

DID CHRIST DIE IN VAIN?

I want us to look at a thought-provoking passage from God's word today. It's especially so, because Paul makes a bold statement in regard to the death of our savior. Listen to him in Galatians 2:20-21.

Galatians 2:20-21 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Could it be that the death of Jesus was a waste of blood and agony? Well, Paul says that if what some were preaching was true, then, yes, Christ died for nothing. Now, most people who say they believe in Jesus Christ believe in the significance of His passion upon the cross. It's historically undeniable that Jesus lived, and died at the hands of the Roman government at the insistence of His own people. And you really couldn't name an event that had a greater impact upon history than the death of Christ. But, was it in vain? Well, friend, if much of what we hear in the pulpits of churches of our land today is true, then yes, Christ died for nothing. So that's our question today: Did Christ die in vain?

No theme is more central to the scriptures, or the annals of history for that matter, than the death of Jesus Christ. His death upon Calvary was not an accident, nor was it unanticipated by God. Revelation 13:8 calls Jesus "the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." That simply means that God knew that Jesus would one day come into the world for the purpose of being crucified for our sins; for the creation of man and his fall in the Garden of Eden, to the sacrificial system instituted immediately for sin, through the development and history of God's people in the Old Testament over 4000 or so years, that history is soaked in blood, and every drop is a foregleam of Calvary. Every sacrifice, every ceremony, every precept was in some way a shadow cast upon the landscape of time to the cross of Christ. When the "eternal Word" as John calls Him, came down the starry stairs of Heaven, the path that He trod was a steep climb to the summits of Calvary. He was born to die, and the eternal future of the human race depended upon the death of Jesus.

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

Romans 3:24 "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Colossians 1:20 "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

Friend, everything that has taken place in God's interaction with man points forward to or back upon the cross of Christ. In Galatians 2, Paul is magnifying the theme of salvation by grace by means of the cross. That's his theme in this letter to the Galatian church, because they were being troubled by false

teachers, who were essentially undoing everything that Paul had preached. They were enforcing the law of Moses upon the church, namely circumcision. Paul says that by doing so, they were frustrating the grace of God, and making the death of Christ a vain and worthless tragedy. You know, it's an awful thing to see someone die in vain. We watch the news and see where a child was innocently and uselessly killed, and we think what a waste of life! That's very difficult for us to emotionally process. A man goes into the service of his country, and if we feel for some reason the cause is unjust or unnecessary, that makes the sight of each flag-draped coffin returning home all the more painful. We think their death didn't have to be, or it was in vain. Well, Jesus gave His life for the greatest cause known to man: your salvation from sin and mine. And it's very likely that you believe that Jesus lived and died, and you, perhaps, claim to honor the death that He died and the cause for which He died. In fact, you'd probably recoil at the suggestion that Jesus died in vain. After all, don't we all preach the necessity of Christ's death? Don't all churches talk about the necessity of Jesus' death on the cross? We would like to think so. Isn't the cross the spiritual landmark of the Christian faith? Why then would Paul say Christ died in vain? It's because if what these false teachers were saying in Galatia was true, then Jesus' death simply was not necessary. Think about that: the scourging, the bloody crown of thorns pressed into His brow, the nails driven into His hands and feet, the hours of unthinkable torture, for nothing? Well, I believe there are many things that men today preach and practice that do exactly what Paul suggested in Galatians 2:21, and negate the death of Jesus, simply because they contradict the many things that Christ died to accomplish.

Now, let's begin with the context of Paul's statement in Galatians 2, and that is to say that if righteousness can be attained through the Old Testament law, then Christ died in vain.

Galatians 2:21 "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Keep in mind that when you see the term '*the law*' in the New Testament, you can pretty well mark it down that it's referring to the old law that came through Moses. Just write that in the margin of your Bible and consider that a rule of thumb, as you're reading the New Testament. '*The law,*' without any further qualifications, is referring to the Mosaic law that came to Moses upon Mt. Sinai. The ceremonial law that was appended to that, and that the Jews were given by which to worship and live. Don't make a mistake about the matter, there was a time when God's people were bound by the commands and the ceremonies of that law. And it's simply untrue if someone tells you that people who believe that we are now living in the New Testament age, and are freed from the Old Testament law, that somehow we must not believe in the Old Testament. That's simply NOT the case.

2 Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

The scriptures that Paul was speaking of, that they had at that time, were the Old Testament scriptures. The Old Testament came from God. It was verbally inspired of God, through the Holy Spirit, and it was not a mistake or an ill thought-out thing on God's part. Rather, it was all a part of God's plan. You see,

God gave that law to the Jews for a very important reason. In the next chapter of Galatians, Paul gives us an idea as to the scope of this law, to whom it was given, why it was given and for how long it was given.

Galatians 3:23-25 “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”

Paul here is contrasting two different dispensations of time. When he refers to ‘*the faith*’ or ‘*before faith came,*’ he’s talking about this gospel age where our justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ, this system of salvation by faith in Christ. Paul says before that era came, we were kept under the law. God’s people, the children of Abraham at that time, were kept under the law. He says, “*shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*” That simply means that the faith had not yet been revealed. It was a mystery. Christ had not yet come and died and the gospel was not yet a reality. It was merely pointed forward to or pre-shadowed. He says that during that time, we were “*kept under the law*” and then he tells us what the law was. He says that the law was “*our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.*” Now, the word ‘*schoolmaster*’ doesn’t mean schoolteacher. Rather, it refers to a tutor, and I understand that if we were to have something in our day and time equitable to that position, it might be a school bus driver. The schoolmaster was responsible for the well-being and care of the student, to see that they were taken to school, or to the feet of the teacher, in order to be taught. Much like a school bus driver: you entrust the care of your children to that bus driver and he takes them to school. In that sense, Paul says the law was our schoolmaster, or the Jewish people’s schoolmaster, to bring us “*unto Christ*” to the point where we can now be “*justified by faith*” in Christ. But now that that faith is come, he plainly says that we are no longer under a schoolmaster. In other words, the law has been fulfilled. The law of Moses has served its purpose in God’s economy, and now we enjoy a NEW covenant with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. In Romans 7, Paul shows how we have been discharged from that Old Testament law.

Romans 7:1-3 “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”

Paul is, first of all, showing the marital relationship between a man and a woman, and how God intended for that to last for life. He says that a man and a woman are joined together until death do they part, and he says that if one of the parties in that marriage leaves that marriage and marries or is joined to somebody else while their original spouse lives, Paul says that they become guilty of adultery. Now, Paul’s purpose is not to preach a sermon on divorce and remarriage, rather he’s using this for illustrative purposes. He goes on in verse 4.

Romans 7:4-5 “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth

fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”

Remember, I said the term *‘the law’* refers to the law of Moses. Paul says here that we are now free, we are delivered from *‘the law.’* We’re delivered from the law of Moses. Now, the law of Moses came from God. The law of Moses was inspired, but the result of the law of Moses was spiritual death. Why? Because no man could keep it. And in order to be justified by the law of Moses, a person had to keep it perfectly. He could not break it in one single point, and the apostle Paul later told us that if we offend in one point of that law, then we are guilty of ALL of the law. So Paul says, thankfully, we are now delivered from that law. We’re no longer under it. Paul is using this illustration of marriage and remarriage to point out that someone has to die before we can be married to another. Now, if a man leaves his wife and is married to someone else while his wife lives, and that makes him an adulterer physically in the sight of God, what does it make those who seek to be joined to Moses’ law and Jesus Christ at the same time? Isn’t Paul pointing out that that would make one guilty of spiritual adultery? So, you see, the law of Moses had to die so far as its authority over us, in order that we might now be married to Christ. Well, when, where and how did the law die?

Colossians 2:14 “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

Paul tells us plainly that Jesus nailed the law, the Mosaic law, to His cross. He fulfilled it, nailed it to the cross, and we now are privileged to be part of a new and a better covenant. A covenant built on better promises, on a better foundation. It is a better covenant in every single way. The problem that Paul was addressing at the church at Galatia was that Judeaizing teachers had been saying, “It’s all right that you’ve obeyed the gospel. It’s all right that you believe in Jesus, and follow Jesus. It’s all right that you keep the New Testament commandments, but in order to be saved, you also have to go back and keep the Old Testament commandments, namely circumcision, in order to be justified in God’s sight.” Paul says that if that were the case, if we could be justified by keeping that old law, then why did Jesus die? Jesus died in vain, if that’s the case. Why? Because He died in order to *“blot out that handwriting of ordinances that was against us.”*

Well, are there people today trying to bind circumcision on Christians? Are there people today who are trying to go back and resurrect the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament? Not necessarily, at least not that I have heard of. But I can tell you that the religious world is full of multitudes of people who lean upon the Old Testament law as a pattern or a justification for their worship and the life they live. They look to the Old Testament law still as a set of commandments that we must in order to be justified in the sight of God. One of the most obvious examples of that is that of Sabbath keeping; people who say that you must worship on the Sabbath day instead of Sunday, the Lord’s Day. Now, the New Testament never tells us to keep the Sabbath. Once the church was established, the example we have is of the disciples coming together on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, Sunday, in order to break bread. So, the Sabbath was something that belonged under the Old Testament dispensation. God commanded the Jews to honor the Sabbath day, to remember it and keep it holy. They were not to work on the

Sabbath day. It was to be considered and kept as a holy day. Why? Because that foreshadowed and prefigured the rest that we would one day have in Jesus Christ after the burdensome law was taken out of the way. So when men today tell you that you have to go back and keep the Sabbath day, they're going back to the law of Moses for their justification. After saying that Christ took that old law out of the way, Paul says in Colossians 2:16:

Colossians 2:16 "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days."

The sabbath was one of the things he mentioned. Let me give you another example, that of a priesthood above, beyond or separate from that of every believer in Christ. There are many people who call themselves priests. They are ordained to a position in their church that they call "the priesthood." These priests similarly function on behalf of the people or "laity" of that congregation, much as the priests of the Old Testament did for God's people back then. But in Revelation 1:6, Jesus tells us, through John, that it has now changed in this economy, and that ALL OF US have been made kings and priests by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:6 "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

In other words, if I have been baptized into Christ, if I'm a Christian, I'm also a priest. It has nothing to do with being a preacher. It has nothing to do with being in some elevated position or office in the church. Rather, to be a priest simply means that I am a Christian and in Christ, thus I have become a priest. Just as the priest back under the Old Testament offered sacrifices and performed the rituals of worship on behalf of the people, today I, if I'm a Christian, can come boldly before the throne of grace on my OWN behalf. I can confess my sins to God and ask God to forgive me of my sins if I've obeyed the gospel and am in Christ, and I don't have to go through a man for that. If I'm in Christ, I'm a priest. If you're in Christ, you're a priest. We are priests, not on behalf of someone else, but on behalf of ourselves. And the idea of a distinction between a priesthood and laity, or clergy and laity, as is very common in religion today, is BORROWED from that Old Testament arrangement. We're not under that law any longer.

2 Corinthians 4:5 "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

Paul, even an apostle, inspired of the Holy Spirit, didn't consider himself in an elevated, superior position, closer to God than others. He said that he considered himself their servant for the sake of the Lord.

What about those who justify their worship by the Old Testament? Did you know that there's not a command or example in the New Testament of using instrumental music in Christian worship? You have to go back to the Old Testament to find the justification and the commandment or example for using a mechanical instrument in worship. We're told in the New Testament to simply sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:19 "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Colossians 3:16 "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Someone might say, "Well, instrumental music is still used in the Bible, even if it is in the Old Testament. Shouldn't that be all right?" What if we were today to offer animal sacrifices to the Lord, or seek to burn incense to the Lord? You might say, "Well, THOSE things were done away with at the cross. Now, Jesus is our sacrifice." Friend, if that's the case, then why is it any better to go back to the law to justify a practice such as instrumental music? Resurrecting these things from the grave of Mosaic legalism is no less offensive to the cross of Christ than bringing back animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. Most people would reject one, but for some reason, accept the other. To seek to be justified by the law would make Jesus' death upon the cross a vain and futile thing, because He died to fulfill that law and take it out of the way.

Next, I want to say that if I can be saved outside of the church that Jesus established, then Christ died in vain. We see all kinds of attitudes about the church today, and one of the most predominant attitudes is that the church is good, and it's all right if you choose to be a member of it and enjoy the benefits of association with the church, but the church doesn't have anything to do with your salvation. We're told that whether or not I am identified with the church, or I serve God within the church, that really has no bearing on my salvation. But what does the Bible say about that? And what does that have to do with the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross?

You remember in Matthew 19, when Jesus was having a conversation with the Pharisees about divorce and remarriage. They came to Jesus tempting Him, testing Him, questioning Him about if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife and marry another. Jesus answers their question by not only showing what the law of Moses says, but also giving His law.

Matthew 19:5-6 "And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Notice that Jesus says that when a man and woman are joined together in marriage, they become one, and He says when God brings that union to pass, let not man divide it or "*put it asunder.*" What in the world does that have to do with the church or with the death of Jesus? Well, in Ephesians 5:21- 32, Paul uses that fleshly marital arrangement in comparison with the relationship of Christ and the church. Paul quotes the words of Jesus concerning marriage between a man and woman, then concludes with:

Ephesians 5:32 "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

So, just as a man is married to a woman, the Bible says that Christ is joined to His church. Does it not stand to reason that if a man is in Christ, he must be a part of Christ's bride? Friend, if a man can be saved outside of the church, then he can be saved without being joined to Jesus. If a man can be saved

without the church in his life, then he can be saved without Christ's death. Paul, speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus, said:

Acts 20:28 "...feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

If anything, that ought to emphasize in our minds the sacredness, the importance and the awesomeness of the church. The church is not important because you or I may be a member of it. The church is important because Jesus built it. It is part of Him. It is His bride. The entire mystery of redemption in Christ Jesus is directly tied to the establishment and existence of the church.

1 Timothy 3:14-16 "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

This is a beautiful passage of scripture that some believe might have actually been a hymn that was sung in the early church. Paul speaks of these six things that are basically the plan of redemption, the work of Christ in a nutshell. He says that these six things constitute "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" He says that "*without controversy*" this has now been revealed. The mystery of Christ is no longer a mystery, but is now exposed and revealed and thus without controversy. "*Great is the mystery of godliness.*" What does this mystery contain?

1. "*manifest in the flesh*"—This refers to the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ our Lord. That Jesus, in the form of human flesh, became our vicarious sacrifice upon the cross, in order that we might enjoy the benefits of His death and be saved from our own spiritual death. So, God was manifest in the flesh. That is a direct reference by the apostle Paul to the cross of Jesus.
2. "*justified in the spirit*"—That word 'justified' means vindicated. In other words, Jesus not only claimed to be the Son of God, He not only died on the cross claiming to be our Savior, our sacrifice, our Lamb, our Redeemer, but He was vindicated by the Spirit of God on those claims. How? The Spirit of God brought Him forth from that death, brought Him out of that tomb upon the third day.
3. "*seen of angels*"-- He was then seen of angels, that word 'angels' simply meaning messengers, and in this case, it refers to human messengers, the apostles who saw Him after His death.
4. "*preached unto the Gentiles*"—The apostles were then dispatched to carry the message of His death, burial and resurrection, the message of the gospel into the world.
5. "*believed on in the world*"—Men believed on Him, obeyed Him, became God's children through His work upon the cross.
6. "*received up into glory*"—Right now, He sits at the right hand of God as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and He reigns over His kingdom that He established here on this earth in the hearts of men on the day of Pentecost.

That, in a nutshell, is the gospel. Paul says that the church is "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" What does that mean? Does it mean that the church, by preaching the truth, upholds and guards the truth? Well, the church DOES preach the truth. It is commissioned to preach the truth.

Jude 3 "...and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Yes, the church is to defend truth. But that's not exactly what Paul is talking about when he calls the church "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" What is a pillar or ground? What does that refer to? When we build a building today, we first lay a foundation and there is a certain support system built in order to hold that building up. If you compromise that foundation and structural support of that building, then it cannot stand. It will fall. So Paul is not so much talking about what the church DOES, but what the church IS. The church IS "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" If you want to see the mystery that is now revealed, what God had planned from the foundation of the world, God's scheme of redemption now unfurled, what Paul is saying is that it's all in the church. It's found in the church. The church exists in this world because Jesus died upon the cross and it's this simple: if you have no kingdom then you have no king. If you have no bride, then why do you need a bridegroom? How could you have a bridegroom? So friend, if you have no church then you don't have Christ because Jesus died for His church. He died to purchase His church with His blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore if I can be saved outside of the church, then Jesus died in vain.

Let's look at another passage in Ephesians 3 that beautifully bears out this whole idea. Paul is talking about his place as an apostle and making the mystery of redemption, the mystery of salvation, known unto the Gentiles.

Ephesians 3:8-9 "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. "

Again, salvation in Christ, of both Jew and Gentile together in Christ, was a mystery. It was known ONLY to God until He brought it to pass and chose to reveal it. But now that has changed. Paul continues:

Ephesians 3:10-11 "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul says that this was the eternal purpose of God, and it is now made known in the church. Again, he is really not talking about what the church DOES, but what the church IS. In other words, the church is this wonderful mystery, this eternal purpose that God had in mind from the very creation of the world! The church is the unfurling of that purpose. The church is the manifestation of God's purpose through the ages. The church was not some afterthought on the part of God after Jesus came and was rejected by the Jews, like the doctrine of dispensational pre-millennialism suggests. Rather, the church was the result of the eternal purpose, planning and work of the heavenly Father.

The word '*manifold*' in verse 10 means multi-colored or multi-splendored, much like a patchwork quilt, where you take all types of fabrics from different sources, different colors and different designs, and you weave them together, and one fabric may not seem to have much relationship to another but when you're finally finished, you have a beautiful quilt that paints a picture or design in and of itself. You see, all of the various interactions that God had with humankind down through the ages until the cross were small snapshots in time, or a small patch of fabric you might say. It might seem that one didn't have much to do with the other, but oh, they all had something to do with one another, and ultimately the cross. Because now, when you see the church, the product of Jesus' death on the cross, and redemption, ALL of those pieces come together to create one beautiful picture, and Paul says, that is the church.

So, what does that say for those who contend that you can be saved by Christ and have nothing to do with His church? Or who say that it's just a man, and not a plan? Friends, I don't dispute that our salvation is the result of a man, but that man has a plan, and that plan involves the church. Are you a member of Christ's church today? Have you obeyed the gospel? For the Bible teaches that when we do, the Lord adds us to that church. When I come to realize the benefits of His death, and I come to appropriate the benefits of His blood to my soul, and I am thus saved, the Bible says the Lord adds me to the church. So, if the church was unessential, then Jesus died for nothing, for He died to purchase the church.

Next, I want to talk about a concept that is very, very popular today. In fact, this concept is so ingrained in our thinking today, that I think most people take it for granted. That is, denominationalism--the idea of many churches, many creeds, many names and many beliefs. And that one is as good as another, and it really doesn't make any difference where I go to church because all churches are of Christ. Religious division, as we have it today, came from God and was designed by Christ. Have you ever stopped to think that if all that really is true, that it makes the death of Jesus in vain? Because one of the most primary purposes of Jesus' death was to tear down the walls of religious separation. Have you thought about how Calvary teaches us about the unity of believers? I want to show you from God's word why that is the case.

Matthew 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

Jesus said that He would build HIS church. He never promised to build a thousand different denominations. He didn't say He would build Martin Luther's church or John Wesley's church or John Smith's church, etc...Jesus said upon the fact that He is the Son of God, the great confession that Peter made that day, that He would build HIS church. And the church that He promised to build, and that He did build, is the ONLY church that you read about in this blessed book. In Acts 2, we read about the beginning of the church and how the Holy Spirit brought the promised power from Heaven to the apostles, marking the coming of the kingdom and the establishment of the church. A great sermon was preached that day by the apostle Peter. He was inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit to stand up and point those people who had, just a few days before crucified Jesus, to Christ.

Acts 2:36-38 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Acts 2:41 “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

Notice very carefully what happened in verse 41. The word ‘join’ is not used. These new believers were not instructed to go out and join a church. Rather, the Bible says that they were “*added*” to the number of those who were already saved. Verse 47 is even more specific.

Acts 2:47 “praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

So, every person who is saved in obedience to the gospel, through the blood of Jesus Christ, who receives the forgiveness of his sins, is added to the church—not by men, not by a board of deacons, not by a church creed or any process set up by men—but by the Lord.

In John 17, Jesus prays earnestly on the eve of His death, for all of those who would come to believe in Him through the word that His disciples would preach, and He prayed for them all to be one, as He and His Father in Heaven are one.

John 17:20-21 “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

One in mind, one is mission, one in purpose. Of course, that’s the total opposite of what we have in religion today, with hundreds upon hundreds of denominations and sects and factions, all claiming to be the Lord’s church or part of the Lord’s church. Yet they believe different things, wear different names, and have various doctrines and practices. That is absolutely antithetical to what Jesus established and what He prayed for and what He desires. Furthermore, it is totally contrary to what Jesus died for. Paul powerfully illustrates it this way:

Ephesians 2:11-14 “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;”

Paul is talking about the estranged relationship of Jew (Circumcision) vs. Gentile (Uncircumcision) under the law of Moses. The law of Moses made a division between the Jew and the Gentile. The law was given to the Jewish people, the children of Abraham, and it excluded all of the other nations of the earth.

These other nations were the enemies of God, "*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise*" as Paul says. These other nations did not have part nor lot in the blessing of God or the covenant that God had with man at that time. That is a very dark and bleak picture of where the Gentile world was while God enjoyed His covenant with His people, the children of Abraham, while they lived under the law of Moses. Paul calls that law a "*middle wall of partition between us.*" But now, God has made the Gentiles nigh and brought them into the fold, in other words. He has effected reconciliation, not only with God, but with God's people. Notice the next verses.

Ephesians 2:15-16 "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:"

God took two, Jew and Gentile, and joined them together and made, in Himself, one new man, one body through the work of the cross. In other words, Jesus died to unite religious people. He died in order to bring all saved people into one new spiritual organism: the church. So, yes, we're saved by the work of the cross, but Paul says we are saved and reconciled to God and to one another in one body. What is the Bible speaking of when it mentions 'the body of Jesus?'

Colossians 1:18 "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

We have been reconciled into one church by the cross. Now, if the Lord had ever intended for there to be a system of denominationalism because of different cultures and opinions (a church for people of this or that persuasion), wouldn't it have been during this time of tumultuous division between the Jewish and Gentile people? The Lord could've averted a lot of serious conflict, debate, controversy and unrest amongst the early church had He simply called for a Jewish church and a Gentile church, both going to Heaven, just in different ways, each being as good as the next. But that's not what He did. Instead, He reconciled "*both unto God in one body by the cross.*" There is not a principle in the whole realm of religious thought any more contrary to the cross of Christ and its divine purpose, than the commonly accepted notion that many churches are all serving one God, and one is as good as another, and you can go to your church and I'll go to mine because all churches belong to the Lord. Friend, Jesus died to establish HIS church, ONE church, and to make us ONE IN HIM within that church. When men come with their creeds, catechisms, manuals and confessions of faith and so forth, and they build their many churches upon their own opinions and traditions, they're taking brick and mortar and rebuilding walls that God tore down in the death of Jesus. In other words, if denominationalism is right, it means that the death of Jesus was in vain.

Finally, let me suggest this: if I fail to obey the gospel, then Christ died in vain. It's just that simple and personal. Please stop and think about what a serious thought that is. Many will acknowledge Jesus' death, but it does very little to them. They acknowledge its reality, but they deny its power. Peter was caught up in his cowardice on the night of Jesus' betrayal, and the Bible says that he followed from afar off. Brave, boastful Peter, who said he'd never desert the Lord even unto death, stood out on the fringe, not wanting to be associated with Jesus. It seems as though he was emotionally unmoved by his own

cowardly denial, until one point in time when Jesus stopped and looked at him. What a look that must have been! It melted the stony heart of Peter, and that makes me think of a popular song from a few years ago. The lyric says, "A look of love was on His face, and thorns upon His head; A scarlet robe upon His back, stained a crimson red. His eyes were on the crowd that day, but He looked ahead in time; for when He was on the cross, I was on His mind." That's very true. When Jesus climbed the rugged summit of Calvary and so willingly and lovingly laid down His life upon the cross, He did so with YOU in mind and with ME in mind.

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."

Jesus could've just as well said that God so loved YOU that He gave His only begotten Son. I struggle, as a gospel preacher, to find a way to make people understand not only the reality of Jesus' death, not only the gruesome horror of His death, not only the magnitude of love and grace that led Him to a willing death, but to get people to understand the personal nature of Jesus' death. We're not talking about just some historical event or some far off thing recorded in the Bible or in human history. We're talking about a real thing that happened with the Almighty God in Heaven having YOU in mind when He sent Jesus to Calvary.

I heard a story of a fisherman who was out on the lake enjoying the peace and serenity of it, and was really getting into his fishing. He had taken his dog with him, and suddenly something got the dog's attention, and he began to bark wildly and raise a great clamor there on the boat. This aggravated the fisherman and he told the dog to hush, but he kept barking and raising a huge fuss. The fisherman got so angry that he took a hatchet out of one of the compartments of the boat, took the dog up on the bow of the boat and cut off its paws one by one, and threw the yelping dog into the lake to drown.

I imagine how you must be recoiling at that story. How awful. It's unthinkable. But, you know, people are often more moved by that story than they are the cruel death of Jesus on their behalf. Friend, He died for YOU as though you were the only sinner in the world! The only sinner in need of a savior! If you were the only person who had ever sinned, I firmly believe that God would have loved you enough to send Jesus to take your place, so that you would not die eternally. Now, that places a great burden on you and upon me, to respond to such overtures of grace, mercy and love in faith and obedience.

The poet once said:

They crushed the thorns upon His brow, and struck harsh blows that day.

Lord, I would not treat thee so; I only walked away.

They drove the nails into His hands, and raised the cross on high.

Lord, that men could be so vile; I only passed thee by.

But blinded eyes and heart of stone will spurn a love like thine.

Lord, I struck the cruelest blows; the sharpest thorns were mine.

Will you really let Jesus writhe in agony upon the cross for YOU all in vain? Can you really, by the eye of faith, see Jesus on the cross two thousand years ago, then so flagrantly and callously continue in sin, and act as though the death of Jesus might as well not have happened? I'll have a lot to answer for when I stand before the Lord one day, and you'll have a lot to answer for as you account to the Lord. But I'll tell you that one sin I especially don't want to have to answer for is the sin of allowing the death of Jesus Christ to be a waste. Did Jesus die in vain? If you remain outside of Christ, failing to obey the gospel, refusing to be part of His church and follow His word, seeking unity with other believers, then yes. For you, Jesus died in vain.

