

THE GOOD NEWS IN A NUTSHELL

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Foreword

The gospel of Jesus Christ is totally different than any other religion. All others have one common-denominator: you try to win the favor of God (or of the gods) by the good things you do or that you sacrifice. In contrast, the gospel of Christ is a revelation of what God has done and is doing for us. Worship therefore is simply beholding, contemplating, understanding, appreciating the character of this loving heavenly Father. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," He says (Isaiah 45:22, KJV). Stricken Israelites could simply look at a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole and be healed (Numbers 21:9). John says, "Behold, what manner of love (agape) the Father hath bestowed upon us" (1 John 3:1, KJV).

People are amazed—you just look and you're saved?! Yes, that's indeed what the Bible teaches. Just by looking, we are changed, converted: "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image ... by

the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

But what are we to "look" at, to "behold"? The answer: the cross of Christ. He said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15). There is where the love (agape) is revealed for us to "behold." The gospel is the news that tells what He has done.

The easiest thing any human can do is to look. The Good News in a Nutshell invites you to look ... and live.

The Good News in a Nutshell

Our Human Dilemma

Today, wherever we go, the world is in trouble. Men and women everywhere are seeking the solution to insurmountable moral, personal, social, national, and international problems. Underneath is a longing to know the real meaning of life and the future. People are asking where the world came from, how life began, why men are continually at war, and why there is so much hatred between various races and ethnic groups. Is there no hope for lasting peace? Why is human nature torn between ideals and actions; between hope for something better and the perverse inclination to do something worse?

Unaided by some power outside of himself, man has never been able to find a satisfactory answer to these problems. But there is hope. Implanted in every human heart is a measure of faith, a desire to worship some higher power, a desire to seek after God. God indeed has the

answers.

"What Must I Do?"

His wonderful plan of salvation is revealed through His Word, the Bible. In Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, chapter 19:16-26, we read the story of a young man who came to Jesus with a question which is on many minds: "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

In response, Jesus answered, "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." In other words, if you think you can earn eternal life—salvation by your good works—you must keep the commandments. Since this young man was a Jew to whom the commandments meant the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, he wanted to know to which of the commandments Jesus was referring. Jesus' answer summed up the last six commandments of the moral law, the Ten Commandments: "Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

Because he had been raised a strict Jew, this young man replied, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" In other words: Is there anything lacking in my performance that will deprive me of heaven? To this Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect [i.e., if you really love your neighbor as yourself], go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have [my] treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

What a bargain! But this was more than the young man was willing to do. He was rich and had great material possessions. He turned away sorrowfully and went home without the assurance of eternal life.

The disciples of Jesus witnessed this incident, and Jesus used it to show them that when it comes to salvation, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

When Human Effort Fails

Because sin is a deceiver, many have been

misled into thinking that they can save themselves by their own good works. In a recent survey in three cities of America the question was raised: Who goes to heaven and who goes to hell? The typical answer in every city: those who are good go to heaven and those who are bad go to hell.

But the Bible clearly teaches that "by observing the law [trying to be good], no one will be justified [declared righteous]" (Galatians 2:16). Paul repeats the same statement in Romans 3:20, and then adds, "Through the law we become conscious of sin."

The Jews of Christ's day made the tragic mistake of believing that they could be saved by keeping the law. For this reason, in the beginning of His ministry, Jesus invited these sincere Jews who desperately tried to work their way to heaven, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened [very discouraged], and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Hope for the Helpless

Man's only hope of salvation is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish counsel called the Sanhedrin and one of the prominent leaders of Judaism, Jesus made a statement which has become the favorite Bible text of many Christians: "For God so loved the world [human race] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus came to this world for that purpose.

As we read the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, we discover three very important facts.

1. All In One. God created all people—the whole human race—in one man. In Acts 17:26 we read, "From one man [Adam] he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth." In Genesis 2:7 the creation of Adam is recorded for us. The word "Adam" in Hebrew means mankind. We read that God breathed into Adam the breath of life. While the English Bible uses the word life in

the singular, the original Hebrew text from which the English was translated actually has the word life in the plural form—lives. God was not creating one man when He created Adam, He was creating the whole human race in that one man.

2. A Ruined Race. Through that one man, sin entered the world. In the New Testament, especially in Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, we discover that Satan ruined the whole human race in one man-Adam. When Adam and Eve were created, God told them to multiply the corporate life that He had created in them (Genesis 1:28).

But before Adam and Eve began the multiplication process (had any children) they sinned. Therefore, the life that Adam passed on to his children, his posterity, was a life that had already sinned. Since the life that you and I were born with is an extension of Adam's life, it is a life that stands condemned, a life that must die.

According to Romans 5:12, "Sin entered the

world through one man." In verse 18, Paul concludes his statement by saying, "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men." God doesn't blame us for the sin predicament that we are in because of the condemnation we inherited at birth.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15:21: "For since death came through a man [singular], the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [singular]." In verse 22, the apostle points out who these two men are: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." This brings us to the third fact.

3. Amazing Good News. The amazing good news of salvation is that God redeemed all men in one man, Jesus Christ, just as Satan ruined the whole human race in one man, Adam.

Through No Choice of Our Own

But there is one difference: we need to clearly understand what Adam did to the human race. We had no choice in it. It is our common heritage because we are by nature the descendants of Adam. But because God so loved the world, what He did for us in Christ is a gift. And like any gift, we cannot enjoy it until we receive it.

The Gospel in a Nutshell

We find the whole plan of salvation "in a nutshell" in Ephesians 2:4-6. In the first three verses of this chapter the apostle Paul paints a very dark, dismal, and hopeless picture of mankind. He does this because the good news of salvation that God obtained through Jesus Christ is not for good people; it is for sinners who need a Savior.

In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He is talking about sinners, one hundred percent sinners, as we all are. For us to receive the gift of salvation and to

make the plan of salvation, obtained in Jesus Christ, effective to us individually, God first has to destroy all confidence that man has in himself in terms of salvation.

Sin is a deceiver. It deceives us into thinking that we can save ourselves by our good works. But the Bible is clear: "There is no one righteous, not even one ... there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:9-12).

Discouraged?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians was a prison letter. He had been the pastor of Ephesus for about three years, but now he was imprisoned in a Roman dungeon for preaching Christ. Many of the members of the Ephesus church became very discouraged. They thought: If God is not able to protect our pastor, the great apostle Paul who is languishing in a Roman dungeon, what hope is there for lay people like us?

So Paul wrote this wonderful letter, which

some call the "queen" of Paul's epistles. In Ephesians 2:1-3, he reminds the Ephesian Christians that they were not saved because they were good. They were sinners, both by performance and by nature, but they were saved by grace.

The church at Ephesus was a mixture of Gentiles and Jews and, in Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul is addressing the Gentile believers: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." In other words, they had no spiritual life before they were converted. The King James Version adds, "And you hath he quickened [made alive]," but you will notice that those words are in italics, which means this is a supplied statement and is not in Paul's original text.

In verse 2, Paul goes on to speak of their former sins "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient [to the gospel]." He is saying, You were sinners by nature as well as

sinners by performance. Whichever way you look at it, you were sinners.

In verse 3, Paul turns to his fellow Jews, "All of us also lived among them at one time [not only you Gentiles, but even we Jews who lived among you Gentiles], gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects [children] of wrath." In other words: Our condition as Jews is the same as that of the Gentiles. We, both Jews and Gentiles, are sinners by nature and sinners by performance. Also, in Romans 3:23, Paul says, "There is no difference [between Jew and Gentile], for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Alive From the Dead!

After painting this dark, dismal picture, Paul introduces the wonderful news of salvation in Ephesians 2:4: "But [in spite of the fact that we are all sinners, worthy of condemnation and death] because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in

mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved," According to this verse, it is because of God's great love for us that we have been redeemed in Jesus Christ. The foundation, the source of our salvation, is the love of God.

An Alien Love

Here is where a major problem exists, because the word Paul uses for love is a word that does not have an equivalent in our English language. We have only one word for love in English. Whether we talk about love between husband and wife or boyfriend and girlfriend, love we have for our pets or food, or the type of love displayed in fiction and movies, we use the same word.

Therefore, when we read 1 John 4:8, "God is love," we project these human ideals of love onto God. The moment we do that, we pervert the biblical concept of God's love, and, by extension, we pervert the gospel. The word Paul used is *agape*, one of four words in the Greek language

that he could have chosen for "love." To define God's love he chose the noun agape, which was obscure among the secular Greeks, but is the word used in the New Testament to describe God's love.

"God is agape" and it is this agape that is the foundation of our salvation. It is extremely important that we understand agape love because it is upon this basis that God saved us. If we project human love onto God, it is guaranteed that we will pervert the gospel; we will fail to understand the infinitely good news of salvation. There are some major areas in which human love and God's love are not only different, but are exact opposites. It is only as we understand the love of God as revealed in the New Testament that we can understand the good news of salvation, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conditional Love (I'll Love You If—)

Human love is conditional, which means that it depends on beauty or goodness and therefore it

needs to be aroused. Human love does not love another automatically. The object to be loved has to be good or appealing to us because human love expects some benefit in return. We love only if we are loved. If we become enemies, our love disappears.

Human love is the wrong foundation for the gospel because if we project this kind of conditional love onto God, then the gospel is no longer good news. It becomes good advice, telling us that unless we are good of ourselves, Jesus will not take us to heaven. This contradicts the good news of the gospel.

Unconditional Love (I Love You In Spite Of—)

In complete contrast to conditional human love, God's love {agape} is unconditional; it is spontaneous; it is uncaused and independent of our goodness. Paul explains this love of God when he tells the Christians in Rome: "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love

into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5). Then he explains this love of God in a unique way by contrasting it with human love.

Powerless on Our Own

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless [or helpless], Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). The word ungodly means wicked. We were helpless, incapable of saving ourselves, but Christ died for us because Christ's love is unconditional.

In Romans 5:7, Paul describes human love: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die." Human beings have been known to lay down their lives for a loved one, a friend, or their beloved country, but even this is rare. In verse 8, he describes God's love in complete contrast to human love, which is limited only to those who are good: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This is the amazing truth about God's love.

In verse 10 Paul goes one step further: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled [past tense] to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" That is why God's love, which is unconditional, is the foundation of our salvation. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:4 that it is because of this love that God is able to redeem us.

Beyond "Until Death Do Us Part"

Human love is changeable as well as conditional, therefore it fluctuates and is unreliable. Peter was sincere when he told Jesus in the upper room, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Matthew 26:35). But when the human love that he had for Christ was tested a few hours later, he disowned Jesus, not once or twice, but three times, the third time with cursing and swearing.

It is because human love is changeable,

unreliable, and fluctuating that there is so much divorce in many countries. Men and women fall in love with each other and get married, but within a few years end up in the divorce court. But God's love is changeless, In Jeremiah 31:3, God says to the rebellious Jews, "I have loved you with an everlasting love [emphasis ours]."

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 we read, "Love [agape] never fails." In John 13:1 we are told that Jesus loved His disciples to the very end, in spite of the traitor Judas and the self-centered motivation of the rest. In Romans 8:35-39 Paul says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" He says that in times of crisis we will feel forsaken, but the fact is, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Upside-Down Kingdom

God's love is changeless, unconditional, and finally, self-emptying. It seeks not its own. Because of this love, Jesus, who Himself is God, stepped down lower and lower. He became a human being and then stepped down even lower to be obedient to the death of the cross so that you and I might be saved (see Philippians 2:6-8). He loved us to the very end. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

In complete contrast, human love is self-seeking and egocentric; therefore, it is always seeking a higher place. Economically, religiously, educationally, socially, man is always trying to raise himself higher and higher because he wants to be number one. In complete contrast, God stepped down lower and lower for us. That is the basis of our salvation.

But the fact that God loves us unconditionally

is not enough to save us. God is holy and righteous; therefore, He cannot save the sinner without maintaining His integrity regarding His law.

In Christ

With this clear understanding of God's love, we read in Ephesians 2:4-6: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

In this powerful statement, Paul is bringing out the key phrase that runs all through his epistles. If we deleted this phrase, there would be little left of Paul's exposition of the gospel. This recurring phrase is the central theme of Paul's theology and the means of our salvation.

In verse 4, Paul tells us that God saved us because He loved us. In verse 5, he tells us that He made us alive and saved us by grace; finally, He

raised us up and "seated" us in heaven—all of this in Christ Jesus. The key phrase is "in Christ."

This phrase is also expressed in other similar phrases such as in him, or through him, in the beloved, or together with him, etc. These phrases are synonymous and imply the in Christ motif or theme. The truth behind the phrase was first introduced by Christ Himself when He told His disciples, "Abide in me" (John 15:4 KJV).

The words in Christ are the under girding words of the gospel, and if we do not understand what the New Testament, especially Paul, means by the expression in Christ, we will never be able to understand the wonderful message of the gospel, the good news of salvation.

The phrase in Christ is the very heart of the gospel message. As Christians, there is nothing we have except that we have it in Christ. Everything we hope for and enjoy as believers—the peace of justification, holy living through the process of sanctification, and the blessed hope of glorification

which we will have at the second coming of Christ—all of these wonderful ramifications of the good news of salvation are always ours in Christ. Outside of Him we have nothing but sin, condemnation, and death, which we inherited from Adam.

Though God loves us unconditionally, and because He is a holy and righteous God, He cannot save us by simply excusing our sins. We regularly excuse the mistakes of our children and the sins of others, but God cannot do that unconditionally because He is a righteous God.

Solidarity

So the question is, "How did God save mankind?" How can God justify the ungodly (Romans 4:5) who believe in Jesus and yet maintain the integrity of His holy law which condemns the sinner? Does He bypass the law? God cannot say, I am sovereign and therefore I don't have to keep my own law. Since I love this rebellious, sinful human race unconditionally, I

will take them to heaven. God cannot do that, because He is always true to Himself. So the answer to the problem is the in Christ idea.

The expression in Christ is a rather difficult phrase to understand, just as "you must be born again" was difficult for Nicodemus. "'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!'" (John 3:4). Likewise, the concept of in Christ seems a foreign idea for us to understand. This is especially true of the Western mind, because in the Western world we think in terms of individuals, whereas the in Christ idea is based on what is known as biblical solidarity—the many in one.

To help us understand what the term means, we will look at two examples in the Bible, which will also help us understand what God is saying in Ephesians 2. The first example is found in the book of Romans. Quoting from the Old Testament, the apostle Paul is addressing Jewish believers at Rome. God is speaking to Rebekah, the wife of

Isaac: "She was told, The older will serve the younger" (Romans 9:12).

God was talking in "solidarity" language. When He used the word older, He was not referring to Esau, but to the Edomites, who were descendants of Esau. When He used the word younger, He was not talking of Jacob the individual, but of the Israelites, who were the descendants of Jacob (see Genesis 25:21-23). It is true that the Edomites, Esau's descendants, did serve the Israelites, Jacob's descendants. That is solidarity.

Another example in the New Testament that is helpful in understanding what Paul means by the phrase in Christ is in Hebrews 5-8. Paul is trying to convince the Jewish Christians that Christ, as their High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, is far superior to the Levitical priest of Judaism. These Jewish Christians were in constant danger of giving up Christ and returning to Judaism. So Paul told them, to give up Christ as your High Priest and to go back to Levi as your priest is a step backward. Don't give up reality for a substitute.

But to convince them not to give up their faith in Christ as their High Priest, Paul had to prove that Christ, as the believer's great High Priest, is superior to the Levitical priesthood of the earthly sanctuary that was practiced in Old Testament times. How did he do it?

1. Christ could not belong to the Levitical priesthood because, according to the law of Moses, he had to be a descendant of Levi. Christ was born under the tribe of Judah. Both Joseph and Mary were of the tribe of Judah, so Christ is said to be the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, a priest who existed in the time of Abraham (Hebrews 6:20).

2. Having established this fact, Paul then explained that Melchizedek was superior to Levi. The proof he gave was that Levi paid tithe to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:10). However, if you read the Old Testament, Levi, as an individual, never paid tithe to Melchizedek. It was Abraham that paid that tithe. The explanation is that even though

Levi, the great grandson of Abraham, did not exist when Abraham met Melchizedek, he was in the loins of his father, therefore Levi was implicated in paying tithe to Melchizedek in Abraham. Because you and I were in Adam when he sinned, we therefore suffered the consequences of his sin.

Likewise, at the incarnation, God took the corporate life of the human race to which we belong and which needs to be redeemed and, in the womb of Mary, God united the human race and the divine life of Christ, so when Christ was born into this world He was both God and man. The human aspect of Christ was really the corporate life of the human race whom He came to redeem. That is why Jesus is called the second or last Adam (mankind—1 Corinthians 15:45).

Qualified

Now this did not save us, but it did qualify Jesus to be our legal Substitute or Representative. With this in mind, we go back to Ephesians 2:5. Paul says that God made us, who were dead in

trespasses and sins, alive. That is, spiritually alive when we were united with the divinity of Christ at the incarnation. Then he adds, "By grace you have been saved." This is a powerful statement. He meant that by His perfect life and sacrificial death, He fully satisfied the law in order for the human race to be saved by grace.

He Did It All

There are two things that the law demanded of Jesus as our Substitute in order to save us totally from sin.

1. Jesus had to obey the law perfectly. Throughout the 33 years of his life He obeyed the law perfectly. He told the Jews that He came not to do away with the law but to fulfill it (see Matthew 5:17). In Romans 10:4, Paul tells us that, "Christ is the end [completion or fulfillment] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." Because Jesus' humanity was our corporate humanity and we were in Him by God's act, then His obedience can be reckoned or imputed

to us because we were in Him when He obeyed the law perfectly.

2. Still, this was not enough to save us because we are sinners, and the law says, "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). In the Jewish system the male was not a man until he reached the age of 30. So Jesus, having obeyed the law perfectly from birth to manhood, took our corporate humanity to the cross. There He submitted that humanity to the wages of sin, so when He died on the cross it was not just one man dying instead of all men, but all humanity died in Him. According to John 12:31-33, the entire human race was judged [executed] in Christ.

Even though the Bible teaches that Christ died for us, or in our place as our Substitute, the reason He could die for us is because all men were in Him. In other words, His death was a corporate death ["One died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14)]. All men died in one man, Jesus Christ. This does not mean that we paid the price for sin. He paid the price, but we were implicated

in that death even as Levi was implicated when Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek.

Compelling Love

This is clearly brought out in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all." Yes, one died for all, but "therefore, all died." All died when one died for all because all were in Him. This is what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:5: "It is by grace you have been saved."

It is the perfect obedience in Christ's life and sacrificial death, the doing and dying of Christ, that fully satisfies the law of God on behalf of the whole human race. By that dual act, Christ changed the status of the human race from condemnation to justification unto life. This is the amazing good news of the gospel (see Romans 5:18).

This point is so important that we will look at another text, 1 Corinthians 1:30: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus." Notice that three

people are involved. There is a "him;" a "you," which is in the plural form; and Christ. The next part of this verse identifies the "him": "Who has become for us wisdom from God." So the "him" is God. Paul tells us that God took the whole human race and put us all into Christ. The "you" is us, and Christ is the Son of God. This is what God did for us in the incarnation.

A New History

Then Paul says that God made Christ to be wisdom for us. The word wisdom means special knowledge. Remember what Jesus said in John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." By the truth he meant Himself. In verse 36 we read: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." This special knowledge is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians

1:30,31).

This can be illustrated very simply. Take a piece of paper, which represents us, and place it in a Bible, which represents Jesus Christ, because John 1:14 tells us that He is the Word of God who became flesh. By doing this, the two of us have become one. If we wrap the Bible in brown paper, go to the post office, and mail it to another country, the paper that represents us goes there too. The paper can never claim that it went on its own, but it can claim, and legally so, that it went in the Bible. Say that after the parcel containing the Bible arrives, there is a fire in the post office and the Bible is burned. What happens to the paper? The paper (us), which is in the Bible (Christ), is burned also. The history of the Bible becomes the history of the paper because the two have become one. Where the Bible goes, the paper goes. What happens to the Bible happens to the paper. This illustrates how God saved us in Christ. God put us in Christ so that He could rewrite our history in Christ and change our status from condemnation to justification. This is what Paul means when he says

"by grace you have been saved."

Out of This World

After Christ redeemed us by His life and death, Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:6, "God raised us up with Christ." We were with Him in the incarnation; we were with Him in His perfect life; we were with Him on the cross; and now we are with Him in the resurrection. He went to heaven and sat on the right hand of God, and we were there with Him. Paul says in Ephesians 2:6: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

What God did for us in Christ is God's gift to mankind, but because God created us with a free will there has to be a human response. That response is faith. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8,9: "By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Salvation is entirely, one hundred percent, a free gift to us, given at infinite cost to God.

Faith's Reality

This gift is ours, but is not experienced automatically. We must believe, and have faith. Faith, as defined in the New Testament, involves three major elements.

1. To have genuine faith, we must first know the gospel. We must know the truth as it is in Christ, for Paul says in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." That is why Jesus gave the commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (see Mark 16:15).

2. Just knowing the gospel is not enough. We must believe this truth as it is in Christ. Belief means a heart response to this truth. Jesus said, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Unfortunately, too many Christians stop too soon.

3. The third element is very important. We must obey this truth. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome, "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves of sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching [the gospel] to which you were entrusted" (Romans 6:17). In Romans 10:16 (KJV), he tells the Jewish nation, the reason you are lost is because you "have not all obeyed the gospel." In Galatians 5:7, he told the Galatians, "You were running a good race. Who... kept you from obeying the truth [the gospel]?" True faith produces obedience.

Obeying the Good News!

To obey the gospel simply means to surrender the will to the truth as it is in Christ. Because you and I are sinners, the law condemns us to die. We have no choice. Die we must. But we can choose to die in Christ, a death which took place 2,000 years ago, and we can now accept His death as ours. In this death there is hope because Jesus did not remain in the grave. He rose from the dead. If you

choose to die out of Christ there is no resurrection to life because the wages of sin is "good-bye" to life forever. Even though you become a Christian, you will die. But that death is only a sleep, because there is the hope of the resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

It is our prayer that you will not reject this wonderful good news of salvation. The statement that Philip, the deacon, made to the first Gentile who requested baptism was, "If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized]" (Acts 8:36). Jesus commissioned His disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes [has faith] and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15,16).

Predestined

The moment we accept the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we receive all the blessings that come to those who hear, believe, and obey the gospel. Ephesians 1:3-6 records our joy: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

In Christ we are holy and blameless. "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."

Faith Works!

Paul says that we not only have peace through Jesus Christ, but in Ephesians 2:10 he tells us that God "created [us] in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Genuine justification by faith not only brings us peace with God and hope of eternal life, but it changes our whole attitude of life so that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Through the Holy Spirit we begin to live a life of good works and loving obedience to His word, which is the fruit of salvation. These good works have no merit, but are

the evidence of our justification by faith.

Believing is Seeing!

This is the good news of salvation that God sent His Son to bring to all mankind. The question is: What must I do to be saved? The answer is: "Believe [have faith] on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Freed from the condemnation of the law, let Christ live in you that the world may see Christ in you, the hope of glory. This is our prayer for you, in Jesus' name. Amen.