

## Christianity Plus Paganism Equals Paganism

When we speak of the exclusive nature of salvation through Christ, just how exclusive is it? Do we take our cue from the Scriptures or from today's Evangelical theologians? From my formulated question, you will discern that I do not believe them to be the same.

Permit me to begin with a couple of quotes from men of by-gone days:

To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men. This is such a common truth that one hesitates to mention it, yet it appears to have been overlooked by the majority of Christians today.<sup>1</sup>

It is never right to do a little wrong to obtain the greatest possible good . . . Your duty is to do the right: consequences are with God.<sup>2</sup>

Here are two men from very different times who sought to place an emphasis upon being right with God, whatever the consequences. That is not a message that is in tune with the modern ecumenical emphasis. Allow their emphasis on being right with God to settle into your mind as you consider the following study of the Scriptures regarding the topic at hand.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

*Gird up the loins* is not a phrase we would use on a daily basis; however, it was common, at the time that Peter wrote this, for most people to wear long flowing robes, which are not particularly practical for working or moving about in haste. It was the custom, therefore, to bind the lower portion of the robe around the waist so as to facilitate unimpeded movement. When Israel prepared for the first Passover and their escape from Egypt, they were specifically instructed to eat the meal with their *loins girded* (Exodus 12:11); they were to be in a state of readiness to leave, and to leave in haste. Peter's admonition is that the minds of the followers of Christ must be ready for the task at hand – anything that would impede our understanding of what God desires of us must be tied up out of the way! In addition, we are to be clear-minded (*sober*), and we are to completely (*to the end*) hope in the grace that is being brought (it is present tense) to us in the revealing of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> God's grace, as expressed through the sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus Christ, is continually being granted to us for a very specific purpose. After carefully rehearsing the sure promise of the Lord's return and the establishment of a new heaven and earth, Peter makes this challenge: “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things [in anticipation of these things], be diligent that ye may [make every effort to] be found of him in peace, without spot [pure], and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14). The challenge is that we are to expend every effort so that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bethelministries.com/tozer.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/SPURGEON-QUOTES.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Strong's Online.

Christ will find us pure and without any blemish.<sup>4</sup> God's grace, being revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ, is given to lead us into holiness; as we increasingly submit to the leading of the Spirit of God, His grace will work in us to instill the righteousness of the Law of God (the Ten Commandments<sup>5</sup>) into our daily living (Romans 8:1-4).

The mental-preparedness, being clear-minded, and hoping completely in the grace of God characterizes the *children of obedience* (a literal translation of the Greek – 1 Peter 1:14).<sup>6</sup> Peter goes on to describe these *children* as those who are no longer conforming to the desires that they left behind when coming to faith in Christ. As Paul explained to the Ephesians, there is to be a change when Christ is our Lord – the old things (after the manner of our sinful natures) are replaced with new and sanctified desires (Ephesians 4:22-24). Peter's exhortation, that we make every effort to be pure before the Lord, is in keeping with the *new man* whom we are to don – a *new man* created by God "in righteousness and true holiness." This should not be surprising, for we have received a *holy* calling from God, not according to anything that we have done, but according to His purpose and grace found in Christ (2 Timothy 1:9). We have received a holy calling from a holy God to a life of holiness! Contrary to everything that we are told today, it's not about us, it's all about God and what He has done for us; we might well be the objects of His grace, but we can take no credit for that.

The popular view of God is that His "defining character trait is love."<sup>7</sup> This thought permeates modern Evangelicalism. Billy Graham, that celebrated pope of Evangelicalism, has said, "I find love to be the supreme and dominant attribute of God."<sup>8</sup> The famous Four Spiritual Laws has contributed to this perception through their simplistic first law: "God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life."<sup>9</sup> This brings God's love and a wonderful life together, and there is little that follows this to correct the false impression that this leaves with a first-time reader. As this concept has taken root within the minds of Evangelicals, there has followed a significant lack of consideration for the holiness of God, and how it tempers His love for mankind.

There is no denying God's infinite love for mankind, after all, we read that "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16). However, can we Biblically call *love* God's *defining* trait? The Scriptures tell us of God's great love in action: "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" (John 3:16). God so loved the fallen creatures who were made in His image, that He gave a member of the eternal Godhead (John 10:30) to become a perfect man in order to pay the price of redemption. Even as sinful and fallen men, God's love for us still finds expression: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Why did Christ have to die for us? How does His death demonstrate [*commendeth*] God's love for us?<sup>10</sup> John, who spoke much

<sup>4</sup> Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>5</sup> For ease of understanding: the Law of God is the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God upon tables of stone (Exodus 31:18), which are now written upon the hearts of all who come to faith in Christ (Jeremiah 31:33; Matthew 26:27-28); the Law of Moses is made up of the many ordinances and statutes that governed the Jews' daily life, and outlined the details of the priesthood and sacrificial systems, which were fulfilled in Christ and done away with at the cross (Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossians 2:13-14).

<sup>6</sup> Stephanus' 1550 NT.

<sup>7</sup> Joel C. Rosenberg, *Inside the Revolution*, p. 457.

<sup>8</sup> <http://billygraham.org/story/billy-graham-on-experiencing-gods-love/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

concerning the love of God said, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Here’s a word we don’t use much anymore: *propitiation*. It means that Christ was the means of forgiveness for us,<sup>11</sup> He is our sin-offering. The shed blood of Christ on the cross served to turn the wrath of God aside, so that, as we are in Christ by faith, when God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ, and not our sinfulness. As we are **in Christ**, we are free from the condemnation of death that sin carries (Romans 8:1; 6:23). Christ died so that we, as sinners, could be reconciled to a **holy** God; we have been created in His image, and Christ paid the price in order to restore our relationship with Him. The sacrificial system that dominated the lives of the Israelites for centuries, and the many burnt offerings made before that, provided a temporary restoration of the man-to-God relationship, if they were accompanied by faith in the promises of God. The sacrificial system, implemented through Moses, underscored the sinfulness of mankind and the holiness of God – it was through faith in the prescribed sin offerings that this relationship could be temporarily restored. It was not a permanent restoration because the sacrifices had to be repeated at determined intervals. All of these sacrifices pointed forward to the coming promised One (Messiah Jesus), Who would forever break Satan’s hold on sinful man (Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 9:11-12). There is only one Way that sinful man can be reconciled with a holy God, and that is through Christ (both eternal God and sinless Man). It was God’s love that sent Christ to earth, but it was God’s holiness that required the sacrifice to be made for the sins of mankind; man, in his sinfulness, has no hope before a holy God: “There is none righteous, no, not one ... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ... For the wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 3:10,23; 6:23). In Christ, we are made free from the death-grip that sin has upon us.

However, that does not give us freedom to live as we please. “... Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:11-13). What did Peter write? We are to be holy, even as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ so that we might live in righteousness and true holiness, “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus warned that we are either with Him or we are against Him – there is no middle ground (Matthew 12:30).

Who will face the wrath of God? Everyone outside of Christ – He is our only hope, which is why He openly declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by [through] me” (John 14:6).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, if we are in Christ, then we have embarked on the only Way to the Father.

Man, left to his own devices, will face the wrath of God: “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand [act prudently], *and* seek[ing] God. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy [corrupt]: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psalm 14:2-3).<sup>13</sup> When Adam chose to sin, he placed all of his

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<sup>11</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>12</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>13</sup> Strong’s Online.

descendants under the curse of sin – without exception.<sup>14</sup> “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things [the things that Paul just listed, which are not to be a part of those who are followers of God] cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6). Who are the *children of disobedience*? They are those who live under the guidance of the spirit of this world (Ephesians 2:2), namely the devil; all of the sons and daughters of Adam fall into this general category of being children of disobedience. Paul warns the Ephesians (and us) to not be deceived by empty words: it is those who are not living in obedience to God’s commands who will be subject to the wrath of God – those who are living outside of Christ.

While on earth, Jesus spoke these words: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow [compressed, restricted] *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).<sup>15</sup> If we pause to consider these words carefully, there are several things here that we must understand. The words *enter in* are a command; if we are to be obedient to the Lord, then it will require that we enter this narrow (*strait*) gate in order to embark on this way to life that is said to be restricted (*narrow*). The Greek word translated as *narrow*, is *thlebo*, which is also translated as *suffer tribulation* (1 Thessalonians 3:4).<sup>16</sup> This way to life, which Jesus commands us to approach by entering the narrow gate, is not without its price; this is not a walk in the park on a warm, sunny day. Jesus also said, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27); *disciple* is from the Greek word *mathetes* (*math-ay-tes*), which means a pupil, or a learner.<sup>17</sup> Following the Lord involves bearing a cross, which provides a glimpse into what is entailed on this restricted way to life. However, if we are willing to submit to the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we have this encouragement from Him: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). *Learn* is from the Greek word *manthano* (*man-than’-o*), and is the root word for *mathetes* (disciple). In essence, Jesus is saying that if we yoke up with Him and become His disciple, then we will find rest for our souls; this is still on that compressed way that leads to life: challenging in every way, yet spiritually rewarding. This Way is Jesus (John 14:6)! He is the restricted Way, and He is the only Way to life eternal. Do not lose sight of the fact that the way to life is very exclusive; there are not many ways – only one Way leads to life.

How does Scripture flesh out this narrow, restricted way that leads to life? Let’s consider one very clear illustration.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was earnestly trying to prevent them from departing from the faith – that Gospel message that he brought to them under the guidance of the Spirit of God. You will recall that the believers in the region of Galatia were being influenced by Jews from Jerusalem, who proclaimed that it was necessary for everyone to keep some of the Jewish traditions in order to be truly saved. “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. ... But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to

<sup>14</sup> Jesus was born of the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), and, therefore, did not have the inherited sin-nature that comes through the man.

<sup>15</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>16</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>17</sup> Strong’s Online.

circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:1,5). This was the message being presented to the Galatians, and, since these Jews came from Jerusalem, they felt that they were under some compulsion to give attention to their teachings – after all, they should know. Paul, realizing that this was the case, wasted no time addressing the problem in his letter: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another [different (*heteros*)] gospel: Which is not another [same (*allos*)]; but there be some that trouble you, and would [intend to] pervert [change into an opposite state] the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).<sup>18</sup> This is a very strongly worded challenge to the Galatian believers! Paul identifies these Judaizers (those who taught that it was necessary to keep the Law of Moses in addition to faith in Christ, in order to be truly saved) as those who were intent on changing the Gospel of Christ into something that was the opposite. What is the opposite to life (which is the message of the Gospel)? It must be death! This “changed” gospel, Paul says, is a message of death, of hopelessness, and those who were teaching it he condemns to divine wrath (*accursed – anathema*, to deliver over to divine wrath<sup>19</sup>)!

However, Paul does not leave it there: “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly [worthless] elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” (Galatians 4:9).<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt that the Galatians, to whom Paul is writing, are truly born again: they *have known God* and God has *known* them. Paul’s question is this: why are you reverting to worthless traditions (*elements*) and again making yourselves slaves to them? We know that the Galatians did not come out of Judaism, but out of paganism: “when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods” (4:8). By adding Jewish traditions to the Gospel of Christ, Paul says that they will, in essence, be returning to their former paganism; this *perverted* gospel holds no more life than the paganism from which they came. In other words, the gospel of the Judaizers was devoid of life; it was no better than paganism. Christianity (the Gospel held by the Galatians) plus the perverted teachings of the Judaizers equals a lifeless perversion of the gospel that Paul likens to paganism. Paul’s message was Jesus, and all that He has done to redeem us; it was Jesus, plus nothing! His fear was that the work that he had done among them would be in vain; if they thought that their salvation included keeping Jewish traditions, then they were fallen from (lost to) God’s grace, and they were estranged, or removed, from Christ (5:4).<sup>21</sup>

This narrow message of life is not new. As God proclaimed the many statutes and ordinances that the children of Israel were to keep, He said this: “And in all *things* that I have said unto you be circumspect [take heed]: and make no mention of [*zakar* – cause to remember] the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth” (Exodus 23:13).<sup>22</sup> In other words, Jehovah is saying that they are to attend carefully to what He has said to do, and they are to put paganism out

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<sup>18</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>19</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>20</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

<sup>21</sup> Gingrich Lexicon.

<sup>22</sup> BDB.

of their minds. Just before he died, Joshua exhorted Israel, "... come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of [*zakar*] the name of their gods, nor cause to swear *by them*, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them ..."

 (Joshua 23:7). The message of God to man has always been very evident, and His prohibitions have been equally clear.

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments" (John 14:15). God's message to man remains the same: do as I have commanded you! "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). We typically apply this to the Word of God – we are not to add to, or remove from, the text of Scripture, and that is right. However, I think that we have been rather restrictive in the application of this exhortation from Jehovah. Jesus said that if we love Him, then we are to carefully live out His commands; it would be in keeping with what we have looked at to this point to say that we are not to go beyond, or to fall short of, what He has commanded us to do.

God, through the Apostle Paul, condemned the doctrine of the Judaizers – they were going beyond what He had commanded; they were adding to what God had proclaimed. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not [do not cling to] the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ..." (2 Corinthians 6:17). Modern ecumenism refuses to comply with God's Word; the whole premise of ecumenical thinking is that of joining together with all those who profess to know God, yet many of whom go so far as to deny the Lord Jesus Christ as being the only way of salvation. Ecumenism is part of the *unclean* that Paul addressed; it taints all those who participate in its sinful gatherings, and even those who sit under the teaching of participating ecumenists (by doing so, they are giving their approval to the ecumenical mindset). If we do not separate from all those who are actively ecumenical, and from those who sit under ecumenical teaching, then we have failed to keep the Lord's command to *come out from among them* – we are, therefore, by our inaction, reducing, or diminishing, the Word of God by ignoring His command – ecumenists are in violation of Deuteronomy 4:2. Or, it could be argued, we are going beyond His Word by doing what we are commanded not to do; either way, we are breaking the Word of God. If we fail to obey His command, the Lord says that He will not receive us, and Jesus says that we do not love Him (John 14:15). "And hereby we do know [are knowing – present tense] that we know [have known – perfect tense ("an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated")]] him [God], if we keep [are carefully attending to] his commandments" (1 John 2:3).<sup>23</sup> Do we find ourselves being selective as to the commands of God that we obey? If so, we are guilty of either adding to, or taking away from, God's Word. Like the overseer of the assembly in Pergamos, Jesus has one word for us: *Repent* (Revelation 2:16)! Paul identified the Gospel of Christ plus the works of the Law of Moses as being paganism – outside of Christ, destitute of the grace of God; we must do no less, if we would be true to Scripture.

It is useless for large companies of believers to spend long hours begging God to send revival. Unless we intend to reform we may as well not pray. Unless praying men

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<sup>23</sup> Strong's Online.



have the insight and faith to amend their whole way of life to conform to the New Testament pattern there can be no true revival.<sup>24</sup>

How many Christians today are sincerely praying for revival, even while they refuse to check the mirror to see why revival is not coming? Do not expect massive revivals, for the Lord said that the gate that opens to the pathway to life is narrow, and there will only be a few who will find it. However, as we understand the importance of obedience in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, then, and only then, will a working of the Spirit of God begin within our hearts! We are to be children of obedience (1 Peter 1:14), if we are not, then we find ourselves in the company of the children of disobedience and walking that broad road that leads to destruction. Do not be deceived! There are only two roads: Jesus is the Way to life eternal; every other path leads to eternal ruin. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but **he that doeth the will of my Father** which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21); “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ...” (2 Corinthians 13:5a).

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bethelministries.com/tozer.htm>