

# Salvation Through Jesus Christ Is It as "Simple as ABC"?

A short while ago, as I dialed across my car radio, I came upon two evangelicals discussing how "simple" it was to be saved. The one said to the other, "It is as simple as ABC. A, you must realize that you have been a sinner. B, you must receive Christ as your Savior, who died for your sins. And, C, you must ask Him to forgive you of your sins and publicly acknowledge Him as your Savior." The two then continued to discuss how "easy" it is to *be saved! How attractive* it all seemed! But is it true? Is it really all that easy to be saved? What did Jesus Christ say? What did the first apostles say? What does your Bible say about *how to be saved*? Is such a profound thing as transitioning from human life to the Kingdom of God as "simple as ABC"?

*by Garner Ted Armstrong*

You have heard all your life the expression, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Probably, you have heard very similar statements.

To millions, the way to salvation is truly as "easy" as ABC. But is receiving eternal life in the Kingdom of God easier than getting a driver's license? It is easier than negotiating a contract, or joining the armed services, or taking out a marriage license?

If it is so *easy*, why do so many hundreds of millions of human beings continue to reject it? Why do they resist being saved?

Let's carefully examine the words of the two Christian ministers who discussed salvation on the radio.

## "A"

In a very matter-of-fact tone, the two men said, "You must realize that you are a sinner."

But how does one realize one is a sinner if one does not know *what sin is*?

No two people believe the same thing about what sin is or is not, in God's sight, unless they know God's own definition in His Word.

One person may walk outside the steps of a church building, light up a cigarette, and enjoy a smoke on his way home, thinking nothing of it. Another may believe smoking is a *sin*, and may be fighting the habit wanting to get rid of it.

One person may enjoy a cocktail or a glass of wine with dinner, while another may look upon taking a single drop of any alcoholic beverage as a terrible *sin*.

One person may enjoy a neighborhood game of cards, while another may believe all card-playing is of the devil.

One person may enjoy dancing, while another may condemn any form of dancing as satanic.

One person may enjoy a plate of shrimp and lobster, while people at the next table may look at the same dish with distaste, and would never eat shellfish or shrimp because they believe it would be a sin.

One person may make out a shopping list, or gather up vegetables and produce and go to the farmer's market on Saturday, enjoying the busiest shopping day of the week while others would never think of doing so, because

they know it is the Sabbath day, hallowed of God at creation, and *holy time* in which they are not to conduct their own business.

Many millions of people believe "sin" is "something which is displeasing to God." On the list can be drinking, dancing, smoking, going to movies, reading the wrong kind of books, cussing, or being lazy, rude, thoughtless, and abusive toward your wife and children. Millions know it is a sin to steal, to be abusive toward their parents, or to murder. Others have no conscience whatsoever if they lie or cheat.

But how many know the *Bible* definition of sin?

Many, when they hear the true definition of sin from their own Bibles, begin to squirm, reason, argue, and try desperately to find some way out of the plain scripture. They want the definition to be greatly modified by some "new" commandment of Jesus, whereby they can just "love one another" in some manner. By no means do they want to be told they must *obey* God!

But your Bible plainly says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for *sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4).

God's Ten Commandments point out *what sin is*.

When Jesus Christ delivered the famous Sermon on the Mount He *magnified* the law and "made it honourable."

Notice: "The Eternal is well pleased for His [Christ's] righteousness' sake; He will *magnify* the law, and make it honourable" (Isaiah 42:21).

How did Jesus do this?

He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause ["without a cause" is not in the best manuscripts] shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [vain, useless fellow], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool [graceless wretch], shall be in danger of [Gehenna] fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:21-24).

Christ shows how the commandment against murder can be broken by *human rage and anger*; that if one becomes *angry* with a fellow human being to the point of utterly disparaging them, wanting them to "drop dead," so to speak, it is the *same thing as murder* in the sight of God.

This indeed "magnifies" the law, and makes it "honorable," for it goes far beyond the deed itself, and deals with the *thoughts* of the *heart*.

What a paradox it is that millions believe the Sermon on the Mount *does away* with God's law when it does precisely the *opposite*. It makes God's law far more *binding*, by restoring it to its *spiritual* plane and applying it to every human deed and action, and to the *human thought* process as well.

Jesus said, "Think NOT that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). To "fulfil" does not mean "destroy," no matter how many clever arguments are advanced by theologians who want to be rid of the requirements of God's law.

It means to *do* or *perform*. The law is a *lifetime* obligation, just like laws in society. If it is against the law to murder on Tuesday, it is still against the law to murder on the following Monday.

Jesus Christ kept His Father's commandments to set us "an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15: 10).

When a young nobleman came to Christ and asked Him what he must *do* in order to be saved, Christ answered, "If thou wilt enter into life, *keep the commandments*." When the young man asked "Which?" Christ went on to enumerate examples of the *Ten Commandments of God*, and then *summed up* the last six by saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 19:17-19).

To fail to love God *by keeping His commandments is sin!*

John wrote, "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we *keep His commandments*. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3,4).

God says there are *conditions* to answered prayer! God simply does not answer the prayers of those who refuse to obey Him: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him *because we keep His commandments*, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

As Christ explained, if we keep God's commandments, we abide in the *love of Christ*. John wrote, "By this we know that we *love the children of God*, when we love God, and *keep His commandments*. For this *is* the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:2,3).

How many professing Christians truly know that *sin is the transgression of God's law*? How many know that God tells us over and over again that if we *love* Him, we win *keep His commandments*?

This is very *different* from the matter-of-fact manner expressed by the two theologians over the radio—that we must "realize we have sinned."

God told Isaiah, "Cry aloud, spare not lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 58:1).

Paul explained that it is the *law* which points out *what sin is*: "What shall we say then, is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, *I had not known sin* but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7). Then he said, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (verse 12).

Had the two theologians explained *what sin is*, what its evil effects are, and why it is so *wrong* for us; and had shown that Christ died to atone for the *sins* of the world, that He took our sins upon Himself, I would have listened further. But they obviously *did not know* what sin truly is.

On its face, what they said is correct, as far as it went. The trouble is, it barely scratches the surface of a far deeper truth. A matter-of-fact, intellectual acknowledgement that one "is a sinner" does not remotely indicate that deep, soul-shattering *repentance* has occurred.

When we are convicted of sin, God wants us to *repent* of sin, and cry out to Him for forgiveness. Job said, when he truly saw his sin, "Wherefore *I abhor* myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

Paul put it this way: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O *wretched man that I am!* Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:22-25).

Paul felt absolutely *wretched* when he looked deep inside himself and saw that it was his human nature, his passions, lusts, and senses that caused him to give in, to stumble, to make mistakes! He *hated* those lapses, those mistakes, and cried out "O *wretched* man that I am!"

Yet, Paul was a deeply *converted* man, one who labored very hard to preach the gospel to others. How *encouraging* it is to every struggling Christian to read Romans 7, and know that one of the greatest Christian men in history had to struggle against his own human nature, just as we do. Yes, it is true we must come to know we have sinned. But such knowledge should have a deep, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual *effect* on us, and not be a casual, matter-of-fact observation.

Next, the two theologians said we must "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."

## "B"

Jesus Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). Did Jesus mean that is *all* we must do? A little later, to the same people, Jesus said, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

What did Jesus mean when He said we must "believe on Him"?

To millions, it means we must believe that He was the Christ, that He was the Son of God, that He died for the sins of the world. But do these same millions of professing Christians believe they must *obey* what Jesus Christ said we are to *do*? Do they believe Christ set us an *example*, that we should follow in His steps? Do they believe we must also *believe the message He preached*, and *live* by it?

The Bible does not contradict itself. God's Word must be "rightly divided," discerning the truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

The eighth chapter of John is a fascinating example of how people in Jesus' day *believed on Him*, and yet, within only a short time, "took up stones to cast at Him" (John 8:59) and tried to *kill* Him!

Study the whole chapter! He had entered the Temple when the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They demanded to know what He would say about the Law of Moses, or rather, whether He would say they should stone her to death.

"This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground [floor], as though He heard them not. So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, *being convicted by their own conscience*, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" (John 8:6-9).

It is obvious Jesus had written *names* in the dust. The "pecking order" of the scribes and Pharisees dictated that the "highest ranking," or the "eldest," should have opportunity to peer over Jesus' shoulder at the ground, and see what it was He had been stooping down to write. No doubt, as each one in his turn saw what Jesus had

written, his cheeks flushed with shame and embarrassment for *each one of them now knew what every other one of them had done*. That Jesus had linked certain names together seems inescapable.

In any event, instead of *stoning* the woman, they went out as quickly as they could, and the woman was left standing alone.

Jesus asked her, "Where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8: 10,11).

This marvelous example of loving compassion and forgiveness should be an inspiration to every human being. The Pharisees, whose own lives were far from perfect, and who had no doubt been guilty of the very same kind of sin, wanted to *stone* the woman to death! By being outraged at her sins, and carrying out the *punishment* for sin right then and there, they could point the finger of guilt *away* from themselves.

But Jesus Christ, seeing the shame and remorse of the woman, and knowing her public humiliation, forgave her.

At some later point, He was again speaking to the Pharisees, and said, "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me" (John 8:14-16).

He told the Pharisees He would go His way, and they would seek Him, yet die in their sins. He said, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world: I am not of this world" (verse 23).

Finally, after referring to His divine origins, and speaking of His impending death and resurrection, He said, "And He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone: for I do always those things that please Him. *As He spake these words, many believed on Him*" (John 8:29,30).

Finally, after a lengthy argument, and after seeing some of their own number publicly humiliated, some of those in His audience *believed* on Him!

They had now accomplished, according to the two radio preachers, the A of salvation! Now, they had taken the *first step* in what is called an "*easy path*" to eternal life!

Notice what happened!

"Then said Jesus *to those Jews WHICH BELIEVED ON Him, If ye continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the *truth*, and the *truth* shall make you free" (verses 31,32).

Plainly, He told them they must continue believing the *message* He was preaching, and that they would come to know the *truth*!

This stung their pride! This hurt their self-righteous vanity! They "believed on Him" only moments before, but now He was implying they *did not yet know the truth*.

"They answered Him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth forever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed: but *ye seek to kill me*, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father and ye do that which ye have seen with your father" (verses 33-38).

Christ was cutting right through to the heart of their spiritual pride and vanity. They trusted in their tradition, their national religion, and their history. Inwardly, they were not repentant. Again, they drew themselves up to their spiritual haughtiness and said, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus retorted, "If ye were Abraham's children [spiritually], ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to *kill* me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father" (verses 39-41).

At this point, they lost their tempers. Jesus was plainly denying that their *spiritual* father was Abraham, even though He had acknowledged that physically, racially, they had descended from him. They knew He was referring to Satan when He said they were doing the deeds of their "father."

So infuriated were these men, who only minutes earlier had "believed on Him," that they said, "We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God!" (John 8:41).

They called him *illegitimate!*

Jesus then drove His point home more intensely: He said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, *YE BELIEVE ME NOT!*" (verses 44,45).

There is the *difference* between "believing on Him," and *believing Him!*

Study this entire chapter. The argument continued for some time, culminating in their attempt to *stone Him to death on the spot!* (John 8:59).

This is a poignant example of people who came to "believe on Him," yet did *not believe what He said!* Do you see the difference? One may "believe on" Jesus Christ; that is, believe that He is the Christ, that He died for the sins of the world, that He is the Savior, that He was the Son of God—and yet *reject His message* and refuse to *obey* Him, and therefore believe on Him in vain! Not only did these Jews who "believed on Him" reject His message, they tried to *kill* Him on the spot!

Look at Jesus' own words:

"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But *in vain* they do *worship* me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:7-9).

The two theologians I heard on the radio said it was necessary to "profess Christ orally" as a part of their "simple as-ABC" formula for being saved. Here, Jesus says it is possible to speak in worshipful language, to speak honorably of Jesus, and to do it *all in vain!*

Here is another striking example: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

"Jesus is Lord" is a common bumper sticker or decal I have seen on car windows. It is also a common slogan on billboards outside churches. Do all those who proclaim "Jesus is Lord" also *do the will of the Father*? Do they know what His will *is* toward mankind? Do they understand that *sin is the transgression of God's law* (1 John 3:4), and that *repentance of sin* is necessary for salvation (Acts 2:38)?

No matter what the two evangelicals said on the radio about how "*simple*" it is to be saved, Jesus said otherwise.

He continued, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I *never knew* you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity [lawlessness]" (Matthew 7:22,23).

Here Jesus is clearly speaking of *religious leaders*. The average layman will never claim to have preached and prophesied, cast out demons, and done many wonderful works in the name of Christ.

Then there is something *beyond* the simplicity of "ABC" in being saved after all, isn't there?

Jesus cried out, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

Obviously, then, just "believing on Jesus"—accepting the fact that He was the Son of God, that He died for the sins of the world—is not *enough*, by itself, for salvation! There is something called "the will of the Father" that we must *do* in order to be saved. There are some things Jesus Himself said we must do!

### ***Repent***

The first recorded public command Jesus gave is in Matthew 4: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, *Repent*: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (verse 17).

Mark recorded the same thing: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: *repent* ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1: 15).

When Jesus sent out the twelve to preach the gospel to the surrounding provinces, He gave them power over unclean spirits, and issued instructions about how they were to conduct their journey. They were to take no extra clothing, not even money (Mark 6:7-11). Mark writes, "And they went out and preached that men should *repent*" (Mark 6:12).

Strangely, I did not hear one single word from the two evangelicals on the radio about the need to repent. In a very matter-of-fact tone, they said one must "acknowledge that he is a sinner" and then "believe that Christ died to save sinners."

Jesus and the apostles did not teach it as a matter-of-fact realization or thought. No, Jesus said, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but *sinners to repentance*" (Mark 2:17).

To repent means to be emotionally contrite, sorrowful. It means to be truly *brokenhearted* over sins one has committed, and to desperately *want to be forgiven*. Job came to feel complete self-*revulsion* over his self-righteousness when he repented, as we read above.

On the Day of Pentecost, when Peter had finished His powerful sermon about how the Jews in his audience had been directly complicit in the death of Christ, they were *convicted of sin*. Frantically, they cried out "Men and brethren, *what shall we do?* Peter did not tell them "It's as easy as ABC..." No, he said, "*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 spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Stricken, ashamed, and deeply remorseful, *thousands* in Peter's audience *repented* of what they had done, and were baptized. The two theologians on the radio said *absolutely nothing* about repentance, and *nothing* about the command to be baptized.

## *Is Baptism Necessary?*

When Peter said "be *baptized*," he was using a word that means "be immersed." The Greek word *baptizo* means to "plunge into," or "to immerse." It does not mean to sprinkle or to pour water on one's head.

Baptism carries deep spiritual significance.

Paul wrote, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are *buried* with Him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3,4).

The wages of sin is *death* (Romans 6:23). Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Romans 5:8). He was *buried* in the tomb, and was *resurrected* by God the Father after three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40; Acts 2:32).

The Bible shows that baptism is a *symbol*, or a type of *our death, burial, and resurrection*. Instead of being a literal burial, it is a symbolic "burial" in *water* for only a few brief moments.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be *born of water* and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The Holy Spirit of God is likened unto water many times in the Bible. It is also likened unto wind, and unto fire.

Paul likened the process of Christ cleansing, edifying, and building up His church to "the washing of water *by the word*" (Ephesians 5:26), once again using water as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. This same symbolism is used by Paul in his letter to Titus: "according to His mercy He saved us, by the *washing of regeneration* and renewing of the Holy spirit" (Titus 3:5).

Water is not only essential for life itself (for without it there could be no life on earth), but it is a solvent a cleansing agent. We wash our bodies and our clothes in *water*.

Baptism symbolizes burial by a repentant sinner being lowered completely under the water, and it pictures being *washed* from our sins, as if they were washed away, left behind in a watery grave. It is not a symbol of *burial* to splash a bit of water into the face of a startled infant of six weeks at a "christening," or to sprinkle a few drops on the head of a person who is supposedly "being baptized" by a priest in a formal church ceremony.

The health department would not agree that dead bodies should be propped up, or tied to a tree, and have one shovelful of dirt thrown on them. No, they demand that bodies be *buried*.

Paul wrote, "For if we have been *planted* together [some used the term *planted* referring to burial of a body] in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead [baptism pictures *death* of the "old man"] is freed from sin. Now if we be *dead with Christ* [symbolized by our being immersed in water by baptism], we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Romans 6:5-8).

The two radio preachers said absolutely *nothing* about baptism. Yet, it is a *requirement* of God! Jesus Christ *commanded* baptism! Peter commanded those who were conscience-stricken on Pentecost to "be baptized!"

Christ commissioned His apostles, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world [the Greek term for "world" means "age"]. Amen" (Matthew 28:19,20).

When God sent Ananias to Saul, who was struck down by God on the road to Damascus, Ananias *baptized him*: "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was *baptized*" (Acts 9:18).

When Philip had expounded many Old Testament scriptures concerning Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection, the Ethiopian eunuch asked, "See, here is *water*, what doth hinder me to *be baptized*? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down *both into the water* [Philip did not scoop up a handful; they waded out into the water together], both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38).

In spiritual metaphor, Paul likened the passage of Israel through the parted waters of the Red Sea to *baptism*. He wrote, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were *baptized* unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat [*manna* was a type of the Word of God]; And did all drink the same spiritual drink [the water from the rock, miraculously produced, was a type of God's Holy Spirit]: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

There is simply no remote question about whether the rite of *baptism* is a requirement of God! When we are baptized, we humbly and obediently show our God and our Savior that we are deeply sorry for our sins; that we acknowledge that our sins cost the *life of the Savior*, that we realize our baptism pictures not only *His death and burial* but the death and burial of *our old person*; that we joyously and gratefully are calling upon Him to *wash away our sins*, so that just like a *resurrection*, we come up out of the water "in newness of life."

Christ commanded His apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel [good news] to every creature:

He that believeth and *is baptized* shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned [condemned, judged]" (Mark 16:15,16).

So, no matter what the two radio preachers said about "ABC," since they completely *omitted* any real explanation about *repentance*, and since they said *nothing about baptism*, they were not telling their audience the *truth* about how our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said we must be saved!

Yes! We must *believe!* But read Christ's commands again! "He that believeth AND IS BAPTIZED shall be saved!"

## "C"

The two preachers did mention asking Christ to forgive us of our sins, but did not even begin to explain *what sin is!* They seemed to lay great stress upon *public* acknowledgement of Jesus Christ, as if by saying something about Him *publicly*, Christ is satisfied, and forgives us, and saves us.

Certainly, we are to be a *light* unto the world. Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your *good works* [*your what?* Not your fair speeches, or your testimonies, or your arguments?], and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Peter wrote, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to *give an answer* to every man that *asketh you* a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

Many believe it is necessary to confess Christ *publicly* in order to be saved. They have seen hundreds "coming forward" at massive outdoor evangelistic campaigns; they have seen "altar calls" in local churches, and at revivals. Yet, the Ethiopian eunuch walked away from his caravan and his chariot with Philip, and the two of them walked out into the water where the eunuch was baptized. Philip and the eunuch had enjoyed several hours of *private* conversation.

There is a difference between being ready to "give an *answer*" to an obvious *question*, and attempting to publicly proclaim our beliefs and convictions to unbelievers.

God's Word emphasizes "*good works*" more than fair speeches. Yet, there is a caution with this understanding. Casting pearls before swine is one thing; being joyously enthusiastic and humbly grateful for our salvation is another.

Jesus said, "For whosoever shall be *ashamed* of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).

God expects His people to use *wisdom* in knowing when and under what circumstances they should speak concerning their convictions, their belief in Christ.

Notice: "And at that time there was a *great persecution* against the church which was at Jerusalem; and *they were scattered abroad* throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles .... Therefore they that were scattered abroad [disciples of Christ, newly converted laymen—part of the "fruit" born on the Day of Pentecost] went everywhere *preaching the word*" (Acts 8:1-4). Philip was one of these. His preaching in Samaria and his encounter with Simon the magician follow in the ensuing verses.

The climate of the times—terrible persecutions, people being thrown into prison for their beliefs—gave rise to the most urgent and enthusiastic speaking, teaching, and preaching on the part of these members of God's church.

These were not "testimonies" about the people, personally, but were messages about *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*, about His *resurrection*, and about the coming *Kingdom of God*.

"But when they *believed* Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the *name of Jesus Christ*, they were *baptized*, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).

Not every member of God's church has been called to preach. Yet, every one of them, with the obvious exception of the deaf or those with speech impediments, can *talk*. When the opportunity presents itself, when questions are asked, when discussions develop that make it appropriate, Christ expects His people to be *completely unashamed* of their beliefs and convictions.

Paul explained that different people have *different gifts* of God's Holy Spirit:

"For to one is given by the Spirit the *word of wisdom*; to another the *word of knowledge* by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the *gifts of healing* [would God that *anyone* in God's church today possessed such a wonderful gift as this!] by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another different kinds of tongues [languages]; to another the interpretation of tongues [languages]: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit dividing severally [individually] as He will" (1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

There is one guaranteed impediment to receiving any one of God's spiritual gifts. That is *vanity*. Spiritual pride and vanity—wanting to appear "special," or "spiritual," in front of other people—automatically cancels any opportunity for a person to receive one of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit.

There are many thousands who aspire to be someone "special" in God's sight. Thousands believe they have received a special calling. They believe they are prophets or prophetesses, or have special knowledge. Strangely, I do not know of a single one of them who has the *gift of healing* exactly as the Bible describes.

Obviously, there is very much *more* to the process of salvation than indicated by the two radio preachers I heard the other day.

### ***What Did Jesus Say About Salvation?***

We cannot save ourselves. By living perfectly, in accordance with God's Ten Commandments, for ten lifetimes of one hundred years each, we still could not save ourselves! Why? Because we have all *sinned* and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

It required the shed blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins. When we repent, and receive baptism and the laying on of hands for God's Holy Spirit, we are *then justified* in the sight of God.

Justification means all our sins are washed away in the waters of baptism. It means that we *are forgiven*.

We are *justified* by Christ's death, but we are *saved by His life!* "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now *justified* by His blood, we *shall be saved* from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we *shall be saved by His life!*" (Romans 5:8-10).

The church cannot save us. A religious organization cannot save us. A family member cannot save us (1 Corinthians 7:16). We cannot save ourselves.

We can only be saved by the *life* of Christ. Not only does Jesus Christ, through the power of God's Holy Spirit, begin to live His life within us (1 John 4:2; 5:11,12), but He becomes our *daily High Priest*, sitting on the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Did Jesus say it would be as "easy as ABC"?

Notice: "Enter ye in at the strait [narrow] gate: for *wide* is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14).

He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in heaven" (verse 21).

He said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

He told a young nobleman, "If thou wilt enter into life, *keep the commandments*" (Matthew 19:17).

He commanded His disciples to go into the world, and preach the good news about Him, and about His coming kingdom, "*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*" (Matthew 28:20).

But the two radio preachers who were happily discussing how *simple* salvation was—as "simple as ABC"! —said *nothing* of repentance, of sin, of baptism, of living a life of overcoming, of *obeying* God, or of *doing what Christ said*.

Peter remembered vividly the teachings of Christ. He wrote, "For the time is come that *judgment* must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us [the church], what shall the end be of them that *obey not* the gospel of God? And if the righteous *scarcely* be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17,18).

Some of the greatest and certainly the easiest to understand of Christ's promises are found in Revelation 2:26,27. He said, "And he that *overcometh*, and keepeth my *works* unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father."

Overcome? How? Overcome *what*? It is obvious. God's Word tells us we must resist Satan (James 4:7); overcome the satanic, deceived, sin-sick, crime-ridden, drug-infested, war-torn world around us; and overcome our own human natures. Does this sound as "easy as ABC"?

On the other hand, it is not so difficult as to be impossible. Salvation is God's free, loving gift. God does not want us to be in doubt of our salvation. John wrote, "And this is the record, that God *hath given* to us eternal life, and this life *in His Son*. He that hath the Son [abiding in Him, living in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit] hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11,12).

Paul said, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who, being in the form of God [see John 1:1-10], thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:5,6).

With Christ living in us, all things are possible. We cannot accomplish the good works God demands of us on our own strength, but only through the faith of Christ in us, through His indwelling presence.

Paul wrote, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always *obeyed*, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling. For it is God which *worketh in you* both to will [to have the courage and determination—which He supplies through His Spirit] and to DO of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12,13).

### ***But If We Sin, Then What?***

There is a tendency to think that once we are baptized, we will be living *perfect* lives. Many enter into God's church, into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, with enthusiasm and zeal, feeling completely forgiven of all their past sins, determined to live as *perfectly* before God as they can.

But the months and years slip by. Human relationships become difficult. People betray one another, desert one another; divorces occur; human anger and rage enter in. Lusts and appetites seem to boil up within, and Satan's world beckons with all its glitter and glamour, all its noisy and strident clamor.

Many times, those who *started to live a life close to God* look around one day and realize they have slipped back into their old way of life. They become discouraged. Some simply *give up and quit*, thinking they have lost out.

But have they?

Not according to the apostle Paul. He wrote of how our human compulsions are in conflict with our best intentions, how we do not always do what we want to do: "For the things I do I wish I didn't do. What I want to do, I don't do, and what I hate, I find myself doing. If then I do the things I don't want to do, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now it is no more the real me that does it, but *sin* that lives inside of me. Because I know that in me (that is, in my physical flesh), lives nothing good: for to determine is present with me; but now to

perform good things I find not. Because the good things that I wish I would do I don't do: but the evil things I wish I wouldn't do I find myself doing.

"Now if I do the things I wish I wouldn't, it isn't the real me that does them, but sin that lives inside of me. I find it is a law, then, that when I would do good things, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my physical members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin that lives in my members. O *wretched man that I am!* Who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God that it will be done through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:15-25, paraphrased).

The radio preachers said nothing about this daily *struggle* in the hearts and minds of converted people against the compulsions and carnal reactions of their human natures. If Paul, whom we feel to have been one of the greatest Christians who ever lived, could say he felt *wretched* because of his own personal mistakes, then no wonder we feel wretched when we do similar things!

John was special to Jesus. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved. John was an elderly man, an apostle, and the overseer of the church in Ephesus. He wrote, "If we [including himself!] say *we* have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we *confess* our sins [to God, not to man!], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10). John was writing to converted people in God's church. He acknowledged that all people sin from time to time, and included himself.

James said, "My brethren, don't many of you become teachers [ministers, overseers], knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment. For in many things all of us offend others. If any man never offends in what he says, he is a perfect man" (James 3:1,2, paraphrased).

God's Word clearly shows that converted Christians do slip up, make mistakes, and commit sins. That is what *overcoming* is all about. What is there to "overcome" if one is *perfect* from the moment of baptism?

Christ shows it is a *strait*, narrow road that leads to Salvation, and says only "few" really find it! Peter said the righteous are "scarcely" saved! Paul said he was a *wretched* man. John said *he also* sinned!

The entire book of Hebrews deals with the *priesthood* of Jesus Christ, how He makes intercession for *converted Christians* who need to cry out to God on a daily basis.

The radio preachers did not explain a single word about *what Jesus Christ is doing today* in their happy remarks about "ABC." They did not discuss why He is a *daily High Priest!*

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be *touched* with the *feeling* of our infirmities: but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:14,15).

Jesus Christ of Nazareth can *feel* our human compulsions and weaknesses. He never gave in to them, but He *understands them*.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace [unmerited mercy and pardon], that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

No, salvation is *not* as "easy as ABC." Neither is it so difficult as to be impossible, or out of reach. It is only through the sacrifice of Christ and the daily intercession of Christ—through the faith of Christ—that we can be saved!

The true "ABCs" of salvation are:

A: *Repent!* But before we can do that, we need to understand *what* we repent of. That means we need to know what sin IS, what it was that cost the life of Christ. We need to know who and what Jesus Christ *was* before His human birth; How He could die for the sins of the world; whether He was dead; how long He was in the tomb (Matthew 12:40); whether He was resurrected, and why.

B: *Be baptized!* We need to know the true picture of baptism (Romans 6); that it symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and also symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of our "old man," and the emergence of the "new man," a "new creature in Christ," to live in a new and different life. We need to know that the Greek word *baptizo* means "to immerse," or "to plunge into," and that baptism is not a ceremonial sprinkling, or pouring, or "christening" of an infant.

C: *And you shall receive the Holy Spirit!* We need to know God, that He is a Spirit, and we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. We need to know what IS the Spirit of God, and *how* God begets us as His own children. We need to know the fruits of the Spirit; about love, about forgiveness and tolerance, and about the gifts of God's Spirit. We need to know about the coming resurrection and our new spiritual bodies!

Salvation is hardly simple! It is a fabulous wonder, almost incredible, that God could decide upon a process to make sinning, carnal human beings into His own children, to ultimately *change* our human bodies to become like Him!

ABC?

Hardly!

-End-

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