate enough religious questions to occupy a university department and still remain without salvation. **The Christian may win the argument about dinosaurs, settle the controversy over Cain's wife, and explain every apparent contradiction in Scripture, yet accomplish nothing eternally if the sinner never hears why Jesus Christ died for him.**

Eventually, a clear Gospel conversation must reach the question of personal faith. In Acts 16:30, the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer was direct: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The response God requires was not concealed behind a religious ceremony. The sinner was directed to Christ. But the desire to obtain a decision has produced some dangerous practices in modern evangelism. People are pressured to raise hands, walk aisles, sign cards, repeat prescribed prayers, and make public declarations they may not understand. Then the evangelist announces that another soul has been saved because the correct physical movement occurred at the correct moment. Now I am certainly in favor of a sinner believing on Christ immediately. But salvation is not produced by a handshake, an altar, a decision card, or a collection of memorized words. **A man can walk fifty feet down a church aisle without moving one inch toward God in saving faith. The distance that matters is not between the pew and the pulpit. It is the difference between unbelief and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.**

We must also distinguish the conviction produced through God's Word from emotional pressure manufactured through human techniques. Romans 10:17 declares, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” A sinner may weep when he understands his condition. Another may remain outwardly composed while genuinely trusting Christ. Neither tears nor the absence of tears determines whether salvation has occurred. We must never assure somebody that he has been born again simply because he repeated a prayer to satisfy an enthusiastic Christian. Likewise, we must never tell a person that God refused to save him because his emotional response was insufficiently dramatic. The object of saving faith is Jesus Christ, not the experience accompanying the profession.

We can explain the Gospel, ask whether the individual understands it, answer further questions, and invite him to believe. What we cannot do is manufacture the new birth. **The Holy Ghost has never needed a preacher to operate a religious assembly line, pushing sinners through the machinery until enough decisions emerge to decorate the annual report.**

After someone professes faith, our responsibility does not disappear. The newly saved believer needs assurance grounded in Scripture rather than human emotions. John 5:24 declares that the believer has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation. John 10:28 records the Lord's promise that His sheep shall never perish. Ephesians 1:13 explains the sealing of believers with the Holy Spirit of promise. These passages establish a security that rests upon the Saviour, not upon the believer's ability to maintain flawless behavior. The new Christian also needs instruction in prayer, Bible study, fellowship, sound doctrine, and spiritual growth. But none of those responsibilities must be presented as additional conditions for retaining salvation. We must be equally careful concerning false professions. An outward religious decision does not automatically establish that the individual understood or believed the Gospel. **A baptismal certificate may identify when water was applied, and a decision card may identify when words were spoken, but neither possesses the authority to declare what only God knows perfectly about the heart.**

Some of the most difficult witnessing opportunities concern people closest to us. An unsaved spouse, parent, child, brother, sister, or longtime friend may have heard our testimony repeatedly and remain unconvinced. We may know their habits, their objections, their religious background, and the arguments they raise whenever salvation is mentioned. It is tempting either to withdraw completely or to turn every family gathering into another confrontation. Neither approach necessarily reflects wisdom. Paul expressed his burden for Israel in Romans 10:1: “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” His concern did not disappear because many rejected his message. We should pray for unsaved relatives, answer their questions patiently, maintain honest relationships, and take opportunities to explain the Gospel clearly. Yet we must not manipulate them through affection, embarrassment, financial pressure, or family guilt. **You cannot argue your father into regeneration, threaten your spouse into saving faith, or obtain eternal life for your children by teaching them to repeat the words that make you happy. Each must personally believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.**

There will also be people who refuse the Gospel regardless of how clearly it is presented. Some will mock. Others will become hostile. Some will postpone further consideration, while others will listen politely and remain unconvinced. The Christian must understand

that witnessing faithfully does not guarantee an immediate profession. First Corinthians 3:6 declares, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” That statement should eliminate both spiritual pride and unnecessary discouragement. One believer may plant the seed, another may answer questions years later, and another may have the privilege of hearing the person's profession of faith. God gives the increase. We should never use His sovereignty as an excuse for failing to witness, but neither should we imagine that our cleverness possesses the power to regenerate sinners. **The Lord never commissioned Christians to manufacture salvation statistics. He commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel. A field does not become fruitful because the farmer stands beside it boasting about how many ears of corn he intends to produce. He must plant, water, and depend upon God for the increase.**

There is an urgency to this work that should never disappear beneath our arguments about methods. Hebrews 9:27 declares, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Men and women around us are traveling toward eternity every day. Some are wealthy, some are poor, some are educated, some have little formal schooling, some are deeply religious, and others have never considered spiritual matters seriously. But every one of them needs the Saviour. The finest home in the neighborhood cannot preserve its owner from death. The largest retirement account cannot purchase another eternity. The most impressive religious accomplishments cannot remove one sin from a guilty conscience. We do not need to manufacture frightening predictions about the hour of someone's death. God's Word already establishes the seriousness of judgment and the certainty of eternal consequences. **A man may possess enough money to purchase the finest medical treatment in the world, but he cannot write a check large enough to purchase redemption. That price was paid by the blood of Jesus Christ.**

I want this series to accomplish something more than adding ten additional Bible studies to somebody's reading collection. I want the reader to understand the Gospel so thoroughly that he can explain it to a child, a neighbor, a coworker, an elderly relative, or a stranger who has never opened a Bible. I want Christians to recognize the difference between salvation and religion, repentance and human reform, saving faith and religious agreement, biblical conviction and emotional manipulation, assurance and presumption, spiritual growth and attempts to earn justification. Above all, I want the Lord Jesus Christ to remain the center of every Gospel conversation. If these studies produce nothing more than additional arguments about evangelistic terminology, we will have missed the practical responsibility before us. **The Bible was not given so Christians could spend their lives polishing theological weapons that never leave the display case. God's truth is to be believed, studied, proclaimed, and obeyed.**

And let us never forget what makes this work possible in the first place. We were not saved because God examined the human race and discovered that we were unusually promising candidates for heaven. Romans 3:23 included every one of us. We were sinners who needed mercy. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. His righteousness, not ours, provides the basis of justification. His blood, not our religious activity, accomplished redemption. His resurrection, not our personal enthusiasm, establishes the victory of the Saviour. Whatever knowledge, opportunities, abilities, or experience we possess must therefore be used without self-righteous boasting. The man witnessing is not naturally superior to the man hearing the Gospel. He is a saved sinner explaining to another sinner where salvation may be found. **There is no room for religious arrogance at the foot of Calvary. The ground is occupied by guilty sinners, and the only righteousness sufficient to save them belongs to Jesus Christ.**

So we begin this series with an open King James Bible, the finished work of Jesus Christ, and a responsibility that should occupy the attention of every believer. Learn the Gospel. Understand the sinner's condition. Know the identity of the Saviour. Explain His death, burial, and resurrection. Preserve salvation by grace through faith without adding human works. Pray for open doors, speak with wisdom, answer objections honestly, invite sinners to believe, and continue serving whether the response is immediate or delayed. Never confuse religious decisions with regeneration, and never allow fear of rejection to become a permanent excuse for silence. **You cannot save a soul. You cannot purchase a soul. You cannot argue a soul into the kingdom of God. But you can tell a lost sinner about the Son of God who loved him enough to die for his sins and powerful enough to rise again. You can place the Gospel before someone who may never otherwise hear it clearly. And when this earthly life is finished, there are few things more worthwhile than knowing you did not keep the greatest message ever entrusted to mankind locked inside your own heart. The Gospel was never given to be admired in silence. It was given to be believed and proclaimed. Open your Bible. Open your mouth. Tell somebody about Jesus Christ.**

1 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: The Greatest Message a Christian Can Give

Key Passage — 2 Corinthians 5:20 (KJV): “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” There is a statement that ought to get hold of every born-again Christian who has ever wondered what he is supposed to be doing between the day he was saved and the day the Lord takes him home. Paul was describing the ministry of reconciliation committed to him and his fellow laborers, and the message has not changed for believers who proclaim that same Gospel today. An ambassador does not invent the policies of the government he represents. He does not negotiate away his country's authority to make himself popular with the people of a foreign nation. He carries a message from someone greater than himself. The Christian has been entrusted with the greatest announcement ever delivered to a condemned world: Jesus Christ has made reconciliation with God possible through His finished work. The question is not whether the message is important. The question is whether Christians consider it important enough to open their mouths.

We are living in an age when Christians can discuss politics for three hours, argue about the economy for another two, explain every detail of a football game they watched last Sunday, and describe the latest scandal in Washington without needing a single note. But mention witnessing to an unsaved neighbor, and suddenly everybody develops a speech impediment. A fellow who could sell refrigerators to Eskimos cannot explain John 3:16 to the man living across the street. Christians who have no difficulty telling complete strangers which restaurant they should visit become strangely concerned about appearing intrusive when the subject turns to eternal salvation. Now there is something wrong with that picture. The Lord Jesus Christ did not suffer, bleed, die, and rise again so His people could become spectators in a religious auditorium while a handful of professional clergymen handled all the witnessing. He saved us by grace, placed us in His body, gave us His Word, and left us in a world filled with people who desperately need to hear what that Word says about salvation.

Personal evangelism is not a denominational recruiting program, an exercise in public relations, or a competition to see which church can collect the most decision cards. It is the personal communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people who need to be saved. That sounds simple because it is simple, but modern religion has managed to complicate practically everything God made plain. One crowd turns evangelism into entertainment, another turns it into an emotional sales presentation, another substitutes humanitarian activities for the Gospel, and another seems to think that if the church develops an impressive enough calendar of activities, sinners will somehow discover salvation by osmosis. Meanwhile, people live and die without understanding that Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose again. The purpose of this study is to put the Gospel back where it belongs: in the Bible, in the mouth of the believer, and before the sinner who needs it. A

Christian does not have to be famous, wealthy, educated, or eloquent to witness. He must know whom he has believed and be willing to tell somebody else.

1. The Ambassador of Christ — A Message Entrusted, Not Invented

Paul begins the passage by declaring in 2 Corinthians 5:18, “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” Notice where the reconciliation originates. It is “of God.” Notice who accomplished it. It was accomplished “by Jesus Christ.” And notice what was given to those entrusted with proclaiming it. It was a ministry of reconciliation, not a license to manufacture another plan of salvation. Verse 19 identifies the substance of the message: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” and verse 21 explains the basis of that reconciliation through the sinless substitute who was made sin for us. In its immediate setting, Paul is defending and describing his apostolic ministry, but the saving message entrusted to him remains the message Christians must proclaim. We do not inherit Paul's apostolic office or miraculous credentials. We do possess the same Gospel he preached. The ambassador's authority is not found in his personality, educational accomplishments, religious title, or ability to impress an audience. His authority rests in the message of the King he represents.

An ambassador is not supposed to arrive in a foreign country and announce that he has improved upon his government's instructions. Imagine a representative of the United States entering an international negotiation and announcing that he has rewritten the Constitution because certain provisions might offend the people sitting across the table. He would not be an ambassador for very long. Yet that is precisely what religious men do when they rewrite the Gospel to accommodate contemporary tastes. God says man is a sinner, and they say man merely needs encouragement. God says Christ died for our sins, and they say Jesus came primarily to demonstrate a better lifestyle. God says salvation is by grace through faith, and they say salvation requires a lifetime of religious performance. God says eternal life is a gift, and they produce a payment schedule. That is not presenting the Gospel more attractively. It is presenting another message altogether. Galatians 1:8 pronounces a curse upon the preaching of another gospel, and Paul was not discussing a difference in musical preferences or church architecture. The message of salvation is not negotiable merchandise.

The Christian therefore approaches personal evangelism with a tremendous responsibility and a tremendous privilege. He is not going into the world to demonstrate how intelligent he is, how righteous he has become, or how superior his denomination happens to be. He is going with news concerning Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:5 Paul declares, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus'

sake." That one verse would put a considerable number of modern religious personalities out of business if they ever took it seriously. Evangelism is not a traveling exhibition of the preacher's accomplishments, and the sinner does not need an autobiography disguised as a sermon. Personal testimony certainly has its place, but testimony is evidence of what God has done in an individual life; it is not a replacement for the Gospel itself. The ambassador must keep the King at the center. A messenger who becomes more important than his message has forgotten why he was sent.

2. The Gospel Itself — The Power Is in the Message, Not the Messenger

Romans 1:16 declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Paul did not say the Gospel becomes powerful after the preacher adds enough emotional stories, dramatic music, carefully timed illustrations, and professional advertising. He said the Gospel "is the power of God unto salvation." The power belongs to God, and the message identifies the Saviour through whom God saves. The historical order "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" recognizes the Gospel's initial presentation in God's dealings with Israel and its proclamation to the Gentiles; it does not establish two different ways of salvation during the present dispensation. Both Jew and Gentile must come to God through Jesus Christ. Romans 3:22 speaks of the righteousness of God "unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." The same Gospel that saves the wealthy businessman can save the man sweeping his office floor. Neither has anything to contribute to the price of redemption.

What exactly is this Gospel? Paul provides the inspired definition in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. He reminds the Corinthians of the Gospel he had preached, which they had received, and then declares, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." There it is. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He rose again the third day. These are not optional decorations around the edges of Christianity. They are the central historical and saving facts of the Gospel. The death of Christ was substitutionary, His burial testified to the reality of His death, and His resurrection demonstrated that the crucified Saviour lives. A message about finding happiness, repairing a marriage, improving finances, or achieving personal fulfillment may interest somebody, but those things are not the Gospel. A sinner can enjoy a wonderful marriage, own a successful business, live in a beautiful house, and still die lost. The Gospel addresses a problem that prosperity cannot solve and religion cannot cure.

Romans 6:23 provides the contrast every evangelist should understand: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The first half

identifies what sinners have earned. The second half identifies what God freely gives through His Son. Notice that God does not offer eternal life as a salary for religious service, a reward for moral improvement, or a certificate awarded after completing sufficient church activities. It is a gift. Ephesians 2:8–9 further establishes salvation by grace through faith, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” This does not mean good works are unimportant in the Christian life; verse 10 places them where they belong, after salvation, as the intended conduct of those created in Christ Jesus. But putting works before salvation reverses God's order and corrupts His Gospel. The Christian must learn to present Christ's finished work without adding religious installment payments. When God calls eternal life a gift, the fellow trying to attach a price tag is not helping the customer understand the offer. He is contradicting the One who made it.

3. Seeing the Soul Behind the Face — People Are More Than Their Earthly Appearance

Proverbs 11:30 declares, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.” This proverb belongs to the wisdom literature given through Israel, and it teaches a principle that remains abundantly applicable to the believer's concern for the lost. Wisdom recognizes the value of a soul and the importance of turning people toward righteousness and life. The expression does not establish a numerical quota of conversions for Church Age Christians, nor does it suggest that human skill can regenerate anybody. Nevertheless, it rebukes the astonishing foolishness of Christians who can recognize the value of practically everything except the souls of men. We know the price of automobiles, property, investments, groceries, and entertainment. We know which possessions are worth protecting and which opportunities are worth pursuing. But the Lord Jesus asked in Mark 8:36, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Here is heaven's appraisal against the world's bookkeeping. A man can own everything his neighbors admire and still be spiritually bankrupt.

The Christian must learn to look beyond the outward appearance of people. That well-dressed businessman has a soul. The waitress bringing another cup of coffee has a soul. The mechanic changing the oil, the nurse working the night shift, the neighbor mowing his grass, the young fellow operating the cash register, and the elderly woman sitting alone in her house all have souls. Their occupations, incomes, educational backgrounds, nationalities, personalities, and social positions do not alter their need for Jesus Christ. John 3:36 declares, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” That is a considerably more important distinction than whether somebody drives a luxury automobile or an eighteen-year-old pickup truck. Men spend fortunes maintaining bodies that eventually return to dust while neglecting souls that face eternity. Personal evangelism

requires the Christian to recognize what ordinary human observation cannot reveal: every person he encounters has an eternal destination, and the Gospel addresses that destination.

Consider how differently Christians would approach ordinary life if they remembered that the people around them are not merely temporary acquaintances passing through their daily routines. The person sitting beside you on an airplane may never sit beside you again. The family member you have been meaning to speak with may not have another twenty years. The coworker who seems perfectly healthy this morning may face circumstances neither of you anticipated tomorrow. Hebrews 9:27 declares, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” The appointment is certain, although its date is generally concealed from the person who must keep it. This truth should produce urgency without producing theatrical foolishness. There is no biblical authority for inventing frightening stories, harassing strangers, or pretending that every conversation must become a public confrontation. But neither is there any wisdom in treating eternal salvation as a subject that can always be postponed. We would not watch a man walk toward a collapsed bridge without warning him, yet Christians regularly watch people travel toward eternity while convincing themselves that silence is good manners.

4. The Responsibility of Witnessing — Not Every Christian Is a Preacher, but Every Christian Has a Gospel

In Mark 16:15 the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The immediate audience was the eleven, and the surrounding passage contains signs associated with that original apostolic commission. Those signs must not be carelessly transferred to every Christian in the present dispensation as though believers today were commanded to handle serpents or perform miraculous demonstrations to establish their authenticity. Nevertheless, the command reveals the worldwide scope of Gospel proclamation, and the subsequent New Testament record shows that the message of Christ was not intended to remain confined to the original apostles. The Church's responsibility to proclaim the Gospel is firmly established through the Pauline epistles and the historical witness of the early believers. We must distinguish the particular commission and credentials of the apostles from the continuing responsibility of Christians to make Christ known. Right division does not give the Church an excuse to become silent. It keeps our message and ministry in their proper biblical setting.

Acts 8:4 states, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” The persecution following Stephen's death scattered believers beyond Jerusalem, and the Word traveled with them. They did not require an elaborate religious marketing

campaign before speaking about what God had revealed. Philip later encountered the Ethiopian eunuch and, beginning with the Scripture the man was reading, “preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Notice the object of his proclamation. It was Jesus, not Philip's personal achievements. The historical setting of Acts includes transitional developments that must be handled carefully, but the principle of directing someone from Scripture to Christ remains sound. Paul praised the Thessalonian believers because “from you sounded out the word of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). They were not all apostles, pastors, or traveling evangelists. They were believers whose faith and testimony had become known beyond their immediate location. A local church should train and encourage Christians to understand the Gospel and communicate it faithfully rather than producing an audience that can only repeat what the preacher said last Sunday.

Now understand something. Not every Christian has the same spiritual gift, personality, opportunity, or public responsibility. Ephesians 4:11 distinguishes evangelists from pastors and teachers, and 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that the members of Christ's body do not all perform identical functions. But differences in gifts do not eliminate the ordinary responsibility to speak truthfully about the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian mother explaining salvation to her child is not attempting to become an apostle. A Christian employee answering a coworker's sincere question about eternal life is not establishing a competing pulpit. A believer handing somebody a sound Gospel tract and offering to explain the Scriptures is not claiming ecclesiastical authority. These are ordinary opportunities to make Christ known. The absurdity is imagining that a saved person must attend a theological institution before he is permitted to tell somebody that Jesus Christ died for sinners. Formal training can certainly strengthen biblical understanding, and careless teaching can do real damage, but Scripture itself is not reserved for professional religious men. You do not need a preacher's title to tell the truth about the Preacher who came down from heaven.

5. The Difference Between Giving the Gospel and Merely Making People Religious

One of the greatest obstacles to clear evangelism is the confusion between salvation and religion. A Christian invites an unsaved acquaintance to church, the acquaintance attends a few services, begins enjoying the music, becomes acquainted with several families, participates in an activity, and eventually joins the congregation. Everybody congratulates everybody else, and the matter is considered settled. There is only one difficulty: nobody has established whether the individual understands or believes the Gospel. Church attendance is a good opportunity to hear biblical preaching, but occupying a seat does not regenerate a sinner. Membership in a Bible-believing church does not supply the new birth. Titus 3:5 declares, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to

his mercy he saved us." If salvation cannot be obtained by works of righteousness, it certainly cannot be obtained by signing a membership application. A sinner may enter a church building lost and leave the same building lost, notwithstanding the friendliness of the congregation and the excellence of the refreshments afterward.

The distinction becomes unmistakable in 1 Corinthians 1:17, where Paul states, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Paul was not condemning water baptism, which has a proper place as an ordinance for believers. He was distinguishing the Gospel itself from a ceremony that certain religious systems have attempted to make necessary for justification. The Corinthians had already developed divisions around prominent ministers, and Paul refused to encourage the idea that salvation depended upon being associated with the right human administrator. The same error appears whenever a sinner is told that believing in Christ is insufficient until water has been applied, communion received, religious vows fulfilled, or membership established. Acts 16:31 gives the answer to the Philippian jailer's question about salvation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." His household also needed to hear and believe the Word, as the following verses show; salvation was not inherited through the jailer's decision. The answer directs faith to Christ. When the Bible says believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the religious salesman has no authority to add a baptismal pool, a membership committee, and a monthly payment plan to the terms.

Neither is personal evangelism identical with charitable work, political activity, social reform, or the distribution of religious encouragement. Christians should demonstrate compassion, meet legitimate needs when possible, and conduct themselves honorably before the world. Galatians 6:10 tells believers to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith. But charitable activity cannot take the place of proclaiming Christ. Feeding a hungry man is a good work; telling that man how to receive eternal life is a different responsibility. Helping a struggling family may open an opportunity for witnessing, but the material assistance itself does not communicate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Likewise, an invitation to church may be useful, but an invitation is not the Gospel. A personal testimony may attract attention, but testimony without Scripture can leave the listener admiring the Christian while remaining ignorant of Christ. Romans 10:17 declares, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The witness must actually communicate God's Word. A charitable organization can improve a man's circumstances, and a religious institution can improve his reputation, but neither can forgive his sins. Only the Saviour can do that.

6. The Excuses That Silence Christians — Fear, Inexperience, and the Failure to Open the Mouth

One of the most remarkable contradictions in Christian living is that believers frequently possess enough knowledge to explain the Gospel but lack the courage to mention it. Some are afraid of rejection. Others fear ridicule, difficult questions, awkward conversations, or the possibility of making a mistake. Timothy evidently needed encouragement concerning fear, for Paul reminded him in 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” That does not promise every witnessing encounter will be pleasant or successful, but it certainly does not encourage Christians to surrender their testimony to embarrassment. There is a strange inconsistency in being willing to offend a stranger over politics, sports, or the price of gasoline while remaining silent about eternal salvation. We have somehow developed a generation of Christians who can argue fearlessly about everything except the subject upon which eternal life depends. The fear of looking foolish before men has kept many believers from doing something wise before God.

Another common excuse is inadequate biblical knowledge. A Christian says he would witness if only he understood every difficult passage, mastered every prophetic controversy, and could answer every objection an unbeliever might raise. Well, if complete knowledge is the prerequisite, nobody will ever begin. That does not excuse ignorance or careless handling of Scripture. Second Timothy 2:15 still commands diligent study and rightly dividing the word of truth. But a believer who understands Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Ephesians 2:8–9, and Acts 16:31 already possesses the foundational passages needed to explain the Gospel clearly. Further study will strengthen his understanding, improve his ability to answer objections, and guard against doctrinal confusion. Nobody becomes skilled at personal witnessing merely by collecting theories about it. At some point the Christian must speak. A fellow can read twenty books about fishing, memorize the names of every fish in the lake, and purchase the finest equipment available, but he will never catch anything while his fishing line remains rolled up in the garage.

Wisdom must accompany boldness. Colossians 4:3 records Paul's request that God would open “a door of utterance,” and verse 6 instructs believers, “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Notice the combination. There is a door to be opened, a message to be spoken, and wisdom needed in the speaking. Some opportunities require a direct question about salvation; others develop naturally through conversations concerning death, family troubles, religious confusion, or questions about Scripture. A Christian should listen carefully, answer honestly, and avoid turning every human interaction into a verbal ambush. Gospel tracts can be valuable when they contain a clear biblical message, but handing someone a piece of paper does not eliminate the responsibility to explain the truth when an opportunity

arises. We should pray for open doors, prepare ourselves with Scripture, and recognize opportunities when they come. The Christian who never opens his mouth should not complain that God never opens a door.

7. The Faithful Witness — Our Responsibility Is to Give the Gospel, God's Work Is to Save the Soul

Personal evangelism must always preserve the distinction between the responsibility of the witness and the saving power of God. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6–7, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” The immediate context concerns divisions among the Corinthians and their misplaced admiration for individual ministers, but the principle establishes something essential about Gospel labor. One servant plants, another waters, and God gives the increase. That should encourage the Christian whose witness appears to produce little immediate response, while also restraining the individual who boasts about the number of professions he has obtained. A saved person cannot regenerate another human being. He cannot manufacture saving faith, forgive sins, or seal anybody with the Holy Spirit. He can proclaim Christ faithfully and call upon the sinner to believe the Gospel. We are responsible for delivering the message; we are not responsible for manufacturing the miracle.

This distinction becomes particularly important when discussing decisions for Christ. The Gospel calls for a genuine response of faith, not merely admiration for Christian principles or agreement that Jesus Christ was a historical figure. Acts 16:30 records the jailer's question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer was direct: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” There was no elaborate ceremony, no demand for a probationary period of improved conduct, and no suggestion that salvation depended upon repeating a particular arrangement of religious words. A person may express faith through prayer, but the words themselves are not a magical formula. Walking an aisle, raising a hand, shaking a preacher's hand, or signing a card cannot substitute for believing on Christ. We should explain the Gospel plainly, ask whether the listener understands it, and invite him to trust the Saviour without coercion. A preacher can obtain a hundred handshakes in an evening, but a handshake has never washed away a single sin.

The responsibility of witnessing also carries eternal seriousness. Second Corinthians 5:10 teaches that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where their service will be examined. That judgment must not be confused with the Great White Throne of Revelation 20, where the dead face final judgment. The Christian's salvation rests upon Christ, not upon his success in personal evangelism, but his service is nevertheless accountable to the Lord who saved him. Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Knowing

therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." The apostle understood both accountability and the gravity of the message he proclaimed. We should not transform this into a competition involving religious statistics, nor pretend that every conversation must produce an immediate conversion. But neither should we use God's sovereignty in giving the increase as an excuse for never planting anything. Some Christians will sow where others eventually reap. Others will encounter people already prepared to hear. Our calling is faithfulness. The Lord never commanded His servants to produce impressive numbers; He commanded them to be faithful with what He entrusted to them.

CONCLUSION

The greatest privilege a Christian possesses after salvation is not the opportunity to become prominent in religious circles, accumulate titles, establish an impressive reputation, or demonstrate how much biblical information he has memorized. It is the privilege of making Jesus Christ known to people who need Him. A Christian may never preach before a large congregation, publish a book, lead a ministry, or travel to a foreign mission field. He may spend his entire earthly life working an ordinary job, raising a family, caring for elderly relatives, and serving faithfully in a small local church. Yet he can still tell another person how to be saved. Consider the extraordinary simplicity of that privilege. A man rescued by the grace of God can explain to another sinner the message through which he himself was saved. He does not possess the power to save anybody, but he possesses the truth concerning the One who does. Heaven has placed an extraordinary message into very ordinary hands, and the value of that message is not diminished by the weakness of the messenger.

We must therefore reject two opposite errors. The first is the careless attitude that treats lost souls as little more than a subject for occasional religious discussion. The second is the manipulative approach that treats human beings as numbers to be collected through pressure, emotional excitement, and carefully manufactured decisions. Neither reflects faithful biblical evangelism. The Christian should speak because he knows the truth, loves the Lord, understands the seriousness of eternity, and genuinely desires that others hear the Gospel. He should use Scripture rather than religious gimmicks, persuasion rather than coercion, patience rather than irritation, and boldness rather than cowardice. He must never sacrifice doctrinal accuracy for a favorable response or mistake personal aggression for spiritual courage. The Word of God is sufficient to declare the sinner's condition and God's provision. Hebrews 4:12 describes that Word as "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword." Our responsibility is not to improve the sword by decorating its blade. It is to use the Word faithfully and trust the God who gave it.

The question that remains is personal and unavoidable. When was the last time you explained the Gospel of Jesus Christ to someone who needed to hear it? Not when you criticized the direction of the country, complained about modern churches, recommended a preacher, shared an inspirational quotation, or invited somebody to attend a service. When did you actually explain that all have sinned, that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and rose again, and that salvation is the free gift of God received through faith in Him? If the answer is that you have never done so, then there is no better time to begin learning than now. Open your King James Bible. Learn the essential passages. Pray for wisdom and an opportunity. Be ready to speak when that opportunity comes. And remember that the Gospel you carry is infinitely greater than the messenger carrying it. You cannot save a soul, you cannot purchase a soul, and you cannot force a soul into the kingdom of God. But you can tell a lost sinner about the Saviour who purchased redemption with His own blood. You may never accomplish anything greater for another human being than making certain he has heard that message clearly.

2 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: Before a Sinner Can Understand Salvation, He Must Understand His Sin

Key Passage — Romans 3:23 (KJV): “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul did not begin his great explanation of justification by faith in Romans by telling sinners how wonderful they were, how much undiscovered potential they possessed, or how Jesus Christ could help them achieve their personal ambitions. He began by establishing the guilt of the entire human race before a holy God. By the time Paul reaches Romans 3:23, he has already examined the Gentile world in Romans 1, confronted the self-righteous moralist in Romans 2, and stripped the religious Jew of every imaginary advantage that might exempt him from God's judgment. Then comes the verdict: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Notice that little word “all.” It includes the drunkard and the deacon, the prostitute and the preacher, the criminal and the judge, the man sleeping under a bridge and the millionaire sleeping behind iron gates. God did not convene a popularity contest to determine who deserved salvation. He opened the courtroom, examined the evidence, and pronounced the entire race guilty. Before a man can appreciate the pardon, he must understand the sentence.

There is something almost comical about modern evangelism when compared with the Bible. We have developed religious presentations that spend fifteen minutes complimenting the sinner, another fifteen minutes assuring him that God has wonderful plans for his earthly happiness, and the final five minutes inviting him to make Jesus part of his already promising future. Apparently, the Almighty has been reduced to a heavenly life coach who specializes in polishing the self-esteem of people who are already doing reasonably well without Him. That may fill an auditorium, produce a pleasant atmosphere, and generate impressive statistics, but it does not explain why Jesus Christ had to die on Calvary. The Bible says, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). If sin is nothing more than a temporary inconvenience, a mistaken choice, or an unfortunate habit, then the cross becomes an extraordinary solution to a rather ordinary problem. But if sin places a man under divine condemnation, separates him from God, and leaves him facing judgment, Calvary becomes the most necessary event in human history.

Personal evangelism must therefore begin with the truth about man's condition, not a flattering description of man's possibilities. This does not mean walking up to strangers and insulting them, manufacturing fear, or pretending that the Christian possesses some natural moral superiority over the person he is witnessing to. Romans 3:23 includes the evangelist just as certainly as it includes the unbeliever. The only difference is that the saved sinner has received the righteousness of Jesus Christ through faith, while the unsaved sinner remains without that righteousness. The purpose of explaining sin is not to humiliate somebody for the entertainment of a self-righteous religious spectator. It is to establish why salvation is necessary and why Christ alone can provide it. A physician who discovers a deadly disease and conceals the diagnosis because the patient might become uncomfortable is not demonstrating compassion. He is abandoning his responsibility. A Gospel that refuses to explain sin is like a rescue operation that refuses to mention the danger. It may sound reassuring, but it leaves the victim exactly where he was.

1. The Universal Verdict — There Is None Righteous, No, Not One

Paul begins the great indictment in Romans 3:9 by asking, “What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.” That statement establishes the doctrinal setting of the passage. Paul is not confusing Israel with the Church or denying the historical privileges God gave the Jewish nation. He is demonstrating that possessing the law, the covenants, the promises, and the outward marks of religious distinction did not exempt individual Jews from the need for righteousness before God. The Gentile could not plead ignorance, and the Jew could not plead ancestry. Both stood under sin. Paul then gathers testimony from the Old Testament, beginning with Romans 3:10: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” That is

not a statistical estimate based on the latest religious survey. It is God's declaration concerning fallen humanity. When the Lord says there is none righteous, the fellow announcing that he has always been a pretty decent person has just contradicted the Judge.

The indictment continues in Romans 3:11–12: “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” These words expose the difference between human self-evaluation and divine judgment. Men generally assess their goodness by comparing themselves with somebody worse. The honest businessman remembers the thief. The faithful husband remembers the adulterer. The respectable church member remembers the fellow who has not attended a service since his wedding. Everybody manages to find somebody standing a few steps lower on the moral staircase. But the Lord is not grading on a curve, and the judgment of God is not a neighborhood competition. A man might be the cleanest sinner in the county and still be a sinner. You could wash a pig, comb its hair, tie a ribbon around its neck, and enter it in the county fair, but you have not changed its nature. Respectability can improve a sinner's reputation without removing a single sin from his record.

Romans 3:19 brings the matter to its proper conclusion: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Notice the movement from those under the law to the guilt of the whole world. Israel received the Mosaic law, but the law's exposure of sin contributes to Paul's demonstration of universal accountability. Verse 20 explains that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” The law reveals the problem; it does not provide fallen man with the power to erase his guilt. The commandments are not a ladder by which a sinner climbs into heaven. They are a standard that exposes how far he has fallen short. A mirror can show a man the dirt on his face, but nobody with an ounce of sense tries to wash his face with the mirror. The law can reveal the sinner's condition, but only the blood of Jesus Christ can provide the cleansing he needs.

2. Sin Entered Through Adam — The Problem Is Deeper Than Bad Behavior

Romans 5:12 takes us back to the entrance of sin into human history: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Paul is dealing with Adam, the first man, whose disobedience introduced sin and death into the human family. The historical fall recorded in Genesis 3 was not an allegory about humanity gradually discovering its imperfections. Adam disobeyed a direct command from God, and the consequences reached beyond the

garden. Romans 5:19 explains, “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Paul establishes the contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ, the disobedience of the first man and the obedience of the Saviour. The problem confronting the sinner is not merely that he has made several unfortunate decisions. He belongs to a fallen race, possesses a sinful nature, and personally commits sins. You cannot repair the consequences of Adam's fall by teaching his descendants better table manners.

Consider the evidence Paul presents in Romans 3:13–18. He describes the throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, and eyes, producing a devastating picture of human corruption. “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit,” he declares in verse 13. Verse 14 speaks of a mouth “full of cursing and bitterness,” while verse 18 concludes, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Sin is not restricted to the occasional spectacular scandal that produces a newspaper headline. It appears in deceitful speech, corrupt desires, hatred, pride, dishonesty, cruelty, unbelief, and the refusal to acknowledge God's authority. Some sinners advertise their wickedness where everybody can see it; others conceal theirs beneath clean clothing, respectable occupations, and carefully managed reputations. The Bible does not require that every individual commit every particular sin described in the passage. It demonstrates the corruption and guilt of humanity under sin. A man does not become righteous merely because his particular sins are less fashionable than his neighbor's.

The problem also reaches beyond outward conduct into the heart. Jeremiah 17:9 declares, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” In its historical setting, Jeremiah exposes the treacherous condition of Judah's heart before the Lord; the principle of man's inward corruption agrees with the broader testimony of Scripture. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 7:21–23 that evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, and other evils proceed from within and defile the man. Notice the direction. Sin is not simply something the wicked world pours into otherwise spotless human beings. The heart itself is corrupt. Education may restrain certain behaviors, civil government may punish particular crimes, and social improvement may alleviate genuine hardships, but none of those things can regenerate a sinner. You can build a better schoolhouse, pave every road, and appoint an entire committee to investigate human conduct, but you cannot legislate a new birth into existence. Man's trouble is not simply that he lives in a fallen world. He is part of the reason the world is fallen.

3. The Holiness of God — The Standard Is His Righteousness, Not Our Reputation

The reason sin is so serious is that the God against whom it is committed is holy. Isaiah 6:3 records the seraphims crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” The scene concerns Isaiah's vision of the Lord in the year King Uzziah died, and it reveals the holiness before which even a prophet recognized his uncleanness. Isaiah did not respond by congratulating himself on being a better man than the surrounding population. He cried, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). That is what happens when a man measures himself against the right standard. God is not an enlarged version of mankind, possessing greater abilities while overlooking the same moral defects. He is perfectly righteous, entirely truthful, and incapable of wickedness. Habakkuk 1:13 describes Him as being “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.” His holiness is not a decorative attribute that preachers mention before returning to more agreeable subjects. It is fundamental to understanding His judgment of sin.

The sinner naturally prefers a standard he can manage. He points to his charitable contributions, faithful employment, respectable family, or relative absence of spectacular wickedness. But James 2:10 declares, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” James originally addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and the verse concerns the unity and authority of God's law. It does not mean stealing and murder are identical offenses in their earthly consequences. It means that the man who violates God's law cannot claim to be an obedient keeper of the whole law. Paul establishes the corresponding doctrine in Galatians 3:10, where those relying upon the works of the law are placed under its curse because the law requires continued obedience. The religious man wants partial credit for the commandments he remembers keeping, but God's righteousness cannot be purchased with selective obedience. A man who breaks one window cannot defend himself by pointing proudly to the nineteen windows he left intact. The broken glass is still lying on the floor.

God's standard becomes even clearer when we consider the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15 declares that He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” First Peter 2:22 says, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” Second Corinthians 5:21 identifies Him as the One “who knew no sin.” There is the standard against which sinners should examine their supposed righteousness. Not the criminal in the penitentiary, not the hypocrite down the street, not the corrupt politician, and not the preacher whose conduct has disgraced his profession. Look at Jesus Christ. He never lied, never coveted, never committed adultery, never entertained a wicked thought, never disobeyed His Father, and never needed forgiveness for a single personal sin. When Romans 3:23 says all have “come short of the glory of God,” it is not announcing that humanity has fallen slightly below an attainable passing grade. It exposes our complete failure to meet divine righteousness. The

distance between the best sinner and the worst sinner is measurable. The distance between either sinner and the sinless Saviour is beyond man's ability to bridge.

4. The False Refuge of Human Goodness — Religion Cannot Acquit the Guilty

The Lord Jesus Christ exposed religious self-righteousness in Luke 18:9–14, where He addressed individuals “which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” A Pharisee entered the temple and congratulated God on the extraordinary privilege of having such a respectable worshipper. He fasted, tithed, and compared himself favorably with extortioners, unjust men, adulterers, and a nearby publican. The publican, however, stood afar off, would not lift his eyes toward heaven, and cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The Lord declared that the publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee. The historical setting precedes Calvary and must not be substituted for Paul's fuller explanation of justification through Christ's finished work. Nevertheless, the contrast is unmistakable. One man approached God boasting about himself; the other acknowledged his guilt and sought mercy. The Pharisee had enough religion to fill a calendar and enough self-righteousness to fill a warehouse, but he had completely misunderstood his condition. A man who spends his entire prayer congratulating himself has left very little room for the mercy of God.

Paul understood the emptiness of religious credentials because he possessed an impressive collection before his conversion. Philippians 3:4–6 identifies his circumcision, Israelite descent, tribal identity, Hebrew heritage, Pharisaic standing, zeal, and outward righteousness under the law. If salvation could be obtained through religious qualifications, Paul would have been an exceptionally strong candidate. Yet Philippians 3:7 declares, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” In verse 9, he expresses the desire to be found in Christ, “not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Here is the decisive distinction between self-righteousness and imputed righteousness. Paul abandoned confidence in his religious standing and rested in the righteousness God provides through Christ. That should settle the matter for anybody trusting denominational membership, baptismal certificates, confirmation records, sacramental observance, or generations of family church attendance. Religious accomplishments may impress other religious people. They cannot justify an ungodly sinner before God.

Sincerity provides no safer refuge than religious performance. Romans 10:2 describes Paul's concern for Israel: “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” Verse 3 explains that they were ignorant of God's righteousness and attempted to establish their own, refusing to submit themselves to God's righteousness. These were not necessarily people who lacked religious enthusiasm. Their

enthusiasm was directed toward a mistaken basis of acceptance before God. Verse 4 declares, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” A person may sincerely believe that church membership saves, that good deeds outweigh bad deeds, or that all religions eventually arrive at the same destination. His sincerity cannot make the proposition true. A traveler can be completely sincere while driving east on a highway that leads west from his intended destination. His sincerity may make him pleasant company, but it will not turn the automobile around. The question is not whether a sinner sincerely believes something. The question is whether he believes what God has said concerning His Son.

5. The Wages of Sin — Death, Condemnation, and an Appointment Nobody Can Cancel

Romans 6:23 gives one of the clearest statements in the Bible concerning the consequences of sin: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In its immediate context, Paul is instructing believers concerning their relationship to sin and righteousness after salvation. Romans 6 contrasts the former servitude of sin with the new life of those who belong to Christ. Yet the declaration about sin's wages expresses a fundamental truth that applies to every sinner. Wages are earned. A man works throughout the week, receives his pay, and understands that the money represents what he has earned through his labor. Sin also pays wages, although its compensation is considerably less attractive than the advertisements suggest. The final payment is death. Romans 5:12 already established the entrance of death through Adam's sin, while Scripture elsewhere reveals the eternal consequences of remaining condemned before God. Sin makes promises like a wealthy employer, but when payday arrives, the envelope contains a death certificate.

The unbeliever's difficulty is not merely that he might become condemned at some distant future judgment. John 3:18 declares, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Notice those last two words: “condemned already.” The sinner does not occupy some spiritually neutral waiting room where God has suspended judgment until he decides whether religion interests him. John 3:36 states that the person who does not believe the Son “shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” This is why personal evangelism cannot be reduced to offering someone a more satisfying earthly existence. The unbeliever needs deliverance from divine condemnation. The Christian witness must explain this without pretending that every person who refuses an immediate invitation has committed some uniquely unforgivable offense. The issue is the individual's standing before God, not whether he has satisfied an evangelist's timetable. A

condemned man does not primarily need a more comfortable prison cell. He needs a pardon.

Hebrews 9:27 brings the certainty of judgment directly before the reader: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” The surrounding passage contrasts the repeated sacrifices associated with Israel's priestly system against the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Verse 28 declares that Christ “was once offered to bear the sins of many.” The comparison is deliberate: men face death and judgment, while Christ has offered the sufficient sacrifice for sins. This does not authorize us to calculate the hour of another person's death or pretend that every illness is an immediate sentence from God. It does establish that death is an appointment human beings cannot indefinitely postpone. Wealth cannot cancel it, medicine cannot permanently defeat it, and religious ceremonies performed by surviving relatives cannot overturn God's righteous judgment. The cemetery contains people of every occupation, denomination, age, and financial condition. Their monuments may differ considerably, but death is no respecter of social prestige. The rich man may purchase a finer casket than the poor man, but he cannot purchase a different appointment with eternity.

6. The Final Judgment — Hell Is Not a Religious Scarecrow

Revelation 20:11–15 describes the Great White Throne judgment, one of the most solemn passages in the entire King James Bible. John declares, “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.” This judgment appears after the thousand-year reign described earlier in Revelation 20 and after Satan's final rebellion. It must not be confused with the judgment seat of Christ described in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1 Corinthians 3:11–15, where the works of believers come under examination. The judgment seat of Christ concerns those who belong to the Lord; the Great White Throne presents the final judgment of the dead appearing before God. Nor should the passage be moved backward into the present Church Age as though its prophetic events had already occurred. Rightly dividing Scripture does not remove the warning. It identifies the judgment accurately so that we do not frighten saved people with condemnation from which Christ has already delivered them.

Revelation 20:12 declares, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life.” The dead are judged according to their works, and verse 15 concludes, “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” Notice that human distinction disappears before the throne. The small and great stand before the same Judge, and the records are opened. No political office, academic degree, bank account, hereditary title, or religious reputation can influence God's judgment. The judgment according to works does

not establish salvation by works. It demonstrates the righteous examination of those standing before God, while the book of life identifies the decisive matter of life before Him. John 5:24 gives the believer a different assurance: “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” The believer's security rests in Christ, not in the hope that his good deeds will outweigh the evidence against him.

Hell must be presented as a biblical reality, not a collection of theatrical inventions designed to frighten people into a religious response. The Lord Jesus warned repeatedly about the danger of eternal judgment. In Mark 9:43–48, while instructing His hearers in the setting of His earthly ministry, He spoke of the fire that never shall be quenched and warned of entering into hell. Revelation 20:14 identifies the lake of fire with the second death, and Revelation 21:8 describes the final portion of those who remain under condemnation. We do not need imaginary eyewitness reports, fabricated descriptions of demons operating torture chambers, dramatic sound effects, or invented testimonies from people supposedly returning from Hell. The words of Scripture are sufficiently serious without assistance from a religious theater department. Neither should a Christian speak about eternal punishment with amusement or delight. Paul expressed great heaviness and sorrow concerning his lost kinsmen in Romans 9:1–3. A man who enjoys describing Hell more than he desires to see sinners saved has misunderstood the spirit in which the warning should be delivered.

7. Biblical Conviction — Let the Word of God Expose the Sin and Present the Saviour

The Lord Jesus Christ explained the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8–11: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” The immediate setting is Christ's instruction to His disciples concerning the coming Comforter, and His words identify the Spirit's work in relation to the world. Verse 9 explains the matter of sin: “Of sin, because they believe not on me.” Here the Lord brings the issue directly to the rejection of Himself. The Christian witness must understand that his responsibility is to communicate the truth, not manufacture spiritual conviction through human pressure. Romans 10:17 declares, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The Holy Spirit uses divine truth to confront the sinner with his condition and direct him toward Christ. The preacher may possess a commanding voice, and the evangelist may have considerable persuasive ability, but neither can accomplish the inward work of God. Conviction is not something a clever religious salesman produces by discovering which emotional button makes the customer surrender.

This is why personal evangelism must reject manipulative invitations, exaggerated threats, and the practice of obtaining professions through relentless pressure. Second Corinthians

4:3–4 identifies the spiritual blindness affecting those who are lost, while verse 5 declares, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” Second Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to avoid striving, to be gentle and patient, and to instruct those opposing themselves in meekness. These passages do not authorize cowardice or doctrinal compromise. They establish that the witness must depend upon truth rather than fleshly methods. There is a considerable difference between explaining that an unbeliever faces judgment and declaring that God will certainly strike him dead before morning unless he repeats a prayer immediately. One statement rests upon Scripture; the other presumes knowledge God has not given. We must also resist the temptation to treat tears, trembling, outward excitement, or a dramatic religious experience as proof of salvation. A sinner can cry over his circumstances without believing the Gospel, and another sinner can believe the Gospel without producing a theatrical performance.

The proper purpose of exposing sin is to bring the sinner to the finished work of Jesus Christ. Romans 3:24–26 follows the universal indictment with God's provision of justification and redemption through Christ. Romans 5:8 declares, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Notice the order. Christ did not wait until sinners became respectable, religious, obedient, or worthy of His sacrifice. He died for us while we were yet sinners. Verse 9 establishes justification by His blood and deliverance from wrath through Him. Here is the message that must follow the diagnosis. The sinner cannot cleanse himself, pay his debt, produce divine righteousness, or reverse the consequences of Adam's fall. But the sinless Son of God died for sinners, was buried, and rose again the third day. Salvation is offered through faith in Him, not through human improvement. The purpose of showing a sinner the depth of his guilt is not to leave him staring into the grave. It is to show him the Saviour who conquered the grave.

CONCLUSION

When witnessing to an unsaved person, we must learn to present the truth in a clear biblical order. Romans 3:23 establishes that all have sinned. Romans 6:23 explains the wages of sin and introduces the gift of eternal life. Romans 5:8 reveals God's love demonstrated through the death of Jesus Christ for sinners. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies His death for our sins, burial, and resurrection according to the Scriptures. Acts 16:31 directs the individual to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. These passages are not a magical formula that must be recited in one prescribed sequence, but together they provide a clear explanation of the sinner's condition and God's remedy. The evangelist should understand them well enough to communicate their meaning naturally and answer reasonable questions from Scripture. There is no need to decorate the

message with human inventions. God's Word has already exposed the disease, revealed its consequences, identified the remedy, and directed the sinner to the Great Physician.

We must never forget that the Christian himself once stood in the same condition as the person he is attempting to reach. First Corinthians 6:11, following a description of serious sins, declares to the Corinthians, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” That statement should eliminate every trace of self-righteous superiority from personal evangelism. The saved man has nothing to boast about in himself. He was not rescued because God discovered exceptional moral potential beneath an otherwise unfortunate exterior. He was rescued by grace. We should therefore speak seriously about sin, plainly about judgment, confidently about Christ, and compassionately toward those who remain lost. Never soften God's verdict to obtain another person's approval, but never use that verdict as an excuse for personal cruelty. The Christian is not a righteous man standing above a condemned world. He is a forgiven sinner pointing other condemned sinners toward the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The final issue is not whether a person considers himself good, religious, sincere, respectable, or considerably better than the worst people he knows. The issue is what God has said. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” That verdict includes every sinner born into Adam's fallen race, and no amount of religious decoration can overturn it. But the same Bible that pronounces the condemnation also announces the remedy. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. His blood provides redemption, His righteousness provides justification, and His resurrection establishes the victory of the Saviour in whom eternal life is found. The sinner does not need another opportunity to prove himself worthy. He needs to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 2:3 asks, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” That is the question every unsaved person must face. Before a sinner can understand why he needs to be saved, he must understand why he is lost. Before he can appreciate the righteousness of Christ, he must acknowledge the failure of his own. And before he can rejoice in the gift of eternal life, he must recognize the wages his sin has earned. The greatest news a guilty sinner can ever hear is not that his sins were insignificant, but that Jesus Christ died to save him from them.

3 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: The Identity of Jesus Christ — Why the Saviour Must Be More Than a Good Man

Key Passage — John 8:24 (KJV): "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus Christ made one of the most disturbing statements an unsaved religious man will ever encounter when He declared in John 8:24, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Notice what the Lord did not say. He did not tell those unbelieving Jews that they needed to become more religious, improve their personal conduct, attend the synagogue more faithfully, or develop a stronger appreciation for spiritual things. They already possessed enough religion to stock a warehouse. They had the law, the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the traditions, and the Scriptures. What they refused to acknowledge was the identity of the One standing directly in front of them. The Lord connected their eternal destiny with their unbelief concerning Himself. That is a serious matter. **A man can believe in God, admire the Bible, respect Christianity, and spend his entire life discussing Jesus Christ without ever believing in the Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture.**

Modern religion has manufactured enough versions of Jesus to fill a department store, and nearly every version comes with a different price tag. One organization presents Him as a remarkable moral philosopher. Another reduces Him to a social reformer who came to correct the political problems of His generation. Another calls Him a created being, the highest creature God ever made, but a creature nevertheless. Others turn Him into a religious example, a spiritual guide, a miracle-working celebrity, or a convenient symbol of universal brotherhood. The entertainment industry occasionally borrows His name, dresses Him in the latest cultural costume, and sends Him around agreeing with whatever opinions happen to be popular that particular season. Apparently, the Son of God is expected to keep up with the fashions. But the biblical Christ is not a character that religious organizations are free to redesign. His identity is established by the inspired words of the King James Bible, and no preacher, denomination, council, or theological institution possesses the authority to change it.

This brings us to one of the most important responsibilities in personal evangelism: the Christian must explain not only what Jesus Christ accomplished but **who Jesus Christ actually is**. A sinner cannot exercise saving faith in a Christ who exists only in his imagination. The Gospel declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). But the identity of the One who died determines the significance of that sacrifice. If Jesus Christ were merely another sinful descendant of Adam, His death could not purchase redemption for the human race. If He were merely a created heavenly messenger, He would not be the eternal God manifest

in the flesh. If He were only a good man who happened to suffer unjustly, Calvary would be a tragedy rather than the accomplishment of redemption. **The question is not whether a person believes in somebody named Jesus. The question is whether he believes in the Jesus Christ who possesses the power and righteousness necessary to save his soul.**

1. The Eternal Word — Jesus Christ Did Not Begin His Existence at Bethlehem

John 1:1 opens with a declaration that destroys the entire foundation of every religious system that reduces Jesus Christ to a created being: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Three statements, and not one of them requires assistance from a theological committee to make it understandable. The Word already existed in the beginning. The Word was with God, establishing a personal distinction. The Word was God, establishing His divine identity. John does not say the Word eventually became divine, developed divine qualities, received promotion into deity, or was rewarded with the title of God because of exceptional obedience. He says the Word was God. Then John 1:14 identifies the Word beyond reasonable dispute: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The eternal Word entered human history. Bethlehem marked His incarnation, not the beginning of His existence. **The One lying in the manger was older than the manger, older than Bethlehem, older than Abraham, and older than the world itself.**

John continues in verses 2–3, "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." That presents a rather serious problem for anyone attempting to classify Jesus Christ among created beings. If all created things were made by Him, and nothing that was made came into existence apart from Him, then the Word cannot be placed among the things He created. The Creator is not one of His own creations. Colossians 1:16 confirms the matter: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible," including thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Verse 17 declares, "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." That is not the description of a talented carpenter who happened to develop unusual religious insights. This is the eternal Creator sustaining the very creation He brought into existence. **A created Christ cannot be the Creator of everything created without turning the Bible into nonsense.**

The Old Testament had already prepared the way for this revelation. Isaiah 9:6 declares concerning the promised Son, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," and among His names are "The mighty God" and "The everlasting Father." That prophecy concerns Israel's promised Messiah and His coming kingdom, and those national promises must retain their proper prophetic setting. Nevertheless, the divine identity of the promised Son is unmistakable. Micah 5:2 identifies Bethlehem as the place from which Israel's ruler

would come, while declaring that His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Hebrews 1:8 records the Father's declaration concerning the Son: “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” Scripture is not whispering some uncertain possibility about the identity of Christ. It is announcing His deity from multiple directions. The religious fellow who insists Jesus Christ was merely a remarkable creature has to spend an extraordinary amount of time explaining why the Bible keeps calling Him God. **When Scripture identifies the Son as God, faith accepts the testimony; unbelief starts looking for an eraser.**

2. God Manifest in the Flesh — The Miracle of the Incarnation

First Timothy 3:16 declares, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Notice those opening words: “God was manifest in the flesh.” The Bible does not describe a human being who gradually developed divine consciousness, nor a man who became God through exceptional spiritual achievement. God was manifested in genuine human flesh. The eternal Son entered the human condition without ceasing to be God. John 1:14 says the Word “was made flesh,” not that the Word stopped being divine. Philippians 2:6–7 describes Christ as being “in the form of God” and taking “upon him the form of a servant.” He did not exchange deity for humanity as though putting aside one suit of clothing to wear another. He humbled Himself by becoming man. **The incarnation was not God resigning from His throne. It was the eternal Son entering His own creation to accomplish the redemption of sinners.**

The virgin birth is essential to this truth. Isaiah 7:14 declared, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Matthew 1:23 applies that prophecy to the birth of Jesus Christ and explains the name as “God with us.” Luke 1:34 records Mary's question, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” The angel answered in verse 35 that the Holy Ghost would come upon her and the power of the Highest would overshadow her, concluding, “therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” The conception was miraculous, and the child was holy. Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus Christ, and the virgin birth was not an ornamental detail supplied to make the Christmas story more interesting. It concerns the identity of the Saviour Himself. Remove the virgin birth, and you are no longer explaining the biblical account of His entrance into the world. **Bethlehem was not the birthplace of another ordinary sinner needing salvation. It was the birthplace of the Saviour who came to provide it.**

At the same time, the incarnation means that Jesus Christ possessed genuine humanity. Hebrews 2:14 declares, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” The Lord Jesus became hungry,

experienced weariness, wept, suffered, and physically died. John 4:6 records Him sitting at Jacob's well because He was wearied with His journey. John 11:35 declares, “Jesus wept.” Luke 23:46 records Him yielding up the ghost upon the cross. These were not theatrical performances staged by someone pretending to be human. His humanity was real, yet entirely without sin. Philippians 2:8 describes Him becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” As God, the eternal Son possesses divine life; as man, He could truly suffer and die for sinners. The incarnation therefore brings together two truths that must never be separated: Jesus Christ is fully God and genuinely man. **A Saviour who was not truly man could not die in man's place, and a Saviour who was merely another sinful man could never accomplish man's redemption.**

3. The Claims of Christ — He Did Not Leave His Identity Open to Religious Interpretation

Return to John 8:24 and consider the people to whom Jesus Christ was speaking. His audience included unbelieving Jews who possessed the Old Testament Scriptures and claimed knowledge of the God of Israel. The discussion occurs during His earthly ministry before Calvary, and the immediate issue concerns His identity and His relationship to the Father. In John 8:23, the Lord declares, “Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.” Then follows the warning that those who refuse to believe His identity will die in their sins. This passage must not be twisted into a claim that salvation requires passing an elaborate theological examination before a person can believe. It establishes something more fundamental: unbelief concerning the person of Christ is not a harmless disagreement over religious terminology. The Lord Jesus Himself made His identity a matter of eternal consequence. **You cannot reject the Christ whom God has revealed and then claim to possess the salvation that only that Christ can provide.**

The discussion becomes even more pointed in John 8:56–58. Jesus tells His hearers that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, and they immediately object that He is not yet fifty years old. His answer is devastating: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” Notice the contrast between Abraham's existence and Christ's declaration. Abraham “was”; Christ says, “I am.” The expression recalls the divine name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14: “I AM THAT I AM.” The reaction of the hearers confirms that they understood His declaration as far more than a claim to being an unusually old religious teacher. John 8:59 records that they took up stones to cast at Him. Their hostility was not evidence that His claim was false; it demonstrated their refusal to receive it. The Lord did not retreat, apologize, or explain that everybody had misunderstood a harmless figure of speech. **When Jesus Christ declared His eternal identity, unbelief did not ask for a second opinion. It reached for a rock.**

John 10:30 records another unmistakable declaration: “I and my Father are one.” The immediate setting concerns the sheep who hear His voice, whom He gives eternal life, and who can never perish. In verses 28–29, Jesus describes His power to preserve His sheep and the Father's power to keep them. Then He declares His unity with the Father. The Jews again take up stones, and their accusation in John 10:33 identifies the issue: “because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” Their accusation of blasphemy was false because His claim was true. The Father and the Son are personally distinct, yet one in divine being. First John 5:7 declares, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” The biblical doctrine is not that the Father and Son are the same person, nor that the Son is a lesser deity. **Christianity does not proclaim three competing gods or one God wearing three different costumes. It proclaims the living God revealed in the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost.**

4. The Sinless Christ — Why Only He Could Die for Our Sins

The deity and humanity of Jesus Christ bring us directly to another indispensable doctrine: His absolute sinlessness. Hebrews 4:15 declares that He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” First Peter 2:22 says, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” Second Corinthians 5:21 identifies Him as the One “who knew no sin.” Those statements eliminate the idea that Jesus was merely a particularly righteous example drawn from the same fallen condition as every other descendant of Adam. He experienced genuine temptation, yet never committed sin. His words were pure, His thoughts were righteous, His obedience was complete, and His relationship with the Father was without the slightest moral corruption. The religious world can admire good men until the sun burns out, but every merely human candidate eventually comes with a record of sins. **The sinner needs more than a good example to follow. He needs a sinless substitute to stand in his place.**

John the Baptist identified Jesus Christ in John 1:29 with the words, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John was ministering to Israel and preparing the way for the Messiah, but his announcement identifies the One whose sacrifice would accomplish redemption. The sacrificial system under the law had demonstrated the seriousness of sin through repeated offerings, yet Hebrews 10:4 declares, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” Those sacrifices could not provide the complete redemption accomplished by Christ. First Peter 1:18–19 contrasts corruptible things such as silver and gold with “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The spotless character of the sacrifice matters. Christ was not carrying His own guilt to Calvary. He was offering Himself for the guilty. **If the**

Lamb had possessed sins of His own, He would have needed a sacrifice Himself. But the Lamb of God was spotless, and His blood was sufficient.

Second Corinthians 5:21 brings the doctrine into one extraordinary statement: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Notice the exchange. The sinless Christ was made sin for us, and those who are in Him receive the righteousness of God. This does not mean Jesus Christ became morally wicked or personally committed the sins of mankind. He bore our sins as the righteous substitute. Isaiah 53:6 declares, “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,” while Romans 5:8 announces that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Then 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 declares His death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. The resurrection establishes that our Saviour lives, and Romans 4:25 connects His resurrection with our justification. **Calvary was not the death of a noble martyr who happened to inspire generations of religious admirers. It was the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God for sinners who could never pay their own debt.**

5. The Only Mediator — Why There Cannot Be Several Different Ways to God

First Timothy 2:5–6 declares, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” Paul is instructing Timothy concerning prayer and God's desire that people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The foundation for that salvation is not a collection of religious mediators representing different traditions. It is one mediator, Jesus Christ. A mediator must stand between the parties concerned, and the Lord Jesus is uniquely qualified because He is God manifest in the flesh and genuinely man. His mediation rests upon His person and His redeeming work. He did not merely deliver information about reconciliation; He accomplished the sacrifice necessary for it. The Bible identifies no second redeemer waiting for those who find Jesus inconvenient. **God did not establish a heavenly department store where sinners can choose whichever religious mediator happens to suit their personal preferences. He provided one Saviour because only one Saviour could accomplish redemption.**

The Lord Jesus Christ stated the exclusivity of salvation plainly in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” In its immediate setting, the Lord was comforting His disciples before His departure, answering Thomas concerning the way to the Father. But the statement itself is universal: “no man.” That includes the highly educated philosopher, the sincere religious devotee, the charitable philanthropist, and the individual who insists that all spiritual paths eventually arrive at the same destination. Acts 4:12 confirms the matter when Peter declares before Israel's rulers, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given

among men, whereby we must be saved." Peter's message was delivered in a particular historical setting concerning the rejected and risen Messiah, but the exclusive sufficiency of Christ is not restricted to that audience. **If there were another way to God apart from Jesus Christ, the crucifixion of the Son of God would have been an unnecessary expenditure of divine blood.**

This doctrine also exposes the failure of religious systems that place another human being, priesthood, institution, or sacramental arrangement between the sinner and the finished work of Christ. Hebrews 7:25 declares concerning the Lord Jesus, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." His priesthood is permanent, His intercession is sufficient, and His ability to save is complete. The present dispensation does not require a sinner to obtain eternal life by joining the correct denomination, receiving a sacrament, submitting to a particular religious hierarchy, or obtaining permission from a human intermediary. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. The local church has an important biblical responsibility to preach the Word, teach sound doctrine, and edify believers, but the church does not become the Saviour. **The Christian who directs an unsaved man to a religious organization without clearly directing him to Jesus Christ has confused the signpost with the destination.**

6. Another Jesus — The Counterfeit Christ of False Religion

Second Corinthians 11:4 contains a warning that every Christian engaged in personal evangelism should understand: "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him." Paul is addressing the Corinthians' dangerous willingness to tolerate false teachers. The surrounding passage exposes ministers who present themselves as apostles of Christ while corrupting the truth. Verses 13–15 identify deceitful workers and warn that Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. The point is that religious deception does not necessarily arrive wearing a horned costume and carrying a pitchfork. It frequently arrives carrying a Bible, speaking respectfully about Jesus, and advertising itself as a more enlightened expression of Christianity. **The devil does not have to persuade everybody to stop talking about Jesus. He can accomplish considerable damage by persuading them to talk about a Jesus who is not the Christ of Scripture.**

Consider the various counterfeits. A created Jesus denies the eternal deity of the Word. A merely human Jesus denies that God was manifest in the flesh. A sinful Jesus destroys the qualification necessary for a spotless sacrifice. A Jesus whose death accomplishes nothing without additional human works undermines the sufficiency of His redemption. A Jesus

presented as one spiritual teacher among many contradicts His declaration that no man comes to the Father except by Him. A Jesus who promises salvation without regard to His death and resurrection is detached from the Gospel Paul preached. These are not harmless differences in religious vocabulary. They strike at the identity, authority, or saving work of Christ. Galatians 1:8 warns against another gospel, and 2 Corinthians 11 warns against another Jesus. There is a reason those warnings appear in the Scriptures. **A counterfeit twenty-dollar bill does not become genuine because somebody sincerely appreciates the artwork, and a counterfeit Christ does not become the Saviour because somebody speaks enthusiastically about him.**

Yet biblical discernment must not be confused with demanding that every newly converted sinner possess a complete education in theology. The Philippian jailer asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” and received the answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30–31). Paul and Silas then spoke the Word of the Lord to him and his household. The man did not need to master every controversy concerning the incarnation, memorize the entire Gospel of John, or explain all the distinctions between the divine persons before he could believe. But he did need the real Christ presented through the Word of God. There is a difference between limited understanding and positively believing a false identity. The evangelist must distinguish those matters carefully. We should teach clearly, answer honestly, and refuse to conceal essential biblical truth. **Saving faith does not require knowing everything about Jesus Christ, but it cannot be built upon a deliberate rejection of who He is and what He has done.**

7. Presenting the Real Christ — Clear Enough for a Sinner to Understand

How, then, should a Christian explain the identity of Jesus Christ during an ordinary Gospel conversation? Begin with the Scriptures rather than an encyclopedia of theological terminology. John 1:1 establishes that the Word was God. John 1:14 establishes that the Word became flesh. First Timothy 3:16 identifies God manifest in the flesh. First Peter 2:22 establishes Christ's sinlessness. First Corinthians 15:3–4 presents His death for sins, burial, and resurrection. Acts 16:31 identifies the response of faith. These passages provide a straightforward biblical explanation without requiring a formal lecture on every subject connected with Christology. The evangelist should explain unfamiliar expressions rather than assuming the hearer understands them. If someone asks what “manifest in the flesh” means, explain that the eternal Son of God became genuinely human without ceasing to be God. If someone asks why His sinlessness matters, explain that a guilty sinner cannot provide a spotless sacrifice for another guilty sinner. **Clarity is not the enemy of doctrinal depth. Confusion is.**

It is also useful to ask questions that reveal what a person actually believes. Someone may say, “I believe in Jesus,” but that statement can mean very different things depending upon what he has been taught. A respectful question such as, “Who do you believe Jesus Christ is?” may uncover whether the individual regards Him as God manifest in the flesh, a created being, merely a prophet, or a moral teacher. Another question—“What do you believe Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross?”—may reveal whether the person understands redemption or has been taught that His death merely made salvation possible through subsequent religious performance. The purpose is not to trap the listener, embarrass him, or display superior biblical knowledge. It is to establish whether the conversation is centered upon the biblical Saviour. Second Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to avoid striving and to teach with patience. **A Christian who spends an hour proving that he knows more theology than an unbeliever may win the argument and still never give the fellow the Gospel.**

Finally, bring the listener directly to the saving work of Christ and the promise of salvation by faith. Explain that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, born of a virgin, genuinely human, completely sinless, and the only Saviour. Explain that all have sinned and that the wages of sin is death. Explain that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. Then explain that eternal life is God's gift through Him, not a reward for water baptism, church membership, moral improvement, or religious obedience. Romans 4:5 declares, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Do not replace believing on Christ with repeating a mechanical prayer, surrendering every imaginable aspect of life, or promising never to sin again. Those additions only obscure the sufficiency of the Saviour. **The Gospel is not complicated because Jesus Christ failed to finish the work. It becomes complicated when religious men insist upon adding their own work to His.**

CONCLUSION

The identity of Jesus Christ is not an optional theological subject reserved for advanced Bible students who have exhausted the simpler teachings of Scripture. It stands at the very center of personal evangelism. The Word was God. The Word became flesh. God was manifest in the flesh. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived without sin, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. He is the only mediator between God and men, the only Saviour, and the only way to the Father. Remove His deity, and you have removed the eternal God who accomplished redemption. Remove His genuine humanity, and you have removed the One who suffered and died in man's place. Remove His sinlessness, and you have removed the spotless sacrifice. Remove His resurrection, and you have removed the victory proclaimed by the Gospel. **The Christian faith does not rest upon an inspiring**

memory of a deceased religious teacher. It rests upon the living Lord Jesus Christ, who possesses the identity and power necessary to save sinners eternally.

We must therefore reject the modern assumption that all religious references to Jesus Christ are essentially interchangeable. The name alone does not settle the question. There are religious systems that use His name while denying His eternal deity, contradicting His finished work, or placing human efforts between the sinner and salvation. There are people who admire His teachings while rejecting His claims, respect His character while denying His resurrection, and celebrate His birth while refusing to believe His Gospel. The Christian must not become quarrelsome or unnecessarily offensive when addressing such individuals, but he must also refuse to exchange biblical truth for agreeable religious conversation. Romans 1:16 declares that the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” That power does not reside in an invented Christ who conforms to man's preferences. It belongs to the Gospel of the Christ revealed in the Scriptures. **A man who rejects the biblical Saviour has not improved Christianity by making Jesus more acceptable. He has rejected the only One who can save him.**

The question Jesus asked His disciples in Matthew 16:15 remains a fitting challenge for every Gospel witness: “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In that historical setting, the Lord was revealing His messianic identity to His disciples, and the full revelation of His death, burial, resurrection, and the Church Age Gospel would unfold through subsequent events and apostolic teaching. But the question still directs attention to the essential issue: Who is Jesus Christ? Every sinner must ultimately face the testimony God has given concerning His Son. The Christian's responsibility is to make that testimony unmistakable. We do not need to invent a more attractive Saviour, modernize His identity, conceal His deity, or apologize for His exclusive claim to salvation. We need to open the King James Bible and proclaim Him faithfully. **The greatest question a sinner will ever answer is not what he thinks about religion, what church he attends, or how much good he has accomplished. It is what he believes concerning Jesus Christ. If the Saviour being presented is not the eternal Son of God who died for our sins and rose again, the message may sound religious, but it is not the Gospel that saves. And if the sinner refuses the Christ whom God has revealed, all the religion in the world cannot supply another Saviour.**

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (KJV): "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul did not leave the Church guessing about the Gospel that saves a sinner. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, he wrote, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand." He continues by identifying the message he had delivered: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. There it is, written plainly enough for a child to understand and deep enough to occupy the most serious Bible student for a lifetime. Notice that Paul did not announce a religious program, a personal improvement course, or a twelve-step journey toward divine acceptance. He declared historical events accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not primarily an account of what a sinner must accomplish for God. It is the announcement of what God has accomplished for sinners through His Son. **The most important work involved in your salvation was completed before you were ever born, and you could not have contributed one finger's worth of effort to it if you had tried.**

There is something profoundly wrong with modern evangelism when a person can sit through an entire religious presentation and hear about happiness, fulfillment, purpose, relationships, prosperity, and emotional healing without hearing a clear explanation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have religious establishments offering people a better life while neglecting the eternal life Christ purchased with His blood. The audience is told that Jesus understands their struggles, sympathizes with their disappointments, and wants to help them achieve their dreams. Wonderful. But the question remains: Why did He have to die? Why was the sinless Son of God nailed to a Roman cross? Why did the Father allow His beloved Son to suffer? Why was His blood shed? If the purpose of Christianity were merely to improve someone's circumstances, God could have sent another teacher, established another school, or provided another set of instructions. Instead, He sent His Son to die for sinners. **Calvary was not God's attempt to improve human behavior. It was God's provision for human guilt.**

Every Christian who intends to witness effectively must understand the finished work of Christ well enough to explain it without confusing the sinner. The cross was not a tragic accident. The blood was not an insignificant detail. The burial was not an unnecessary interruption between Good Friday and resurrection morning. The resurrection was not merely an inspiring conclusion to an otherwise sorrowful story. Each belongs to the Gospel as God revealed it. The sinner must understand that Christ died for sins He never

committed, that His sacrifice was sufficient, that His burial established the reality of His death, and that His bodily resurrection demonstrated the victory of the Saviour. Redemption, justification, propitiation, and reconciliation are not theological decorations intended to make a preacher sound educated. They are biblical truths describing what God accomplished through Christ. **The Gospel does not announce that Jesus Christ opened a religious business and invited mankind to become paying customers. It announces that the debt was paid by Someone who owed nothing.**

1. The Gospel According to the Scriptures — God's Message, Not Man's Religious Invention

Paul begins his explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:3 with the words, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received.” Notice those words carefully. Paul did not invent the Gospel. He received it and delivered it. Galatians 1:11–12 confirms that the Gospel he preached was not after man, but came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15 places this message before the Corinthian believers as the foundation upon which they stood, particularly because some among them were denying the resurrection of the dead. Paul's language in verse 2 concerning keeping the message in memory and not believing in vain must be read in light of that controversy. He is not introducing salvation by maintaining perfect religious performance. He is establishing the indispensable truth of the Gospel, including the resurrection those Corinthians were being tempted to deny. **If you remove the resurrection from Christianity, you have not made the religion more intellectually respectable. You have removed the living Saviour and left yourself with a funeral service.**

Twice Paul adds the expression “according to the scriptures.” Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. His death and resurrection were not divine improvisations after Israel rejected her Messiah. Isaiah 53:5 had declared, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” Verse 6 states, “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Psalm 16:10 speaks of God's Holy One not seeing corruption, and Peter applies that prophecy to Christ's resurrection in Acts 2:25–32. These passages belong to their proper historical and prophetic settings, including Israel's promised Messiah, but the inspired New Testament identifies their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Gospel was not invented by a religious committee in Jerusalem or manufactured by Gentile philosophers centuries later. God's redemptive purpose was being revealed throughout Scripture, and the death and resurrection of Christ accomplished what the prophetic Word had anticipated.

The present Gospel of grace must nevertheless be proclaimed according to the doctrinal revelation entrusted to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, he addresses believers concerning the

message through which they had been saved. Romans 3–5 explains justification through faith, while Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace apart from works. We do not take Israel's national promises under the law, combine them with the earthly kingdom preaching before Calvary, add a few verses concerning Christian obedience, and manufacture a religious stew called salvation. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ form the saving message proclaimed in this dispensation. The Christian must learn to distinguish the historical progress of revelation without dividing Christ into competing saviours or imagining that God has several different plans operating simultaneously today. **A rightly divided Bible does not produce a divided Saviour. It tells us precisely what God has accomplished and what sinners must believe now.**

2. Christ Died for Our Sins — The Substitution That Makes Salvation Possible

The most important three words in 1 Corinthians 15:3 may be "for our sins." Paul did not merely say Christ died. Thousands of men died under Roman authority. Others were crucified, beaten, humiliated, and subjected to terrible suffering. The historical fact that Jesus Christ died becomes the Gospel when we understand why He died and who He was. Romans 3:23 establishes that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 declares, "For the wages of sin is death." The human race stands guilty before a holy God, and no sinner possesses the righteousness necessary to satisfy divine justice. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, was without sin. Hebrews 4:15 declares that He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He did not go to Calvary to pay for His own transgressions. **The only Man who never deserved death voluntarily suffered death for men who deserved judgment. That is substitution, and without it the cross becomes an execution rather than redemption.**

Second Corinthians 5:21 states the doctrine with extraordinary precision: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Notice the two sides. Christ knew no sin, yet He was made sin for us. The believing sinner possesses no righteousness sufficient for justification, yet receives the righteousness of God in Christ. This does not mean the Lord Jesus became personally wicked or developed a sinful nature upon the cross. He remained the spotless Son of God while bearing the sins of others. First Peter 2:24 declares, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Isaiah 53:5 explains that "the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." The issue is judicial and substitutionary. Christ bore what sinners deserved so that sinners believing on Him could receive what they never earned. **God did not overlook sin at Calvary. He dealt with it in the person of His sinless Son.**

Consider the astonishing contrast between human religion and biblical redemption. Religion tells the sinner to do enough good to compensate for his evil. God declares that the wages of sin is death. Religion recommends ceremonies, fasting, penance, moral improvement, and additional commitments. Scripture announces that Christ died for our sins. Religion tells a man to become worthy of God's acceptance. Romans 5:6 declares, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” The ungodly are not people who have successfully prepared themselves for salvation. They are the very people who need it. Verse 8 continues, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ did not wait for the human race to become respectable before purchasing redemption. **The Lord did not die because sinners had finally improved enough to deserve His sacrifice. He died because sinners could never improve enough to save themselves.**

3. Redemption Through His Blood — The Price Was Paid in Full

Colossians 1:14 declares concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” Ephesians 1:7 states, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” These passages explain redemption with remarkable clarity. Redemption concerns deliverance through the payment of a price, and Scripture identifies that price as the blood of Jesus Christ. The believer does not possess a certificate announcing that God might eventually redeem him if he remains sufficiently obedient. Paul writes, “we have redemption.” The statement describes a present possession in Christ. First Peter 1:18–19 explains that believers were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, “But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The currency of heaven's redemption was not money, merit, or religious achievement. **The richest man who ever lived could not purchase one drop of redeeming blood, and the poorest sinner who ever believed the Gospel received its full saving benefit without paying a penny.**

The significance of blood is established throughout Scripture. Leviticus 17:11 declares, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood,” and explains God's provision of blood upon the altar for atonement. That verse belongs to Israel under the Mosaic law and must not be transferred mechanically into Church Age doctrine. Nevertheless, it establishes the biblical connection between blood, life, sacrifice, and atonement. Hebrews 9:22 declares, “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” The sacrifices under the law anticipated a greater accomplishment, but Hebrews 10:4 states that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. The Lord Jesus Christ accomplished what those repeated sacrifices never could. His blood was not

merely a dramatic detail in the crucifixion narrative. Scripture explicitly identifies it as the means of redemption. **A religion that praises the cross while treating the blood of Christ as an embarrassment has managed to admire the instrument of execution while neglecting the price of redemption.**

We must also distinguish the finished sacrifice of Christ from the repeated religious rituals men have constructed around it. Hebrews 9:12 declares that Christ entered the holy place "by his own blood," having obtained "eternal redemption for us." The passage contrasts His effective sacrifice with the temporary and repeated provisions associated with the earthly tabernacle. Hebrews 10:12 states, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Why did He sit down? Because the sacrifice was completed. The Levitical priests stood ministering repeatedly, but the Lord Jesus offered one sufficient sacrifice. His priesthood continues, and He makes intercession for believers, but His atoning sacrifice is not being repeatedly performed. **You cannot improve upon a sacrifice that God declares sufficient for ever. Any religious system attempting to repeat or supplement that payment has misunderstood the meaning of finished redemption.**

4. Justification and Propitiation — How a Holy God Declares the Ungodly Righteous

Romans 3:24–26 opens the courtroom of heaven and explains how God can justify guilty sinners without compromising His righteousness. Paul declares that believers are "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Notice the word "freely." Justification is not purchased through personal obedience, earned through sacramental observance, or awarded after a sinner successfully reforms his life. It is freely bestowed through God's grace on the basis of Christ's redemption. Verse 25 identifies Christ as the One "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Propitiation concerns the satisfaction of divine justice through the sacrifice God Himself provided. God does not simply pretend that sin never occurred. Neither does He abandon His holiness to make salvation convenient. The righteous judgment against sin is answered through the atoning work of Christ. **God did not settle the sinner's case by hiding the evidence. He settled it through the sacrifice of His Son.**

Romans 3:26 declares God's purpose "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." There is the answer to a question no human court could solve by ordinary means: How can a righteous Judge declare a guilty individual justified without becoming unjust Himself? The answer is Jesus Christ. God's justice is not compromised because the sinless substitute has accomplished redemption. God's mercy is not limited because salvation is offered through faith rather than personal merit. Romans 4:5 makes the matter unmistakable: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth

the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Notice whom God justifies—the ungodly. Notice what the sinner does not do—work for his justification. Notice the response—believing on Him. Religion generally attempts to justify people who have made themselves sufficiently godly. The Gospel announces that God justifies the ungodly through faith in Jesus Christ. **If you must become righteous before God will justify you, you have eliminated the very sinners the Gospel was sent to save.**

Romans 4:25 identifies Christ as the One "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." His death and resurrection cannot be separated from the doctrine of justification. Christ was delivered because of our offenses, and His resurrection belongs to the completed saving work upon which justification rests. Romans 5:1 therefore announces, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That peace is not merely a pleasant emotional sensation or temporary relief from anxiety. It concerns the believer's standing before God through Christ. A justified sinner may experience difficult circumstances, sorrow, persecution, or personal weakness, but his acceptance before God rests upon the righteousness of Christ rather than the condition of his emotions. **The Christian does not wake up justified on Monday, lose his justification during a difficult Tuesday, and need to purchase it again before Wednesday. His standing rests upon the finished work of a risen Saviour, not upon the daily performance of a fallen man.**

5. Reconciliation — The Enemies of God Brought Near Through Christ

Romans 5:10 declares, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Here Paul describes the condition of those who needed reconciliation. They were enemies. This does not necessarily mean every unbeliever consciously announces hatred toward God every morning. It means fallen man stands alienated from God through sin. Colossians 1:21 describes believers before salvation as those who "were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works." The problem was not that God lacked sufficient friendliness or needed instruction concerning human dignity. The problem was sin. Romans 5:11 declares that believers have "received the atonement" through Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is therefore not a vague improvement in religious feelings. It rests upon the death of God's Son and brings the believer into a restored relationship with God. **The sinner did not need God to become less holy. He needed Christ to remove the barrier that sin had established.**

Second Corinthians 5:18–19 declares that God "hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" and explains that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." This passage does not teach that every individual is automatically saved because Christ died.

Paul immediately appeals to hearers to be reconciled to God, and the broader Pauline revelation establishes justification through faith. The completed provision of redemption must be personally received through believing the Gospel. Neither should reconciliation be confused with God reconciling Himself to human rebellion as though the Almighty were the guilty party in the controversy. God initiated salvation in grace while mankind remained sinful and hostile. Christ accomplished the work necessary for peace with God. **The Gospel is not the announcement that God has finally learned to tolerate sin. It is the announcement that Christ has provided the righteous basis upon which sinners may be reconciled to God.**

Paul then declares in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” The apostle is describing the ministry entrusted to him and his fellow laborers, and the saving message remains the responsibility of Christians who proclaim the Gospel today. Notice that the ambassador does not announce his personal ability to reconcile anybody. He declares what God has accomplished in Christ and calls upon the sinner to respond. Personal evangelism is therefore more than inviting someone to become religious or explaining how Christianity might improve his earthly life. It is the proclamation of reconciliation through the death of God's Son. The message directs attention away from the messenger and toward the Saviour. **An ambassador who spends the entire conversation describing his own accomplishments while neglecting the message of his King has forgotten why he was sent.**

6. The Burial and Resurrection — The Saviour Really Died, and the Grave Could Not Hold Him

First Corinthians 15:4 declares, “And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” The burial is not an insignificant historical detail that Paul inserted merely to lengthen the sentence. It belongs to the inspired declaration of the Gospel. Christ actually died. His body was taken down from the cross, prepared for burial, and placed in a tomb. John 19:38–42 records Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus attending to His burial. Isaiah 53:9 had declared concerning the suffering Servant, “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” The burial confirms the reality of the death that preceded it and establishes the historical setting of the resurrection that followed. The Lord Jesus did not merely faint, enter a temporary state of unconsciousness, or escape death through an elaborate deception. **The tomb was occupied because the Saviour had truly died, and the Gospel would be meaningless if His death were nothing more than a carefully staged performance.**

The resurrection was equally real and bodily. Luke 24:39 records the risen Christ declaring, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” The disciples were not merely remembering their departed Teacher with extraordinary affection. They encountered the living Lord. John 20 records the risen Christ appearing to His disciples and confronting Thomas with the evidence of His wounds. First Corinthians 15:5–8 lists appearances to Cephas, the twelve, more than five hundred brethren at once, James, the apostles, and finally Paul. Paul was not describing the survival of Christ's teachings or a symbolic resurrection in the minds of His admirers. He was defending the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. **The resurrection was not Christianity learning to move forward after its Founder died. It was the Founder of Christianity walking out of the grave alive.**

Paul states the consequences of denying the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:14: “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” Verse 17 adds, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” That settles the importance of the resurrection more forcefully than a shelf full of religious speculation. Without the resurrection, the Christian message collapses, the apostles become false witnesses, and believers remain in their sins. But verse 20 declares, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” The resurrection establishes the victory of Jesus Christ over death and provides the foundation for the believer's future resurrection hope. We must distinguish the resurrection of Christ, the future catching away of the Church, and the prophetic resurrections associated with God's later program, but all biblical resurrection hope depends upon the living Christ. **A dead saviour might leave behind an impressive collection of quotations. Only a risen Saviour can give everlasting life.**

7. It Is Finished — Why Religion Cannot Improve Upon the Work of Christ

John 19:30 records the words of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross: “It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” Those words announced the completion of His earthly redemptive work as He surrendered His life. Hebrews 10:14 explains the sufficiency of His sacrifice: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Notice the number of offerings—one. Notice the duration of the accomplishment—for ever. The death of Christ was not the first installment in a salvation arrangement requiring the sinner to make regular contributions throughout the remainder of his life. His sacrifice was sufficient. His resurrection established the triumph of the living Saviour. His present ministry of intercession does not mean that His atonement must be repeatedly performed. **When Jesus Christ declared, “It is finished,” He did not mean that the difficult part was completed and mankind could now begin paying the remaining balance.**

This is where much of modern religion departs from the Gospel while continuing to use its vocabulary. One system requires baptism as an indispensable condition of obtaining salvation. Another places sacramental observance between the sinner and justification. Another demands a promise of complete surrender, personal reformation, or continuing obedience as part of the saving transaction. Still another combines grace with religious performance and somehow imagines the mixture remains grace. Romans 11:6 declares, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is God's gift, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:10 then places good works after salvation as the proper conduct of those created in Christ Jesus. The order is essential. **Good works are the expected fruit of salvation, not the down payment required to purchase it. Religion keeps sending invoices for a debt Christ has already paid.**

When witnessing to an unsaved person, explain the finished work of Christ plainly and invite him to believe the Gospel. Do not merely ask whether he knows that Jesus died. Ask whether he understands that Christ died for his sins, was buried, and rose again. Explain why His blood matters, why His sacrifice was sufficient, and why eternal life cannot be earned through human performance. Acts 16:31 gives the response: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The Christian may pray with the individual, answer questions, and encourage him to express his faith, but repeating a prescribed prayer is not itself the means of justification. Nor does salvation depend upon walking an aisle, shaking a preacher's hand, or producing an emotional display. Faith must rest upon Christ. John 5:24 declares that the believer “hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” **The object of saving faith is not a religious experience remembered afterward. It is the crucified and risen Christ who saves.**

CONCLUSION

The finished work of Jesus Christ is the center of the Gospel because it accomplishes everything necessary for the sinner's redemption. The cross establishes the substitutionary sacrifice of the sinless Son of God. His blood provides redemption and forgiveness. His death satisfies divine justice and establishes the righteous basis of justification. His sacrifice makes reconciliation with God possible. His burial confirms the reality of His death, and His bodily resurrection declares the victory of the living Saviour. These are not disconnected religious theories collected by theologians looking for additional subjects to discuss. They are the inspired truths of Scripture explaining what happened at Calvary and why it matters eternally. Romans 5:9 announces, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” The sinner who believes on Jesus

Christ receives what no amount of religious activity could accomplish. **The Gospel is not man's successful climb toward God. It is God's completed provision for sinners who could never climb high enough.**

Christians must therefore guard the simplicity and purity of this message whenever they witness. There is nothing wrong with explaining Christian conduct, inviting someone to attend a Bible-believing church, or encouraging a newly saved person to study Scripture and grow in grace. Those responsibilities belong in their proper places. But when the subject is salvation, keep the sinner's attention upon the person and finished work of Christ. Do not exchange redemption for self-improvement, justification for religious performance, or saving faith for emotional excitement. Paul declared in Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Christian has no personal righteousness to advertise and no additional sacrifice to offer. He possesses a message concerning the One who completed redemption. **The greatest service an evangelist can render is not convincing a sinner to become impressed with the evangelist. It is making certain the sinner understands why Jesus Christ alone is sufficient to save him.**

The final question every unsaved person must face is not whether Jesus Christ died, for that historical fact alone does not establish personal salvation. The question is whether he believes the Gospel concerning the One who died for his sins and rose again. The sinner cannot improve upon Christ's blood, contribute to His sacrifice, add to His righteousness, or strengthen His resurrection. He can only receive God's gift through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 6:23 declares, “But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” That is the announcement the Christian must carry into a lost world. The salvation God provides is neither a religious installment plan nor a reward awaiting the morally accomplished. It is eternal life through the crucified and risen Saviour. **Calvary was not God giving mankind another opportunity to pay its debt. Calvary was the Son of God paying what mankind could never pay. The empty tomb was not an inspiring conclusion added to make the story more encouraging. It was the declaration that the crucified Saviour lives. And the Gospel is not an invitation to finish what Jesus started. It is an invitation to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who finished what no sinner could ever accomplish.**

5 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: Salvation by Grace Through Faith — What a Sinner Must Believe and What He Must Never Be Told to Do

Key Passage — Ephesians 2:8–9 (KJV): "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

INTRODUCTION

There are few things more astonishing in modern Christianity than the number of people who claim to believe in salvation by grace while spending the remainder of their religious careers explaining what a sinner must do to earn it. The Apostle Paul settled the matter in Ephesians 2:8–9 with language so plain that a schoolboy ought to understand it: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." There are no complicated religious formulas hidden between those words. Salvation is by grace. It is received through faith. It is God's gift. It is not of ourselves. It is not of works. Yet along comes the religious professional carrying a baptismal certificate, a membership application, a list of commandments, a surrender agreement, and enough additional requirements to qualify a man for employment in the federal government. Apparently, according to this arrangement, Jesus Christ completed the difficult part of salvation, and the sinner must now finish the paperwork. **But when God says salvation is not of works, He has already dismissed every human contribution to the purchase price.**

The immediate context of Ephesians 2 makes the doctrine even more remarkable. Paul begins the chapter by reminding these believers that they had been dead in trespasses and sins. They had walked according to the course of this world, lived under the influence of sinful desires, and belonged to the fallen human race described as children of wrath. Then comes one of the greatest contrasts in the entire Bible: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us" (Ephesians 2:4). Notice who takes the initiative. It is God. Notice the condition of those being saved. They were dead in sins. Notice the basis of the deliverance. It is mercy and grace, not human achievement. A spiritually dead sinner does not possess a collection of good works capable of purchasing his resurrection into spiritual life. He needs the saving power of God through Jesus Christ. **Grace is not God's reward for the sinner who successfully improves himself. It is God's provision for the sinner who could never make himself righteous.**

This doctrine is absolutely essential to personal evangelism because the Christian who confuses grace and works will inevitably confuse the sinner he is attempting to reach. It is not enough to tell somebody that Jesus died for his sins and then quietly add that salvation also requires baptism, church membership, sacramental observance, complete surrender, or a promise never to commit another known sin. Those additions do not clarify the Gospel. They corrupt it. Galatians 2:16 declares that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 4:5 describes God as the One "that justifieth the

ungodly." Titus 3:5 declares that salvation is not by works of righteousness which we have done. These passages are not isolated statements requiring rescue by religious tradition. They establish the doctrine of justification under grace. **The greatest danger in personal evangelism is not merely failing to explain salvation. It is explaining a counterfeit salvation so convincingly that the sinner believes he has received something the Bible never offered.**

1. Grace Means Grace — Not a Mixture of God's Work and Man's Effort

Ephesians 2:8 begins, "For by grace are ye saved through faith." Notice that Paul identifies grace as the basis of salvation and faith as the means by which the sinner receives it. Grace is God's unmerited favor, manifested in the salvation He provides through Jesus Christ. It is not divine assistance added to a sinner's independent efforts, as though God contributes ninety percent of the price and expects the sinner to finance the remaining ten. Romans 3:24 declares that believers are "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The word "freely" leaves no room for an outstanding religious balance. Jesus Christ accomplished redemption, and God justifies the believer by grace. The sinner has no righteousness to contribute to the transaction. **When the Lord pays the entire debt, the religious man demanding another payment is not defending holiness. He is denying the sufficiency of redemption.**

Romans 11:6 establishes a principle that destroys every attempt to combine grace and works as competing grounds of acceptance before God: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." Paul is discussing God's gracious election of a remnant in Israel, not giving an unrelated illustration about charitable behavior. Nevertheless, the statement establishes the mutually exclusive character of grace and works as a basis of divine acceptance. If something is granted by grace, it is not earned by works. Otherwise, grace ceases to be grace. The principle agrees completely with Paul's explicit teaching concerning individual justification in Romans 4 and Ephesians 2. Religious men have spent centuries attempting to accomplish what Paul declares impossible. They mix faith with ceremonies, grace with human merit, and Christ's righteousness with personal obedience, then announce that the resulting arrangement is still salvation by grace. **You can mix flour and water and call it dough, but you cannot mix grace and human merit and honestly call the result free salvation.**

The phrase "it is the gift of God" in Ephesians 2:8 establishes the character of salvation beyond reasonable dispute. A gift is received; wages are earned. Romans 6:23 deliberately contrasts the two: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sin pays wages because sinners have earned its consequences. Eternal life is God's gift because sinners have not earned it and cannot purchase it. Imagine

someone announcing that he intends to give you a thousand dollars, then requiring you to work forty hours, pass an examination, and promise lifetime service before receiving the money. Whatever arrangement he has proposed, it is no longer an ordinary gift. Yet religious organizations regularly perform the same trick with eternal life. They advertise grace on the front door and collect works at the counter. **If salvation must be earned, call it wages. If it must be maintained through performance, call it a contract. But do not call it the free gift of God.**

2. Romans 4 — The Difference Between Working for Wages and Believing God

Romans 4:4–5 provides one of the clearest explanations of justification by faith in the entire New Testament: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Paul is not describing a complicated philosophical distinction. He is explaining the difference between receiving something as payment and receiving something by grace. A worker earns his wages. The employer owes him what he has earned. But the sinner cannot place God under obligation by presenting a record of religious achievements. Salvation is received by faith in the One who justifies the ungodly. Notice that remarkable expression, “him that worketh not.” Paul does not say the sinner must work enthusiastically, work consistently, or work until God becomes sufficiently impressed. He specifically excludes works from the basis of justification. **The man who arrives before God carrying a bill for services rendered has misunderstood which party owes the debt.**

Paul reinforces his argument by examining Abraham. Romans 4:3 asks, “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6 records Abraham believing the LORD, who counted it to him for righteousness. The historical setting concerns God's promise to Abraham concerning his seed, long before the complete revelation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was entrusted to Paul. We must not pretend Abraham possessed the entire doctrinal content of 1 Corinthians 15 while standing beneath the stars in Genesis 15. But Paul deliberately uses Abraham to demonstrate the principle of righteousness accounted through faith rather than earned through works. Romans 4:9–12 further shows that Abraham was counted righteous before receiving circumcision. That chronological detail demolishes the notion that an outward religious ordinance establishes justification. **Abraham was counted righteous before the religious ritual was performed, which leaves the ritual remarkably little opportunity to claim credit for the result.**

David provides Paul's second Old Testament witness. Romans 4:6 declares, “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness

without works." Paul then quotes Psalm 32 concerning forgiven iniquities and sins not imputed. Here the doctrine of imputation becomes essential. God credits righteousness to the believer apart from works, while forgiveness rests upon His righteous provision. The sinner does not become justified by accumulating enough righteous behavior to outweigh his transgressions. He receives righteousness through faith in Christ. Romans 5:1 concludes, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is a settled standing grounded in the Saviour, not an uncertain religious account requiring daily payments. **The believer's righteousness is not an unfinished portrait that must be improved before God will accept it. His acceptance rests in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.**

3. What Must I Do to Be Saved? — The Question God Already Answered

Acts 16:30 records one of the most important questions ever asked by an unsaved man: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The setting is Philippi, where Paul and Silas had been imprisoned after suffering persecution. Following the earthquake, the jailer feared that his prisoners had escaped, but Paul assured him that they remained. The jailer then brought them out and asked his question. Here was a man who did not need another religious performance, an impressive sermon about personal potential, or a motivational lecture concerning a better tomorrow. He wanted to know how to be saved. The answer in Acts 16:31 is unmistakable: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Notice the simplicity. Paul and Silas directed the man to Jesus Christ as the object of saving faith. **If salvation required a list of additional conditions, this was the perfect opportunity for an inspired apostle to mention them. He did not.**

The following verses explain that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and all who were in his house. The household promise did not mean the jailer's personal faith automatically regenerated his relatives. Each needed to hear the message and believe. Verse 33 records that the jailer washed their stripes and was baptized, he and all his, while verse 34 describes the rejoicing associated with believing in God. These details must be kept in their proper order. The answer to the salvation question was belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. The subsequent actions demonstrated the consequences of receiving the message. Water baptism did not suddenly become an unspoken condition concealed inside Paul's answer. Neither did the washing of the prisoners' wounds, the provision of food, or the jailer's hospitality contribute to justification. **The Bible distinguishes salvation from the actions that follow salvation, and a religious system has no authority to reverse the order simply because it prefers a more complicated arrangement.**

Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is also more than acknowledging several historical facts about Him. A person may believe that Jesus existed, that Roman soldiers crucified Him,

and that Christians claim He rose from the dead without personally relying upon Him for salvation. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the Gospel: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Saving faith receives God's testimony concerning His Son and relies upon Christ and His completed work rather than personal righteousness. It is not faith in faith, faith in a religious experience, or faith in the sincerity of a prayer. John 3:36 declares, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." The object matters. **A man can admire a lifeboat, describe its construction, and explain its history while remaining aboard a sinking ship. The issue is whether he will entrust himself to the rescue provided.**

4. Religion's Additions — Baptism, Sacraments, Membership, and Ceremonies

One of the most persistent corruptions of the Gospel is baptismal regeneration, the doctrine that water baptism is necessary to obtain salvation. First Corinthians 1:17 declares, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Paul was addressing divisions among the Corinthians concerning the ministers associated with their baptisms, but his distinction is decisive. He did not despise baptism. He recognized its proper place without confusing it with the Gospel itself. If water baptism were an indispensable component of saving faith, Paul's declaration would create an extraordinary contradiction. How could he be commissioned to preach the Gospel while distinguishing that commission from baptizing? Acts 10:43 records Peter declaring that those believing in Christ receive remission of sins through His name, and verses 44–48 show the Holy Ghost falling upon the hearers before their water baptism. **Water may wash the outside of a sinner, but no quantity of water can accomplish what Scripture assigns to the blood of Jesus Christ.**

Church membership, confirmation, communion, priestly confession, penance, and sacramental systems cannot provide justification either. Titus 3:5 declares, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The washing in that passage concerns regeneration and the renewing work of the Holy Ghost, not a declaration that a religious institution can manufacture the new birth by applying water. First Timothy 2:5 identifies "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." A sinner does not require a human priest to obtain the justification Christ freely provides. Neither does the Lord's Supper become a repeated payment for sins. Hebrews 10:14 declares, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." The sacrifice was completed once. **A religion that continually sends the sinner back to another ceremony for the righteousness Christ already purchased has confused remembrance with redemption and ritual with regeneration.**

This does not mean baptism, fellowship, church attendance, and obedience are unimportant. They have their proper biblical places in the Christian life. Water baptism is a public testimony associated with discipleship and obedience. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of Christ's sacrifice. The local church provides teaching, fellowship, and opportunities for service. Hebrews 10:25 warns believers against forsaking the assembling of themselves together. But none of these responsibilities constitutes the price of eternal life. Colossians 2:10 declares concerning believers, “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” The believer's completeness is in Christ, not in the religious institution to which he belongs. **A church can teach the Gospel, but it cannot become the Gospel. An ordinance can testify to salvation, but it cannot replace the Saviour. And a membership certificate may identify a congregation without identifying a single name written in heaven.**

5. Lordship Salvation — When Discipleship Is Made the Price of Justification

Another dangerous confusion arises when the demands of Christian discipleship are presented as additional conditions for receiving eternal life. The Lord Jesus Christ is Lord, and Scripture never invites anyone to believe in a fictitious Christ stripped of His true identity. Romans 10:9–13 openly identifies Him as Lord. But acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ is not the same thing as promising perfect obedience, unconditional surrender of every future decision, or a lifetime of successful discipleship as the purchase price of justification. Romans 4:5 directs faith toward the One who justifies the ungodly. The ungodly man does not first make himself obedient enough to qualify for salvation. He trusts the Saviour. **If a sinner must become a successful disciple before he can be justified, salvation has been moved from the cross to the sinner's performance record.**

Consider the discipleship passages so frequently used to confuse the issue. Luke 14:26–33 concerns the cost of following Jesus Christ in the historical setting of His earthly ministry. The Lord confronts would-be disciples concerning allegiance, sacrifice, and the seriousness of following Him. Those words should be respected and taught accurately. But they cannot simply be substituted for Paul's explanation of justification by faith under grace. Likewise, Romans 12:1 urges believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, but Paul addresses people already described as brethren who have received the mercies of God. He does not tell spiritually dead sinners to present a successfully surrendered life in exchange for justification. Ephesians 4–6 contains extensive instruction concerning Christian conduct, but it follows the doctrinal declaration of salvation in Ephesians 2. **When the Bible places Christian service after salvation, a preacher has no business dragging it backward and making it the admission fee.**

Repentance must also be handled honestly rather than used as a convenient hiding place for works. Acts 20:21 describes Paul's testimony concerning “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Biblical repentance is not an invitation to remain comfortably committed to unbelief; it concerns a genuine change of mind toward God and His truth. But demanding that a sinner abandon every known sin, achieve moral reform, and demonstrate future obedience before God will justify him adds human performance to the finished work of Christ. Salvation does not excuse sin or eliminate the believer's responsibility to obey the Lord afterward. Romans 6 firmly rejects continuing in sin as though grace were permission for wickedness. Nevertheless, Christian growth follows regeneration. **A sinner cannot clean himself sufficiently to earn the cleansing of Christ's blood. The very reason he needs the Saviour is that his own efforts cannot make him righteous.**

6. Good Works Have Their Place — After Salvation, Not Before It

Ephesians 2:10 immediately follows Paul's declaration of salvation by grace through faith: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Notice that Scripture does not reject good works. It establishes their proper place. We are not saved **by** good works; we are created in Christ Jesus **unto** good works. The difference is fundamental. Good works are the intended fruit of salvation, not the root that produces it. The sinner does not perform good works in order to become God's workmanship. Having been saved by grace, the believer is called to walk in the works God has prepared. The distinction is not an insignificant technicality. It determines whether Jesus Christ receives the glory for salvation or whether the sinner attempts to share credit for his justification. **Works belong in the Christian life, but they belong on the right side of salvation. Put them on the wrong side, and you have turned fruit into a purchase price.**

Titus 3 makes the same distinction. Verse 5 denies salvation by works of righteousness, while verse 8 instructs believers to “be careful to maintain good works.” The apparent contradiction disappears when the order is understood. Works do not save; saved people should perform good works. Similarly, James 2 addresses the practical demonstration of faith through works, exposing the emptiness of mere religious claims that produce no corresponding action. James addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad and develops the subject through examples such as Abraham and Rahab. His discussion of faith and works must be read in that setting rather than used to overthrow Paul's explicit teaching concerning justification before God apart from works. The Christian should not use grace as an excuse for disobedience, spiritual laziness, or worldly conduct. But neither should he turn obedience into the condition that keeps God from revoking eternal life. **The answer to**

careless Christianity is sound instruction concerning Christian living, not the invention of a salvation system that requires continuing performance to remain effective.

The distinction also protects the believer's assurance. Ephesians 1:13 declares that those who believed the Gospel were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Verse 14 identifies the Spirit as the earnest of the inheritance. Ephesians 4:30 states that believers are sealed "unto the day of redemption." John 10:28 records Christ's promise concerning His sheep: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Eternal life is not temporary life distributed in renewable installments, contingent upon the believer maintaining an acceptable religious performance record. The Christian will answer for his service at the judgment seat of Christ, but that judgment must not be confused with condemnation to the lake of fire. First Corinthians 3:15 describes a man whose works are burned, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." **The believer's works may be judged, but the blood of Christ is not placed on trial again every time the Christian stumbles.**

7. Giving the Gospel Clearly — Never Add a Bill to a Finished Payment

Personal evangelism requires the Christian to explain salvation in terms the listener can understand without corrupting the doctrine. Begin with the sinner's condition: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Explain the consequences: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Present the Saviour: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Explain God's provision: "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Then give the biblical response: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). The order need not become a mechanical formula, but the substance must remain unmistakable. **A Gospel presentation should leave the sinner looking at the finished work of Christ, not searching his own life for additional qualifications.**

When someone says he believes in Jesus Christ, do not assume that the statement settles every question. Ask what he believes Christ accomplished and what he is trusting to take him to heaven. A man may acknowledge the crucifixion while believing his baptism must complete the work. Another may admire the resurrection while depending upon regular communion and priestly absolution. Another may say he trusts Christ but ultimately believe that his obedience determines whether he retains eternal life. These misunderstandings need careful biblical correction. Explain Romans 4:5 and Ephesians 2:8–9. Explain that Christ is sufficient and that saving faith rests upon Him alone. Do not manufacture a decision through pressure, threaten someone with an invented deadline, or

assure him of salvation merely because he repeated a prayer. The words of a prayer possess no saving power apart from genuine faith in Christ. **A man is not justified because he successfully repeated the preacher's sentences. He is justified by faith in the Saviour those sentences ought to explain.**

The evangelist must also learn when to stop talking and allow Scripture to accomplish its work. Some Christians become so anxious to secure an immediate profession that they bury a clear Gospel presentation beneath another half-hour of explanations, illustrations, emotional appeals, and repeated invitations. Others complicate matters by introducing baptism, church attendance, surrender, discipleship, and dozens of secondary doctrines before the sinner has even understood justification. The Bible does not require every unbeliever to become an expert in Christian theology before trusting Christ. He must understand his need, the identity and saving work of Jesus Christ, and God's promise of salvation through faith. Answer genuine questions, correct false teaching, and invite the person to believe the Gospel without manufacturing consent. Romans 10:17 declares, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **The Christian's responsibility is to present the Gospel faithfully. He cannot improve God's saving message by adding conditions the Author never authorized.**

CONCLUSION

Salvation by grace through faith is not a theological preference, a denominational tradition, or an optional explanation among several equally acceptable ways of obtaining eternal life. It is the doctrine revealed in Scripture for sinners seeking justification before God in the present dispensation. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation as God's gift apart from works. Romans 4:4–5 distinguishes faith from earning wages. Romans 11:6 declares that grace and works cannot be combined as competing grounds of divine acceptance. Titus 3:5 rejects salvation by human righteousness, and Acts 16:31 directs the sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. These passages agree because God is not confused about His own plan of salvation. The confusion begins when religious men decide that the Gospel is too simple and must be improved with additional requirements. **The Almighty has not invited the religious world to form a committee and amend the terms of redemption. Christ has accomplished the work, and God has declared how the sinner receives its saving benefit.**

The Christian must therefore distinguish salvation from everything that properly follows salvation. Water baptism has its place. Church membership has its place. The Lord's Supper has its place. Christian service, obedience, holiness, giving, prayer, Bible study, and faithful discipleship all have their places. None belongs beside the blood of Jesus Christ as an additional payment for justification. We must also reject the equally foolish conclusion

that grace makes Christian conduct unimportant. God saves believers unto good works, and the New Testament contains serious instructions concerning their obedience, growth, separation from sin, and accountability at the judgment seat of Christ. But those responsibilities do not rewrite the conditions of receiving eternal life. **A man does not become the child of God because he has learned to behave like one. He becomes God's child through faith in Christ, and then he is instructed to live according to the relationship God has established.**

Here is the question that must settle the matter for every unsaved person: Upon what are you depending for your salvation? If your answer includes your baptism, your church, your sincerity, your religious service, your obedience, your personal reform, or your promise to remain faithful, you are depending upon something Scripture explicitly excludes from the basis of justification. The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. He accomplished redemption through His blood and provides eternal life to those who believe on Him. John 5:24 declares that the believer "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Salvation rests upon Christ, not upon the sinner's ability to complete or maintain what Christ purchased. **God is not asking you to help His Son finish redemption. He is not offering eternal life on credit, with obedience payments due until death. He is not waiting to see whether your religious performance becomes impressive enough to qualify you for heaven. Jesus Christ paid the price. The work is finished. The gift is free. The invitation is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And the moment a preacher adds your works to His finished payment, he has stopped preaching salvation by grace and started selling something God never offered.**

6 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: Repentance and Faith — Turning to God Without Turning Salvation Into a Promise to Reform

Key Passage — Acts 20:21 (KJV): "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

INTRODUCTION

There are few words in the Bible that have been twisted into more contradictory religious requirements than the word *repentance*. One preacher tells a sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Another informs him that believing is insufficient unless he abandons every known sin, surrenders every department of his life, promises lifelong obedience, and demonstrates enough personal reformation to satisfy the preacher's

definition of genuine repentance. A third fellow makes repentance little more than a meaningless religious expression, disconnected from sin, unbelief, or the sinner's attitude toward God. Between those two extremes, the Gospel gets buried beneath enough theological confusion to keep a religious committee occupied until the Judgment Day. Yet the Apostle Paul described his preaching in Acts 20:21 with remarkable clarity: “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice the direction of repentance and the object of faith. Repentance is **toward God**, and faith is **toward our Lord Jesus Christ**. The sinner is being directed toward the Lord, not toward an elaborate program of human self-reconstruction.

The trouble begins when religious men take a biblical word, attach their preferred requirements to it, and then insist that everybody must accept those requirements because the word itself appears in Scripture. The Bible certainly commands repentance. Nobody who believes the King James Bible has any business denying that. Acts 17:30 declares that God “commandeth all men every where to repent.” But the Bible also declares in Romans 4:5 that God justifies the ungodly who believe on Him, and Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Those statements cannot contradict one another because the Holy Ghost inspired them all. If your definition of repentance transforms salvation into something a sinner earns by abandoning sins, performing acts of obedience, or promising future faithfulness, your definition has collided headfirst with Paul's doctrine of justification. **The Bible does not need to be rescued from itself. The preacher needs to stop importing a works program into a word God never authorized him to corrupt.**

Personal evangelism requires us to understand what repentance means, why God commands it, how it relates to saving faith, and how to distinguish it from remorse, regret, restitution, and the good works that ought to follow conversion. We must also examine the audience and historical setting of passages concerning repentance rather than pretending every command in every dispensation was delivered under identical circumstances. John the Baptist preached repentance to Israel. Peter addressed Israel at Pentecost. Paul preached to Jews and Gentiles under the revelation of the Gospel of grace. Churches are commanded to repent concerning particular sins and failures. Even God is described as repenting in certain Old Testament passages, although He has never committed a sin. Those facts alone ought to discourage careless definitions. The purpose is not to weaken repentance or make sin respectable. It is to preserve the Gospel. **A sinner cannot wash himself clean before coming to the only One whose blood can cleanse him. And a preacher who demands that impossible washing has placed another obstacle between the sinner and the Saviour.**

1. What Repentance Actually Means — Let the Scriptures Define the Word

The safest way to understand repentance is to examine how the King James Bible uses the word rather than beginning with a religious slogan. In Genesis 6:6, Scripture declares, “And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” Exodus 32:14 states, “And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.” Jonah 3:10 records that God repented of the evil He had said He would do unto Nineveh, and He did it not. Are we supposed to conclude that God had committed some terrible personal sin and needed to reform His conduct? Of course not. God is perfectly holy. In those passages, the language concerns a change in His announced dealings with mankind in response to the circumstances described. The word cannot inherently mean abandoning personal wickedness in every biblical setting. **If your definition of repentance requires God to confess His sins, you have not discovered a deep theological truth. You have demonstrated that your definition is wrong.**

When repentance concerns sinful human beings, it involves a genuine change of mind and disposition toward the truth confronting them. It is not merely pronouncing the words “I have changed my mind” while remaining committed to the same unbelief. Acts 17 confronts men whose understanding of God was corrupted by idolatry. Acts 20 joins repentance toward God with faith toward Jesus Christ. First Thessalonians 1:9 describes people turning from idols to the living and true God. In each setting, the change has an identifiable object and direction. The sinner who formerly rejected God's testimony concerning His Son must cease treating that testimony as false and believe it. The man depending upon his own righteousness must abandon that false confidence and rely upon Christ. Repentance is not an independent payment added to faith. **It is the sinner's change toward God as he receives the truth that exposes his condition and directs him to the Saviour.**

This also explains why repentance cannot honestly be reduced to ordinary regret. A criminal may regret getting caught while remaining perfectly satisfied with the crime. A drunkard may regret the consequences of yesterday's drinking while looking forward to another bottle tomorrow. A dishonest businessman may regret losing his reputation without acknowledging God's judgment of his dishonesty. None of those experiences, by itself, establishes biblical repentance toward God. Conversely, a sinner may genuinely recognize his guilt and believe on Christ without producing the emotional display some evangelists demand. Scripture does not establish a required quantity of tears, a prescribed period of mourning, or a minimum number of abandoned habits before justification can occur. **Repentance is not measured with a handkerchief, recorded on a stopwatch, or certified by a preacher inspecting a sinner's emotional performance. The issue is**

whether the sinner has believed God's truth concerning himself and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Acts 17:30 — God Commands the World to Repent of Its Ignorance and Idolatry

Acts 17:30 declares, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Those words were spoken by Paul in Athens, where he encountered a city given to idolatry. The Athenians possessed altars, temples, religious interests, and philosophical discussions, but their abundance of religion did not constitute saving knowledge of the true God. Paul stood on Mars' hill and declared the God who made the world and all things therein. He explained that God does not dwell in temples made with hands and is not dependent upon human service as though He needed anything. He exposed the foolishness of imagining that the Godhead could be represented by gold, silver, or stone shaped by human art. Then he commanded repentance. The context identifies the problem: men were ignorant of the true God and devoted to false objects of worship. **Athens had enough religion to furnish a museum, but its impressive collection of idols could not provide one sinner with eternal life.**

Paul did not instruct those Athenians to spend six months proving that they had successfully abandoned every personal sin before God would consider saving them. He confronted their false conception of God, commanded repentance, and announced coming judgment. Acts 17:31 explains that God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has ordained, and has given assurance concerning Him by raising Him from the dead. The message moved from the true Creator to human accountability and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When the Athenians heard of the resurrection, some mocked, others postponed further consideration, and certain individuals believed. Notice that the response was not described as completing a moral rehabilitation course. Verse 34 declares that certain men “clave unto him, and believed.” **The apostle confronted false religion with the true God and pointed the hearers toward the risen Christ. He did not replace the Gospel with a spiritual improvement contract.**

The statement that God commands all men everywhere to repent must be taken seriously. It eliminates the notion that repentance is unnecessary because God has no objection to unbelief, idolatry, or false worship. God commands men to change their attitude toward Him and receive His truth. But the command does not authorize an evangelist to invent additional conditions for justification. The same apostle who preached repentance in Athens declared salvation by faith apart from works in Romans 4 and Galatians 2. Those teachings belong together. The unbeliever must not continue trusting a false god, personal righteousness, or religious ceremonies while pretending those things are equivalent to believing on Jesus Christ. **God commands the sinner to turn from his false confidence**

toward the truth. Religion adds that he must first demonstrate enough personal improvement to deserve the privilege. One is repentance toward God; the other is salvation by human performance wearing repentance's name tag.

3. Acts 20:21 — Repentance Toward God and Faith Toward Jesus Christ

Acts 20:21 provides the clearest practical connection between repentance and saving faith: "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul is speaking to the elders of the church at Ephesus and reviewing his ministry among them. He reminds them that he taught publicly and from house to house, withholding nothing profitable, despite the difficulties and persecutions he encountered. His testimony reached both Jews and Greeks. That is important because the historical distinctions between Jew and Gentile did not establish two competing Gospel messages during Paul's ministry. Romans 3:22 declares the righteousness of God is available "unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." Paul directed both groups toward God through faith in Christ. **The Jew could not purchase salvation with his religious ancestry, and the Greek could not obtain it through philosophy. Both needed the same Lord Jesus Christ.**

Notice that Paul did not say repentance toward a church, repentance toward a preacher, repentance toward a religious institution, or repentance toward a collection of moral regulations. He said repentance "toward God." Then he identified faith "toward our Lord Jesus Christ." These are closely related aspects of the sinner's response to the Gospel, not two separate payments required before God will issue eternal life. A sinner who genuinely turns to God through believing the Gospel is not continuing to reject God's testimony. Likewise, a person who merely announces that he has repented but refuses to believe on Jesus Christ has not received the salvation Paul preached. The objects matter. Faith must rest upon the biblical Saviour who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. **Repentance without Christ is not the Gospel, and faith in an imaginary Christ who cannot save is no substitute for believing God's revelation concerning His Son.**

Some preachers insist that repentance must mean promising to forsake every known sin, and then they attempt to reconcile that requirement with salvation by grace by calling the promise an expression of faith. But changing the label does not change the substance. If a man must promise future obedience in order to obtain justification, his promise has become a condition of salvation. Romans 4:5 declares that God justifies the ungodly who believe. That man is not described as someone who has already achieved sufficient holiness to qualify for acceptance. He is ungodly when he is justified. Biblical repentance does not make a sinner's proposed future conduct the foundation of his salvation. **A promise to behave tomorrow cannot pay for the sins of yesterday, and a man who**

cannot guarantee his next heartbeat certainly cannot guarantee a lifetime of perfect obedience. Salvation rests upon Christ's accomplished righteousness, not man's unfinished promises.

4. Romans 2:4 and 2 Corinthians 7:10 — Conviction Is Not the Same as Emotional Sorrow

Romans 2:4 asks, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Paul is confronting the self-righteous individual who condemns others while committing sin himself. The surrounding verses establish that God's judgment is according to truth and that human religious superiority cannot excuse guilt. Notice what leads the sinner toward repentance: the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God. The Lord's patience is not evidence that He approves of sin. It provides opportunity for the sinner to recognize his condition and respond to divine truth. Romans 2:5 warns against a hard and impenitent heart that treasures up wrath against the day of judgment. Repentance therefore involves a serious response to God's truth, not a superficial religious expression. **God's patience is not permission to continue in unbelief, and the fact that judgment has not yet fallen does not mean the Judge has lost the evidence.**

Second Corinthians 7:10 declares, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” This verse is frequently lifted from its setting and converted into a requirement that every unsaved person must display a specified quantity of sorrow before receiving eternal life. But Paul is addressing a church concerning the effect of an earlier corrective letter. Verses 8–11 describe the Corinthians' sorrow, their repentance, and the earnestness produced by that correction. The passage concerns a response to rebuke within a congregation, not a new condition added to justification by faith. The word “salvation” must be understood according to the deliverance involved in that context rather than automatically equated with the initial new birth every time it appears. **A verse about a church responding to correction cannot be used to overthrow Paul's explicit doctrine that God justifies the ungodly through faith apart from works.**

There is a tremendous difference between godly sorrow and worldly regret, but neither should be confused with the completed work of Christ. Matthew 27:3 records that Judas, when he saw Jesus was condemned, “repented himself” and returned the thirty pieces of silver. His regret and restitution did not establish that he had received eternal life. By contrast, the publican in Luke 18:13 acknowledged his guilt and cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” That account belongs to the Lord's earthly ministry before Calvary and must not replace the full Church Age Gospel, but it exposes the difference between self-

righteous boasting and acknowledgment of guilt before God. Tears may accompany repentance, but tears do not redeem. Restitution may follow conviction, but repayment does not justify. **A man can weep over his sins until he floods the altar and still remain lost if his confidence never rests upon Jesus Christ. Heaven does not issue salvation certificates according to the number of tears collected.**

5. Rightly Dividing Repentance — Israel, the Kingdom, and the Present Gospel of Grace

The Bible records commands to repent in different historical settings, and those distinctions must be preserved. John the Baptist appeared preaching, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). He was ministering to Israel in preparation for the manifestation of her promised Messiah. Matthew 3:6 records individuals confessing their sins and being baptized in Jordan. The message concerned Israel's preparation in the setting of the promised kingdom, before Christ's death, burial, and resurrection had occurred. Mark 1:15 records the Lord Jesus declaring, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” That announcement must be examined within the historical development of God's revelation rather than automatically treated as identical in every detail to Paul's later presentation of the finished cross and resurrection. **Right division does not make repentance disappear. It prevents the preacher from mixing messages delivered under different circumstances and calling the mixture sound doctrine.**

Acts 2:38 provides another passage that has been repeatedly mishandled: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Peter is addressing Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost concerning the Jesus whom they had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead. Their national and historical responsibility is central to the sermon. The events occur during the opening chapters of Acts, when the transition from Israel's earthly ministry to the fuller revelation of the Church is unfolding. That setting must be recognized rather than ignored. We cannot take Peter's address, detach it from its immediate audience, and use it to contradict Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the Gospel. Nor can we overturn Ephesians 2:8–9 by making a water ceremony necessary for justification today. **A Bible verse does not become more spiritual when it is pulled out of its setting and used to contradict another Bible verse.**

The same care is necessary with Luke 13:3, where the Lord warned, “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Jesus was addressing people discussing the deaths of certain Galileans and the victims upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. He confronted the assumption that those who suffered terrible deaths must have been worse sinners than those who remained alive. His warning was serious, and the broader call to repentance

cannot be dismissed. But the passage does not say that a sinner in the present dispensation must abandon every known personal sin before God will justify him. Paul's message under grace is unmistakable: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). **The correct way to study repentance is not to collect every occurrence of the word, erase the historical settings, and manufacture one enormous list of requirements. It is to let each passage speak where God placed it and then proclaim the Gospel revealed for today.**

6. Turning From Idols and Producing Fruit — The Evidence Must Not Become the Price

First Thessalonians 1:9 describes the conversion of believers who had come from pagan idolatry: “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Notice the direction carefully. They turned **to God from idols**. Paul was not presenting a program in which these Gentiles first purified their entire existence, successfully abandoned every sinful practice, and then qualified to approach God. Their turning to the living and true God necessarily involved abandoning confidence in false gods. Their subsequent service demonstrated the new allegiance produced by receiving the Gospel. Verse 10 adds their expectation of God's Son from heaven, “even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The passage gives a beautiful picture of conversion and its consequences. **The Thessalonians did not exchange one collection of idols for a Christian collection of meritorious works. They turned to the living God, and their changed service followed their changed relationship.**

Acts 26:20 records Paul's testimony that he preached to Jews and Gentiles “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” There are three expressions worth examining: repent, turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. The works are appropriate to repentance; they do not become the blood that purchases redemption or the righteousness that justifies the ungodly. Ephesians 2:10 establishes the same order for believers under grace: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Good works belong after salvation as the intended walk of those already created in Christ. Titus 3:5 denies salvation by works of righteousness, while Titus 3:8 exhorts believers to maintain good works. No contradiction exists. **A fruit tree produces fruit because it is alive. Nobody hangs apples on a dead tree and announces that the apples have resurrected it. Good works demonstrate the proper direction of Christian life; they do not create spiritual life.**

This distinction does not authorize careless Christianity. Romans 6:1 asks, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Paul answers in verse 2, “God forbid.” The believer is identified with Christ in His death and resurrection and is commanded to reckon

himself dead unto sin and alive unto God. Sin remains serious after conversion, and the New Testament repeatedly instructs Christians to put away wicked conduct, walk in the Spirit, and live holy lives. But the commands addressed to saved people must not be transferred backward and imposed upon unsaved sinners as conditions for receiving justification. A Christian should grow, obey, confess his sins, and seek to honor the Lord. His failures may bring chastening and loss of reward, but they do not cancel the sufficiency of Christ's blood. **The answer to a disobedient Christian is biblical correction, not the announcement that Jesus Christ has started issuing salvation on a probationary license.**

7. The Gospel Invitation — Direct the Sinner to Christ, Not to His Future Performance

When the Philippian jailer asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30–31). That is the question and answer every personal evangelist must understand. The jailer was not told to promise that he would never sin again, surrender every future decision, become a model citizen, or spend a probationary period demonstrating repentance through successful moral reform. He was directed to the Lord Jesus Christ. The following verses explain that the Word was preached to his household and that they responded. Salvation was not automatically inherited by the family because the jailer believed; each needed the Gospel. The simplicity of the answer does not eliminate repentance toward God. It shows how the sinner is directed to the Saviour rather than to his own performance. **If an inspired apostle can answer the salvation question by directing a sinner to believe on Christ, a modern evangelist has no authority to add another twelve conditions.**

The content of that faith must also be explained. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Romans 3:23 establishes the sinner's guilt, and Romans 6:23 contrasts the wages of sin with God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, not of works. The evangelist should explain these truths plainly, ask whether the hearer understands them, and encourage him to rely upon Christ alone. It is appropriate to explain that he must abandon his confidence in false religion, personal righteousness, and unbelief. It is not appropriate to demand that he first produce a list of every sin he has ever committed and promise never to repeat any of them. **The sinner is not being invited to negotiate a behavioral contract with God. He is being told to believe the Gospel of the Saviour who paid for sins He never committed.**

Finally, the Christian must avoid converting the invitation into a mechanical procedure. A person may express his faith through prayer, but repeating a prescribed prayer does not

automatically establish regeneration. A person may weep under conviction, but tears do not prove justification. A person may walk an aisle or raise a hand, but physical movement does not produce spiritual life. Likewise, the absence of an emotional performance does not prove that someone has failed to believe. The issue is whether the sinner has genuinely trusted Jesus Christ and His finished work. John 5:24 declares that the believer has everlasting life and has passed from death unto life. Romans 4:5 declares that faith is counted for righteousness to the one who believes on Him who justifies the ungodly. **Do not make the sinner's feelings the foundation, his promises the payment, or his prayer the Saviour. Present Christ clearly, call for faith in Him, and leave the saving work where Scripture places it—with God.**

CONCLUSION

Repentance and faith must never be separated into two competing methods of salvation or combined into an arrangement that makes human performance necessary for justification. Acts 20:21 establishes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 17:30 demonstrates the seriousness of God's command to repent. Romans 2:4 reveals the goodness of God leading men toward repentance. First Thessalonians 1:9 illustrates the genuine turning of converts from false gods to the living God. Second Corinthians 7:10 demonstrates why sorrow and repentance must be understood according to their immediate context. And Acts 16:31 directs the sinner plainly to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. These passages agree when they are read carefully and rightly divided. **Repentance does not compete with saving faith, and saving faith does not excuse unbelief. The sinner who turns to God through faith in Christ is not paying for salvation with a promise of future obedience. He is receiving the Saviour whom God has provided.**

We must therefore reject both extremes that have corrupted the preaching of repentance. One extreme makes repentance into an impossible moral qualification, requiring sinners to accomplish what only the grace of God can produce in a saved life. The other treats repentance as an empty religious expression that need not involve any genuine response to God's truth. Scripture permits neither distortion. The unbeliever is guilty before God, must recognize his need of salvation, and must believe the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ. The Christian should then grow in grace, obey the Scriptures, separate from wickedness, and bring forth the good works appropriate to his new life. Those duties are important, but they belong in their proper place. **Grace is not permission to live wickedly, and obedience is not the currency with which eternal life is purchased. Confuse those two truths, and you will either excuse sin or corrupt salvation.**

The final question is not whether the sinner can promise to become the kind of Christian he hopes to be twenty years from now. The question is whether he will believe God's testimony

concerning His Son today. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. His blood accomplished redemption, His righteousness provides justification, and His resurrection establishes the victory of the living Saviour. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation to be the gift of God, not of works. Romans 4:5 declares that God justifies the ungodly who believe. The Gospel does not ask a sinner to prepare a record of promised obedience for divine inspection before he may approach Christ. It directs him to the One who receives sinners through faith. **A man cannot wash away his sins before coming to the only One whose blood can cleanse them. He cannot promise enough obedience to replace the righteousness of Christ. He cannot reform his way into justification, weep his way into redemption, or surrender enough future conduct to pay for the sins of his past. Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ do not send the sinner back to himself. They direct him to the Saviour. And any message that makes man's promises necessary to complete Christ's finished work is not salvation by grace through faith, no matter how loudly the preacher insists otherwise.**

7 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: Opening the Conversation — How to Speak About Christ Without Turning People Away Before You Begin

Key Passage — Colossians 4:5–6 (KJV): "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

INTRODUCTION

There are Christians who can explain the doctrine of justification, defend the deity of Jesus Christ, quote the Gospel from 1 Corinthians 15, and distinguish salvation by grace from salvation by works, but put one of them beside an unsaved stranger and suddenly he cannot remember how to begin a conversation. The fellow who can argue for three hours about the proper interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks becomes remarkably quiet when the waitress asks whether he needs another cup of coffee. He knows what to say about salvation; he simply does not know how to bring up the subject. The Apostle Paul addressed this practical difficulty in Colossians 4:5–6: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Notice that Paul did not merely command believers to speak. He commanded them to walk wisely, recognize opportunities, and know how to answer. **A Christian who possesses the Gospel but never**

communicates it resembles a man carrying the cure for a deadly disease while refusing to open his medicine bag.

Now there are two kinds of foolishness that regularly interfere with personal evangelism. The first is the foolishness of the coward who never opens his mouth because somebody might disagree with him. The second is the foolishness of the religious bulldozer who imagines that offending everybody within hearing distance demonstrates extraordinary spiritual courage. One fellow will not mention Jesus Christ under any circumstances, and the other cannot order a hamburger without turning the restaurant into a courtroom. Neither has necessarily understood the wisdom commanded in Colossians 4. The Christian is not instructed to conceal the truth, but neither is he commanded to behave as though common courtesy were a compromise with the devil. There is a difference between offending somebody with the Gospel and offending somebody with your personality. The first may be unavoidable; the second frequently is not. **If people reject the message of Jesus Christ, that is a serious matter. If they reject the messenger because he behaves like an obnoxious fool, he should not automatically congratulate himself for suffering persecution.**

Personal evangelism requires spiritual concern, biblical knowledge, prayer, observation, courage, and wisdom. It begins with recognizing that the people we encounter are not merely customers, employees, relatives, travelers, neighbors, or casual acquaintances. They are souls who will spend eternity somewhere. Yet recognizing their eternal condition does not authorize us to manipulate conversations, invade personal boundaries, or treat people as targets in a religious competition. The Lord Jesus Christ knew how to begin with a simple request for water and bring a conversation to the subject of everlasting life. Philip knew how to approach a man reading Scripture and direct him toward Christ. Paul knew how to address different audiences without changing the truth he proclaimed. These examples demonstrate that biblical witnessing involves more than memorizing several verses and waiting for an opportunity to recite them. **The message must remain unchanged, but the approach should fit the occasion. A wise fisherman learns where the fish are, how to approach them, and when to cast the line. He does not begin by throwing the entire tackle box into the water.**

1. Pray for the Open Door — The Opportunity Must Be Recognized Before It Can Be Used

Colossians 4:2 commands believers to “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” Paul immediately connects prayer with Gospel opportunity in verse 3: “Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.” Consider the circumstances. Paul was

imprisoned, yet his request was not merely for personal comfort, favorable treatment, or immediate release. He wanted an open door to speak the truth concerning Christ. Verse 4 continues, “That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” There is the proper foundation for personal witnessing. Pray for an opportunity, pray for the wisdom to recognize it, and pray for the ability to communicate the Gospel clearly. **The Christian should spend less time inventing excuses for his silence and more time asking God to provide an occasion for him to speak.**

An open door does not necessarily arrive with trumpets sounding, angels appearing, and somebody announcing that he has exactly fifteen minutes available to hear the Gospel. Frequently, the opportunity appears in an ordinary conversation. A coworker asks why you do not participate in a particular activity. A neighbor mentions the death of a relative. Someone wonders whether there is life after death. A friend asks why you believe the Bible. A stranger notices a Scripture verse or asks where you attend church. None of those circumstances automatically guarantees that the person wants an extended Gospel presentation, but each may provide a natural opening. Colossians 4:5 instructs believers to walk wisely toward those who are without, “redeeming the time.” Opportunities are not unlimited, and wisdom recognizes that an ordinary moment may possess eternal significance. **Some Christians are waiting for God to write their witnessing assignment across the clouds while ignoring the unsaved person who just asked them a spiritual question.**

Prayer must also be accompanied by preparation. The Christian who asks God for an opportunity to witness should know what he intends to say when that opportunity arrives. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. Romans 3:23 establishes the sinner's guilt. Romans 6:23 contrasts the wages of sin with God's gift of eternal life. Ephesians 2:8–9 explains salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Acts 16:31 directs the sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. These passages should become familiar enough that the believer can explain their meaning without searching desperately through his Bible while the conversation disappears. Preparation does not mean memorizing a theatrical sales presentation. It means understanding the Gospel. **A man who prays for fish should at least have enough sense to bring his fishing rod. Likewise, a Christian praying for an opportunity to witness ought to know the message he intends to deliver.**

2. Direct and Indirect Approaches — Knowing When to Ask and When to Listen

There are occasions when a direct approach is entirely appropriate. A person may already be discussing salvation, questioning his eternal destination, or asking what the Bible teaches concerning forgiveness. In such circumstances, there is nothing wrong with

asking, “Do you know for certain that you have eternal life?” or “Have you ever trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour?” The Philippian jailer presented Paul and Silas with a direct question in Acts 16:30: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer was equally direct: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The direct approach fits when the subject is already before the listener or when a relationship and circumstances make the question natural. There is no virtue in circling around the Gospel for forty minutes when somebody is plainly asking how to be saved. **When a drowning man asks where the lifeboat is, that is not the moment to begin an extended discussion about the history of shipbuilding.**

At other times, an indirect approach provides a better beginning. Instead of immediately asking a stranger whether he is saved, a Christian may begin with an ordinary subject that naturally opens the door to something spiritual. A conversation about difficult circumstances may lead to the promises of God. A discussion concerning death may lead to Hebrews 9:27 and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A question about church may provide an opportunity to explain the difference between religion and salvation. The indirect approach is not deception. It is the wise development of a conversation toward a subject the listener may be willing to consider. Proverbs 25:11 declares, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Notice the importance of fitness. A true statement spoken at an inappropriate moment can be unnecessarily difficult to receive. **The objective is not to trick somebody into hearing the Gospel. It is to recognize how an ordinary conversation may become an honest opportunity to present it.**

Matthew 10:16 contains the Lord's instruction, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” The immediate setting concerns the twelve disciples being sent to Israel during Christ's earthly ministry. Matthew 10:5 specifically instructed them not to go into the way of the Gentiles, and that historical limitation must not be confused with the Church's later Gospel ministry. Nevertheless, the wisdom and harmlessness described by the Lord establish a sound practical principle. The Christian needs discernment without dishonesty and courage without recklessness. Some listeners welcome a straightforward question; others respond better when the conversation develops naturally. Some circumstances permit a lengthy explanation; others allow only a brief testimony or an offered Gospel tract. **Wisdom does not water down the message. It prevents the messenger from making the message unnecessarily difficult to hear.**

3. The Woman at the Well — How Jesus Christ Turned an Ordinary Request Into a Spiritual Conversation

John 4:7 records one of the most instructive openings in Scripture: “There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.” Notice where the conversation begins. The Lord Jesus did not open by delivering a lengthy sermon concerning every theological error among the Samaritans. He asked for water. The request was ordinary, but the encounter was extraordinary. The woman immediately recognized the unusual nature of a Jewish man asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. John 4:9 records her question concerning the social and religious separation between Jews and Samaritans. The Lord then directed the conversation toward the gift of God and living water. The historical setting concerns Christ's earthly ministry before Calvary, and His discussion of worship must be understood in relation to Israel and the Samaritans. Nevertheless, His manner of opening the conversation is instructive. **The One who possessed the words of eternal life began by asking for a drink of ordinary water. That ought to correct the fellow who thinks every Gospel conversation must begin with a verbal explosion.**

The Lord did not remain permanently on the subject of water. In John 4:10 He declared, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” The physical subject became the occasion for discussing spiritual life. The woman initially understood His words in relation to the well, its depth, and the absence of a vessel with which to draw. Jesus continued patiently until the conversation reached the difference between ordinary water and the everlasting life He gives. In verses 13–14, He explained that ordinary water leaves a person thirsty again, while the water He provides becomes a well springing up into everlasting life. The Lord was not promising a religious improvement program or identifying water baptism as the source of salvation. He was directing attention to Himself as the giver of life. **A wise witness can begin with earthly things without allowing the conversation to end there.**

Jesus then addressed the woman's personal sin. In John 4:16 He instructed her to call her husband, and the subsequent verses revealed His knowledge of her circumstances. He neither concealed the truth nor began the conversation by publicly humiliating her. When the woman raised the controversy between Samaritan worship and Jerusalem, the Lord answered with truth rather than allowing the discussion to become an endless religious argument. Finally, when she spoke of the coming Messiah, Jesus declared in verse 26, “I that speak unto thee am he.” The conversation had moved from water to everlasting life, from personal circumstances to true worship, and finally to the identity of Christ. The woman later testified to others concerning her encounter with Him. **The lesson is not that Christians possess the Lord's supernatural knowledge of another person's life. The lesson is that a conversation can begin naturally, confront sin truthfully, and end with the sinner's attention directed toward Jesus Christ.**

4. Philip and the Ethiopian — Begin With the Scripture the Person Is Already Considering

Acts 8:26–35 records another remarkable example of personal witnessing. An angel of the Lord directed Philip toward the road descending from Jerusalem to Gaza, where he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch returning from worship at Jerusalem. The man was sitting in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit instructed Philip to join himself to the chariot, and Philip approached with a question: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The eunuch answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30–31). Here was an opening that did not require manipulation, clever entertainment, or an elaborate introduction. The man was already reading Scripture and needed someone to explain its meaning. Philip recognized the opportunity and responded. **There are Christians who would have climbed into that chariot and immediately started discussing their favorite church controversies. Philip had enough sense to begin with the passage the man was actually reading.**

The Ethiopian was reading the prophetic description of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Acts 8:32–33 records the passage concerning the One led as a sheep to the slaughter and silent before His shearer. The eunuch asked whether the prophet was speaking of himself or another man. Verse 35 provides the decisive answer: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Notice the order. Philip listened to the man's question, identified the Scripture under consideration, and proclaimed Jesus Christ from that passage. He did not dismiss the question as foolish or insist upon discussing an unrelated subject. The Old Testament prophecy provided a direct opportunity to explain the promised Saviour. **A Christian who knows his Bible can often begin where the listener already stands and use the Scriptures to bring him to Christ. That is considerably wiser than answering a sincere question with three unrelated sermons.**

The passage also illustrates the importance of preserving biblical context. Philip was ministering during the transitional period recorded in Acts, and the account includes the eunuch's baptism after the Gospel had been explained. Acts 8:37 in the King James Bible records Philip's condition, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," and the eunuch's confession concerning Jesus Christ. We must not turn the historical account into a doctrine that water baptism purchases salvation, nor confuse Philip's ministry with the full Pauline exposition of justification later revealed in the epistles. The practical example remains valuable: understand the question, open the Bible, explain the passage, and preach Christ. **The evangelist does not need to demonstrate that he knows everything**

about Scripture. He needs to know enough to show the sinner what the Scriptures say about the Saviour.

5. Paul Before Different Audiences — Adapt the Approach Without Altering the Gospel

The Apostle Paul demonstrated that different audiences may require different points of introduction while the truth remains unchanged. In Acts 17:2–3, Paul entered the synagogue at Thessalonica and reasoned with the Jews out of the Scriptures, "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead." His audience possessed the Old Testament Scriptures and recognized their authority. Paul therefore began with the prophetic testimony concerning the Messiah and demonstrated its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He did not begin by discussing the philosophies of Athens or explaining pagan idolatry to men whose religious background was rooted in the law and the prophets. The Gospel concerned the same Saviour, but the point of approach suited the hearers. **A wise preacher does not waste twenty minutes proving the existence of Moses to a man who has spent his entire life reading the books of Moses. He opens the Scriptures and shows him Christ.**

In Athens, Paul addressed a considerably different audience. Acts 17:22–23 records his observations concerning their religious practices and an altar dedicated to the unknown God. He began by declaring the God who made the world and all things therein, exposing the error of idolatry and the foolishness of representing the Godhead through objects made by human hands. He then proclaimed God's command to repent, the certainty of judgment, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul's approach differed because his audience differed. The Jews at Thessalonica needed to understand the identity of their promised Messiah; the pagan philosophers at Athens needed to confront the truth concerning the living Creator. Yet Paul did not abandon biblical truth to gain the approval of either group. **He did not preach a Jewish Saviour to the Jews and a philosophical Saviour to the Greeks. He preached the true Christ, beginning where the particular audience needed correction.**

First Corinthians 9:19–23 explains Paul's willingness to accommodate himself to different people for the sake of winning them. He became as a Jew to the Jews and as one without law to those without law, while remaining under the law to Christ. This was not permission to compromise doctrine or engage in sin to make unbelievers comfortable. Paul adjusted his manner of dealing with people without surrendering the truth. The same wisdom applies to ordinary Christians. A person raised in a religious household may need a clear explanation of why church membership cannot save. Someone who has never opened a Bible may need to begin with the reality of sin and the identity of Christ. A skeptical acquaintance may have a genuine objection requiring patient examination. **Faithfulness**

does not demand presenting every conversation in identical words. The Gospel is not improved by being changed, but the opportunity to explain it can certainly be improved by knowing whom you are speaking to.

6. Testimony, Gospel Tracts, and Everyday Opportunities — Tools Are Useful, but They Are Not the Message

A personal testimony can provide a valuable opening when it directs attention toward Jesus Christ rather than the individual telling the story. Paul repeatedly described his conversion, including his encounter with the risen Lord in Acts 22 and Acts 26. His testimony was not a substitute for proclaiming Christ; it furnished an occasion to explain what Christ had done. The Christian today can likewise explain how he came to understand the Gospel, why he abandoned confidence in religious works, and how he came to trust the Lord Jesus Christ. But testimony must remain subordinate to Scripture. One man may have a dramatic conversion story involving extraordinary circumstances; another may have trusted Christ quietly after hearing the Gospel from a parent. Neither story possesses superior saving power. **The important thing is not how spectacular your circumstances were when you got saved. The important thing is the Saviour who saved you.**

Gospel tracts can also be useful when they contain a clear biblical presentation of sin, Christ's death for our sins, His burial, His resurrection, and salvation by grace through faith. A tract may be received by someone who has little time for conversation, retained for future reading, or passed along to another individual. But indiscriminately scattering literature is not the same as exercising wisdom. A tract containing false doctrine can spread error as efficiently as a sound tract can communicate truth. Literature left where it creates unnecessary mess or inconvenience may produce resentment rather than interest. A Christian should be courteous, respect the property and wishes of others, and offer literature appropriately. Romans 10:17 declares, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **The paper has no saving power, the printing press has no saving power, and the person distributing the tract has no saving power. The value lies in the Gospel of Christ communicated through it.**

Everyday opportunities must also be handled with proper respect for circumstances. A workplace may provide occasions for sincere conversations, but employment responsibilities do not disappear because a Christian desires to witness. Customers, patients, students, and employees should not be subjected to coercion or inappropriate pressure, particularly when they cannot easily leave the encounter. An employer's legitimate rules should not be casually disregarded under the pretense of spiritual boldness. The Christian can still conduct himself honestly, answer genuine questions, develop respectful relationships, and recognize suitable opportunities outside restricted

circumstances. Family witnessing likewise requires wisdom. Repeated arguments at every meal may harden resistance where a patient explanation could accomplish more. **The Gospel does not become more powerful because the messenger disregards courtesy, professional responsibility, or another person's reasonable boundaries. Truth requires no assistance from bad manners.**

7. Speaking With Grace and Courage — Do Not Lose the Opportunity Before You Give the Gospel

First Peter 3:15 instructs believers, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” Peter was addressing believers facing opposition and suffering, encouraging them to remain faithful while maintaining a good conscience. The immediate setting concerns their conduct under pressure, but the instruction provides a sound example of how Christians should answer sincere inquiries. Notice the combination of readiness, explanation, meekness, and reverence. The believer is not told to hide his convictions, nor is he instructed to overwhelm every questioner with hostility. He should be prepared to explain the hope he possesses through Christ. **A man who cannot answer a simple question without becoming personally offended should spend some time learning the difference between defending the faith and defending his pride.**

Colossians 4:6 adds that our speech should be “alway with grace, seasoned with salt.” Grace does not mean concealing sin, judgment, Hell, or the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ. Paul himself preached judgment, confronted idolatry, and warned against false gospels. But his instruction requires a manner of speech suitable to communicating truth wisely. Salt preserves and seasons; it does not become the entire meal. The Christian should ask thoughtful questions, listen to answers, and avoid assuming that every hesitation represents deliberate hostility. Sometimes a listener needs clarification. Sometimes he has received false teaching that requires correction. Sometimes he is merely uninterested, and a gracious ending is wiser than an unnecessary confrontation. Proverbs 15:1 declares, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” **The Gospel possesses enough offense for the unbelieving heart without the Christian adding a fresh supply through needless personal irritation.**

Eventually, however, the conversation must reach the Gospel itself. An entertaining discussion about religion is not the same as explaining salvation. A pleasant exchange concerning church attendance is not the same as preaching Christ. The sinner needs to understand that all have sinned, that the wages of sin is death, that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and that eternal life is God's gift received through faith in Him. When the opportunity is appropriate, ask whether the person understands and

believes that message. Do not pressure him into repeating words he does not mean, and do not promise salvation merely because he agrees to an outward religious gesture. If he declines to continue, respect his answer while remaining willing to speak again when invited. **The object of personal evangelism is not to win control of a conversation, collect a decision, or demonstrate superior knowledge. It is to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ unmistakably clear.**

CONCLUSION

Personal evangelism is not reserved for unusually outgoing personalities, professional ministers, or Christians who possess extraordinary conversational ability. It is a responsibility that ordinary believers can learn to fulfill through prayer, preparation, biblical understanding, and experience. The Christian who knows the Gospel should ask God for opportunities to communicate it, remain attentive to the people around him, and exercise wisdom in determining how to begin. Some encounters call for a direct question about salvation; others develop from ordinary conversations concerning family, work, death, eternity, or religious questions. The Lord Jesus demonstrated wisdom in speaking with the Samaritan woman. Philip recognized an opening through the Ethiopian's reading of Scripture. Paul adapted his approach to different audiences without altering the truth. **The ability to begin a Gospel conversation is not a mysterious spiritual talent granted to a fortunate handful. It is a practical responsibility that grows through knowing the Word, caring about souls, and actually speaking when the opportunity comes.**

We must also remember that a faithful witness is not judged by the number of immediate professions he obtains. First Corinthians 3:6 declares, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” Paul was correcting the Corinthians' misplaced allegiance to particular ministers, but the principle is essential to understanding Christian service. One believer may introduce a person to the Gospel. Another may answer questions that arise later. Still another may have the privilege of explaining the truth when that person is ready to believe. God gives the increase. That should encourage the believer who has witnessed faithfully without observing an immediate response and restrain the fellow who imagines his personal techniques possess the power to regenerate souls. **We are not commissioned to manufacture conversions through carefully managed conversations. We are entrusted with the Gospel and instructed to proclaim it faithfully. The results belong to God, and the message must never be sacrificed to improve the statistics.**

The question remains whether we are willing to recognize and use the opportunities God places before us. There are people we encounter regularly who have never heard a clear explanation of salvation by grace through faith. Some possess religious backgrounds filled with ceremonies but little understanding of redemption. Others know almost nothing about

the Bible. Still others have heard contradictory messages concerning repentance, baptism, church membership, and the finished work of Christ. They do not need another performance from a religious salesman. They need the truth about Jesus Christ. Pray for an open door. Learn the Scriptures. Listen carefully. Speak honestly. Be courteous without becoming cowardly and courageous without becoming foolish. Above all, keep Christ at the center. **You do not have to force open every door, and you should not kick down a door simply because somebody refuses to open it. But when God gives you an honest opportunity to speak about His Son, do not stand there admiring the hinges. Open your mouth, give the Gospel clearly, and let the Word of God do the work that human cleverness never could.**

8 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: Keeping Christ the Issue — Answering Objections Without Losing the Gospel

Key Passage — John 5:39–40 (KJV): "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus Christ exposed one of the most dangerous conditions in religious history when He said in John 5:39–40, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Imagine that. Here were men who possessed the Scriptures, respected the law of Moses, observed religious ceremonies, defended their traditions, and considered themselves qualified to judge practically everybody else's standing before God. Yet the very Scriptures in which they professed confidence testified concerning the One standing directly before them, and they refused to come to Him for life. Their problem was not an insufficient supply of religious information. It was their rejection of Jesus Christ. They could examine the Scriptures while rejecting the Saviour revealed in them. **A man can spend his entire life studying the road signs to heaven and still perish because he refuses to travel the only Way.**

There is a remarkable similarity between those religious opponents of Christ and the multitudes who spend their time arguing about Christianity today. Mention the Gospel, and suddenly somebody wants to discuss the Crusades, corrupt preachers, denominational disagreements, dinosaurs, evolution, hypocritical church members, religious wars, unanswered prayers, suffering children, or where Cain found his wife. Another fellow wants

to know whether every religion contains some truth. Another produces a supposedly devastating contradiction he remembers hearing somewhere but cannot locate in the Bible. Still another insists that he cannot possibly consider salvation until every question concerning the history of civilization has been answered to his personal satisfaction. Now some of those questions are sincere, and honest questions deserve honest answers. But others function as convenient exits from the one subject the sinner does not want to face. **A man who changes the subject every time Jesus Christ is mentioned may possess an impressive collection of questions, but his collection will not purchase one moment of eternal life.**

Personal evangelism requires the Christian to recognize that the central issue is not his ability to win religious arguments. It is the person and finished work of Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 4:5 declares, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.” Paul did not describe his ministry as an endless contest to demonstrate superior intelligence. He proclaimed Christ. The sinner must understand that all have sinned, that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, that He rose again the third day, and that salvation is received by grace through faith. Other subjects may require attention because they prevent someone from understanding or believing the Gospel. Nevertheless, they must remain subordinate to the message that saves. **You can win an argument about every disputed subject in the Bible and still lose the opportunity to explain the only message that can save a man's soul.**

1. The Scriptures Testify of Christ — Do Not Miss the Person While Examining the Pages

John 5:39–40 belongs to the Lord's confrontation with Jewish religious opponents during His earthly ministry. The immediate discussion follows His healing of a man on the sabbath and the controversy surrounding His relationship with the Father. In John 5:36, Jesus identifies His works as testimony that the Father sent Him. In verses 37–38, He confronts His opponents concerning the Father's witness and their failure to believe the One He sent. Then He directs attention to the Scriptures. These men claimed to honor the Old Testament, yet they refused the Messiah to whom those Scriptures bore witness. The passage is not a declaration that studying the Bible is unnecessary. It exposes the danger of possessing biblical information while rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ. **The problem was not that those men had spent too much time with Moses. The problem was that they claimed to believe Moses while refusing the One Moses wrote about.**

The Lord makes that point unmistakable in John 5:45–47. He declares that Moses, in whom His opponents trusted, would accuse them, and then explains, “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.” That statement exposes the

absurdity of claiming allegiance to biblical authority while rejecting its testimony concerning Christ. The historical setting concerns Israel and her promised Messiah, and we must not pretend that Moses possessed the complete revelation later given through Paul's Gospel ministry. Nevertheless, the principle is clear. Scripture is not a collection of religious curiosities designed to provide endless opportunities for argument. It reveals God's truth, His righteousness, man's condition, and His redemptive purpose centered in Jesus Christ. The Christian who witnesses should therefore use Scripture to explain the Saviour rather than merely demonstrate how many unusual passages he has memorized. **Knowing the measurements of Noah's ark is useful Bible knowledge, but those measurements cannot substitute for knowing the Redeemer who saves sinners today.**

This is why the Christian must distinguish between answering a biblical question and allowing the question to control the entire conversation. Suppose someone asks about a supposed contradiction between two Gospel accounts. The question may deserve a careful response. But after answering it, the evangelist should return to the central issue: What does the Bible teach concerning Jesus Christ? First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies His death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. Romans 3:23 establishes the sinner's guilt. Ephesians 2:8–9 explains salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Those truths cannot be replaced by an extended discussion of secondary matters. The purpose of biblical knowledge is not to furnish the Christian with ammunition for an intellectual contest. It is to equip him to communicate divine truth accurately. **An open Bible should become a window through which the sinner sees Christ, not a maze in which the evangelist proudly demonstrates how many turns he can remember.**

2. Honest Questions and Foolish Disputes — Learning When to Answer and When to Stop

Second Timothy 2:23–24 provides practical instruction concerning contentious discussions: “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” Paul was instructing Timothy concerning the conduct of a minister responsible for handling God's Word faithfully. The surrounding passage warns against profane discussions, false teaching, and disputes that overthrow the faith of some. Notice that Paul does not forbid answering sincere questions. He distinguishes profitable instruction from foolish controversy. Some discussions produce understanding; others merely produce additional arguments. The Christian needs sufficient discernment to recognize the difference. **There is no biblical commandment requiring a believer to attend every argument to which an unbeliever invites him. The Lord called us to preach the Gospel, not to operate a twenty-four-hour religious complaint department.**

An honest objection generally seeks clarification. The listener may genuinely wonder why God permits suffering, how the resurrection can be believed, or why Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. Such questions should not automatically be dismissed as rebellion. Acts 8:31 records the Ethiopian eunuch acknowledging his need for someone to guide him in understanding Scripture. Philip did not rebuke the man for asking. He explained the passage and preached Jesus. Likewise, a Christian should listen carefully enough to understand what is actually being asked. Sometimes a person who appears argumentative has been taught something false for many years. Sometimes a question concerns a genuine obstacle to understanding the Gospel. Second Timothy 2:25 instructs the Lord's servant to correct those opposing themselves "in meekness." **There is a difference between a man asking because he wants to understand and a man asking because he wants another argument. Wisdom does not treat both men as though they were identical.**

Nevertheless, some conversations eventually reveal a settled determination to avoid the Gospel. Every answer produces another unrelated objection. Every Scripture introduces another controversy. Every attempt to discuss salvation is redirected toward denominational history, scientific speculation, or personal accusations against Christians. Proverbs 26:4–5 presents two complementary instructions concerning answering a fool, demonstrating that circumstances require discernment rather than a mechanical response. Sometimes silence prevents participation in foolishness; sometimes an answer exposes its error. Paul likewise warned against foolish disputes while commanding patient instruction. The Christian may courteously say that he is willing to discuss a particular concern but does not intend to spend the entire conversation chasing unrelated arguments. **If a man asks where the fire escape is, show him the exit. If he insists on debating the architect's choice of wallpaper while the building burns, you are not obligated to join the decorating committee.**

3. Hypocritical Christians and Corrupt Religion — Do Not Defend Sin, but Do Not Abandon Christ

One of the most frequent objections to Christianity concerns hypocritical Christians. Someone mentions a preacher who stole money, a church leader who committed adultery, an abusive religious authority, or a congregation that mistreated its members. The unbeliever concludes that Christianity must therefore be false. The first responsibility of the Christian witness is to refuse the temptation to defend wicked conduct simply because the offender used the name of Christ. Romans 3:23 declares that all have sinned. First John 1:8 warns against claiming to be without sin, and the New Testament repeatedly condemns corruption among professing believers. If a preacher lies, steals, commits adultery, or

abuses people, his religious title does not make the conduct righteous. The sin should be acknowledged plainly. **A crooked preacher does not become straight because he owns a pulpit, and a church building does not become a washing machine capable of cleansing every scandal committed beneath its roof.**

After acknowledging the wrongdoing, return to the distinction between sinful human beings and the sinless Saviour. First Peter 2:22 declares concerning Jesus Christ, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Hebrews 4:15 identifies Him as the One tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. The Christian is not asking the unbeliever to place his faith in the moral perfection of pastors, missionaries, denominational leaders, or ordinary church members. He is presenting Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and rose again. Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 4:5, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." That verse should settle the issue of where saving faith belongs. The failure of a professing Christian may expose hypocrisy or false profession, but it does not establish that Christ committed sin or that His resurrection never occurred. **The bankruptcy of a bank employee does not prove that money is imaginary, and the wickedness of a religious hypocrite does not disprove the righteousness of Jesus Christ.**

Denominational disagreements require similar care. First Corinthians 1:12–13 records divisions among believers identifying themselves with Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ. Paul responds, "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" The questions expose the foolishness of elevating human religious loyalties above the Saviour. When someone asks which denomination is correct, explain that salvation does not come through joining an organization. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Religious institutions can teach truth or error, and doctrinal differences sometimes concern serious matters that should not be dismissed. But the Gospel is not an invitation to select the most attractive denominational label. **The sinner does not need a religious membership card stamped by the correct committee. He needs the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and no denomination possesses the authority to manufacture it.**

4. Biblical Reliability, Creation, and Human Suffering — Answer the Question Without Losing the Saviour

When someone questions the reliability of Scripture, the Christian should be prepared to explain why he accepts the Word of God. Second Timothy 3:16 declares, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The Bible claims divine inspiration, and its testimony must be examined carefully rather than dismissed through superficial objections. Second Timothy 2:15 commands the believer to study and rightly divide the word of truth. Many alleged

contradictions arise because readers ignore the audience, historical setting, sequence of events, or distinctions between God's dealings with Israel and the Church. Other questions require more careful investigation. The Christian should never invent an answer merely to preserve the appearance of knowing everything. **A man who claims to defend the Bible by making up facts is not defending the Bible. He is advertising his unwillingness to study it.**

Questions concerning creation and evolution may also enter a Gospel conversation. Genesis 1:1 declares, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Colossians 1:16 identifies Jesus Christ as the Creator of all things, visible and invisible. Romans 1:20 explains that God's eternal power and Godhead are understood through the things that are made, leaving men without excuse. These passages establish the biblical testimony concerning creation and divine authority. A Christian may need to address genuine questions about origins, but an extended debate concerning every scientific claim is not automatically the most useful approach when the purpose is personal evangelism. The sinner needs to understand his accountability before God and the redemption provided through Christ. **A man may eventually agree that the universe had a Creator and still refuse the Saviour who died for his sins. Winning the first argument does not accomplish the second.**

The problem of human suffering deserves particular seriousness. A person who has buried a child, endured terrible injustice, or watched someone suffer may ask why a loving God allows such things. That question should not be answered with a clever insult or treated as an opportunity to demonstrate verbal superiority. Romans 5:12 establishes that sin and death entered the world through Adam. Genesis 3 records the consequences of man's rebellion, and Romans 8:22 describes creation groaning and travailing in pain. The Bible does not promise that believers will understand every particular tragedy in this present life. But Romans 5:8 reveals God's love through Christ's death for sinners, and 1 Corinthians 15 establishes His resurrection. **Christianity does not answer every sorrow by pretending the sorrow is imaginary. It directs suffering humanity toward the crucified and risen Saviour who has conquered death itself.**

5. Other Religions and Spiritual Experiences — Sincerity Cannot Replace the Biblical Christ

Another familiar objection declares that all religions ultimately lead to God. That sounds wonderfully agreeable until somebody opens the Bible. Jesus Christ declared in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Peter proclaimed in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” First Timothy 2:5

identifies one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Those declarations leave no biblical foundation for several independent ways of eternal salvation. We should treat people of other religions respectfully, but respect does not require pretending contradictory teachings are identical. **If every road leads to God, then the Son of God died to provide a road nobody actually needed. Calvary makes that fashionable religious slogan impossible to defend from Scripture.**

The objection often shifts from religious systems to personal sincerity. Someone insists that a sincere Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, moral philosopher, or unbeliever must surely be accepted because he genuinely believes what he believes. But sincerity does not determine whether a belief is true. Romans 10:2 describes Israel's zeal for God as being "not according to knowledge." Verse 3 explains that they were attempting to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to God's righteousness. Paul's concern was not that these individuals lacked religious enthusiasm. They lacked the righteousness available through Christ. The evangelist should not ridicule another person's upbringing or pretend every follower of another religion possesses identical beliefs. Instead, explain what Scripture teaches concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. **A man can be completely sincere while trusting something that cannot save him. Sincerity may describe the strength of his confidence, but it cannot establish the truth of the object in which he trusts.**

Spiritual experiences must also be tested against Scripture. Someone may describe a vision, a remarkable coincidence, an overwhelming emotional sensation, an alleged miracle, or a religious experience that convinced him he had discovered the truth. Such experiences may be deeply meaningful to the individual, but they cannot override God's written revelation. Second Corinthians 11:4 warns concerning "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel." Galatians 1:8 warns against accepting another gospel even if its messenger appears to be an angel from heaven. Paul directs attention to the content of the message rather than the impressiveness of the messenger. The Christian should therefore ask what the experience taught concerning Jesus Christ and salvation. Does it agree with the Gospel of grace? Does it proclaim the biblical Saviour? **A supernatural-looking experience cannot turn false doctrine into truth. The devil does not need to abolish religion when he can persuade people to trust religious experiences instead of the Word of God.**

6. Paul's Method — Reason From Scripture, Persuade Honestly, and Refuse Foolish Strife

Acts 17:2–3 records Paul's approach in Thessalonica: "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening

and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead." Notice the method and the subject. Paul reasoned from Scripture, and his argument centered upon the suffering and resurrection of Christ. His immediate audience consisted of Jews in the synagogue, so he began with the Old Testament Scriptures they professed to accept. He demonstrated their testimony concerning the Messiah and identified Jesus as the Christ. He was neither afraid of reasoning nor interested in argument for its own sake. **Paul did not enter the synagogue carrying a suitcase full of unrelated controversies. He opened the Scriptures, established the identity of the Messiah, and directed the hearers toward Jesus Christ.**

Acts 18:4 describes his ministry at Corinth: "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." Verse 5 further explains that Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. The reasoning was serious, the persuasion intentional, and the subject unmistakable. When opposition developed, Paul did not surrender the truth merely to maintain an agreeable atmosphere. Neither did he make endless disputation the entire purpose of his ministry. The historical account proceeds to his continued proclamation and the establishment of believers in Corinth. Paul later reminded that church in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." That statement does not forbid teaching other biblical doctrines. It establishes the central place of Christ in his ministry. **A preacher may know enough doctrine to fill a library, but if the sinner leaves without understanding Christ crucified, the library has failed to deliver the necessary book.**

First Peter 3:15 adds another indispensable requirement: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Peter was addressing believers facing hostility and suffering, not instructing Christians to begin unnecessary quarrels. Readiness requires preparation. Giving an answer requires understanding. Meekness requires restraint, and fear demands reverence before God. Second Timothy 2:24–26 similarly instructs the Lord's servant to be gentle, patient, and capable of teaching those who oppose themselves. None of those qualities requires compromising the Gospel. A Christian may answer firmly without becoming personally abusive, and he may acknowledge that a particular question requires additional study. **The fellow who cannot say, "I need to examine that passage more carefully," has made his reputation more important than the truth he claims to defend.**

7. Bring the Conversation Back to Christ — The Gospel Must Remain the Destination

Second Corinthians 4:3–5 establishes the seriousness of Gospel proclamation. Paul declares, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." Verse 4 describes the

blinding work of the god of this world upon unbelieving minds, while verse 5 returns to the essential message: “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” The immediate subject concerns spiritual blindness and the glory of Christ revealed through the Gospel. The Christian witness cannot remove that blindness through intellectual cleverness, verbal aggression, or emotional manipulation. He can proclaim the truth. This should produce both urgency and humility. **A sinner's greatest problem is not that he has failed to appreciate the evangelist's intelligence. His problem is that he remains without the saving light of the Gospel of Christ.**

A practical way to preserve the central issue is to answer a reasonable objection and then ask a question that returns the conversation to Jesus Christ. If someone complains about hypocritical preachers, acknowledge the wrongdoing and explain the sinlessness of Christ. If someone questions biblical reliability, address the concern honestly and examine the Scriptures. If someone insists that all religions lead to God, explain Christ's exclusive claims. Then ask whether the person understands what Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection. Do not pretend that every objection has been settled merely because you have delivered a Bible verse, and do not use questions as traps designed to embarrass the listener. Some people require further study and conversation. Others remain unwilling to consider the Gospel. **The purpose is not to drag a man through a religious interrogation until he surrenders. It is to make certain that the real question of salvation has not disappeared beneath a mountain of secondary arguments.**

When the opportunity permits, present the Gospel plainly. Romans 3:23 declares that all have sinned. Romans 6:23 explains the wages of sin and God's gift of eternal life. First Corinthians 15:3–4 establishes Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Acts 16:31 gives the answer to the sinner's need: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” That is the message. It does not require church membership, water baptism, sacramental observance, moral reformation, or a promise of future obedience as additional payments. If the listener declines, the Christian should not manufacture a profession through pressure. First Corinthians 3:6 reminds us that God gives the increase. **The witness may plant, another may water, but neither can replace the saving work of God with a successful argument or a carefully managed decision.**

CONCLUSION

The central issue in personal evangelism must always remain Jesus Christ. Questions concerning religious hypocrisy, denominations, biblical reliability, creation, suffering, other religions, and spiritual experiences may require careful answers, but none should permanently displace the Gospel. The Lord Jesus warned men who searched the

Scriptures while refusing to come to Him for life. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures concerning Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter instructed believers to answer with meekness and fear. Timothy was warned against foolish disputes that generate strife rather than understanding. These passages establish a consistent principle: truth must be explained accurately, objections must be handled wisely, and Christ must remain the center. **The Christian is not commissioned to win every possible argument before presenting the Gospel. He is commissioned to proclaim the Gospel faithfully, answering what genuinely needs answering without allowing the message to disappear.**

We should also remember that the unsaved person standing before us is not a personal enemy to be humiliated. He is a sinner who needs the same grace that saved us. The Christian possesses no natural righteousness that places him above the individual asking difficult questions. Romans 3:23 includes everybody. The difference between the saved and the lost is not that saved people were clever enough to discover a superior moral arrangement. It is that they have received the salvation provided through Jesus Christ. That truth should eliminate pride from witnessing without weakening conviction. We must refuse false doctrine, expose contradictions with Scripture, and answer honestly, but we must never confuse the victory of an argument with the salvation of a soul. **A man may leave a conversation thoroughly defeated in debate and remain just as lost as when he arrived. Winning the argument is not the same as winning the man to Christ.**

The final question every evangelist must keep before the sinner is not whether he agrees with our opinions about every religious controversy. It is whether he believes God's testimony concerning His Son. Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, the sinless Saviour who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. His blood accomplished redemption. His righteousness provides justification. His resurrection establishes His victory over death. Salvation is the free gift of God received through faith in Him. That is the message worth defending, explaining, and repeating. The Christian should know his Bible, recognize honest objections, refuse foolish disputes, and return again and again to Christ. **You can answer every question about church history and still leave a sinner without the Gospel. You can settle every argument about creation and still fail to explain redemption. You can expose every religious counterfeit and still neglect to present the true Saviour. Never become so occupied defending the road signs that you forget to show the sinner the Way. The greatest question is not whether he agrees with everything you know. It is whether he will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can save his soul.**

9 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: Bringing the Sinner to a Decision — A Clear Invitation Without Emotional Manipulation

Key Passage — Acts 16:30–31 (KJV): "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

INTRODUCTION

There comes a point in personal evangelism when the conversation must move beyond discussing religious information and confront the sinner with the question of what he believes concerning Jesus Christ. Acts 16:30–31 records one of the clearest exchanges in the entire Bible: "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." There stands a condemned sinner asking the most important question a human being can ask, and two servants of God providing the answer without attaching a religious obstacle course to it. They did not prescribe six months of moral improvement, demand a lifetime contract of perfect obedience, or produce an application for church membership. They directed the man to Jesus Christ. Notice the simplicity, the certainty, and the object of faith. **The answer was not believe in yourself, believe in religion, or believe that you have become sufficiently respectable. It was believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Unfortunately, modern evangelism has produced two equally dangerous extremes concerning the sinner's response to the Gospel. One crowd can explain salvation for an hour without ever telling the listener what God requires him to believe. The other crowd is so determined to obtain an immediate decision that it will employ practically any method necessary to secure a visible response. Raise your hand. Walk the aisle. Sign the card. Repeat the prayer. Shake the preacher's hand. Come forward while the music plays. Make a decision before the final stanza ends. Then somebody announces another twenty-seven souls saved, although nobody has established whether those individuals understood the Gospel or actually trusted Jesus Christ. It is entirely possible to obtain a religious decision without obtaining a genuine profession of saving faith. **A preacher can count raised hands until his arithmetic gives out, but the multiplication of decisions does not automatically establish the multiplication of new births.**

This is why bringing someone to a decision requires both doctrinal clarity and spiritual wisdom. We must never become so afraid of manipulation that we refuse to invite a sinner to believe the Gospel. Neither may we become so anxious for a response that we manufacture professions through pressure, embarrassment, emotional excitement, or misleading promises. The Christian's responsibility is to explain the sinner's condition,

proclaim the finished work of Christ, identify the response of faith, and invite the listener to trust the Saviour. The new birth itself belongs to God. John 1:13 declares that those receiving Christ are born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” That ought to settle the limits of human evangelistic ability. **We can preach the Gospel, explain the Gospel, defend the Gospel, and invite sinners to believe the Gospel. What we cannot do is manufacture regeneration through a religious procedure, no matter how impressive the procedure looks from the platform.**

1. The Philippian Jailer — The Right Question and the Right Answer

The historical setting of Acts 16 makes the jailer's question especially remarkable. Paul and Silas had been beaten, placed in prison, and secured in the stocks at Philippi. Instead of conducting a midnight complaint session concerning the unfairness of their circumstances, they prayed and sang praises unto God. Verse 25 records that the prisoners heard them. Then an earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the prisoners' bands were loosed. The keeper of the prison, believing his prisoners had escaped, prepared to kill himself. Paul cried out, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). The jailer called for a light, entered trembling, and brought Paul and Silas out. Then came the question that matters more than every political controversy, financial concern, and religious argument combined: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” **The man responsible for keeping prisoners behind bars suddenly discovered that he was the one who needed deliverance.**

Paul and Silas answered immediately: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Notice that the promise is attached to believing on Christ, not performing a religious ceremony. The expression concerning his household does not mean one man's faith automatically saves his wife, children, and relatives. Verse 32 explains that the Word of the Lord was spoken to him and to all who were in his house. Each needed the saving message. Verse 33 records the subsequent washing of the apostles' stripes and baptism, while verse 34 describes the rejoicing associated with believing in God. These events have their proper place, but they must not be moved backward and inserted into the answer as additional requirements for justification. The jailer was not saved because he washed somebody's wounds or provided a meal. **The apostolic answer was believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and no religious committee has been authorized to amend it.**

The question also demonstrates that a clear Gospel invitation need not be complicated. The jailer did not ask how to become an accomplished theologian, how to establish a successful ministry, or how to produce a lifetime of acceptable Christian conduct. He asked how to be saved. The answer identified the Saviour. Of course, the meaning of that answer required explanation, and Paul and Silas preached the Word to him. A sinner must

understand whom he is trusting and why Christ can save him. First Corinthians 15:3–4 explains His death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. But the response remains faith in Christ. **If a man asks how to escape a burning building, showing him the exit is considerably more useful than handing him a complete architectural history of the property. The evangelist should understand enough doctrine to explain salvation without making the explanation more difficult than the salvation God offers.**

2. Receiving Christ — Saving Faith Is More Than Religious Agreement

John 1:12 declares, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Notice how the passage explains receiving Christ. It identifies those who receive Him as those who believe on His name. The following verse establishes that the new birth is of God rather than human ancestry or natural effort. A sinner does not become God's child by being born into a Christian family, attending a particular church, or undergoing an outward ceremony. He receives Christ through believing on Him. The historical setting concerns the eternal Word who became flesh and came unto His own, yet His own received Him not. John contrasts rejection of Christ with receiving Him. **The issue is not whether a sinner has been introduced to Christian vocabulary. The issue is whether he has believed on the biblical Saviour to whom that vocabulary ought to direct him.**

John 3:16–18 establishes the same distinction. The Lord declared, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Verse 18 states, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already." Those words were spoken in the setting of Christ's earthly ministry, before the complete revelation of His finished sacrifice and resurrection had been proclaimed through Paul. Nevertheless, they unmistakably identify believing on the Son as the dividing line between condemnation and life. The individual does not escape condemnation by admiring Jesus, praising Christian morality, or agreeing that the Bible contains helpful principles. The person must believe on Him. **Knowing that a physician exists is not the same as entrusting yourself to his treatment, and knowing that Jesus died is not the same as relying upon His death for your salvation.**

This distinction must be explained carefully because saving faith is neither blind religious excitement nor merely repeating doctrinal facts without relying upon Christ. A man may acknowledge that Jesus Christ lived, was crucified, and is worshipped by Christians while continuing to trust his own righteousness for heaven. Another may believe that Christ provides some assistance but still depend upon baptism, sacraments, or personal obedience to complete salvation. Neither has understood the sufficiency of Christ's

finished work. Romans 4:5 declares, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Faith rests upon the One who justifies, not upon the sinner's ability to justify himself. **The question is not whether Jesus Christ appears somewhere in your religious beliefs. The question is whether He alone is the One upon whom you are depending for eternal life.**

3. Romans 10:9–13 — Confession, Belief, and Calling Upon the Lord

Romans 10:9 declares, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Verse 10 continues, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” These verses must be read within Paul's discussion of the righteousness of God received through faith, particularly his concern for Israel in Romans 9–11. Romans 10:3 identifies Israel's error of seeking to establish its own righteousness rather than submitting to God's righteousness. Verse 4 declares that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Paul then explains the accessibility of the message of faith. His concern is not to replace righteousness by faith with a new religious performance involving particular spoken words. **A man who turns Romans 10 into salvation by verbal achievement has managed to contradict the very argument Paul is making in the chapter.**

What, then, is the relationship between believing and confessing? The passage joins genuine faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ with acknowledging Him rather than remaining committed to unbelief. Biblical faith is not confidence in an imaginary saviour or a religious figure whose resurrection is denied. The Lord Jesus who saves is the Christ whom God raised from the dead. Romans 10:11 declares, “For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” Notice that believing remains central. An outward confession may express genuine inward faith, but words spoken without faith cannot produce justification. Neither should the passage be twisted into a claim that an individual physically unable to speak cannot receive eternal life. **God does not save sinners because their vocal cords successfully perform a religious exercise. He saves those who believe on His Son.**

Romans 10:13 adds, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” That promise must not be isolated from verse 14, which asks, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” Paul establishes the relationship between faith and calling upon the Lord. Calling is not presented as a magical collection of syllables possessing saving power independently of belief. A sinner may express his faith by calling upon Christ for salvation, but the expression must not become a substitute for the faith it is supposed to express. The individual who repeats words while rejecting the Gospel has not

discovered a loophole in God's plan of redemption. **Romans 10 does not establish a heavenly password system. It proclaims salvation through the risen Lord Jesus Christ, upon whom sinners must believe.**

4. Prayer, Handshakes, Altar Calls, and Decision Cards — The Outward Act Is Not the New Birth

A sinner may naturally express his faith through prayer. There is nothing wrong with helping someone understand how to speak to the Lord, particularly when the individual has little familiarity with prayer. But the prayer must never be presented as a formula that automatically produces salvation. Some people become so occupied remembering the correct words that they lose sight of the Saviour to whom those words should be directed. Others repeat a prayer merely to satisfy an enthusiastic Christian who refuses to end the conversation until a decision has been recorded. The Bible does not teach that a prescribed arrangement of religious sentences regenerates a human being. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, not of works. **A sinner is not saved because he successfully repeats what the preacher says. He is saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ whom the preacher ought to be explaining.**

The same distinction applies to walking an aisle, kneeling at an altar, raising a hand, or shaking a preacher's hand. None of these physical movements possesses independent saving power. If a preacher invites those who desire to trust Christ to come forward, that may provide an opportunity for personal explanation and instruction. If someone expresses his willingness to believe through a handshake, the gesture may communicate something meaningful. But the outward action must never be confused with the inward reality of faith. John 5:24 promises everlasting life to the one who hears Christ's Word and believes on Him who sent Him. It does not attach eternal life to reaching the front of a building before the music stops. **You can walk an aisle without walking by faith, kneel at an altar without trusting Christ, and shake a preacher's hand without ever receiving the Saviour.**

Decision cards require particular caution. They may provide useful information concerning someone who has professed faith, requested additional instruction, or expressed interest in further conversation. But they cannot establish whether regeneration has occurred. A card may record what someone said; it cannot reveal everything occurring in that person's heart. The same is true of impressive reports announcing hundreds of conversions after a highly emotional service. We should rejoice when sinners genuinely believe on Christ, but we should never confuse an outward response with certain knowledge of another person's salvation. First Corinthians 3:6 reminds us that God gives the increase. **A decision card is a piece of paper, not a page torn from the Lamb's book of life. The preacher can record**

a profession, but only God knows perfectly whether the individual has genuinely believed.

5. The Danger of Manipulation — Conviction Must Not Be Manufactured

Second Corinthians 6:2 declares, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 while appealing to the Corinthians concerning the grace of God and the ministry of reconciliation. The passage establishes the seriousness of responding to God's gracious message rather than treating salvation as an insignificant matter that can be postponed indefinitely. But its urgency does not authorize a preacher to invent information about the listener's immediate future. No evangelist knows that a particular individual will die before sunrise unless God has actually revealed such information, and Scripture gives no permission to manufacture prophetic warnings for the purpose of obtaining decisions. **It is one thing to tell a sinner that tomorrow is not guaranteed. It is another thing to pretend that God has privately informed you his funeral will occur before breakfast.**

Emotional manipulation frequently appears when the preacher becomes more interested in producing a visible response than explaining the Gospel. Music may be prolonged until someone finally moves. Public attention may be directed toward a hesitant individual. A listener may be told that refusing to come forward proves hatred toward God, or that failing to repeat a prayer demonstrates an unusually wicked heart. None of those techniques possesses biblical authority to produce saving faith. Romans 10:17 declares, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The Spirit of God uses divine truth to convict and enlighten; human pressure cannot replace His work. **The Holy Ghost does not require a preacher to operate the emotions of a congregation like a salesman adjusting the lighting in a showroom. God's Word possesses power that human stagecraft cannot manufacture.**

This does not mean faithful preaching must be cold, lifeless, or indifferent to the eternal condition of the lost. Paul testified in Romans 9:1–3 concerning his great sorrow for his kinsmen, and Romans 10:1 records his heart's desire and prayer for Israel's salvation. Genuine concern is entirely appropriate. Warnings concerning sin, judgment, and Hell must be delivered when Scripture requires them. An evangelist may appeal earnestly for someone to trust Christ, but earnest persuasion is not the same as coercion. The truth must remain accurate, the decision must not be manufactured, and the listener must understand what he is being asked to believe. **There is a difference between pleading with a sinner because eternity matters and pressuring him because the preacher wants another number for the evening report. One concerns the soul; the other concerns the statistics.**

6. When the Sinner Hesitates — Answer Questions Without Pressuring a Profession

Not every person who hears the Gospel immediately understands it, and not every hesitation establishes hardened unbelief. Some individuals have received conflicting religious teaching for decades. Others have been told that salvation requires baptism, church membership, moral improvement, or a promise to surrender every area of life. Still others understand little about sin, redemption, or the resurrection. When such individuals ask questions, the Christian should answer patiently rather than treating their uncertainty as an inconvenience. Acts 8:30–35 records Philip asking the Ethiopian eunuch whether he understood the Scripture he was reading. The man acknowledged his need for guidance, and Philip began at the same Scripture and preached Jesus. **A Christian who becomes irritated because an unsaved man does not understand the Gospel immediately should remember that he himself was not born knowing the book of Romans.**

Second Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to be gentle, patient, and capable of teaching those who oppose themselves. That does not mean permitting endless foolish disputes or compromising essential doctrine. It means answering sincere questions without unnecessary hostility. If someone asks whether baptism is required, explain salvation by grace through faith. If someone wonders whether Christ can forgive serious sins, explain the sufficiency of His blood. If the person fears he must achieve complete moral reform before believing, explain Romans 4:5. If the listener wants additional time to examine the Scriptures, encourage him to do so without pretending that the passage of a few minutes automatically determines his eternal destiny. **A fisherman who jerks the line before the fish has taken the bait may succeed only in retrieving an empty hook. Wisdom knows the difference between presenting the Gospel and forcing a response.**

Sometimes the person simply declines the invitation. He may understand the message but refuse to believe it, or he may remain unwilling to discuss the subject. The Christian must not manufacture a profession by continuing to pressure him until he finally agrees merely to escape the conversation. Acts 17:32 records that some mocked Paul's preaching of the resurrection, while others desired to hear him again. Paul did not force their agreement. The believer should remain courteous, willing to answer future questions, and concerned enough to pray for further opportunity. The refusal of one conversation does not necessarily eliminate every future possibility. **A forced profession may satisfy the evangelist's desire for a result, but it cannot manufacture saving faith. Better an honest refusal than a false assurance built upon words spoken merely to end an uncomfortable conversation.**

7. Assurance Must Rest Upon God's Word — Not the Memory of a Religious Performance

After someone professes faith in Christ, the evangelist must be careful concerning assurance. There is a tremendous difference between explaining the promises of God and announcing with absolute certainty that another person has been regenerated because he performed an outward action. First John 5:11–12 declares, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Verse 13 explains that these things were written so believers may know that they have eternal life. The foundation of assurance is God's testimony concerning His Son. **If a man must obtain confidence in salvation by remembering the exact words of a prayer twenty years earlier, he has placed his assurance upon his memory rather than the promise of God.**

The same distinction applies when a person describes an emotional experience associated with his profession of faith. Some believers remember extraordinary relief or joy when they trusted Christ. Others remember little emotional excitement but understood the Gospel and believed it. Neither emotional intensity nor the absence of dramatic feelings determines whether the promise of God is true. John 5:24 declares that the one who believes has everlasting life and has passed from death unto life. Ephesians 1:13 identifies believers as sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the Gospel. The evangelist should therefore direct the professing believer to Scripture rather than repeatedly demanding that he reproduce an earlier emotional experience. **Feelings may rise and fall like the weather, but eternal life does not become temporary whenever a Christian has a difficult afternoon.**

At the same time, genuine assurance must not become careless assurance. A person who openly denies the Gospel while relying upon a childhood prayer needs the truth explained, not a blanket declaration that the remembered ceremony guarantees salvation. The evangelist cannot see the heart perfectly. He should ask what the individual believes concerning Christ and where his confidence rests. If the person understands and believes the Gospel, Scripture provides the basis for assurance. If he remains confused, further instruction is necessary. The answer is not to demand repeated salvation prayers whenever uncertainty appears. **God does not save a sinner by one genuine act of faith and then require him to keep repeating a religious formula to make certain the transaction remains valid. Assurance rests upon the Saviour who saves, not the evangelist who witnessed or the ceremony that accompanied the profession.**

CONCLUSION

A clear Gospel invitation is an essential part of personal evangelism because the sinner needs to understand how God's provision of salvation is received. The Christian should not conclude a conversation after explaining biblical history without identifying the personal

significance of Christ's death and resurrection. The listener must understand that he is a sinner, that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, and that eternal life is God's gift through faith in Him. The invitation should direct the sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, not to perform an outward ceremony or promise future obedience as the purchase price of justification. Acts 16:31 gives the answer plainly. **The Gospel is not merely information to be admired. It is God's saving message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, upon whom the sinner is called to believe.**

We must also refuse the temptation to manufacture visible results through emotional pressure, misleading assurances, or unnecessary religious procedures. A preacher may explain the Gospel with passion, compassion, and urgency without manipulating the hearer. He may invite a response without demanding a public performance. He may answer questions without becoming impatient and warn of judgment without inventing frightening details. His responsibility is to proclaim Christ faithfully. The new birth is God's work, and no amount of human persuasion can substitute for genuine faith. Religious decisions may be recorded, but they must never be confused automatically with regeneration. **The evangelist should desire genuine conversions, not impressive statistics. Heaven is not impressed by a crowded altar if the people standing there have never understood the Saviour.**

The final issue is simple, solemn, and eternal. What is the sinner trusting for salvation? If his confidence rests upon his baptism, church membership, personal righteousness, religious ceremony, repeated prayer, or emotional experience, he has misunderstood the basis of justification. If he believes God's testimony concerning Jesus Christ and relies upon the crucified and risen Saviour, he rests upon the One who alone can save. Romans 6:23 declares that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. John 3:16 promises everlasting life to those believing on God's Son. Acts 16:31 commands belief on the Lord Jesus Christ. **The Christian's responsibility is not to force a sinner across an imaginary decision line before the meeting ends. It is to place the Gospel before him so clearly that he understands whom God has provided, what Christ has accomplished, and what it means to believe. A raised hand cannot save him. A handshake cannot save him. An altar cannot save him. A decision card cannot save him. Jesus Christ can save him, and the only acceptable invitation is one that directs his faith to the Saviour rather than to the religious performance accompanying the decision.**

10 of 10 — Personal Evangelism: After the Gospel Is Given — Assurance, False Professions, Family Witnessing, and the Work That Continues

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 3:6–8 (KJV): "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

INTRODUCTION

One of the most dangerous mistakes in personal evangelism is imagining that the entire responsibility of the Christian ends when somebody raises a hand, repeats a prayer, walks down an aisle, signs a decision card, or announces that he has accepted Jesus Christ. Apparently, according to some modern evangelistic methods, the moment a decision is recorded, the work is finished, the statistics are updated, and everybody can proceed to the next religious production. But the Apostle Paul described a considerably different arrangement in 1 Corinthians 3:6–8: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." There is planting, there is watering, and there is the increase that only God can give. The passage concerns the Corinthians' foolish divisions over individual ministers, but its principle exposes the difference between human service and divine results. **The Christian is responsible for faithfully presenting the Gospel, but he cannot manufacture the new birth, and he has no authority to declare a sinner regenerated merely because the fellow successfully completed an evangelistic procedure.**

The other danger is treating the newly saved believer as though he has just entered a religious probation program where his eternal life will be revoked if his performance becomes unsatisfactory. One crowd assures people they are saved because they repeated seventeen words after a preacher. Another tells them that if they fail to attend every service, surrender every possession, abandon every sinful habit immediately, and demonstrate sufficient religious enthusiasm, their salvation was either counterfeit or has somehow expired. Between those two extremes, the actual promises of God disappear. John 5:24 declares that the believer "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." First John 5:13 declares that believers may know they have eternal life. Neither passage directs the Christian to seek assurance in an emotional experience or a lifetime of successful religious performance. **The Lord Jesus Christ did not purchase temporary life and then place the believer on a renewable subscription plan administered by the local church.**

Personal evangelism therefore continues in several important ways after the Gospel has been presented. The believer who genuinely trusts Christ needs sound instruction

concerning assurance, eternal security, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and Christian growth. The person who merely makes an outward profession needs the Gospel clarified rather than a false assurance stamped upon his religious record. Unsaved relatives and friends may require years of patient witnessing, consistent Christian conduct, and repeated opportunities to hear the truth. Those who reject the Gospel must not be manipulated into professions merely to satisfy an evangelist's expectations. And throughout the entire process, the Christian must remember that he plants and waters while God gives the increase. **We are not commissioned to collect religious trophies, manufacture impressive conversion statistics, or turn human decisions into evidence of our spiritual superiority. We are commissioned to preach Jesus Christ faithfully, trust the Word of God, and remember that the salvation of a soul belongs to the Saviour, not the salesman.**

1. Assurance of Salvation — God's Promise Is Greater Than Human Feelings

John 5:24 contains one of the strongest declarations of assurance in the King James Bible: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” Notice the three expressions concerning the believer. He **hath** everlasting life. He **shall not come into condemnation**. He **is passed from death unto life**. The Lord does not describe a person who might eventually receive eternal life after proving his religious worthiness. He describes a present possession and an accomplished passage from death into life. The historical setting concerns Christ's earthly ministry and His relationship with the Father, but the promise concerning life through believing agrees with the Gospel of grace revealed through Paul. **When Jesus Christ says the believer has everlasting life, the Christian has no business replacing that promise with the uncertainty of his own changing emotions.**

First John 5:11–13 establishes the foundation of assurance with equally unmistakable language. Verse 11 declares, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Verse 12 continues, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Then verse 13 explains why these things were written: “that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” Notice where the life is located. It is in God's Son. Notice who possesses it. The one who has the Son. Notice what the Scriptures provide. Knowledge based upon God's testimony. The believer's assurance therefore rests upon the trustworthiness of the Lord and His Word, not upon an unusually emotional conversion experience. **If eternal life depended upon how saved a person felt every morning, some Christians would lose their salvation before breakfast and spend the remainder of the day trying to find it again.**

This distinction is particularly important when helping a new believer. Some people experience extraordinary joy when they trust Christ. Others are quiet, thoughtful, or overwhelmed by the seriousness of what they have understood. Neither emotional reaction determines the validity of God's promise. Romans 5:1 declares, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” That peace concerns the believer's standing before God, not merely a pleasant sensation that disappears whenever circumstances become difficult. If someone asks how he can know he is saved, direct him to the Gospel he believed and the promises God has given. Do not merely remind him that he walked an aisle or repeated a prayer. Ask where his faith rests. **The Christian's assurance should not be tied to the memory of his hand moving toward a preacher. It should be anchored to the Saviour whose nail-pierced hands accomplished redemption.**

2. Eternal Security — The Believer Is Kept by Christ and Sealed by the Holy Spirit

John 10:27–29 establishes the security of those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He declares, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” He then identifies the Father's power to preserve them and concludes that no man can pluck them out of His Father's hand. In its immediate setting, Christ is addressing the Jewish audience concerning His identity as the Shepherd, but His declaration concerning eternal life and divine preservation must not be emptied of its meaning. Notice who gives life. Christ does. Notice what kind of life He gives. Eternal life. Notice His promise. They shall never perish. **If the Saviour says His sheep shall never perish, the preacher announcing that they may perish next Thursday needs to explain why his opinion outranks the Shepherd's promise.**

The Pauline revelation confirms the believer's security through the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 declares, “in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” Verse 14 identifies the Spirit as “the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” Notice the order. The Ephesians heard the word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation, believed, and were sealed. The sealing was not awarded after they demonstrated twenty years of satisfactory religious performance. Ephesians 4:30 instructs believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, “whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” The same passage that acknowledges the possibility of grieving the Spirit confirms the duration of His sealing. **The Holy Spirit is not a temporary visitor who packs His bags every time a believer disappoints Him. God seals His purchased possession until the appointed redemption.**

Now this doctrine must not be twisted into permission for wickedness. Romans 6:1 asks, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Paul answers, “God forbid.” The believer is commanded to live according to his new position in Christ, and Hebrews 12:6 teaches that the Lord chastens those He loves. First Corinthians 3:15 also establishes the possibility of loss at the judgment seat of Christ while declaring, “but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” Salvation and reward are not identical matters. The believer's conduct has consequences, but those consequences must not be confused with the cancellation of justification. The judgment seat of Christ concerns the believer's service; the Great White Throne concerns the final judgment described in Revelation 20. **Eternal security does not make sin harmless. It makes the believer's salvation dependent upon Christ's faithfulness instead of the impossible prospect of his own perfection.**

3. False Professions — A Religious Decision Is Not Necessarily the New Birth

One of the most serious responsibilities following an evangelistic conversation is distinguishing a genuine profession of faith from an outward response that may conceal continued unbelief. Matthew 7:21–23 records the Lord Jesus warning that not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven. He describes individuals appealing to impressive religious activities while remaining unknown to Him. The historical setting belongs to the Sermon on the Mount and must not be used to overthrow Paul's doctrine of justification by faith under grace. Nevertheless, it establishes that religious speech and outward activity do not automatically prove an individual's relationship with God. A person may use the correct vocabulary, participate in religious ceremonies, and sincerely believe himself saved while depending upon something other than the biblical Saviour. **The ability to pronounce the name of Jesus Christ is not the same thing as possessing eternal life through faith in Him.**

Acts 8 provides another sobering example in Simon, who professed belief and was baptized but later attempted to obtain spiritual power with money. Peter rebuked him sharply, declaring in Acts 8:21, “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” The narrative belongs to the transitional history of Acts and concerns particular apostolic circumstances, but it demonstrates the danger of confusing outward religious participation with an upright response to divine truth. The Christian should not appoint himself the infallible inspector of every other person's salvation. Second Timothy 2:19 declares, “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” Yet neither should he pronounce somebody unquestionably regenerated merely because a ceremony has been completed. **A baptismal certificate proves that a baptism was recorded. It does not establish that the individual believed the Gospel any more than a wedding invitation proves the marriage will be faithful.**

The proper response to uncertainty is not suspicion toward every professing Christian, but a clear examination of what the individual believes. Ask what Jesus Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection. Ask whether the person is trusting Christ alone or depending upon baptism, personal righteousness, religious ceremonies, or a remembered prayer. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies the Gospel, and Romans 4:5 establishes justification through believing on Him who justifies the ungodly. Do not require a new believer to demonstrate advanced biblical knowledge before recognizing his profession, and do not make subsequent spiritual growth the price of his salvation. At the same time, never manufacture assurance by declaring that repeating particular words guarantees regeneration. **The issue is not whether the person completed the evangelist's instructions. The issue is whether he believed God's testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.**

4. The New Believer's First Steps — Scripture, Prayer, Fellowship, and Growth

When someone genuinely trusts Jesus Christ, the responsibility of Christian instruction begins. First Peter 2:2 declares, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” Peter was writing to believers facing trials, and his exhortation establishes the importance of spiritual nourishment through God's Word. A newborn child is not expected to possess the strength, understanding, and abilities of a grown adult. Neither should the newly saved Christian be expected to understand every doctrinal controversy before he has begun reading the Scriptures. Encourage him to read the King James Bible, beginning with passages that establish the Gospel and the believer's position in Christ. Romans, John, Ephesians, and other New Testament books furnish abundant instruction. **A Christian who expects spiritual growth without feeding upon the Word of God resembles a farmer who plants seed, refuses to water the field, and then complains because the harvest has not appeared.**

Prayer and fellowship belong alongside Bible study as important responsibilities of Christian living. Philippians 4:6 instructs believers to make their requests known unto God through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Hebrews 4:16 encourages access to the throne of grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:25 warns against forsaking the assembling of believers together. The local church should provide faithful preaching, sound doctrine, fellowship, and opportunities for service, while guarding against the corruption of salvation by religious works. The new believer needs instruction in prayer, the proper place of water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the responsibilities of membership in a sound church. But none of these matters should be presented as additional payments necessary to maintain eternal life. **The church is a place for saved people to receive instruction**

and fellowship, not a religious repair shop authorized to issue or revoke the eternal life purchased by Christ.

Spiritual growth also requires the distinction between position and practice. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, while verse 10 explains that believers are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The order is not negotiable. The believer does not perform good works to become God's child; he should perform them because he has become God's child through faith in Christ. Colossians 2:6 instructs, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” Growth may involve learning, correction, chastening, repentance concerning particular sins, and increasing obedience to Scripture. It does not transform salvation into a probationary contract. Second Timothy 2:15 commands diligent study and rightly dividing the word of truth. **The newborn Christian needs a Bible, sound teaching, prayer, and fellowship—not a religious supervisor standing over him with a stopwatch, measuring how quickly he becomes respectable enough to remain saved.**

5. Witnessing to Unsaved Family Members — The People Closest to Us May Be the Hardest to Reach

Romans 10:1 reveals the Apostle Paul's burden for his own people: “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” That verse concerns literal Israel, and Paul's national burden must not be converted into a statement that Israel has been replaced by the Church. Nevertheless, his concern demonstrates the proper attitude toward people we know and love who remain without the Gospel. Romans 9:2–3 records his great heaviness and continual sorrow concerning his kinsmen according to the flesh. Paul did not consider their religious heritage sufficient for salvation. He understood that they needed the righteousness of God through Christ. The same concern should characterize Christians with unsaved spouses, parents, children, brothers, sisters, and longtime friends. **It is a strange contradiction when a believer can express tremendous concern for strangers across the world while treating the spiritual condition of his own household as somebody else's responsibility.**

Family witnessing, however, requires wisdom because familiarity often creates difficulties that do not arise when speaking with strangers. A husband may have heard his wife's testimony many times and become resistant to further discussion. Parents may continue remembering the foolishness of their child's earlier life and find his conversion difficult to take seriously. Children may feel pressured to repeat religious words merely to please their parents. First Peter 3:1–2 addresses believing wives whose husbands are disobedient to the Word, emphasizing the testimony of godly conduct. First Corinthians 7:12–16 discusses mixed marriages and the possibility that an unbelieving spouse may yet be saved. Neither

passage guarantees that a relative will believe because another family member behaves correctly. **A Christian cannot argue his spouse into regeneration, inherit salvation for his children, or obtain eternal life for his parents through persistence alone. He can witness faithfully, pray earnestly, and live consistently before them.**

There is also a difference between patiently witnessing and turning every family gathering into an exhausting religious confrontation. A holiday meal does not automatically become more spiritual because someone demands an immediate public profession from an unwilling relative. Ephesians 4:29 instructs believers to use speech that ministers grace unto the hearers, and Colossians 4:6 requires wisdom in answering others. Maintain opportunities for conversation where possible, answer sincere questions, and refuse to conceal the Gospel. But do not use affection, financial dependence, parental authority, or family guilt to manufacture a profession. A child should understand the message rather than merely discover which words make an anxious parent happy. **A forced profession may silence the discussion for an afternoon, but it cannot open the gates of heaven. The objective is genuine faith in Christ, not temporary peace around the dinner table.**

6. When the Gospel Is Rejected — Patience, Prayer, and the Door That May Open Later

Not everyone who hears the Gospel will immediately believe it. Acts 17:32 records that when Paul's hearers encountered the doctrine of the resurrection, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear thee again of this matter.” Verse 34 explains that certain individuals believed. The same message produced different responses. Some rejected it, some postponed further consideration, and others received it. The Christian must recognize that he cannot dictate the timing or outcome of another person's response. This does not diminish the seriousness of unbelief or justify concealing the urgency of salvation. Hebrews 9:27 establishes the certainty of death and judgment. But the evangelist has no authority to invent a deadline or pressure somebody into saying words he does not mean. **A man who refuses the Gospel today remains in a dangerous condition, but forcing him to announce belief tomorrow will not produce the faith he refuses to exercise.**

Repeated opportunities may nevertheless prove valuable. A person who rejects the Gospel during an initial conversation may later ask questions concerning Scripture, judgment, salvation, or the identity of Christ. The Christian should remain prepared to respond. First Peter 3:15 instructs believers to be ready to give an answer concerning their hope, while 2 Timothy 2:24–25 calls for patience in teaching those who oppose themselves. Sound Gospel tracts may provide an additional opportunity when they clearly explain Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and salvation by grace through faith. The value lies in the biblical message, not the paper itself. Literature should be offered appropriately rather than forced upon unwilling people or left where it creates unnecessary offense. **A tract may be**

read months after it is received, but scattering paper without discernment does not automatically establish that anyone has heard or understood the Gospel.

There are also circumstances when the most appropriate response is to end the conversation courteously. Some individuals become hostile, repeatedly interrupt, demand endless arguments, or plainly refuse further discussion. Second Timothy 2:23 warns against foolish disputes that produce strife, and Titus 3:10 instructs concerning the rejection of a heretick after proper admonition. The Christian is not commanded to pursue every hostile person indefinitely or permit himself to become the object of endless abuse. Nor should he respond to rejection with threats, insults, or personal retaliation. Pray for the person where appropriate and remain willing to answer a sincere question if another opportunity arises. Romans 12:18 instructs believers, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” **The Gospel is worth defending, but your pride is not. Sometimes the wisest thing a faithful witness can do after presenting Christ clearly is close his mouth and leave the results with God.**

7. Planting, Watering, and God's Increase — Faithfulness Matters More Than Religious Statistics

First Corinthians 3:6–8 brings the entire matter into focus. Paul declares, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” He then explains that neither the planter nor the one watering possesses the power responsible for the increase. The passage concerns divisions among the Corinthians who were elevating particular ministers and identifying themselves according to human loyalties. Paul corrects their foolishness by showing that ministers are servants through whom God works. The principle is essential for personal evangelism. One Christian may introduce the Gospel to a person who has never heard it. Another may explain a difficult passage. A third may answer objections that have troubled the individual for years. Eventually, the person may believe on Jesus Christ. **The Christian who plants is not inferior because another believer witnesses the response, and the Christian who waters is not the Saviour because he happens to be present when the sinner believes.**

This principle should destroy both pride and discouragement in Gospel service. The preacher who boasts that he personally saved hundreds of souls has forgotten that salvation belongs to Jesus Christ. The Christian who becomes discouraged because nobody has responded visibly to his witnessing should remember that faithful proclamation is not measured exclusively through immediate results. First Corinthians 3:8 declares that each servant shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. The emphasis is accountability for service, not ownership of the people reached. Second Corinthians 5:10 identifies the judgment seat of Christ, where believers' works will be

examined. The judgment seat must not be confused with the Great White Throne of Revelation 20, nor should Christian rewards be confused with justification. **The Lord will not need an evangelist's inflated statistics to determine whether the man served faithfully. Heaven possesses better records than a church office armed with a calculator.**

The responsibility continues throughout the Christian life. Some believers have years of opportunity before them; others may have far less time than they imagine. James 4:14 reminds us that life is “even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” That should encourage serious service without producing frantic religious manipulation. Pray for the lost. Study the Scriptures. Explain the Gospel accurately. Encourage those who profess faith to establish their assurance upon God's promises and grow through His Word. Continue witnessing to relatives who remain unbelieving. Answer sincere questions and refuse foolish disputes. Recognize that different Christians may labor in the same spiritual field without possessing identical opportunities. **The Christian is not required to manufacture the harvest, but he certainly ought to be found working in the field. A man who never plants should not spend his life complaining that he has never seen anything grow.**

CONCLUSION

The work of personal evangelism does not end when the invitation ends. A genuine new believer needs the assurance of God's Word, instruction concerning eternal security, and encouragement to grow through Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and obedience. A person who makes a superficial profession needs the Gospel clarified rather than the false comfort of an outward ceremony. Unsaved family members require patience, prayer, and continued concern. Those who reject the message must be treated truthfully without coercion or unnecessary hostility. Throughout these responsibilities, the Christian must distinguish what God has commanded him to do from what only God possesses the power to accomplish. Romans 1:16 declares that the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” **The power is in the Gospel, the salvation is accomplished by the Saviour, and the Christian is privileged to carry the message. Confuse those responsibilities, and evangelism becomes a human performance instead of faithful service.**

We must also refuse to measure the spiritual value of personal evangelism solely through numbers that can be reported, published, or displayed before a congregation. Numbers may record professions, baptisms, attendance, and other outward events, but they cannot establish infallibly the eternal condition of every individual involved. God knows those who belong to Him. The Christian should rejoice when a sinner genuinely believes on Christ

without transforming that person's salvation into a personal trophy. Paul warned the Corinthians against elevating human ministers above their proper place, and the lesson remains desperately necessary. Some Christians will sow for years without personally witnessing the final response. Others will enter a conversation at the moment someone is prepared to believe. **The fellow who receives the applause is not necessarily the one who performed the most faithful labor, and the servant who receives little earthly recognition may possess an abundant account before the judgment seat of Christ.**

As this study of personal evangelism concludes, the responsibility remains as simple and serious as the Gospel itself. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is the gift of God, received by grace through faith, apart from human works. The Christian must know that message, proclaim it clearly, answer objections faithfully, invite sinners to believe on Christ, and continue serving after the conversation has ended. His responsibility is not to manipulate decisions, manufacture conversions, or build a reputation upon another person's profession. It is to remain faithful to the Saviour who purchased his own redemption. Romans 10:1 reveals Paul's earnest desire that his people might be saved, and 1 Corinthians 3:6 reminds us who gives the increase. **Do not spend your Christian life collecting statistics when you ought to be concerned about souls. Do not mistake a raised hand for a regenerated heart, a repeated prayer for saving faith, or a decision card for the book of life. Give the Gospel plainly. Trust the Word of God. Pray for those who remain lost. Teach those who genuinely believe. Plant when you have opportunity, water when another has planted, and never forget who gives the increase. The greatest privilege is not being able to say how many people you persuaded to make a decision. It is being found faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can save them.**

Personal Evangelism — How to Give the Gospel Clearly

Conclusion — The Message Has Been Given, but the Work Is Not Finished

We have reached the conclusion of this ten-part study on personal evangelism, but I do not want anybody to mistake the end of a series for the end of the responsibility. We have examined the sinner's condition, the identity of Jesus Christ, His finished work upon Calvary, salvation by grace through faith, the proper relationship between repentance and believing, the wisdom necessary to begin Gospel conversations, the objections that frequently interrupt them, the invitation to trust Christ, and the responsibilities that follow a profession of faith. We have opened the King James Bible and examined what God actually

said rather than what religious tradition has added to His words. But now comes the question that no amount of additional study can answer for us: What are we going to do with what we have learned? A Christian can possess an accurate understanding of the Gospel and still spend the remainder of his earthly life without explaining it to a single lost person. **Knowing how to give the Gospel is not the same thing as giving it. A fisherman may own the finest equipment in the county, but nobody has ever caught a fish by hanging his tackle on the wall and admiring it.**

The Apostle Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." There is a responsibility in those words that modern Christianity desperately needs to recover. Paul was describing the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to him and his fellow laborers, and the saving message they proclaimed remains the message Christians must carry today. An ambassador does not invent his own message, negotiate away his commission, or substitute his personal achievements for the authority of the one he represents. He delivers what has been entrusted to him. Yet we have Christians who can spend an entire afternoon debating the condition of the nation, criticizing the failures of the churches, reviewing prophetic developments, and discussing every imaginable religious controversy without once mentioning how a sinner can be saved. It is astonishing how much time can be devoted to defending Christianity while neglecting the Christ who stands at its center. **The Lord did not leave His people in this world merely to become professional observers of its wickedness. He left us with the message of reconciliation through His Son.**

The first truth we must never forget is that mankind is lost apart from Jesus Christ. Romans 3:23 declares, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." That includes the most respectable person in the community and the most notorious criminal in the penitentiary. Human righteousness may impress other human beings, but it cannot satisfy the holiness of God. Romans 6:23 declares, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The sinner does not need an improved religious reputation, a more impressive personal history, or a collection of charitable accomplishments presented as payment for his transgressions. He needs redemption. We should therefore reject the sentimental religious nonsense that tells people they are essentially good and merely need encouragement to discover their spiritual potential. The Bible describes a considerably more serious condition. **A man standing under divine condemnation does not need somebody to compliment his character while the judgment approaches. He needs somebody to tell him about the Saviour who can deliver him from it.**

Neither must we forget who that Saviour is. John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 14 announces that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” First Timothy 3:16 declares, “God was manifest in the flesh.” The Lord Jesus Christ is not merely a remarkable moral instructor, an unusually gifted prophet, a religious philosopher, or a spiritual example selected from the same fallen human race as ourselves. He is the eternal Son of God, born of a virgin, genuinely human, and absolutely without sin. His identity is inseparable from His ability to save. A sinful man cannot offer himself as a spotless sacrifice for other sinners. A created religious figure cannot replace the eternal Word who made all things. **If the Jesus being preached is not the Jesus revealed in Scripture, the message may contain enough religious vocabulary to fill a dictionary, but it does not contain the biblical Saviour.** Personal evangelism must therefore identify Christ correctly before asking the sinner to trust Him.

And then we come again to the heart of the Gospel. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Those words must never become so familiar that we lose sight of their significance. The sinless Son of God died for sins He never committed. His blood accomplished redemption. His burial testified to the reality of His death. His resurrection established the victory of the living Saviour. Second Corinthians 5:21 declares, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” This was not a tragic religious misunderstanding that happened to produce an inspiring story. It was the accomplishment of redemption through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. **Calvary was not God giving mankind another opportunity to earn salvation. It was God providing the salvation mankind could never earn. The empty tomb was not merely an encouraging ending to a sorrowful account. It was the declaration that the Saviour who died for sinners had conquered death.**

That finished work is the reason salvation must remain by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” We have spent considerable time examining the religious additions that corrupt this message, and I make no apology for doing so. Baptismal regeneration, sacramental salvation, justification through religious obedience, and systems demanding a lifetime promise of surrendered conduct as the price of eternal life all place human performance where Scripture places the finished work of Christ. Romans 4:5 declares that God justifies the ungodly who believe on Him. He does not instruct the sinner to make himself godly enough to qualify for justification. Good works have their proper place in the Christian life, but Ephesians 2:10 places them after salvation

as the intended walk of those created in Christ Jesus. **Religion keeps attempting to collect payment for a debt Jesus Christ has already satisfied. The Gospel announces that the debt was paid by the blood of the Saviour, not by the future obedience of the sinner.**

The same doctrinal accuracy is necessary when explaining repentance. Acts 20:21 describes Paul's ministry as testifying "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance is biblical, necessary to understand, and never something we should dismiss merely because false teachers have abused the word. But neither may we turn it into a demand that sinners promise to abandon every known sin before God will receive them. A sinner must recognize his guilt, abandon false confidence, and believe God's testimony concerning His Son. That is not the same thing as purchasing salvation through a personal reformation agreement. God does not justify the ungodly because they have provided Him with a convincing prediction of their future conduct. He justifies through faith in Christ. **A man cannot cleanse himself before coming to the only One whose blood can wash away his sins. And the preacher who requires that cleansing before salvation has managed to place the cure on the other side of the disease.**

We must also understand what personal evangelism is not. It is not merely inviting people to church, distributing religious literature, participating in charitable activities, discussing spiritual subjects, or sharing an interesting account of our personal experiences. Those things may have legitimate places, but none automatically communicates the Gospel. A person can attend a Bible-believing church for years and remain lost. He can possess an impressive collection of religious books without understanding justification. He can donate generously to Christian causes while trusting his own righteousness. He can listen to thousands of sermons and still believe that water baptism, communion, or church membership is necessary to complete salvation. Romans 10:17 declares, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The saving message must actually be communicated. **You can invite a man to the finest church in town, seat him in the most comfortable pew, surround him with the friendliest congregation, and still leave him without eternal life if nobody explains the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

That is why we have also examined the practical matter of opening conversations. Colossians 4:5–6 instructs believers to walk wisely toward those who are without, redeeming the time, and to let their speech be "alway with grace, seasoned with salt." The Lord Jesus began His conversation with the Samaritan woman through a simple request for water and directed her toward everlasting life. Philip approached the Ethiopian eunuch by asking whether he understood the Scripture he was reading and then preached unto him Jesus. Paul reasoned with Jews from the Scriptures and confronted Gentile idolatry without

surrendering the truth. These examples should correct two opposite errors. Some Christians never speak because they are afraid of rejection. Others seem to believe that making themselves unnecessarily offensive demonstrates spiritual courage. **There is nothing cowardly about wisdom, and there is nothing courageous about foolishness. The purpose of opening a Gospel conversation is to provide an opportunity for the truth, not to prove how loudly the Christian can speak before somebody asks him to leave.**

We should pray for opportunities and prepare ourselves to recognize them. Colossians 4:3 records Paul's request for prayer that God would open a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ. The Christian should likewise ask the Lord for wisdom, appropriate occasions, and the courage necessary to communicate the Gospel. Those opportunities may arise through family conversations, questions from coworkers, encounters with neighbors, travel, correspondence, or unexpected discussions concerning death and eternity. Sometimes a direct question about salvation is appropriate. Sometimes a natural conversation provides the wiser beginning. A sound Gospel tract may communicate truth when a longer discussion is not possible, but the value lies in the Scripture it contains rather than the paper itself. **A Christian who prays for opportunities to witness ought to be prepared when the opportunity arrives. It makes little sense to ask God to open a door and then complain that someone might expect us to walk through it.**

We have also learned that keeping Christ the issue is essential. An unsaved person can introduce enough religious controversies to occupy the remainder of the week. He may ask about denominations, hypocritical preachers, supposed contradictions, human suffering, other religions, evolution, church history, or unusual passages of Scripture. Some questions are sincere and deserve thoughtful answers. Others may simply prevent the conversation from reaching the subject of personal salvation. Second Timothy 2:23 warns against foolish and unlearned questions that produce strife, while verses 24–25 instruct the Lord's servant to be patient and capable of teaching. We should never invent answers to preserve our reputation or become personally abusive toward someone who disagrees. But neither should we allow secondary controversies to swallow the Gospel. **A Christian may win an argument about every disputed subject in Scripture and still fail to tell the sinner why Jesus Christ died for him. The object is not to send a man home impressed with our intelligence. It is to make certain he understands the Saviour.**

There must also come a point when the sinner is told what God requires him to believe. Acts 16:30–31 records the Philippian jailer asking, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” They then spoke the Word of the Lord to those in his household. The response was

faith in Christ, not completing a prescribed religious performance. We should not be afraid to ask whether someone understands the Gospel and desires to trust Jesus Christ. But the invitation must remain honest. We cannot manipulate a sinner into regeneration through emotional pressure, public embarrassment, prolonged music, or repeated demands for a decision. **A preacher may convince somebody to raise his hand, walk down an aisle, or repeat a prayer merely to end an uncomfortable experience. But a reluctant religious performance is not the same thing as saving faith in Jesus Christ.**

This is especially important because outward religious decisions can create false assurance. A decision card can record a profession, but it cannot produce a new birth. A baptismal certificate identifies a ceremony, but it cannot guarantee that the individual believed the Gospel. A repeated prayer may express faith, but the words themselves possess no independent saving power. First John 5:11–12 declares that eternal life is in God's Son and that the one who has the Son has life. The object of saving faith is Jesus Christ, not the memory of something performed at the end of an evangelistic conversation. We must not become suspicious of every genuine profession, but neither should we pronounce somebody unquestionably regenerated because he satisfied the requirements of our chosen method. **The evangelist can record what a person said, but he cannot look into the heart with the authority of God. A man's name written on a church card is not the same thing as his name written in heaven.**

When someone genuinely trusts Christ, the responsibility of Christian instruction begins. John 5:24 declares that the believer has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation. John 10:28 records Christ's promise, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Ephesians 1:13–14 establishes the sealing of believers with the Holy Spirit of promise. These truths provide assurance grounded in God's Word rather than the uncertainty of human feelings. The new Christian should be encouraged to read the Bible, pray, fellowship with believers, obey sound doctrine, and grow in grace. But none of those duties must be presented as payments necessary to retain eternal life. **The Christian is not saved by good works, kept saved by good works, or finally admitted to heaven because his good works managed to outweigh his failures. His salvation rests upon Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is sufficient and whose promises are eternal.**

I am particularly concerned about the people closest to us who remain unsaved. A Christian may speak to strangers about the Gospel while avoiding the subject with his own relatives because the conversations are uncomfortable or have previously ended badly. An unsaved spouse, parent, child, brother, sister, or longtime friend may have heard the message many times without believing it. We cannot force salvation upon them, and we

should not transform every family gathering into an argument. But we should not surrender concern for their souls either. Romans 10:1 records Paul's declaration, “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” His burden concerned literal Israel, but his prayerful concern provides a serious example of caring about those who remain without Christ. We should pray, maintain a faithful testimony, answer sincere questions, and recognize appropriate opportunities. **A man cannot believe the Gospel for his wife, a mother cannot receive eternal life on behalf of her son, and a grandfather cannot leave salvation to his grandchildren in his will. Each individual must personally believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Some people will reject the Gospel regardless of how carefully it is explained. Acts 17:32 records that some mocked Paul's preaching concerning the resurrection, while others expressed willingness to hear more. Verse 34 explains that certain individuals believed. The same message encountered different responses. That should eliminate the foolish expectation that every faithful conversation must produce an immediate conversion. The Christian's responsibility is to communicate the truth accurately, with appropriate urgency and genuine concern. We should not invent frightening predictions about someone's approaching death, manipulate him through guilt, or continue pressing until he makes a profession he does not mean. Neither should rejection cause us to become bitter, vindictive, or ashamed of the Gospel. **A man who refuses the truth has not disproved it, and a Christian who faithfully delivers the message has not failed merely because the listener refuses to believe. Our responsibility is faithfulness; the saving power belongs to God.**

First Corinthians 3:6–8 brings that distinction into proper focus: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” Paul was confronting divisions among believers who had elevated individual ministers beyond their proper place. His correction demonstrates that the servants are not the source of spiritual life. One plants, another waters, and God gives the increase. This truth should destroy religious pride and discourage the obsession with impressive statistics that has corrupted so much modern evangelism. There is nothing wrong with rejoicing over genuine conversions. The New Testament itself records those who believed. But the number of professions obtained by an evangelist does not establish how many people have actually been regenerated. Neither does a lack of immediate results prove that a faithful witness has accomplished nothing. **Heaven does not need a preacher's publicity department to determine whether souls have been saved. God knows those who are His, and He knows who faithfully proclaimed His Word.**

We should also remember that the Christian's earthly opportunities are limited. James 4:14 describes life as “even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

The young imagine they have decades before them, the middle-aged become occupied with responsibilities, and the elderly sometimes look backward wondering where the years went. Meanwhile, eternity approaches for every human being. I am not suggesting that Christians should become frantic, abandon common sense, or turn every ordinary conversation into an unwanted religious confrontation. I am saying that we ought to understand the value of opportunities while we still possess them. A neighbor may move away. A coworker may change employment. A family member may become seriously ill. A conversation we intended to have next month may never occur. **We spend considerable time preparing for earthly events that may never happen while neglecting eternal matters that certainly will. The wisest Christian understands the difference between what is temporary and what will last forever.**

There is also a personal accountability attached to Christian service. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." That judgment concerns believers and must not be confused with the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. Our salvation is secured through Christ, but our service will be examined. We should therefore seek to be faithful with the opportunities God has provided rather than merely admire the accomplishments of others. Some Christians may never preach before large congregations or receive public recognition for their witnessing. They may speak quietly with a neighbor, explain the Gospel to a relative, distribute sound Scripture literature, or answer the questions of a searching coworker. **The world may never applaud such service, but the Lord does not require a television audience to recognize faithfulness. A conversation unnoticed by men may concern matters of eternal consequence.**

I also want to make something unmistakably clear concerning the place of Bible knowledge in this work. We should study diligently, rightly divide the Scriptures, understand dispensational distinctions, expose false doctrine, and guard the purity of the Gospel. Second Timothy 2:15 commands us to study to show ourselves approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth. But knowledge should make us more useful in proclaiming Christ, not merely more accomplished in religious debate. It is possible to memorize an extraordinary quantity of biblical information while becoming practically useless in personal evangelism. A man can explain the prophetic significance of Daniel's visions, describe the tabernacle furnishings in remarkable detail, trace Israel's historical covenants, and identify the differences between the Rapture and the Second Advent, yet never learn to explain salvation by grace through faith to a lost neighbor. **Bible knowledge is a tremendous blessing when it leads to obedience. But a library full of knowledge**

that never reaches a lost sinner can become a monument to how much a Christian knew and how little he did with it.

And let us never forget that the Gospel must remain the Gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is not received through baptism, communion, confirmation, church membership, penance, charitable works, religious sincerity, or a promise of complete surrender. Romans 4:5 declares that God justifies the ungodly who believe. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is God's gift through faith, not of works. We should never conceal the sinner's guilt or pretend that God is unconcerned about sin. Neither should we replace faith in Christ with a demand that the sinner reform himself before coming to the Saviour. The person hearing the Gospel needs to know why he is lost, who Jesus Christ is, what He accomplished, and how eternal life is received. **If the sinner walks away believing that Jesus Christ will save him only after he has cleaned up his life, we have not clearly proclaimed salvation by grace. We have handed him another religious burden that his own strength cannot carry.**

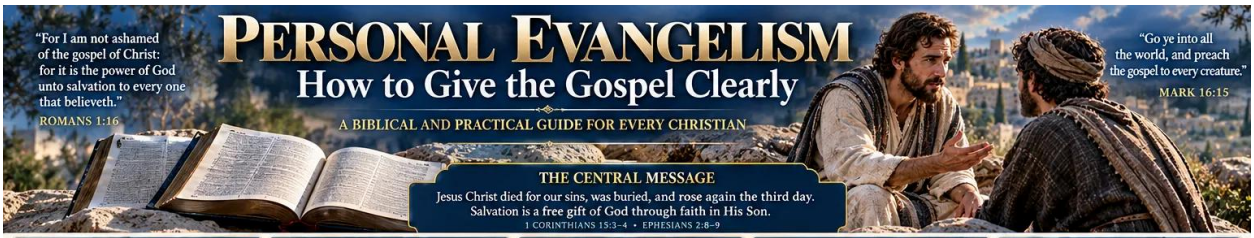
The Lord Jesus declared in Mark 8:36, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” That question ought to remain before us whenever we consider the value of personal evangelism. A man may accumulate wealth, establish a successful career, own beautiful property, receive public recognition, and leave an impressive earthly inheritance. But none of those achievements can purchase eternal life. A woman may be respected by her family, admired by her community, and remembered for decades because of her kindness and charitable works, yet still need the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Eternal salvation is not a reward for respectable living. It is the gift of God through His Son. **The richest sinner in the cemetery cannot purchase another opportunity with his fortune, and the most religious sinner before God's judgment cannot present a membership certificate as payment for his sins. Only the blood of Jesus Christ provides redemption.**

So I would encourage every Christian completing this series to make the Gospel a living part of his Christian service rather than another subject he understands only in theory. Become familiar with Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Ephesians 2:8–9, Romans 4:5, and Acts 16:31. Learn what each passage means in its context. Practice explaining the Gospel plainly without turning the explanation into a mechanical performance. Pray for people who remain unsaved. Recognize the opportunities that arise in ordinary life. Be prepared to answer questions, and have the humility to admit when additional study is necessary. Do not confuse boldness with discourtesy or compassion with doctrinal compromise. Above all, keep the sinner's

attention upon Jesus Christ. **You do not have to possess the eloquence of a celebrated preacher to explain the cross. You must understand the message, believe what God has said, and be willing to speak when the opportunity comes.**

And now, as we close, I want to bring everything back to the one matter that makes personal evangelism worth the effort. The greatest privilege in witnessing is not having somebody thank us for an excellent explanation, praise our biblical knowledge, compliment our presentation, or tell us how persuasive we have become. It is the opportunity to place the Gospel of Jesus Christ before someone who needs eternal life. We cannot know every result of every conversation. Some seeds may fall upon resistant ground. Some may be considered long after we have forgotten the encounter. Others may be watered through the ministry of Christians we will never meet. God gives the increase. Our responsibility is to remain faithful with the truth He has entrusted to us. Romans 1:16 still declares that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. The message has not lost its power because the world has become more technologically advanced, more sophisticated in its arguments, or more openly hostile to biblical truth. **The Gospel does not need a modern replacement. The world needs to hear the Gospel that God has already given.**

I will close with this. One day every opportunity to witness in this present life will be behind us. Every conversation we could have had will belong to the past. Every unsaved relative, every neighbor, every coworker, and every stranger whose path crossed ours will have passed through the portion of life God allowed us to share. We will not be able to return to yesterday and recover an opportunity that has vanished. But today we can still pray. Today we can still open the Bible. Today we can still explain that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. Today we can still point an unsaved person away from religion, away from self-righteousness, away from human works, and toward the only Saviour who can give eternal life. **You cannot save a soul, but you can tell a soul how to be saved. You cannot force a man to believe, but you can make certain he understands whom God has commanded him to believe. You cannot manufacture the new birth, but you can proclaim the Gospel through which God saves sinners. The message has been given. The responsibility is clear. The Saviour is sufficient. The field is before us. Do not spend the rest of your Christian life merely admiring the Gospel from a comfortable distance. Open your King James Bible, open your mouth, and tell somebody about the Lord Jesus Christ. The series is finished, but the work is not.**



1 THE GOSPEL AND ITS URGENCY
Why the Message Must Be Preached



- The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).
- Every person is a sinner and needs a Saviour (Rom. 3:23).
- The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
- Eternal consequences are real (Heb. 9:27).
- The Gospel must be proclaimed (2 Cor. 5:20; Mark 16:15).

KEY PASSAGES
Romans 1:16; Romans 3:23
Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27
2 Corinthians 5:20; Mark 16:15

2 THE SINNER'S CONDITION
Why People Need Salvation



- All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).
- Sin separates man from God (Isa. 59:2).
- Man is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1).
- Good works cannot remove sin (Isa. 64:6).
- Religious people also need salvation (Rom. 2:1–3).

KEY PASSAGES
Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:2
Ephesians 2:1; Isaiah 64:6
Romans 2:1–3

3 WHO JESUS CHRIST IS
The Only Saviour



- The eternal Son of God (John 1:1).
- God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).
- Born of a virgin (Matt. 1:23).
- Lived a sinless life (2 Cor. 5:21).
- The only way to God (John 14:6).

KEY PASSAGES
John 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:16
Matthew 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21
John 14:6; Acts 4:12

4 CHRIST'S FINISHED WORK
The Basis of Our Salvation



- Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3).
- He was buried (1 Cor. 15:4).
- He rose again the third day (1 Cor. 15:4).
- His blood provides redemption (Eph. 1:7).
- His resurrection guarantees eternal life (Rom. 4:25).

KEY PASSAGES
1 Corinthians 15:3–4; Ephesians 1:7
Romans 4:25; 2 Corinthians 5:21
1 Peter 3:18

5 SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH
What a Sinner Must Believe



- Saved by grace, not of works (Eph. 2:8–9).
- Justified the ungodly (Rom. 4:5).
- Received, not earned (Rom. 11:6).
- Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31).
- Faith rests in the person and finished work of Christ (Gal. 2:16).

KEY PASSAGES
Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 4:4–5
Romans 11:6; Acts 16:30–31
Titus 3:5; Galatians 2:16

6 REPENTANCE AND FAITH
Turning to God Without Works



- Repentance is a change of mind toward God (Acts 17:30).
- Repentance and faith are both required (Acts 20:21).
- God's goodness leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).
- Not a promise to reform, but a turn to God (2 Cor. 7:10).
- Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31).

KEY PASSAGES
Acts 17:30; Acts 20:21; Romans 2:4
Acts 16:31; 1 Thessalonians 1:9
2 Corinthians 7:10

7 OPENING THE CONVERSATION
How to Speak About Christ Wisely



- Walk in wisdom toward them (Col. 4:5–6).
- Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16).
- Always be ready to give an answer (1 Pet. 3:15).
- Use natural conversational openings (John 4:7–26).
- Recognize opportunities (Acts 8:26-35).
- A word fitly spoken (Prov. 25:11).

KEY PASSAGES
Colossians 4:5–6; Matthew 10:16
1 Peter 3:15; John 4:7–26
Acts 8:26–35; Proverbs 25:11

8 KEEPING CHRIST THE ISSUE
Answering Objections Biblically



- The Scriptures testify of Christ (John 5:39–40).
- Reason from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2–3).
- Keep Christ the issue (Acts 18:4).
- Answer with meekness and gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24–26).
- The Gospel is veiled to the lost (2 Cor. 4:3–5).
- Be ready with an answer (1 Pet. 3:15).

KEY PASSAGES
John 5:39–40; Acts 17:2–3; Acts 18:4
2 Timothy 2:23–26; 2 Corinthians 4:3–5
1 Peter 3:15

9 BRINGING THE SINNER TO A DECISION
A Clear Invitation Without Manipulation



- Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:30–31).
- Receive Him (John 1:12).
- Whosoever believeth (John 3:16–18).
- Confess and believe (Rom. 10:9–13).
- Not by works, but by grace (Eph. 2:8–9).
- Now is the accepted time (2 Cor. 6:2).

KEY PASSAGES
Acts 16:30–31; John 1:12; John 3:16–18
Romans 10:9–13; Ephesians 2:8–9
2 Corinthians 6:2

10 AFTER THE GOSPEL IS GIVEN
Assurance, False Professions, and Continued Witnessing



- Everlasting life (John 5:24).
- He shall never perish (John 10:27–29).
- Assurance through God's Word (1 John 5:11–13).
- Sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14).
- Continue witnessing to family (Rom. 10:1).
- We plant and water; God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6–8).

KEY PASSAGES
John 5:24; John 10:27–29; 1 John 5:11–13
Ephesians 1:13–14; Romans 10:1
1 Corinthians 3:6–8

FALSE GOSPELS TO AVOID

- Lordship Salvation (adds works to grace)
- Baptismal Regeneration (water does not save)
- Sacramental Salvation (communion, confession, etc.)
- Church Membership as Salvation
- A Promise to Stop Sinning Before Salvation
- Any System That Adds Human Performance to Christ's Finished Work



THE BOTTOM LINE

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.
Our responsibility is to proclaim it faithfully.
God gives the increase.

ROMANS 1:16 • 1 CORINTHIANS 3:6–8

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- Understand the Gospel thoroughly
- Pray for opportunities
- Be ready to explain salvation clearly
- Use wisdom and compassion
- Keep Christ the issue
- Invite sinners to believe
- Follow up and disciple new believers
- Continue witnessing with patience and faithfulness

VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES