

Christ Died For Our Sins

Dave Hunt

In desperation, the Philippian jailor cried, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul's reply was simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). The great apostle said nothing about baptism or sacraments, candles, incense, church attendance, reforming one's life, or anything else being necessary or even helpful for salvation. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible makes it clear that there is nothing a sinner can *do*, much less *must do*, to pay the infinite penalty required by God's justice. One can and need only believe in Christ, who paid the penalty in full: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30)!

Scripture could not be clearer: "[T]o him that *worketh not*, but *believeth* on him that justifieth the *ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5); "For by grace are ye saved, through faith...*not of works*, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8,9). To attempt to do anything for one's salvation beyond believing "on the Lord Jesus Christ" is to deny that Christ paid the full penalty for sin on the cross and to reject God's offer on that basis of forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift of His grace. Clearly, we can be saved *only by faith in Christ*—but exactly what does that mean? What must one believe?

Suppose someone claims to be a "Christian," believes in Christ as a historical person and the best of men, admires and seeks to follow Christ's selfless example, is emotional about Christ's suffering and death on the cross, and regularly goes to church. Yet he thinks it doesn't matter whether or not Christ was virgin-born, or whether He is God come as a man to die in full payment for our sins upon the cross, or whether He rose from the dead. Is such a person saved? Does he really "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"? Or does he admire and believe in "another Jesus...another spirit...another gospel" (2 Cor 11:3,4)? Does it really matter, or are we just "splitting hairs"?

Paul declares that "the gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). So believing "the gospel of Christ" gives salvation. But is believing the gospel the

only way to be saved—and if so, what is the gospel? Peter declared, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we *must* be saved" (Acts 4:12). No answer is given to the question, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation..." (Heb 2:3)? There is no escape except in Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6).

Yet nowhere, in one place, does the Bible define the gospel of Christ fully. Yes, the gospel is "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again [from the dead] the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3,4). But this declaration by Paul says nothing, for example, about Christ being born of a virgin or being the Son of God.

Common sense tells us that Paul's statement, "believe on the Lord Jesus

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

John 3:17

Christ" (Acts 16:31), does not mean merely to believe that there was once a man called Jesus Christ. Obviously, there must be much about Christ not included in that brief statement, but which Paul had already explained to the Philippian jailor. One could not "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" if a false understanding were held about Him.

Christ warned a group of Jews, "ye shall...die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come...if ye believe not that I am *he*...[*he* is in italics, added by the translators] (Jn 8:21,24). "I AM" is the name of God that He revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:14) and that Christ clearly claims for Himself: "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30). Isaiah declared prophetically that the Messiah who would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14) would be "The mighty God, The everlasting Father" (Is 9:6). Christ's language is precise. He doesn't tell the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I was." He says, "Before Abraham was, *I am*" (Jn 8:58). He is the self-existent One without beginning or end, "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rv 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13).

So we have it from the lips of Christ himself that in order to be saved, one must believe that He is God come as a man through the promised virgin birth. Of course, that makes sense. No one but God could be our Savior. Repeatedly, Yahweh, the "God of Israel" (203 times from Ex 5:1 to Lk 1:68) declares that He is the only Savior (Is 43:11; Hos 13:4, etc.). Thus, to be saved, one must believe that Christ is God. To deny this essential is to reject the gospel that saves.

Believing that Christ resurrected is also essential for salvation: "[I]f thou shalt...believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom 10:9). Yet there are pastors and seminary professors who believe neither in Christ's deity nor in His resurrection. They teach "another gospel" that will not save—and millions seem willing to believe such false teachers instead of the infallible Word of God. The doom of both teachers and followers is on their own heads because they have rejected the very salvation that Christ obtained upon the cross in dying for our sins.

And here we face another essential of the gospel that must be believed for one to be saved: "that Christ *died* for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3). His being *scourged, abused, beaten, or mistreated by men*—or even *crucified*, though in fulfillment of prophecy—could not pay the penalty for sin and would not save us. Christ *died* for our sins. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezk 18:4,20); "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Salvation comes through Christ's death. *Death* is the penalty for sin, and Christ had to pay that penalty for all mankind in full. In full? Isn't death just death? Could it be worse than we imagine? Indeed, it is!

While we dealt briefly last month with the distinction between the physical sufferings inflicted by men and the spiritual sufferings at the hands of a holy God against sin, this subject is of such importance that we ought to consider it further. Sin is a moral, spiritual problem involving God's law and man's rebellion against God. That Christ's suffering for sin was not just physical but spiritual is clear: "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...he shall see of the travail of his soul...he hath poured out his soul unto death" (Is 53:10-12); "Christ...through the eternal Spirit offered himself without

spot to God” (Heb 9:14).

Just before Judas betrayed Him, Christ “took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you...[T]his do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19,20; 1 Cor 11:24,25).

Most Christians periodically take the bread and cup as Christ commanded. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches teach that the bread and cup are Christ’s literal body and blood offered on their altars and that He is continually suffering for sin. The Bible declares that Christ: “*once...hath...appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself...was once offered to bear the sins of many...after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God...by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified...there is no more offering for sin* (Heb 9:26, 28; 10:12, 14, 18); Christ...*once* suffered for sins (1 Pt 3:18).

If Christ, as Peter says, “is gone into heaven,” where Steven saw Him when he was stoned to death (Acts 7:55,56), how can He continue to be offered (immolated) on Roman Catholic altars? What of Catholics who really love Christ, believe that He died for their sins, but have believed Catholic doctrine that the wafer becomes the body and blood of Christ and that He continues to be offered? Could they be saved in spite of such ignorance or misunderstanding? What are the limits of the error that can be held within the gospel, and does it matter? Would it matter if they believe that Christ died for our sins yet participate in the “sacrifice of the Mass,” imagining that Christ is still being offered for our sins and that they are ingesting Him into their stomachs when they take that wafer and cup? Yes, Scripture says Christ “suffered *once*” for our sins—but is it so serious an error to believe that He continues to be offered? Yes, it is!

Christ’s offering of Himself to the Father for sin took place on the cross: “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pt 2:24). So, again, it was not in being scourged that Christ bore our sins. He endured something far worse than physical suffering. In the garden, in dread anticipation of that horror, “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Lk 22:44).

When we take the bread and cup as Christ commanded, we do so not to receive forgiveness of sins (as Catholics and Orthodox imagine), or nourishment

for the soul (as Luther and Calvin taught), but gratefully *in remembrance* of Christ in the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross. It is so easy to imagine that in the physical participation of eating and drinking we have done our “duty” to the Lord once again in commemoration of His physical suffering—and to fail to take adequate time to meditate upon what He spiritually “once suffered for sins, [He] the just for [us] the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pt 3:18).

And here again we see the vital importance of distinguishing between the physical suffering our Savior endured at the hands of men, and the punishment He endured from God: “...the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all...it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief...” (Is 53:10).

As we noted last month, it would be absurd to imagine that sinful rebels against God were His servants in executing His justice upon Christ. How would they know just how hard to strike and how many blows to give Him? And how could physical suffering pay the spiritual price of eternal separation from God that sin merits? Christ said, “I lay down my

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead...

Hebrews 9:16-17

life...no man taketh it from me” (Jn 10:17,18). Thus the soldiers could not and did not kill Him. But Christ *died* for our sins—so again, what the soldiers did could not have paid for our sins.

“Christ *died* for our sins according to the scriptures.” We tend to think of death as physical, but surely it is much more. Death is first of all spiritual separation from God—which ultimately causes the separation of the soul and spirit from the body in physical death. Adam was warned, “In the day thou eatest thereof [of the forbidden fruit] thou shalt surely die” (Gn 2:17). He did not die physically that very day but nearly 1,000 years later. Adam and Eve must therefore have died *spiritually* on that very day. They suddenly realized that they were aliens in the garden of Eden, separated from God by their sin, and they tried to hide from Him among the trees (Gn 3:8)—dead to God in their spirits.

All of the descendants of Adam and Eve inherit this spiritual death. We are born “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Physical death began its process in Adam and Eve

the very day they sinned. We are born sinners. Thus our bodies begin to die from the moment of birth—a fact for which medical science has no explanation.

No person (except Christ) has yet experienced the utter horror of death in its fullness. That will only occur after the final judgment: “death and hell...and whosoever was not found written in the book of life...were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rv 20:14,15). Christ became a man so that He “by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9). Therefore, His death on the cross had to include the “second death.” Thus Christ endured on the cross the eternal suffering that all mankind face in the lake of fire! This could only have been at the hands of God, not at the hands of man.

“The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23)—not merely temporary physical separation of soul and spirit from the body, but eternal separation from God. Therefore, in suffering for sin, Christ must have experienced the horror of the eternal separation from God that was due to all mankind. No wonder He cried out in agony, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Ps 22:1; Mt 27:45; Mk 15:34)?! No physical suffering, especially at the hands of sinful men, could mete out that awful penalty. Sin is a moral, spiritual problem involving God’s law and man’s rebellion against God. Both the punishment and the solution can only be spiritual.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that in addition to Christ’s suffering the eternal penalty, we must suffer the “temporal” punishment for sins, either in this life or in purgatory—and few Catholics expect to escape the latter. Supposedly, the flames of purgatory are the means of purging our sins. Here again we have confusion over spiritual and physical suffering, a denial of Christ’s finishing the work of our redemption, and the attempt to earn in part one’s salvation. Scripture unequivocally declares: “[Christ] purged our sins [then] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3); “without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins]” (Heb 9:22); “[Christ] washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rv 1:5).

Recognition that what Christ suffered for our sins was far beyond any physical suffering should increase our gratitude to Him. The deeper our understanding, the greater will be our appreciation for what Christ suffered in our place. May the Lord awaken in our hearts an overflowing river of praise and gratitude so that we continually express our love to the Father for giving His Son, and to Christ for enduring the punishment that we deserved for our sins.

Quotable

The plain truth is that *false doctrine* has been the chosen engine which Satan has employed in every age....Unable to prevent the Fountain of Life being opened, he has laboured incessantly to poison the streams which flow from it....False doctrine soon overspread the Primitive Church after the death of the Apostles....False doctrine in the middle ages so completely overspread the Church, that the truth as it is in Jesus was well nigh buried or drowned. During the last three centuries before the Reformation, it is probable that very few "Christians" in Europe could have answered the question, "What must I do to be saved?"....False doctrine since the days of the Reformation has continually been rising up again....

J.C. Ryle,

Warnings to the Churches, 1877

Q&A

Question: In the feature article of your Sept. '03 newsletter you wrote: "Gays' have managed to be categorized as a persecuted minority even though their 'difference' is by choice, not by birth. They have adopted this aberrant behavior voluntarily and now claim it as a badge of special privilege" (emphasis mine). In an otherwise extremely well written piece, this is where I believe you have erred. The vast amount of male homosexuals never "voluntarily chose" to become homosexuals. (Lesbianism is an entirely different issue.) Nor is it genetically encoded. Evidently, something happens in the early stages of the child's development—long before a "conscious choice"....I work in an industry that is replete with homosexuals, and I have had long and candid conversations with some who have become my friends....I hope you will give the enclosed article by Prager a careful perusal.

Answer: Thank you for your letter and the enclosed articles by Dennis Prager. I respect his intelligence and careful reasoning and read what he said with interest. You fault me for saying that homosexuality is a choice, and you say that Prager refutes this. In fact, he does not refute what I said, but supports it.

Prager states that very few homosexuals have not had sex with women and that the vast majority have unquestionably *chosen* their lifestyle for one reason or another. He suggests that there is a very small percentage for whom this may not be true, but the full explanation for their homosexuality

remains uncertain.

Your statement that homosexuals are created in God's image is of no more validity to your argument than to say that criminals were created in God's image. In fact, Adam is the only one created in God's image, and that image has long been distorted by human rebellion and the effects of sin long practiced to the extent that it is hardly recognizable (Gn 1:27; 5:3).

But even if we accept your statement fully, what does it mean? Surely you are not implying that homosexuality is part of "God's image" in which man was made! Couldn't a shoplifter say that he or she is made in God's image and has no choice because the urge to do so is too strong to resist, began at an early age, and has a name: kleptomania?

You express not only sympathy but an apparent acceptance of the very perversion that the Bible condemns in the strongest language, with no excuses allowed. Even Prager admits this and points to biblical condemnation (in contrast to widespread historic homosexuality in all cultures except among Jews) as one proof that God inspired the Old Testament.

We have two choices: to "accept" homosexuals as "normal" (which Prager, in agreement with the Bible, rejects), or to try to rescue all from this way of life. I think you would agree with me upon the latter course of action.

Question (composite of several): A number of us think you have given more than enough attention to the subject of Calvinism. This should not be the focal point of your ministry! It is time to move on to more edifying subjects; you are only adding fuel to the fires of division. You admit there are good Christians on both sides—so let it go at that.

Answer: I appreciate (and share) your concern lest too much attention be given to debating Calvinism. But I am confronted by a dilemma. Almost everywhere I look in God's Word, one's understanding of the passage depends upon whether or not one is a Calvinist. That's a fact I can't escape, no matter how much I'd prefer to ignore it!

For biblical understanding, one must either accept or reject Calvinism's view that God predestined before their birth all men either to heaven or to the Lake of Fire. Much of Scripture involves God's pleadings with Israel to repent. I must either believe that He sincerely desires to bless them all (in which case Calvinism is false)—or that He is mocking those whom He has predestined to eternal torment and from whom He withholds the very grace they need to repent. How can I study the

Passover and deliverance from Egypt, the Levitical sacrifices, the passage through the Red Sea, water out of the Rock, daily manna, etc., without recognizing that these provisions, which picture Christ's sacrifice, were for all of Israel and not for an elect among them—and thus that Calvinism can't be true? How can I read of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness for the healing of all who believed (not for an elect within Israel who had been *predestined* to believe) without recognizing that here also Calvinism opposes the plain teaching of Scripture?

And how can I overlook the fact that Christ used this incident to explain His sacrifice on the Cross, which must likewise have been for all, and not for an "elect" predestined to believe for eternity past? Moreover, how can I overlook the additional fact that in none of the Old Testament types of Christ and His sacrifice for our sins *was anyone first regenerated* before they believed, as Calvinism claims must be the case?

I'm not trying to argue, but only to share my dilemma. I can't ignore God's Word! Christ's exhortation to pray "Thy will be done..." is cruel and misleading if Calvinism is true, and thus rape, murder, war, lust, etc., are all exactly what God decreed according to His sovereign will—and is a genuine and earnest appeal only if Calvinism is false, and men, by their own free will, continually go against God's will. What do "choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Jos 24:15), "if ye be willing and obedient" (Is 1:19), and a host of other similar scriptures mean? They are misleading if Calvinism is true, and honest appeals only if Calvinism is false. Is "whosoever will may come" a genuine invitation to all, or is it misleading—because only the predestined elect can come? Paul earnestly tried to persuade all the lost whom he encountered to repent and believe. Was he wasting his time, because Christ hadn't died for most of them and they had already been damned before they were born—or does salvation depend upon one's willingness to believe? The meaning of much of Scripture hinges upon whether Calvinism is true or false.

I agree—we don't want Calvinism to be "the focal point of our ministry." I don't think it ever has been. At the same time, however, we can't ignore the fact that the Bible repeatedly deals with these issues. In any study of the biblical teaching of redemption, the love of God, and manifesting that love in our lives, we must either decide for Calvinism or against it. Surely, since I am to be merciful as my Heavenly "Father also is merciful" (Lk 6:36), it matters whether God is merciful to all or just to an elect.

Isn't it important whether God loves all and wants all to be saved, or damns

multitudes whom he *could* save? How can I preach the gospel without deciding whether it is a genuine offer of salvation for all or for only the elect?

Some of my good friends are Calvinists, but we don't break fellowship over our disagreement. Yet are not these issues of vital importance? How can I ignore them? I don't want to perpetuate a quarrel, but I must deal honestly with God's Word. I hope this helps you to understand my sincere dilemma and why I can't just ignore Calvinism.

Question: What might be included in "the strong delusion" in 2 Thessalonians 2:11? And is it already here, or does it only take effect after the Rapture?

Answer: Paul says that the "delusion" specifically causes those who "received not the love of the truth" to be deceived by the "lying wonders" performed by Antichrist ("that Wicked...whose coming is after the working of Satan") and by his "deceivableness of unrighteousness..." (2 Thes 2:8-10). Clearly, this applies to those left behind at the Rapture in a world ruled by Antichrist; but it would seem that their rejection of the truth preceded and prepared them for "that man of sin" (v. 3,4) and thus could occur, at least to a lesser degree, before the Rapture.

The delusion causes "that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned" (v. 11,12). Revelation 13:2,4,8 say the world will *worship* both "the beast" (Antichrist) and "the dragon [Satan who] gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority." Thus we could conclude that the lie is Antichrist's claim that he is God: "he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thes 2:4). The lie would seem to be the total delusion under Antichrist and the false prophet, which would include taking his mark and bowing down to his image. All who do so are damned (Rv 14:9-11).

Question: Will Antichrist be a Jew (just as Judas, a fellow Jew, betrayed Jesus)? If so, will he be of the tribe of Dan (Danish)?

Answer: Danes are not Jews and therefore cannot be from the tribe of Dan! The argument for Antichrist being Jewish is not because Judas was a Jew, but because it is speculated that Israel would only accept a Jew. Unquestionably, Israelis will embrace Antichrist as their deliverer: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (Jn 5:43). But why must he be a Jew?

The majority in Israel today would receive anyone as their Messiah who brought

peace—whether he were Jew or Gentile. That Antichrist will establish a false peace that will deceive Israel seems clear: "them that are at rest, that dwell safely...having neither bars nor gates...that are gathered out of the nations...that dwell in the midst of the land [of Israel] (Ezk 38:11-12); and by peace shall [Antichrist] destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand" (Dn 8:25).

Antichrist could be Jewish, but he need not be. He must, however, according to Daniel 9:26,27, be born within the borders of the ancient Roman Empire: "the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary [temple]...and he shall confirm the covenant [for peace and rebuilding the temple] for one week [seven years]: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease..."

The "covenant" must have provided for rebuilding the temple; the sacrifices could only be stopped if they had started, and for that the temple is essential. Surely the Muslims, UN, EU, and USA would never all agree to the rebuilding of the temple unless it were *forced* upon them—and that is the meaning of the Hebrew. Of course, only Antichrist empowered by Satan could impose this upon the world. (Israel will imagine he is their friend, whereas he has the temple rebuilt because he intends to sit in it declaring that he is God and demanding that all mankind worship him.)

The "people of the prince that shall come," who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, were, of course, the Roman armies under Titus. Thus Antichrist, whether Jew or Gentile, must have been born within the boundaries of the ancient Roman Empire. It would be fruitless and a waste of time to speculate regarding the identity of Antichrist (who can only "be revealed in his time" – 2 Thes 2:6), though that has always been a popular pursuit for many.

News Alert

Chicago Tribune, 04/26/04: Velma Dority managed to tune out the chatter on religious radio stations calling on all Christians to see "The Passion of the Christ." She ignored her virtuous friends who bragged about seeing the film countless time.

But when Ms. Dority's five sisters told her she must see "The Passion"—that watching Jesus suffer would make her a better Christian—she took action. She called her doctor and obtained a written excuse saying the movie would be harmful to her health.

"Once I told my family the doctor said not to see it, they said 'OK, don't see it,'" said Ms. Dority, 64, of Chicago, who suffers

from a variety of ailments, including asthma. "I felt much better after I got the doctor's approval because I didn't feel bad about not seeing the movie."

With Mel Gibson's blockbuster earning more than \$366 million at the box office and energizing evangelicals and conservative Catholics across the United States, some devout Christians have found themselves facing a dilemma.

They prefer not to view the film, because of its violent and gory nature or its traditionalist orientation, but feel pressure from pastors and other Christians to go. Some even say they are made to feel anti-Christian for not joining in the "buzz" surrounding the film at their Sunday services.

Since the debut of "The Passion" on Feb. 27, churches of many denominations have virtually made viewing it an act of religious faith. Some have rented cinemas and bused members to showings. Special study groups have been organized to discuss the film and Jesus Christ's life and crucifixion, while "Passion" websites and chat rooms flourish.

But for some Christians the violence in the film, which depicts in gruesome detail Christ being beaten with nail-studded whips until his skin in caked in blood, is too much to tolerate. Many fear the visceral images could leave them more traumatized than spiritually transformed...

Calls to conform and see the film are especially common among evangelical Christians. Overall, they have been among Mr. Gibson's staunchest backers, and the holy heat they have generated has made some pastors who are lukewarm to the film feel pressure to encourage their parishioners to see it.

"We were approached by a sister church in our neighborhood that is also Baptist about buying a large number of tickets together," said Keith Herron, senior pastor at Holmswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo. "If we did that, we would have clout with the (theater) manager and essentially, could do anything we would want to do."

The idea was clear, Mr. Herron said—the theater could be turned into a stage for saving lost souls. But Mr. Herron recoiled at the notion of using "The Passion" for instant conversions to Christianity.

"We just thought that was manipulative and the wrong approach to sharing the love of Christ," he said. "To pull on people in a moment of weakness like that is just wrong."

Mr. Herron said a number of evangelical churches are "absolutely" compelling worshippers, families and in some cases young children to see the film.

"There's incredible pressure to go see it," Mr. Herron said.

Dave's Itinerary

June 20-22 Calvary Chapel
York, England
44-1904-638777
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June 28-
July 2 Word of Life
Schroon Lake NY
(518) 494-6000

Aug-Sept New Zealand, Australia
New Zealand Coordinator
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National Coordinator
John Odell - +61 (0) 2 9869 7164

For the full Australia/New Zealand
itinerary, visit our website:
www.thebereancall.org

Letters

Dear All,

Already this Spring is seeing momentous events in the world, with the rise of Islamic terrorism in many countries. It's like Revelation 12 in some ways, with the dragon, enraged and full of fury pursuing the Woman of Revelation 12 (Israel) and any who dare to associate with her. Yesterday we had blackmail threats against Europe, with the promise of European countries not being targeted in the same way that the U.S. is being targeted, provided, of course, that they withdraw their troops from Iraq....Of course it's conveniently forgotten that Saddam Hussein gave generous "bounty" payments to the families of suicide bombers who attacked Israelis....Yet the media on the whole is turning people retrospectively against the Iraq war, against Bush, and, latent but definitely there, against the Jews as somehow the cause of all the trouble in the Middle East. RR (UK)

Dear Dave and friends,

My wife and I appreciate your stand on what the Bible says and not compromising your beliefs in the name of "unity." We have truly enjoyed your past two newsletters, as the "seeker friendly church" fad seems to be running unchecked even here in this rural area. It is good to have the reference material you include along with all the documentation for the quotes from those who are leading God's people astray. BA (PA)

TBC:

Concerning your article "The Seeker Friendly Way of Doing Church": what a shame that you feel free to attack Christian ministries God is blessing. Thousands of people have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ through the ministries of Willow Creek and Saddleback. God calls us to fulfill our ministry (2 Timothy 4:5), not tear down the ministry of others (Mark 9:38-40). By the

way, do you even pastor a church? Or is it just your "ministry" to tear down other pastors? Your comments are so derogatory and negative it sounds as though you're talking about pagan opponents to Christianity. Your tone is so negative and inflammatory that you just give fuel to divisive people. For some reason you have a problem with churches that have state-of-the-art sound and lighting, large screens, drama, and musical presentations, cafes that sell food or drink, warm water for baptisms, manicured lawns, church softball teams, microphone headsets, and chinos. Where in the Scripture is there any evidence that any of those things are wrong? I'll answer it for you, nowhere! What a disgrace that you call yourself "The Berean Call." MC (IA)

Dear Mr. Hunt,

I was given your book *What Love Is This?* by [a minister], because I didn't like his free will doctrine, and I wrote to him to tell him he was wrong....When I heard about Calvinism, it made so much sense to me....I had needed God to regenerate me at His timing for my life, and that's why I couldn't change. I walked around on a cloud for a week, thanking God and praising Him for not letting me go to hell. I wondered why He didn't save all, and I didn't think it was fair, but who was I to argue with God? So I tried not to think about it too much....Every decision I ever made was wrong and bad, and now you're telling me that the most important one in life and death was up to me! And if I somehow made the right one, then why did I live the way I did in the past and what made the difference now? No! I would keep thanking God for making that decision for me. I didn't care about my free will. It never did anything for me but get me into prison....It wasn't until I read your book for the second time that I became convinced I was wrong. I almost didn't read it, because the first six chapters made me mad and I thought you were just bashing Calvin, Luther and pointing out faults....I wrote over the pages to point out the false teaching....The biggest blow to me...was where you pointed out that spiritual death wasn't exactly the same as bodily death. I said *yes, it is*. But you showed me in the Scriptures I had read hundreds of times and never made the connection....Salvation [is a] gift you still have to *accept*....It's clear from John 6:64-65 why Jesus said they couldn't come—because of *unbelief* on their part. HW (prisoner, CT)

TBC,

I just visited your website for the first time. Thank you so much for the *TBC* archives going all the way back to 1986. CW (IL)

Dear Dave,

Ten years ago I often thought you were too harsh. I do not think that any more. Instead I am thankful for all your publications informing me, warning me and encouraging me on the narrow road....I am happy that you can reach so many more deceived, lukewarm and misinformed "believers." You are strengthening the faith in our Lord of many people. You are shaking some others. IF (Canada)

Friends,

I just finished reading *Debating Calvinism*. It re-enforces my belief that "Calvinism" is a man-made system. James White does not like Hunt's "shotgun approach" because Hunt has a thousand Scripture pellets to fire, while White is stuck with the six-shooter—relying on forced interpretations of a few scriptures which only results in having to rewrite the meaning of a thousand others....Jesus made the last, complete, infinite atonement for mankind's sin. Accepting or rejecting it is God's offer—and man will be justly judged for how he responds on Judgment Day. A little child can understand. TA (CA)

TBC Notes

We're Not the Final Word

We believe that many of the popular trends taking place today in Christendom are significantly and adversely influencing the spiritual state of the church. Although we give our reasons and provide information and documentation for each subject we address, we are definitely *not* the final word on any particular subject. God's Word is the final word! Our objective is simply to encourage believers to measure everything they do against the plumb line of Scripture.

In these spiritually perilous days before the Lord's return, each of us who professes Christ needs to diligently "Study [the Scriptures] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness" (2 Timothy 2:15,16).

T.A. McMahon
Executive Director

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Gibson's Stations of the Cross

John A. Bjorlik

The Middle Ages featured "mystery plays" that reenacted Bible stories in theaters or public squares. The Reformation replaced theatrics with biblical exposition. The difference was that mystery plays appealed to the senses, while the preaching of the Word of God made its appeal to faith, "*the evidence of things not seen.*" About the Lord Jesus, Peter wrote, "*Whom having not seen you love, in whom though now you see Him not, yet believing you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*" While the Bible is vivid in its imagery and lends itself to story-telling, the things it says (and the things it leaves unsaid) are designed to make real the invisible realities of the spiritual realm.

Through the years since, Christians have sensed this rivalry between theater and pulpit, and generally have held the theater in suspicion. One chief reason for this was the concern that the physical senses might smother the higher senses of thought and volition, and, worse still, do away with the appetite for a faith relationship.

In my library I have books about actors' conversions, telling how newborn Christians immediately renounced the theater, or the testimony of opera singers who refused to perform anything but Christian music. Of course, these books are more than a hundred years old. Today's evangelical has long since shed these ideas, and seems ignorant of the thinking behind these longstanding attitudes. But perhaps the old thinking is not all wrong.

When the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association began to promote gospel films, A.W. Tozer wrote a stinging rebuke, "*The Menace of the Modern Religious Movie,*" in which he warned against this very danger of the senses being acted upon to move the crowd, all the while never eliciting real faith in God.

Mel Gibson's controversial movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, graphically displays the betrayal, torture, crucifixion, and then resurrection of Christ. Gibson is a Roman Catholic, and therefore is insensible to this danger. Roman Catholicism promoted the mystery plays of the Dark Ages. They erected crucifixes, images, and stained glass

windows for the maximum effect on the physical senses. The Vatican has actively promoted a religious experience that can be felt and seen and heard. When John Henry Newman published his Roman Catholic views in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, John Darby answered in a 103-page review. On the first page, Darby writes, "The secret of the course of Dr. Newman's mind is this: it is sensuous; and so is Romanism." Darby's use of the word "sensuous" is not to mean lustful. He meant that Newman was caught up in the outward senses that the Roman system encouraged, with its appeal to formulas, rituals, architecture, artwork, vestments, mystical sounds, candles, and the rest. Newman's infatuation with sensual religion kept him from a settled faith in the unseen and eternal realities.

Of course, God speaks today as well through His creation, which necessarily involves our senses. The danger is not that we might become emotional and actually feel something; would to God that we would all have more emotion toward Him. The danger is that we would mistake a sensuous experience for faith in God. A viewer can weep as well for the sufferings of William Wallace in *Braveheart* as shed tears for the Man on the middle cross. Are the tears any different? We cannot expect Hollywood to do in the soul what only the Spirit can accomplish.

God's Word is not bound. To the degree that the Scripture is accurately conveyed in films like *The Passion*, people will have reason to seek God. But this is a mixed medium and sends a mixed message. Souls may have been saved while looking at the "stations of the cross" in a Roman Catholic chapel, and we can expect to see souls coming to God while watching Mel Gibson's film, but let no one imagine that being overcome by emotionally charged special effects is synonymous with faith through the Word of God. "*For we walk by faith, not by sight...Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer*" (2 Corinthians 5:7, 16).

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John Bjorlik and *Uplook Magazine*, March 2004