



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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EASY BELIEVISM

PART ONE

Whenever the discussion relative to “easy believism” is addressed, it should be appreciated that it is simply an old problem with a new name. In the past it may have been called “cheap grace” or “no-lordship salvation”. The dispute however does not need to be clouded with new terminology. The issue is really a very simple one – **what constitutes saving faith.** If men can be convinced that they are saved when in reality they are lost, then in essence the whole landscape of Christianity has been grossly distorted. The current religious environment has consistently communicated that some-

one can come to Christ without ever having to make any significant changes in their life – just believe, just pray this prayer. And the result is that often times people are given the impression that there is no cost associated with believing, no cost associated with salvation, and no significant cost associated with being in God’s kingdom. But the truth of the matter is that there is no such thing as a no-cost Christianity. It does not exist.

Obviously, if there can be genuine faith, then there can be false faith. If someone can have genuine assurance, then someone can just as easily have false assurance. If there can be genuine conversions, then there can be false conversions. And the more that the false conversions are integrated into the life of a local church or denomination, then the more their desire for false teaching will be perpetuated. Every point of doctrine will eventually be weakened and ultimately the life transforming truth of the gospel will be lost and a false gospel preached that has absolutely no saving merit whatsoever. The stakes are incredibly high. Unfortunately, many churches are filled with much that is not biblical, and much of it begins with people being given a superficial and artificial gospel. And what it produces is a segment within the church that believes that it possesses a salvation that it does not have. It produces men and women who are more

than satisfied with a half-hearted commitment to Christ and a somewhat flippant and trivial form of Christianity that is passing for the real thing.

The spiritual culture of today has spawned a multitude of words or phrases that describe the nature of “easy believism”. There are terms like man-centered theology, alternative gospel, purpose driven, seeker sensitive, culturally relevant, emergent church, celebrating recovery, breakout churches, reinventing ourselves, missional, and many, many more. James Emery White wrote a book in 1997 called Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition in which he calls for a “*radical redesign of church processes for dramatic improvement in the fulfillment of the church’s purpose and mission*”. How should the phrase “radical redesign” be interpreted or understood? What is it about Christ’s spiritual mandate of going into the entire world and making disciples that needs to be changed? What principles or truths of the Word of God would be “redesigned”, and from where would the spiritual permission and authority for such changes come?

Unfortunately, terms like “pragmatism” have embedded themselves into the spiritual philosophies of how the church actually approaches ministry. Is it working, do people like what is being done, is it producing results? From just a purely biblical perspective, it would seem foolish to determine outward results to be the true measure of successful ministry. Obviously, if that were the case then Christ would have been considered to be a complete and utter failure. I Corinthians 1:22-23 says,

²²For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.

Both Christ and His message were a “**stumbling block**” and “**foolishness**” to the vast majority who heard it. The message was offensive and the essence of what Christianity proclaimed was considered to be an absurdity and silliness. The Amplified

Bible states the word “**foolishness**” to be “**unphilosophical nonsense**”. Christ Himself in Romans 9:33 was considered to be a “**stumbling stone**” and a “**rock of offense**”.

³³As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

Matthew 7:13-14 unapologetically declares,

¹³“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Without pressing the point, none of the verses quoted in I Corinthians, Romans, or Matthew would come close to being something that could be used in current “success” formulas. The religious consumer would never be satisfied with something offensive and distasteful to their spiritual appetite or something that was difficult and constricting to their lifestyle preferences. For anyone who comes to verses like Matthew 7:13-14 in an intellectually honest manner, it should be more than convincing from Jesus’ own words that not many people will be saved.

The evidence of authentic, biblical, life transforming salvation is never that someone had some kind of meaningful personal spiritual experience earlier in their life. The two responses that seem to be the most easily confused with genuine repentance and biblical faith today are praying a prayer with someone and coming forward at a church service. But praying a prayer or coming forward in a church service is never offered in Scripture as a legitimate and meaningful ground for biblical assurance. Jesus clearly states that a person’s life is the key to understanding whether or not they have been truly born again – how they live, what impact has the gospel made on them personally, are they worldly and carnal in their outlook. The genuine evidence of salvation is ALWAYS a holy life. What is a person’s conduct like in the world? And if there is no observable biblical fruit in a person’s life, Scripture is more than clear that that person has never been saved. It is amazing how

much an individual's life and lifestyle can contradict everything else in Scripture, and yet they still seem to be convinced that they are saved because they prayed a sincere prayer with someone. Any believer should be frightened for those kinds of people. The primary external evidence that the Bible gives for discerning whether or not a person is converted is the fruit of obedience - ([Matthew 7:15-27](#), [John 15:8](#), [James 2:14-26](#), and [I John 2:3](#)).

In reality, the gospel is inherently confrontational, and because of that many churches have become culturally adept at obscuring the genuine aspects of what it means to be a Christian and how someone actually becomes a Christian. They have become conduits of biblical misinformation and half-truths relative to such things as repentance, the cost of discipleship, and the narrowness of the way into God's kingdom. And with that kind of spiritual misrepresentation, many churches have developed a very casual, nonchalant, laissez-faire attitude about what they call the Christian life.

Unfortunately, in many so-called evangelical churches the fear of God and an unyielding confidence in the Word of God has virtually been lost. And in the process, the very foundation of biblical doctrine has been slowly eroded away. The problem with the modern emergent church movement is that it has produced a man-centered theology rather than a God centered theology. Biblical words, phrases, and ideas are still used, but the focus has become man and not God. It is a spiritual climate that addresses man's felt needs or what can God do for me. It aims at giving people what they want rather than confronting them with God's greatness, holiness, majesty, and unchanging gospel. God is presented as being user-friendly. The emergent church seeks to make sinners comfortable (seeker-sensitive) rather than telling them anything that would make them feel uncomfortable.

One of the prevailing pitfalls of the modern "easy believism" church environment is that it tends to use worldly logic cleverly disguised in religious jargon and terminology. For some reason, the more that a

spiritual sounding vocabulary is used and the more that those words are embodied within a religious frame of reference, the more acceptable the ideas seem to become. It could be called a kind of spiritual window dressing that is designed to make the content more believable, more palatable, and more convincing. Some of these terms would be phrases like "*fierce biblical faithfulness*", "*confident humility*", "*God-centered enthusiasm*", "*good to great*", or "*evangelistic passion*". They are all positive phrases that portray a very forward thinking, contemporary, and energetic perspective. They resonate with an upbeat tempo and an optimistic outlook. Invariably, however, they often become the spiritual bait that deludes people into thinking that all is well and that the leadership has finally found the spiritual key to unlock the doors of evangelism and church growth and that all is well with the message being presented. Many of those who utilize contemporary jargon are excellent at communication and articulation of their evangelical forward thinking ideas.

To balance this out, however, it must be understood that there is nothing spiritual about being traditional or conservative. No one group has a corner on spirituality without issues. In an honest and intellectually candid spiritual environment, no one church, no one leader, and no one movement has all of the answers and solutions on such issues as church growth, church leadership, worship, preaching, doctrine, or music. And for that reason, any God-honoring church should consistently evaluate and scrutinize their ministry to see if there are parts of it that are unbiblical or spiritually flawed – and then make the necessary adjustments to alleviate those issues. That should be a normal process in any God-honoring institution. But that is not what has happened within the emergent church movement. Rather, the principles and dynamics of Scripture itself have been jettisoned for practicality, expediency, and logic. The very foundation and underpinning of "easy believism" is flawed because it has inadvertently demoted the Word of God to a subservient role and to a secondary position in favor of cultural pragmatism. And the result? False converts!

Simply stated, the modern church at large has been dissatisfied with their institutional results and in the process has actually offered God a helping hand by reinventing a false gospel that culturally adapts to the consumer. It has tried to make the gospel more appealing, more attractive, and more inviting to the lost, and ultimately has abandoned the very power inherent in the gospel. The modern church has tried to improve on [Romans 1:16](#) with various methodologies and unfortunately has tragically developed a false message with a false hope and a false assurance. Genuine, biblical salvation is never a work of clever methodology or pragmatism. It is never anchored in church growth approaches or individual worship styles. And it is never something that we have been called on to make easy to believe. Salvation is, always has been, and always will be a sovereign work of God. It is anchored in the truth of the gospel and the deep and convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the unbeliever's life. In essence, the church has casually displaced God to a somewhat supporting and secondary role. It has discarded "**Christ and Him crucified**" for a much less offensive message of "you and your best life now". The never changing principles of Scripture have been replaced with the ever changing programs of the present culture.

In his foreword to James White's [Opening the Front Door: Worship and Church Growth](#), Rick Warren made this statement. He said that "*To reach the unchurched for Christ we must first capture their attention....The problem is not the message. The problem is how it is being presented.*" Now, on the surface that concept sounds appealing and interesting, but before someone runs off and reinvents or redesigns how the gospel is presented to the lost, it would seem that evaluating what Christ and the apostles had to say concerning the "presentation" would be a good place to begin. In reality, they said nothing regarding presentation! They never taught that the presentation of the gospel had to be something that captured the attention of the audience or that how the gospel was presented even needed to be

addressed. Just think for a moment of how Peter addressed the multitudes in Acts 2. [Acts 2:14-16](#) describes the event as follows,

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

Peter simply stood up and began to preach, and he warned the people that they needed to "**heed**" his words. Immediately he went to the Scriptures – to "**what was spoken by the prophet Joel**". And then when he had completed his message, he called on his listeners to repent – which they did! He did the same in Acts 3 at Solomon's Portico – preached and called on men to repent ([Acts 3:11-19](#)). In [Acts 4:29](#), in the midst of persecution and threats, Peter and John prayed for "**boldness**".

²⁹Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,

And if this entire introductory portion of Scripture in Acts is read carefully, it becomes more than clear that these men were "**filled with the Holy Spirit**". In addressing the Sanhedrin after their arrest, [Acts 4:8](#) says,

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:

[Acts 4:31](#) declares,

³¹And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

In [Acts 6:8](#), Stephen is called a man "**full of faith and power**". In [Acts 7:55](#), just prior to his stoning, this was declared of Stephen,

⁵⁵But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

In [Acts 10](#) is the story of Peter and Cornelius. Here was a man proclaiming the gospel to individuals who were already eager to hear. [Acts 10:3-4](#) clearly indicate that Cornelius “**prayed to God always**” and that God gave him a vision and told him to send men to Joppa to seek out Peter. Cornelius was so expectant that in [Acts 10:24](#), he asked his relatives and close friends to come to his house to see what God was going to do.

24And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Then in [Acts 10:33\(b\)](#) Cornelius states why everyone had come,

Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.

They were there to simply hear from God. This is an amazing story that only gets better as you read it. Without any question, God had already prepared the hearts of those who would believe. In fact, God had even chosen the place – Caesarea. And the result of all of this divine and sovereign outworking of God in Caesarea? [Acts 10:44](#) gives the result,

44While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

It would be difficult to not understand how all of this transpired. It was a sovereign work of God, and people were moved and touched by God and responded to the Spirit-filled simple presentation of the gospel given by Peter in [Acts 10:34-43](#). The only “manipulation” in all of this was that which was initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

The modern trend of “easy believism” is one of “wooing” people into the kingdom, of **making them feel comfortable with an uncomfortable message.** Simply make the church atmosphere inviting, the gospel message non-threatening, and the entire worship experience meaningful and relational. If

preaching is offensive, then tone it down into smaller and more palatable doses that can be digested more easily than some threatening message on “eternal judgment”, “losing your life”, “worldliness”, or the “cost of discipleship”. Should the church have traditional services, contemporary services, or blended services? Or maybe it should offer all three so that the “consumer” can choose which satisfies his spiritual taste buds the best.

The problem in this seeker sensitive atmosphere is that eventually the services become designed more for the unbeliever than the believer. And to do that, eventually the depth of the message preached will be marginalized for the sake of becoming relevant to the seeker. The emphasis has subtly switched from what God wants to what the consumer or unbeliever wants. The service has to be designed to fit what will invariably be more attractive to the non-Christian. The atmosphere is to be one of informality, of being positive, informative, and relaxed. Provide doughnuts and coffee, user friendly welcoming booths in the vestibule, greeters in the parking lot, soft relaxing music, and well thought out lighting for effect. Articulate the good things about people, not the worst. Always be positive, winsome, and engaging in the service.

So, what is the subtle, but ultimate emphasis of this kind of “positive” approach? It is simple – give people what they want. It seems that the church has been more influenced by George Barna and his research conclusions than they have the Word of God. Bill Hybels once remarked that one of the problems in many churches is that men are “*lecturing on doctrinal issues that aren’t relevant to life*”. Honestly, that is a tragically flawed perspective. It would be far wiser to stake a claim on [II Timothy 3:16-17](#),

16All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Hybels further stated that you have to “*present religion to them in a creative and visual way*”. In that statement

alone, what is being subtly stated is that how things are done has more importance than what is done. Well, what about the people in Papua, New Guinea or on the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe who have no electricity, no running water, and live in grass huts? What about the underground church in China or the people of the bush in Pondoland, South Africa? How does a contemporary, upbeat, user-friendly atmosphere fit in there where some people have walked nearly fifty miles just to hear the gospel?

The most frightening of all scenarios is that somehow those who minister and communicate the gospel would somehow give people the “illusion” that they are saved when in reality they are not. It has to be the most tragic, disastrous, and dreadful misinformation anyone could ever hear. Just imagine the scenario of someone awakening on the other side of eternity only to be brought face to face with the reality that they have arrived in a place of eternal torment and condemnation – the very opposite of where they had fully believed they would be. And to make matters worse, they had been misled into their false sense of security and hope by someone who was their pastor and teacher. They had placed their spiritual confidence in someone whom they had trusted to tell them the truth, but that individual had misinformed them and deluded the true message of Scripture in order to be more “culturally relevant”. No wonder [James 3:1](#) warns,

‘My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Unfortunately, this scenario is being played out in ministry venues everywhere. In the name of “church growth” the message of Scripture is being watered down to be less confrontational, less demanding, and more attractive? In the name of not offending anyone, men have chosen not to teach the deeper truths of God because they are not considered relevant to the unbeliever and are much too hard for the average church-goer to understand. If this approach is not initiated, the belief is that the

fallout will be that many might leave for a more contemporary message to which they can better relate. So the priority becomes making people comfortable with the service, pleased with the programs, captivated by the music, and attracted to the facilities - but not the actual message.

In the city in which I live one of the large, contemporary churches with a fairly “emergent” approach to the ministry and to the gospel rented a moving billboard to advertise their church. There were three different and continuously revolving scenes. The first was the picture of the pastor sitting on a motorcycle with the simple caption “Church Pastor”. The second was a picture of the music leader playing the guitar with the simple caption “Church Music”. The third was just a pair of blue jeans with the caption “Church Clothes”. I suppose that the ultimate question would simply be what does any of that have to do with the gospel? What is someone really trying to communicate or “sell” with that kind of message and approach? Is the goal to somehow make the gospel more palatable and more acceptable for people to believe? Is it trying to make people comfortable with a message that by its inherent nature is designed to make them uncomfortable? Is “style” the new gospel magnet?

Whatever happened to Jesus’ words in [Luke 14](#) calling on men to first “**count the cost**”? Where do the words “**Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it**” in [Luke 17:33](#) fit into the modern cultural scene? It appears that one of the driving motivations fortifying the spiritual culture of “easy believism” is not a heartfelt love for the lost, but an actual embarrassment with the gospel itself. The philosophy seems to be one that thinks the more difficult the message preached, then the more brutal is the aggression against the consumer’s personal and fragile self-esteem. The current trend in many churches is not to confront people with counting the cost of what it truly means to become a Christian and be a disciple, but rather that of encouraging them to count their blessings for being in a particular church. The fallout is tragic. Unfortunately, the modern church has developed a competitive culture in which it markets and pits its spiritual services and activities against those of other

churches. It is a consumer's world, a non-threatening "pick and choose" approach to ministry. In fact, when closely analyzed it has become a system of man's religion that no longer even needs God to produce results. Imagination, creativity, organizational savvy, good marketing techniques, convenience, relevant messages, contemporary music, and facility comfort have become the drawing cards for the unbeliever. And unfortunately, it seems to be working.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit a large, emergent church Sunday worship service. My wife and I had taken a short three day vacation to visit with another pastor and his wife who had been our neighbors in the seminary and on Sunday morning we had determined to visit this particular church. It was a mega-church with mega-facilities. There were uniformed policemen directing traffic at the entrance to the church campus. There were parking lot attendants and special parking places for the visitors, and upon entering the worship center, there was a multitude of activities and various ministry booths to engage people prior to and after the service. As we entered the very large sanctuary area, it was very modern, but informal in décor. The music was very contemporary. The stage was filled with revolving colored lights that moved all around the stage during the "worship" time and would frequently shine out in the audience. The audience lights had been dimmed so that we were basically sitting and standing in a very dimly lit auditorium. There was a fog machine and smoke arising off of the stage setting. Honestly, I felt like I was in a nightclub or at a rock concert rather than a church. The pastor was winsome, fluid, articulate, engaging, and intelligent. His message was on "depression" and I left thinking that I had been participating in a secular university's Psychology 101 class. At the end there was a brief attempt at explaining the gospel in a contemporary way with no mention of subjects like repentance or Lordship, and then a considerable endeavor at attracting what was called "*those who are unattached to a church*". As the service finally closed, I left the

facilities somewhat bewildered as to whether or not I had even been in a church service. And even though a small Scripture passage had been utilized in the message, the Word was not really preached, the gospel was severely minimized to a secondary message, and biblical faith and discipleship were marginalized to the extent that it was almost non-existent.

Unfortunately, this description seems to be the norm for growing, contemporary churches in America – a smorgasbord of programs, an entertaining atmosphere, few if any biblical distinctives, man-centered messages, a watered down gospel, and impassioned invitations for membership. Providing personal choice and multi-level experience opportunities seem to prevail over any attempt to objectively define truth, salvation, and discipleship in any intelligent and biblical language. And strong doctrinal teaching is very often viewed as contentious, divisive, and even hurtful or mean-spirited.

At some point in this sea of spiritual relativity, there has to be the presentation and acceptance of a core set of governing biblical truths that remains absolute and non-negotiable. Everything in the Christian experience must be based on and tested by the truth. There can be no exceptions. If it is not, then the corresponding result will be a false church teaching a false message and birthing false converts. Biblical doctrine will become a mere spiritual platitude, churches will follow popular cultural trends and demands, discernment will be lost, and personal comfort, convenience, and success will become the objective platforms of the pulpit. In this kind of spiritual climate, the church will find itself constantly trying to attract and retain those individuals who have no interest whatsoever in a biblical and demanding commitment to Christ. And unfortunately a compromising church will accommodate that mentality and offer people a salvation that does not save.

In this kind of spiritual plethora, it seems that what has happened is that the actual preaching of the gospel has been severely marginalized and in many cases completely abandoned for more marketable options that will satisfy the religious consumer. Just think about that for a minute – the gospel being marginalized, lost, or abandoned. What would that leave, what kind of church

would that be? The gospel is not something that can be “tacked on” at the end of a service. It is something that by its very nature is at the very core and heart of all biblical preaching. “**Christ and Him crucified**” is the message and can never be distorted or depleted of its meaning for results. Paul was emphatic in his declaration in [I Corinthians 2:2](#) when he said,

²For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

And unless those who supposedly promote the truth are willing to preach it with conviction and without compromise, the result will be the most tragic of all possible outcomes and the eternal aftermath the most horrendous of all scenarios imaginable.

In [II Timothy 4:1-4](#), Paul wrote these words to his protégé. This is something that Paul is charging Timothy to do within the context of the Ephesian church. This is Timothy’s God-given, God-ordained responsibility.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

The problem with weak preaching and weak doctrine is that it produces both weak Christians and false converts. Many professing Christians appear to have a very short attention span and a minimal tolerance relative to meaningful and purposeful doctrinal teaching. But learning the deeper truths of God’s Word takes significant effort and concentration. In [Hebrews 5:12-14](#), Paul referred to such truth as “**solid food**”.

¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The Scriptures are filled with doctrinal issues that simply cannot be fully understood with some brief presentation of information. There are challenging doctrines like limited atonement, total depravity, the sovereignty of God, or the Incarnation that are overflowing with depth and greatness, with meaning and importance, with wisdom and gravity, and by their very nature cannot be fully undertaken in a few short “sermonettes”. There are certain doctrines that require a grueling and exhausting exercise of heart and mind to be able to fully grasp their spiritual depth. There are specific areas of each doctrine that are challenging and require strenuous and often demanding effort to understand. So the teaching surrounding such topics - just by default - must have some degree of longevity and subsequent “digging” into the subject or its truths will not be uncovered or understood.

The message of [II Timothy 4:1-4](#) is really very clear. Paul is directing Timothy to boldly proclaim the truth and teaching of Scripture on a consistent and methodical basis. Why? It is because there will come a time when the truth of God’s Word will be consistently rejected in favor of what people both want and want to hear. Charles Swindoll calls the teachers that Paul is speaking of as “*pulpit whores*”. What an indictment! The moment that the church stops preaching Christ and tries to “market” Christ what happens is that it produces false converts who then in turn hire false teachers – what Paul described as “**heap up for themselves teachers (accumulate – NASB, ESV; gather around them – NIV)**”...who “**turn their ears away from the truth**” and “**aside to fables**”.

When Paul commands Timothy to “**preach the word**”, in essence he is telling him **not to tamper with the**

message. The message is God's message. The church does not own the message, but is simply a steward of the message and it does not have the right to tamper with or alter it in anyway. To somehow weaken or distort the message for cultural relevance will only create a superficial Christianity that conceives artificial Christians in a lukewarm church. And the more distant that the church wanders from the truth, the more it becomes content with entertainment and less biblical teaching. The emphasis gradually shifts from content to presentation, from doctrine to methodology, and from truth to pragmatism.

The problem with the modern church mentality is that it clearly underestimates the power of the gospel and the Scriptures. One of the greatest hindrances to the spread of the gospel is the Christian church's lack of confidence in the actual power of the gospel. [Romans 1:16](#) boldly declares,

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it (the gospel) is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

One of the ways in which the church can be guilty of subtly tampering with the gospel message is in trying to make it more palatable and more acceptable to the unbeliever, or its thinking that presentation technique is what is important in communicating the gospel. None of this means that "how" information is presented is unimportant – not at all. Being obnoxious, insensitive, inconsiderate, callous, demanding, thoughtless, uncaring, or condescending in the presentation of the gospel has no place in the church. Men of God who handle the Word of God should have a godly boldness and grace about their lives, but never an attitude of superiority or condescension in presenting the gospel message. However, one of the most tragic results of over-emphasizing the "how" of presentation is that it generally is forced to downplay the truth and eventually discard doctrine in order to accommodate prevailing church growth philosophy – which is always in a constant state of flux. The tragedy is that having the

wrong focus inherently disregards the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of drawing the lost to Christ. [John 6:44\(a\)](#) states the issue this way when it says,

⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him....

There is nothing in that verse that speaks about presentation technique, evangelistic methodology, or marketing flexibility. To the contrary, it is an appeal to appreciate that the ultimate power that brings someone to genuine faith in Christ is not man and his efforts, but God and His Spirit.

Within the presentation of the gospel, there must be a clear explanation of what it means – both practically and eternally. It is a gospel of conversion, a gospel of regeneration, and within its spiritual parameters there must be the discussion of what genuine biblical faith and repentance innately produce in the life of a new believer. No reasonable Christian would ever argue against the message of the Scriptures being presented in a way that makes sense to the person who is actually engaged in hearing it. Knowing your audience is an intelligent attribute of anyone who preaches. What someone would say to a six-year old is different than what would be said to someone who was fifty years old. Jesus spoke to many different kinds of people – the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, Zaccheus, tax collectors, religious hypocrites, rulers, and multitudes on a hillside. But He never compromised the message even though how he approached an individual may have been different than the person before. The content never changed. The Christian life is an on-going and persevering life of godliness and holiness, and if these fundamental and non-negotiable truths are not accurately communicated, then in essence the truth has been minimized and the impending potential for false conversions substantially maximized. Invariably the outcome is that of a culturally acceptable gospel of "easy believism" which becomes a woeful and damning substitute for biblical and life transforming truth.

Obviously, there is nothing in the New Testament that could give any honest reader the idea that early Christi-

anity as depicted in Acts and the New Testament epistles was a popular and highly accepted religious movement. The message of the early church was so unacceptable and offensive to the culture of that day that it spawned intense reaction and persecution against it. It was the gospel message that offended. It was the message of salvation apart from works and through the sacrificial blood of Christ that antagonized and infuriated those who heard it. It was a message preached against personal sin and an individual's proud rebellion against the truths of Scripture. It was offensive, insulting, and distasteful to the prideful arrogance of those who heard it. There was nothing popular or culturally acceptable about early Christianity. The obvious problem that the modern church movement has is that it has clearly marginalized the gospel message to accommodate cultural reactions against it. And this marginalization and demotion of the gospel for the sake of accommodation has germinated an enormous sub-culture within the church at large of "unbelieving believers", or a false set of converts. Jesus, in describing this kind of individual, stated this in [John 2:23-24](#),

²³Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

²⁴But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.

The "many" professed a belief in Jesus because of the miracles they had seen, but He was not willing to "commit Himself to them" because He fully understood that their belief was not a genuine biblical faith. He was never willing for any reason to lessen the demands of faith and discipleship for the sake of expanding the kingdom.

The issue being addressed is really very simple – genuine saving faith has many counterfeits and many spiritual forgeries and imitations. Unfortunately, the very essence of biblical salvation has much too often been woefully misrepresented and distorted, and the result is an innumerable multitude of people who have been fatally deceived into believing that they have eternal life when in reality they have never truly been

saved. The tragedy for those individuals is immeasurable.

Continued in next edition...



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Easy Believism: Is It Heresy?

Part One

Every month we choose a topic to write about that will challenge both the writers and the readers. This topic is no different and certainly has presented us with a dilemma. Do we approach this topic from the side of salvation or from the side of discipleship?

There is so much to say from either side that it our hope and prayer that it will both stimulate your thinking as well as your presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:14 (NASB)

¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours in your ignorance,*

The Scriptures do not teach that the Person of Jesus Christ nor any of the important offices which God has

given Him can be divided or ignored according to the whims of men.

Therefore, I must be frank in my feeling that a notable heresy has continued to flourish throughout our evangelical Christian circles—the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as Lord as long as we want to!

This concept has sprung naturally from a misunderstanding of what the Bible actually says about Christian discipleship and obedience. It is now found in nearly all of our full gospel literature. I confess that I was among those who preached it before I began to pray earnestly, to study diligently and meditate with anguish over the whole matter.

I think the following is a fair statement of what I was taught in my early Christian experience and it certainly needs a lot of modifying and a great many qualifiers to save us from being in error.

“We are saved by accepting Christ as our Savior; we are sanctified by accepting Christ as our Lord; we may do the first without doing the second!” This belief system has been around several decades.

The truth is that salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred Scriptures. Peter makes it plain that we are **“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience” (1 Peter 1:2).**

1 Peter 1:2 (NASB)

² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

What a tragedy that in our day we often hear the gospel appeal made on this kind of basis:

“Come to Jesus! You do not have to obey anyone. You do not have to change anything. You do not have to give up anything, alter anything, surrender anything, give back anything—just come to Him and believe in Him as Savior!”

So they come and believe in the Savior. Later on, in a meeting or conference, they will hear another appeal:

“Now that you have received Him as Savior, how would you like to take Him as Lord?”

The fact that we hear this everywhere does not make it right. To urge men and women to believe in a divided Christ is bad teaching, for no one can receive half of Christ, or a third of Christ, or a quarter of the Person of Christ! We are not saved by believing in an office nor in a work.

I heard well-meaning Christians say, “Come and believe on the finished work.” That work will not save you. The Bible does not tell us to believe in an office or a work, but to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Person who has done that work and holds those offices.

Now, note again, Peter’s emphasis on obedience among the scattered and persecuted Christians of his day.

It seems most important to me that Peter speaks of his fellow Christians as **“obedient children” (1 Peter 1:14)**. He was not giving them a command or exhortation to be obedient. In effect, he said, “Assuming that you are believers, I therefore gather that you are also obedient. So now, as obedient children, do so and so.”

Obedience Taught Throughout Bible

Brethren, I would point out that obedience is taught throughout the entire Bible and that true obedience is one of the toughest requirements of the Christian life. Apart from obedience, there can be no salvation, for salvation without obedience is a self-contradictory impossibility. The essence of sin is rebellion against divine authority.

God said to Adam and Eve, **“But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” Genesis 2:17 (NASB)** Here was a divine requirement calling for obedience on the part of those who had the power of choice and will.

In spite of the strong prohibition, Adam and Eve

stretched forth their hands and tasted of the fruit and thus they disobeyed and rebelled, bringing sin upon themselves.

Paul writes very plainly and directly in the book of Romans about “**one man’s disobedience**” ([Romans 5:19](#))—and this is a stern word by the Holy Spirit through the apostle—by one man’s disobedience came the downfall of the human race!

Romans 5:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

In John’s Gospel, the Word is very plain and clear that sin is lawlessness, that sin is disobedience to the law of God. Paul’s picture of sinners in Ephesians concludes that the people of the world are “**the children of disobedience**” ([Ephesians 2:2](#)). Paul certainly means that disobedience characterizes them, conditions them and molds them. Disobedience has become a part of their nature.

Ephesians 2:2 (NASB)

² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

All of this provides background for the great, continuing question before the human race: “Who is boss?” This breaks down into a series of three questions: “To whom do I belong?” “To whom do I owe allegiance?” and “Who has authority to require obedience of me?”

Now, I suppose of all the people in the world Americans have the most difficult time in giving obedience to anyone or anything. Americans are supposed to be sons of freedom. We ourselves were the outcropping of a revolt. We spawned a revolution, pouring the tea overboard in the Boston harbor. We made speeches and said, “That sound of the clash of arms is carried on every wind that blows from the Boston Commons” and finally, “Give me liberty or give me death!”

That is in the American blood and when anyone says, “You owe obedience,” we immediately bristle! In the natural sense, we do not take kindly to the prospect of yielding obedience to anyone.

In the same sense, the people of this world have a quick and ready answer to the questions: “To whom do I belong?” and “To whom do I owe obedience?”

Their answer is: “I belong to myself. No one has authority to require my obedience!”

In the Name of "Individualism"

Our generation makes a great deal out of this, and we give it the name of “**individualism.**” On the basis of our individuality we claim the right of self-determination.

In an airplane, the pilot who sits at the controls determines where that plane is going. He must determine the destination.

Now, if God had made us humans to be mere machines we would not have the power of self-determination. But since He made us in His own image and made us to be moral creatures, He has given us that power of self-determination.

I would insist that we do not have the right of self-determination because God has given us only the power to choose evil. Seeing that God is a holy God and we are moral creatures having the power but not the right to choose evil, no man has any right to lie.

We have the power to lie but no man has any right to lie.

We have the power to steal—I could go out and get myself a better coat than the one I own. I could slip out through a side door and get away with the coat. I have that power but I do not have the right!

I have the power to use a knife, a razor or a gun to kill another person—but I do not have that right! I have only the power to do it.

Actually, we only have the right to be good—we never have the right to be bad because God is good. We

only have the right to be holy; we never have the right to be unholy. If you are unholy you are using a right that is not yours. Adam and Eve had no moral right to eat of that tree of good and evil, but they took it and usurped the right that was not theirs.

The poet Tennyson must have thought about this for he wrote in his *In Memoriam*: **“Our wills are ours, we know not how; our wills are ours to make them Thine!”**

Oh, this mystery of a man’s free will is far too great for us! Tennyson said, “We know not how.” But then he girds himself and continues, “Yes, our wills are ours to make them Thine.” And that is the only right we have here to make our wills the wills of God, to make the will of God our will!

God Is the Sovereign

We must remember that God is Who He is and we are what we are. God is the Sovereign and we are the creatures. He is the Creator and therefore He has a right to command us with the obligation that we should obey. It is a happy obligation, I might say, for **“[His] yoke is easy and [His] burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).**

Now, this is where I raise the point again of our human insistence that Christ may sustain a divided relationship toward us. This is now so commonly preached that to oppose it or object to it means that you are sticking your neck out and you had best be prepared for what comes.

But how can we insist and teach that our Lord Jesus Christ can be our Savior without being our Lord? How can we continue to teach that we can be saved without any thought of obedience to our Sovereign Lord?

I am satisfied that when man believes on Jesus Christ he must believe on the whole Lord Jesus Christ—not making any reservation! I am satisfied that it is wrong to look upon Jesus as a kind of divine nurse to whom we can go when sin has made us sick, and after He has helped us, to say “Good-bye”—and go on our own way.

Suppose I slip into a hospital and tell the staff I need a blood transfusion or perhaps an X-ray of my gall bladder. After they have ministered to me and given their services, do I just slip out of the hospital again with a cheery “Good-bye”—as though I owe them nothing and it was kind of them to help me in my time of need?

That may sound like a grotesque concept to you, but it does pretty well draw the picture of those who have been taught that they can use Jesus as a Savior in their time of need without owning Him as Sovereign and Lord and without owing Him obedience and allegiance.

No Such Concept of Salvation

The Bible never in any way gives us such a concept of salvation. Nowhere are we ever led to believe that we can use Jesus as a Savior and now own Him as our Lord. He is the Lord and as the Lord He saves us, because He has all of the offices of Savior and Christ and High Priest and Wisdom and Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption! He is all of these things and all of these are embodied in Him as Christ the Lord.

My brethren, we are not allowed to come to Jesus Christ as shrewd, clever operators saying, “We will take this and this, but we won’t take that!” We do not come to Him as one who, buying furniture for his house, declares: “I will take this table but I don’t want that chair”—dividing it up!

No, sir! It is either all of Christ or none of Christ!

I believe we need to preach again a whole Christ to the world—a Christ who does not need our apologies, a Christ who will not be divided, a Christ who will either be Lord of all or who will not be Lord at all!

I think it is important to agree that true salvation restores the right of a Creator-creature relationship because it acknowledges God’s right to our fellowship and communion.

You see, in our time we have over-emphasized the psychology of the sinner’s condition. We spend much time describing the woe of the sinner, the grief of the sinner and the great burden he carries. He does have all of these, but we have over-emphasized them until we

forget the principal fact—that the sinner is actually a rebel against properly constituted authority!

That is what makes sin, sin. We are rebels. We are sons of disobedience. Sin is the breaking of the law and we are in rebellion and we are fugitives from the just laws of God while we are sinners.

By way of illustration, suppose a man escapes from prison. Certainly he will have grief. He is going to be in pain after bumping logs and stones and fences as he crawls and hides away in the dark. He is going to be hungry and cold and weary. His beard will grow long and he will be tired and cramped and cold—all of these will happen, but they are incidental to the fact that he is a fugitive from justice and a rebel against law.

So it is with sinners. Certainly they are heartbroken and they carry a heavy load. Certainly they labor and are heavy-laden. The Bible takes full account of these things; but they are incidental to the fact that the reason the sinner is what he is, is because he has rebelled against the laws of God and he is a fugitive from divine judgment.

It is that which constitutes the nature of sin; not the fact that he carries a heavy load of misery and sadness and guilt. These things constitute only the outcropping of the sinful nature, but the root of sin is rebellion against God. Does not the sinner say: "I belong to myself—I owe allegiance to no one unless I choose to give it!" That is the essence of sin.

But thankfully, salvation reverses that and restores the former relationship so that the first thing the returning sinner does is to confess: **'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."**'" ([Luke 15:18-19](#) (NASB)).

Thus, in repentance, we reverse that relationship and we fully submit to the Word of God and the will of God, as obedient children.

Now that happiness of all the moral creatures lies right here, brethren, in the giving of obedience to

God. The Psalmist cried out in [Psalm 103:21](#) (NASB) , **"Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will."**

The angels in heaven find their complete freedom and highest happiness in obeying the commandments of God. They do not find it a tyranny—they find it a delight.

I have been looking again into the mysteries of the first chapter of Ezekiel and I don't understand it. There are creatures with four faces and four wings, strange beings doing strange things. They have wheels and still other wheels in the middle of the wheels. There is fire coming out of the north and there are creatures going straight ahead and some that lower their wings and wave them. Strange, beautiful beings and they are all having the time of their lives utterly, completely delighted with the Presence of God and that they could serve God!

A World of Disobedience

On the other hand, hell is certainly the world of disobedience. Everything else that may be said about hell may be true, but this one thing is the essence—hell is the world of the rebel! Hell is the Alcatraz for the unconstituted rebels who refuse to surrender to the will of God.

I thank God that heaven is the world of God's obedient children. Whatever else we may say of its pearly gates, its golden streets and its jasper walls, heaven is heaven because children of the Most High God find they are in their normal sphere as obedient moral beings.

Jesus said there are fire and worms in hell, but that is not the reason it is hell. You might endure worms and fire, but for a moral creature to know and realize that he is where he is because he is a rebel—that is the essence of hell and judgment. It is the eternal world of all the disobedient rebels who have said, "I owe God nothing!"

This is the time given us to decide. Each person makes his own decision as to the eternal world he is going to inhabit.

A Serious Decision

This is a serious matter of decision. You do not come to this decision as though it were a matter of being interviewed for a job or getting your diploma at a school.

We have no basis to believe that we can come casually and sprightly to the Lord Jesus and say, "I have come for some help, Lord Jesus. I understand that you are the Savior so I am going to believe and be saved and then I am going to turn away and think about the other matters of lordship and allegiance and obedience at some time in the future."

I warn you—you will not get help from Him in that way for the Lord will not save those whom He cannot command.

He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is—the anointed Savior and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of lords! He would not be who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives.

Brethren, I believe in the deeper Christian life and experience—oh, yes! But I believe we are mistaken when we try to add the deeper life to an imperfect salvation, obtained imperfectly by an imperfect concept of the whole thing.

Under the working of the Spirit of God through such men as Finney and Wesley, no one would ever dare to rise in a meeting and say, "I am a Christian" if he had not surrendered his whole being to God and had taken Jesus Christ as his Lord. It was only then that he could say, "I am saved!"

Today, we let them say they are saved no matter how imperfect and incomplete the transaction, with the proviso that the deeper Christian life can be tacked on at some time in the future.

Can it be that we really think that we do not owe Jesus Christ our obedience?

We have owed Him obedience ever since the second we cried out to Him for salvation, and if we do not give Him that obedience, I have reason to wonder if we are really converted!

I see things and I hear of things that Christian people are doing. As I watch them operate within the profession of Christianity I do raise the question of whether they have been truly converted.

Brethren, I believe it is the result of faulty teaching to begin with. They thought of the Lord as a hospital and Jesus as chief of staff to fix up poor sinners that had gotten into trouble!

"Fix me up, Lord," they have insisted, "so that I can go on my own way!"

That is bad teaching, brethren. It is filled with self-deception. Let us look unto Jesus our Lord, high, holy, wearing the crowns, Lord of lords and King of all, having a perfect right to command full obedience from all of His saved people!

Remember What the Bible Says

Just remember what the Bible says about the Person and the titles and the offices of Jesus.

".....God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." [Acts 2:36 \(NASB\)](#)

Jesus means Savior, Lord means Sovereign, Christ means Anointed One. The apostle, therefore, did not preach Jesus as Savior—he preached to them Jesus as Lord and Christ and Savior, never dividing His person or offices.

Remember, too, that Paul wrote to the Roman Christians: **"But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." [Romans 10:8-9 \(NASB\)](#)**

The apostle did not say that "You shall confess with your mouth the Savior." He said, **"For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation..... For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'" [Romans 10:10, 12-13 \(NASB\)](#)**

NOTES

Three times he calls Jesus “Lord” in these passages telling us how to be saved. He says that faith in the Lord Jesus plus confession of that faith to the world brings salvation to us!

God desires that we be honest with Him above everything else. Search the Scriptures, read the New Testament, and if you see that I have given a germ of truth, then I urge you to do something about it. If you have been led to believe imperfectly in a divided Savior, be glad that there is still time for you to do something about it!

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