



Essay One

A Faithful Creator

“And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26). If we are to rightly understand God’s plan and purpose for mankind, we must not forget that it was our Creator’s expressed purpose to make man in his own image and after His likeness. Is it possible that the eternal suffering or annihilation of the creature was what God had in mind? ***“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.”*** (Romans 8:20) ***“Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?”*** (Isaiah 50:2) ***“The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: . . . For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?”*** (Isaiah 14:24&27)

We are God’s Workmanship Created in Christ Jesus

God is not like the craftsman or artisan who lays aside the marred work of his hands in disappointment and despair. ***“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) This promise isn’t limited to Christians, for **all** are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. ***“For by him (Christ) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.”*** (Colossians 1:16) Therefore, ***“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*** (Philippians 1:6)

Job, reflecting on the vanity of the creature exclaims, ***“If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands.”*** (Job 14:14&15) Job does not base his hope for the redemption of his body on his own righteousness, but rather on the fact that he is God’s workmanship, and his confidence that the Creator has a desire to perfect the work of his hands. ***“But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not***

wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.” (Isaiah 64:8-9) *“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”* (I Peter 4:19)

When God said, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,”* he was not speaking of Adam alone, but of the entire Adamic race. God’s creative work, begun in Eden, has been proceeding without interruption. Thus far, God’s creative purpose has been completed only in the case of *“the perfect man”*, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has become the pattern and the model after whom all the redeemed shall be fashioned, *“being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.”* (Hebrews 1:3) *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:13) In God’s creative process we are like the unplanted acorn which bears little resemblance to the stately oak which it is destined to become.

As in Adam All Die, so in Christ shall All be made Alive

We should remember that God’s creative process to perfect the creature is as much a work of God as was the conception of the creature. *“But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be . . . But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. . . The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”* (I Corinthians 15:35-38, & 47-49)

What a simple creative principle! If we have been born in the flesh, we shall just as surely be reborn in the spirit, ultimately, *“being the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his person.”* (Hebrews 1:3) *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.”* (I Corinthians 15:22&23)

We Are Conceived by the Word of Truth

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18) *“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them,*

heard I say, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Revelation 5:13)

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6) We shall have as little to do with our spiritual birth as we did with our physical birth, as both are of the Creator’s design and doing. *“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”* (Ecclesiastes 11:5) *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* (II Corinthians 3:18)

Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord

Therefore, *“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”* (Psalm 100)



Essay Two

The Nature of Man

Throughout the history of the Christian church there have persisted two schools of thought on the nature of man, apart from the Spirit of God. One viewpoint holds that the natural man is totally corrupt, incapable of fulfilling the conditions for salvation, and without the sovereign intervention of God, the natural man is irretrievably lost. The second school of thought contends that the natural man, through the exercise of **'free will'**, can initiate or reject God's plan of salvation for the individual.

These divergent views of the nature of man were as prevalent at the time of Martin Luther as they are today. Erasmus, the Christian humanist of Luther's day, brought this issue into sharp focus when he published a tract titled, **On the Freedom of the Will**. Erasmus was urged by the ecclesiastical leaders of the day to state at what point he differed from Luther, for in many ways these two men were fellow laborers during the birth of the Reformation.

There are None Righteous, No not One

Luther thanked Erasmus for centering the discussion on the nature and destiny of man. He wrote to Erasmus, **"You alone have gone to the heart of the problem instead of debating the papacy, indulgences, purgatory, and similar trifles. You alone have gone to the core, and I thank you for it."** Luther responded to Erasmus by writing **The Bondage of the Will**, said to be the greatest piece of theological writing that ever came from Luther's pen. Luther recognized that "the natural man can practice the civil virtues as a responsible husband, an affectionate father, a decent citizen, and an upright magistrate. He saw that man was capable of the integrity and valor as displayed by the Romans of old, or the Turks of his day. Furthermore, he acknowledged that most of the precepts of the gospel can be outwardly kept. But in the eyes of God, ***"there are none righteous, no not one."*** Motives are never pure. The noblest acts are vitiated by arrogance, self-love, the desire of the eye, and the lust of power. From the religious point of view, man is a sinner. He has therefore no claim upon God. If man is not irretrievably lost, it can only be because God deigns to favor him beyond his desert. The problem then shifts from man to God." (**Here I Stand - A Life of Martin Luther**, by Roland H. Bainton, page 253)

Luther Believed Man was Impotent in Matters of Salvation

Luther wrote, “God has surely promised his grace to the humbled: that is, to those who mourn over and despair of themselves. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will and works, and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another – God alone. As long as he is persuaded that he can make even the smallest contribution to his salvation, he remains self-confident and does not utterly despair of himself, and so is not humbled before God; but plans out for himself (or at least hopes or longs for) a position, an occasion, a work, which shall bring him final salvation. But he who is out of doubt that his destiny depends entirely on the will of God despairs entirely of himself, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; and such a man is very near to grace for his salvation.” (Bondage of the Will, by Martin Luther, translated by J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston, page 100)

Erasmus believed Man could fulfill the Conditions for Salvation

Erasmus, as do many of our modern evangelical preachers, conceived of free will as, “a power of the human will by which a man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from the same. Is it not unjust that God should create man incapable of fulfilling the conditions for salvation, and then at whim save or damn for what cannot be helped?” (Bondage of the Will, page 137)

Luther responded, “Doubtless it gives the greatest possible offence to common sense or natural reason, that God, who is proclaimed as being full of mercy and goodness, should of his own mere will abandon, harden and damn men. . . It seems an iniquitous, cruel, intolerable thought to think of God; and it is this that has been a stumbling block to so many great men down the ages. And who would not stumble at it? I have stumbled at it myself more than once, down to the deepest pit of despair, so that I wished I had never been made a man. (That was before I knew how health-giving that despair was, and how close to grace) This is why so much toil and trouble has been devoted to clearing the goodness of God, and throwing the blame on man’s will.” (Bondage of the Will, page 55)

Luther rightly saw that the natural man was incapable of contributing to his eternal salvation. However, he had not yet been given understanding of God’s ultimate plan for the reconciliation of mankind, which reveals to us the fullness of God’s mercy and goodness.

Reformation or Crucifixion of the Natural Man?

The danger of the Erasmian view of the nature of man is that Christians will substitute the reformation of the natural man for crucifixion of the natural man. Erasmus declared, **“If this be so, who will try and reform his life?”** Luther replied, **Nobody! Nobody can! God has no time for your practitioners of self-reformation, for they are hypocrites. The elect, who fear God, will be reformed by the Holy Spirit; the rest will perish unreformed. Who will believe (you say) that God loves him? I reply, Nobody! Nobody can! But the elect shall believe it; and the rest will perish without believing it, raging and blaspheming, as you describe them.”** (Bondage of the Will, page 99)

Transforming Themselves into Apostles of Christ

Because of the Erasmian view of the nature of man, we find many Christians building their lives on the reformation of the natural man. The difficulty in dealing with the natural man arises from the fact that he can accomplish his self-exalting purposes either through evil, hostile, anti-social behavior, or, through cleverly concealed altruistic behavior manifest in apparent good works. In fact, the natural man can be reformed to the point of appearing as an angel of light, or a minister of righteousness. In II Corinthians 11:13-15 we read, **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”** In Matthew 7:22, the apostles of Christ working through the natural man claim to prophecy, cast out devils, and do many wonderful works in the name of Jesus. Christ says he will profess unto them, **“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”** Certainly Christ is not talking to the new creature which is borne of the spirit, but to the old carnal nature which cannot enter his kingdom.

Thomas Jefferson's Erasmian View of Christianity

Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States, author of the Declaration of Independence, author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and founder of the University of Virginia, believed that a Christian was saved by his good works. Gary Scott Smith, author of Faith and the Presidency, wrote on pages 61 and 65, **“Jefferson wished that Christians and other theists would stop debating Christ's divinity, and focus on**

his character and moral teachings. The planter rejected the doctrines of Christ's virgin birth, vicarious atonement, and bodily resurrection. He was convinced that people had an intrinsic disposition to do good rather than evil, to live an upright rather than an immoral life. He maintained that if he ever founded a new denomination, "its fundamental principle would be the reverse of Calvin's belief, that is, we are saved by our good works which are within our power, and not by our faith which is not in our power." Jefferson's Erasmian view of Christianity, founded on the belief that man's first duty is the reformation of the natural man, now permeates our Christian communities and institutions.

Ye are the Temple of God

Instead of putting off the old man, we try to give him an extreme makeover and hope that God will accept him. However, the scriptures are very plain that the old nature is totally unacceptable to God no matter how upright the old nature may appear. The Christian is warned that he must build his spiritual life wholly on the new creature, which is Christ in us. In I Corinthians 3:11-16 we read, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*"

Put off the Old Man and Put on the New Man

The scriptures tell us there are two natures dwelling within the body of the Christian. In Ephesians 4:22-24 we read, "*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*" These two natures are engaged in continual conflict to control our minds, which in turn controls our behavior. Proverbs 23:7 says, "*For as he (man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" In Romans 12:1-2 Paul beseeches us to "*present your bodies a living sacrifice*", and that we be transformed into the new nature "*by the renewing of your mind*" in the word of God. "*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*" (John 15:3)

As Luther indicated, this transformation is impossible until we utterly despair (or repent) of our whole sinful nature, not just the sins of the old nature. In Romans 7:18 Paul

declares, *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.”* In Romans 8:6-7 we read, *“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”*

Beware of our Reformed Carnal Nature Posing as God

Most Christians acknowledge that the carnal nature (or carnally controlled mind) cannot keep God’s law, but at the same time they assign to this carnal nature the capacity to believe God, to receive spiritual gifts, and to confess Christ as Lord and Saviour. As soon as we assert this element of goodness in the carnal man we set the stage for his reformation and eventual exaltation in the temple of God, *“which temple ye are.”* (I Corinthians 3:17) In II Thessalonians 2:3-4 we read, *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”*

The Natural Man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God

In I Corinthians 2:12 we read, *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given us of God.”* We can’t even appreciate the things God has for us until he first gives us his Spirit (new nature), let alone receive spiritual gifts. In I Corinthians 2:14 we read, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

The only thing God asks us to do with our old carnal nature is to crucify it. In Romans 6:6 we read, *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him (Christ), that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”* In Colossians 3:3-5 we read, *“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”*

Death is swallowed up in Victory

Once we acknowledge and accept the appointed destiny of our carnal nature, God gives us victory over sin and death. We are assured that this sinful nature, which we all must wrestle with, will be finally put off at death. Paul rejoices in this fact in I Corinthians 15:54-55. *“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written,*

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The scriptures admonish us not to know (or identify) ourselves, or our brethren, by the old carnal nature. In II Corinthians 5:16 we read, ***Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.*** In Galatians 5:17 we read, ***For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*** While our flesh is still lusting after the Spirit in this mortal body, we are to reckon our carnal man as already dead, and in faith, trust God for our eventual and complete transformation, as death is swallowed up in victory.



Essay Three

What Shall I do to Inherit Eternal Life?

A young man came to Jesus and asked, ***“Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”*** (Matthew 19:16) What a Pandora’s box of spiritual remedies has been opened by this question posed by the rich young ruler. How easily we miss the message of hope in Christ’s answer.

In Matthews 19:17, Christ advises the young man, ***“But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”*** Did Christ actually believe this young man had any hope of earning eternal life by keeping the commandments? ***“Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*** (Romans 3:20&23)

All these Things have I Kept, what Lack I yet?

Why didn’t Christ reply? ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*** (John 14:6) It should be obvious that this young man had not yet learned the lesson which God’s law was meant to teach. After hearing Christ outline the requirements of the law, ***“The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”*** (Matthew 19:20)

How quick we are to commend this young man for his diligence in keeping the commandments, without ever recognizing the enormity of his pride, and total lack of understanding of the demands of God’s law. Christ’s “sermon on the mount” makes it clear what God’s law requires. ***“But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment. . . . But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”*** (Matthew 5:22&28) What young man can stand uncondemned before such a righteous law as this?

Sell what you Have and Give to the Poor

Christ, seeing the pride and unbroken spirit of the young man, in love, further increases the demands of God's righteous law. ***"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions."*** (Matthews 19:21-22)

What a pity! If only the young man had sold his possessions and followed Christ, he could have earned eternal life. Such nonsense! If it were possible for men to earn eternal life by keeping the commandments, the kingdom of God would be populated with arrogant egotists as proud as Satan himself. Thank God we cannot meet the demands of his righteous law in the flesh. Christ put it this way: ***"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."*** (Matthew 19:24) What is true for the rich man is true for all of us, if we are trusting in our own righteousness.

The Commandments are given to Show us our Impotence

Luther, in **The Bondage of the Will** makes plain the role of God's law as ***"our school master to bring us unto Christ."*** (Galatians 3:24) ***"The commandments are not given inappropriately or pointlessly; but in order that through them proud blind man may learn the plague of his own impotence, should he try to do what is commanded. Hence, the work of Satan is to hold men so that they do not recognize their wretchedness, but presume that they can do everything that is stated. But the work of Moses the lawgiver is the opposite of this, namely, through the law to lay open to man his own wretchedness, so that, by thus breaking him down, and confounding him in his self-knowledge, he may make him ready for grace, and send him to Christ to be saved."*** (**Bondage of the Will**, pages 160 & 162)

With God All Things are Possible

In Matthew 19:25, the disciples begin to see the futility of trying to obtain eternal life under the conditions of the old covenant. ***"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil."*** (Deuteronomy 30:15) ***"When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."***

I'm afraid that in most evangelical circles Christ would have received rather low marks for the way he witnessed to this young man. Why didn't he concentrate on the grace of God, and keep quiet about the demands of the law?

Luther expressed it this way. **“God has surely promised his grace to the humbled: that is, to those who mourn over and despair of themselves. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will and works, and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure and work of another. God alone. As long as he is persuaded that he can make even the smallest contribution to his salvation, he remains self-confident and does not utterly despair of himself, and so is not humbled before God; But plans out for himself (or at least hopes and longs for) a position, an occasion, a work, which shall bring him final salvation. But he who is out of doubt that his destiny depends entirely on the will of God despairs entirely of himself, and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; and such a man is very near to grace for his salvation.”** (Bondage of the Will, page 100)

God is not willing that Any should Perish

I wonder if Christ is able to complete the good work which he began in that young man? If eternal life is in any way dependent upon our own merit, then the answer is no. But if salvation is wholly a work of grace by a sovereign God, then there is hope for all. ***“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*** (II Peter 3:9)

Is obedience to God’s commandments an essential part of our Christian experience? Certainly! But let those good works spring forth from the fountain of the new creature which God has created in us, and let us forever abhor the notion that apart from Christ’s indwelling we can author any good work which will please God. ***“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”*** (Philippians 2:13)



Essay Four

The Yoke of Sign Seeking

How many sincere and well intentioned evangelical ministers seek signs from members of their congregation that they have given their hearts to Christ, rather than preaching the gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ?

If Thou be the Christ tell us Plainly

We piously censure the Jews when we read in John 10:24, *“If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly?”* In our hearts we wonder, didn’t those Jews know the scriptures which testify of Christ? Yet, do we not ask the same faithless question of our brethren? If you’re a Christian, tell us plainly? Don’t the scriptures teach us that our sonship was settled by God before the foundations of the world were laid? (Ephesians 1:4-5), and as promised to our fathers and the prophets in Genesis 17:7 and Hosea 1:10, and fulfilled by Jesus Christ in sealing the new covenant with his blood at Calvary? In John 10:25 we read, *“Jesus answered them, I told you and you believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.”* Is not this how Jesus said we could identify his sheep? *“Ye shall know them by their fruit.”* (Matthew 7:16)

There Shall No Sign be given this Generation

In Mark 8:11-12, *“The Pharisees came forth, and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith. Why does this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.”* Do we not grieve the Spirit of God when we seek a sign from the Christ indwelling the heart of the believer? Or worse yet, do we imply that the sign is a condition of becoming a Christian? By the upraised hand have your sins forgiven, by the upraised hand receive eternal life, by the upraised hand become a child of God. Such nonsense!

The Sign of Circumcision

The apostles had to contend with those seeking signs in the days of the early church. In Acts 15:1-2 we read, *“And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”* Now we know that circumcision was a sign or a token of the unconditional covenant which God made with Abraham. In Romans 4:11 we read, *“And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.”*

Why tempt God to put a Yoke on the Neck of the Disciples

In Acts 15:10, Peter speaking on this matter says, *“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”* Are we not reverting back to the yoke of the conditional old covenant when we ask the people to give us a sign of their faith. At the sealing of the old covenant the people said in Exodus 24:7, *“All that the Lord hath said will we do,”* At the sealing of the new covenant, the people remained silent, and the Spirit of God descended upon them to speak the words of the prophets concerning the grace of Christ. (Acts 2:4& 16-39)

We are Children of the Promise

In Galatians 4:28-31 Paul tells us to cast out the bondwoman (the old covenant) with all of its vestiges, and to stake our faith on the unconditional new covenant which frees us from all dependence on the flesh. *“Now we brethren, as Issac was, are the children of promise. . . Cast out the bondwoman and her son (old covenant): for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman (new covenant). So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”*

God has broken the yoke upon his people that teaches we are saved by works, a teaching which prevailed until the time of Martin Luther. God must, and will, break the yoke that teaches we are saved by signs. Many of God’s children have borne this burden of trusting in signs of the flesh, and not trusting wholly in the finished work of Christ. Indeed it is too heavy a burden.

That They may Glory in Your Flesh

In Galatians 6:12 Paul says, ***“As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised: only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”*** Unfortunately, if you teach that Christ finished the work for man’s salvation on the cross, independent of the will of man, you’re going to be persecuted, as were the apostles. Paul goes on in Galatians 6:13, ***“For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.”***

How many ministers judge the success of their ministry by the number of signs of upraised hands, or responses to altar calls? In Galatians 6:14 we read, ***“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”***

These Signs shall Follow Them that Believe

The Lord has given us the ordinance of baptism as a token or sign (not a condition) that we are God’s workmanship. ***“That he might sanctify and cleanse it (the Church) with the washing of water by the word.”*** (Ephesians 5:26) In Mark 16:17-18 Christ says, ***“And these signs shall follow them that believe.”***

“In my name they shall cast out devils.” This includes devilish doctrines as spoken of in I Timothy 4:1, ***“In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”***

“They will speak with new tongues.” In John 8:28 Jesus said, ***“but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.”*** Even so, we must speak the words of God and not our own.

“They shall take up serpents.” Luke 10:19 says, ***“behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing by any means shall hurt you.”*** In Matthew 23:33, Christ identifies these serpents as religious unbelievers.

“And if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them.” Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 20:23, ***“Ye shall drink indeed of my cup,”*** and so they did, caring not about those who could destroy the body, but not the spirit.

That Ye Break Every Yoke

In Isaiah 58:6 we read, *“Is not the fast which I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”*



Essay Five

Christ's Decision for Us

The thrust of modern evangelical preaching is to encourage sinners to ‘**make a decision for Christ**’, and on the basis of this decision, the sinner **gets saved**, obtains the gift of eternal life, and is assured of going to heaven when he dies, providing he does not commit some unpardonable sin. The scriptural basis for this message is of course, John 3:16. *“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.”* Romans 10:9 adds the further condition of, *“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus.”*

Making a Decision for Christ

These two conditions of believing and confessing are euphemistically referred to as: **making a decision for Christ**, accepting Christ as our personal Saviour, or, giving our heart to Jesus. With this theology in mind, wouldn't it be nice if the preacher could keep track of who was saved, and who wasn't, and be able to tell how effective his preaching was by counting the converts? So, we add to the process of getting saved, the raising of hands, the altar call, or some other sign that the sinner is genuinely saved. Well, what's wrong with that? Nothing, except Satan has now been given the perfect instrument to immobilize the babe in Christ – namely, **doubt**.

If Satan can get us thinking that we had something to do with our salvation, he can just as easily persuade us that we didn't do it quite right. Maybe we weren't truly repentant. Maybe we promised God we would not commit a certain sin, and then we backslid. Maybe we weren't really serious about becoming a Christian. Maybe we didn't understand the scriptures about salvation. Maybe we didn't really give Christ our whole heart, as if our desperately wicked heart could play any role in our salvation. *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9)

The Natural Man Receiveth Not the Spirit of God

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