



Sharing Christ – Part 3
Various Scripture
GCSP – 06/06/2009

I am a Cub's fan. I have been a Cub's fan for over forty years. I contracted this disease in 1967. Every year since then I believe they can win the World Series. And every year since then my belief has been wrong. But this year...!

So what's the problem – other than being a rabid fan of a team that hasn't won a World Series since 1908? The problem is that just because I believe something it doesn't necessarily make it true. I somehow overlook the faultiness of my evaluation of the team each year. I miss the fact that they really do not measure up to many other teams. Because of my belief I overestimate just how good the players are in comparison to the others.

This same tendency happens all the time with Christians and those who think they are Christians. We read or hear about a verse or principle in the Bible and we make an evaluation in our own minds as to how that matches up with our beliefs. If it matches then we embrace it; if it doesn't match up then we explain it away or simply ignore it. We find ways to justify our beliefs and why that verse means something different than what it says.

We say things like, "Well, my God wouldn't do that", or "My God couldn't act in that way." And guess what? You are exactly right. Your god wouldn't do that and your god couldn't act in that way, because your god in that case doesn't exist. You have become guilty of creating a god of your own choosing; one that has been molded into your own image of what God should be.

In our Wednesday evening study on "The Way of the Master" we watch some real life witnessing encounters that have been captured on DVD. One of these interviews was asking people on the street what they believe about hell. Person after person gave what they believed about hell; none of which were what the Bible has to say. In one interview, Ray Comfort asks the person, "You're just making this up as you go aren't you?" To which the young man truthfully replies, "Yes, I am."

The group laughed at this and many of the other answers that were given, but Christians are guilty of the same sin every time we ignore certain Scriptures or try to explain them away because they do not match up with what we believe. I see it all the time. I have encountered it some of our Bible studies and I am sure I am guilty of this sin myself at times.

When asked to explain themselves, many times the response is simply, "I just don't believe that." Think about the implications of a statement like that when it is made in reference to God's Word.

Beloved, there are some hard things in the Bible. There are some things written in these pages that seem to contradict other things written in these pages. They do not contradict each other it just seems that way in our puny minds sometimes. You read a

verse that says, God chooses us for salvation and then you read another that says, **"Whosoever will may come"**, or **"God is not willing that any should perish."** How do those two concepts coexist? I can't answer that but they do coexist, and God knows how they coexist.

There must be at least a dozen or more passages in Scriptures that speak with absolute clarity that God has chosen His elect for salvation. How many of you believe that? How many of you also believe it when the Bible says, **"Whosoever will may come"**? If you believe both, which you should because that is what Scripture says, then you need to ask yourself why you at times get so dogmatic about other beliefs when certain passages of Scripture clearly go against your belief.

The point is to be careful with how easily you set your beliefs in cement without fully knowing the whole counsel of God. Cement hardens and cannot easily be reshaped or remolded. Remain teachable and remain pliable when it comes to God's Word. Bring all that the Bible says to the forefront. Make sure you have the proper context of what is being said. Study to show yourself approved. Listen intently for the Holy Spirit's illumination.

What the Bible has to say concerning salvation goes contrary in many ways to how most of us have been raised; it definitely goes contrary to what most of the mega-churches and most of the TV evangelists preach and teach today.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Ephesians**. I want to revisit a passage we looked at last week, and then we will look at another example of how Jesus preached salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Let's pray.

The false gospel that is being preached in most churches today is a gospel of salvation without the necessity of a changed life. They will read and proclaim **verses 8-9** of our text and skip or marginalize **verse 10**. They will preach **Romans 6:23** which says, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** but they will conveniently never preach about the implications of calling Jesus our Lord. They will expound upon God's love and God's mercy and God's forgiveness, but they will never even broach the subject of God's wrath and God's justice and God's judgment. They will speak of the glories of heaven but avoid speaking about the awful nature and reality of hell. They will talk about the joy and love and peace and prosperity in the Christian life but will ignore the promise of persecution and tribulation for those who desire to live a godly life.

It is a half-gospel or gospel light that is being proclaimed today, which is no gospel at all according to Scripture.

So let's look a little closer at our passage and make sure we have the entire picture.

Salvation is indeed solely by grace and solely through faith. Martin Luther almost lost his life on several occasions for publicly proclaiming salvation by grace alone and through

faith alone. And while this is the foundational truth about salvation, it means nothing if we have a misunderstanding of grace or a faulty definition of faith.

God's grace is not an attribute where He accepts hardened, unrepentant sinners. Grace will not change a person's standing before God yet leave his or her character untouched. Grace does not leave the Christian with the liberty to live his or her life the way they choose.

Hold your place in **Ephesians** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Titus**.

Titus 2:11-14

Here we have the Biblical definition of grace. Grace is salvation that is manifest in our lives by denying ungodliness, denying worldly desires, living sensibly, living righteously, living godly NOW, living in anticipation of the Lord's return, refraining from every lawless deed, and being zealous for good works.

Are these characteristics present in your life? Would the people that know you look at this list and be able to truthfully say, "Yeah, I see all of these attributes in them on a regular basis"? Or would they laugh and say, "Are you kidding me?"

Let's look at it again and ask yourself the following questions: Am I consciously and consistently denying ungodliness, denying worldly desires, living sensibly, living righteously, living godly, living in anticipation of the Lord's return, refraining from every lawless deed, and being zealous for good works?

In **1 Corinthians 7:19**, Paul specifically speaks of circumcision but the context is that religion, tradition, and ritual mean nothing, "**but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.**" Grace empowers us to keep the commandments of God. Grace does not grant us permission to live according to the flesh but instead enables us to live according to the Spirit.

Saving faith is not just understanding the facts and mentally acknowledging their place in our lives. Saving faith is not just repeating a simple prayer and then getting on with your life. Saving faith is inseparable from genuine repentance, complete surrender, and a divine longing for utter obedience to God's Word.

James 2:17 makes it clear: "**Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.**" If your life is lacking good works on a regular and consistent basis, if you still live like the world with no remorse or guilt, if you have no desire to seek out what God's Word has to say so you can be immediately obedient, then the Bible says your faith is dead! You don't have saving faith at all.

James goes on to say, "**You see that a man is justified by works and not faith alone**" (**James 2:24**). The point is that even though salvation is by grace alone and through faith alone, apart from works, salvation was never genuinely attained. You cannot simply point to a time when you walked down an aisle at church or prayed a simple prayer and prove your salvation. The genuineness of your salvation is only affirmed by a changed life that is zealous for good works.

Some in the church today try to say that faith and works are incompatible. They point to other religions, such as Catholicism, which in practice is primarily based upon works as a means for salvation. And because of this they shun works like the plague as being connected in any way to salvation. They stumble over the fact that salvation is a free gift while at the same time costs us everything; and that is the teaching of Scripture.

Christ told those who wanted to follow Him to count the cost. He tells us that our love for Him is to be so intense that we will forsake all others, causing the outside world to think we hate our families in comparison to our love and devotion for Him. Jesus told His disciples to leave everything behind and take up their cross and follow Him. Yes, salvation is a free gift, but at the same time it does cost you everything if you will be a genuine disciple and follower of Jesus Christ.

But this seeming paradox is found in other portions of the Bible. In **Matthew 11:28-29**, where Jesus says, "**I will give you rest**" and then He immediately says, "**Take My yoke upon you.**" The rest Jesus speaks of is not a rest of inactivity.

Genuine believers are characterized by faith that is repulsed and sickened by the life of sin. Genuine believers will still battle against sin, but we will progressively sin less and less, and the sin we do commit will bother us more and more. We will find ourselves so convicted that we immediately confess and repent when sin creeps in and trips us up. We are drawn to Jesus Christ with such an overwhelming attraction and thus we are drawn away from everything else.

I have a long way to go in my walk with the Lord, but yesterday morning after I completed the email devotion I send out occasionally, I almost literally had an ache to stay at my desk and study the Scriptures in communion with the Lord. But I knew I had my responsibilities with the insurance office and other things that were on my plate. So I reluctantly got up, packed my briefcase, and started toward the car. It was then that I realized that my keys were in the side compartment of the vehicle Connie took to work. I couldn't go anywhere and I had a glorious day with the Lord.

Like I said, I have a long way to go in my walk with the Lord, but that longing and that desire to study my Bible and commune with Jesus is an evidence of the genuineness of my salvation. I don't have a longing on that level of intensity every minute of every day, but it is dwelling within me. I have a conflict raging within me every week between my responsibilities with my insurance business and my longing to study more and pray more and do ministry more. If that conflict was non-existent or if I couldn't wait to put my Bible down and get back to selling insurance, then there would be a problem; then I would have to examine myself and test myself to see if I was in the faith, as **2 Corinthians 13:5** says.

We will eventually get back to our text in **Ephesians** so continue to hold your place there while turning with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Luke**.

Luke 3:7-14

Can you see the clarity of how genuine salvation has to be characterized by true repentance and a radically changed life manifest by good works? The fruit of obedience to God's Word will be the primary characteristic of a genuine believer's life. There is no

provision in Scripture for conversions that lack life change. A true believer cannot remain rebellious or even indifferent. Genuine saving faith will provoke obedience to God's Word. Genuine saving faith will spark and then fan the flame of desire for the things of God. Your passion for the things of the world will diminish and fade away as your passion for God and His Word will grow.

Now turn back to our passage in **Ephesians**.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Salvation by grace alone and through faith alone does not eliminate good works it only does away with works that are the result of human effort alone (**verse 8**). It abolishes any attempt to merit God's favor by our works (**verse 9**). And then it gives works its proper place in our lives by revealing God's divine purpose (**verse 10**).

Works are not necessary to earn salvation but true salvation will produce an abundant and bountiful harvest of good works in every genuine believer; **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."**

So let me ask you a few questions: First, how can you possibly present the plan of salvation to an unbeliever without the aspect of lordship? How could you only deal with the love of God and how He has a wonderful plan for their life? How can you tell someone only about how happy they will be when they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior?

We can't do it. We can't preach a half-gospel and expect God to bless our efforts. We can't only present one side of things and water down the gospel message of Jesus Christ just so we can feel more comfortable and hopefully avoid offending someone.

As the Wednesday evening group heard this week, we shouldn't feel bad about condemning sinners because the Bible says they are condemned already if they have not repented and believed in the name of Jesus (**John 3:18**). We aren't condemning them; God is condemning them for their unbelief.

We cannot join the happy, happy, joy, joy, big teeth smiling evangelists who are proclaiming a gospel of lies. We must proclaim the gospel according to Jesus that requires recognition of the deceitfulness of sin in one's life, genuine repentance of those sins, and a completely surrendered life to the lordship of our Master Jesus Christ.

Beloved, I am sometimes criticized for being critical of other preachers and evangelists; and I do need to be careful in this regard, but I cannot stand idly by while God's Word is being watered down and thousands, if not millions of people are being deceived into thinking they are on their way to heaven when the gospel they are believing in is no gospel at all!

So for those of you who are genuinely in the faith, make sure you are communicating the whole and pure gospel message when God gives you opportunity to witness.

The second question, and the most important one for everyone here tonight, is your life characterized by everything we have looked at in God's Word this evening? Have you tested and examined your life to ensure that you are in the faith? Have you based your salvation on a false gospel message of walking an aisle in church and praying a simple prayer but have never experienced true repentance and life change? Did somewhere along the line you miss the Biblical fact that Jesus cannot be your Savior if He is not also the Lord and Master of your life?

Regardless of where you find yourself tonight, listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you right now. Get things right before you leave this room. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow.

Let's pray.