

SALVATION = A CHANGED LIFE!!!



...OLD THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY;
BEHOLD, ALL THINGS ARE
BECOME NEW

Throughout the New Testament, the writers, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, encourage and exhort those who say they are believers in Jesus as their Messiah, Lord and Savior, to now go forth and live the lifestyle that Jesus role modeled as He walked on this earth. They use phrases such as: "One in Christ (Galatians 3:28)," "One new man in Christ (Ephesians 2:15)," "New creature in Christ (2Corinthians 5:17)," etc. All of these imply and express that something has changed and taken place within the life of that person who now declares their belief in all that Jesus did for them and has now made available to them.

It is the total belief that Jesus took the cross for all their sins. It is a total belief and understanding that Jesus took the punishment (eternal death and separation from God) that we all deserved because of our sins. It is most importantly the understanding and recognizing that Jesus then made a way for all of us to have eternal life and be restored back into relationship with our God through His victorious and glorious resurrection. The scriptures are clear. The person who totally puts their trust in that belief is now a "born again child of God." That person is **absolutely no longer the same person they were**. They are a completely different "species of being." They once were a "sinner." Now, through Jesus they are "a child of God." They have been "born again." Old things, the old lifestyle and its manner of behavior is now dead, dead dead!!! Behold, all things are made totally new, new, new!!!

This changed life begins at the very moment of salvation. However, that is the point of this writing. Over my life of being involved with the Body of Christ, I have witnessed some perplexing behavior by many of us who call ourselves believers in Christ. While trying not to be harsh or judgmental, I find it difficult to grasp the lifestyle and manner of behavior of some that say they have "accepted" Jesus as their Lord and Savior. As this new creation, the scriptures tell us that we are to "put off" the lifestyle and character of that dead man and "put on" the new lifestyle and character that has been given to us through the blood of Jesus. We are now able to live this new life because we have been given the Holy Spirit. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that we live this new Christ-like lifestyle. It is called being a "Son of God" and a true disciple of Jesus. As you have "heard" me discuss and express many times, the term "disciple" does not only mean to be a pupil or a student. It explicitly implies that the disciple of Jesus is to now totally change their lifestyle and manner of behavior to that of the one they are choosing to follow - Jesus! This can also be referred to as a lifestyle of sanctification.

The Apostle Paul expresses in Philippians 2:12 - "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Many times this scripture has been used to give excuse for a "believer's" sinful lifestyle and manner of behavior. They say that they are "working at it" and that it is "a process" and that God is "not done with me yet." However, if we read on and look at this scripture in the context in which it was written, Paul was exhorting the Philippian believers in Christ to grasp the fact that their new life, as a disciple of Jesus and as a born again child of God, should now become a "light" that would shine in the midst of a "*crooked and perverse nation*" as well as the world. (Philippians 2:15) The term "*work out*" means to "to perform, accomplish and achieve; to fashion for the purpose of rendering one fit for a thing." Paul is saying that it is the **believer's responsibility** to now live this new Christ like lifestyle and let it "shine forth" as a light in this darkened world.

It should be a true believer's desire and attitude of heart to stay on a path that is continually expressing the lifestyle and character of a true disciple of Jesus. The true believer has been given everything they need to walk in this new Christ like lifestyle. As I mentioned previously, the Holy Spirit is given to this "new

creation," this born again child of God. This means that this "new creation" would now have the very Spirit of God, Himself, dwelling within. The same Spirit that Jesus walked in on this earth. If that is not enough for one to now begin to live this "new creation lifestyle," than something must be wrong!!! Could it be that God is really holding back on these "new creations" and He has only given them partially of His Spirit? Could it be that is the reason why we are having problems living the Christ like lifestyle? To that I say, "I don't think so!!!"

Going back to my point concerning that this new lifestyle begins at the very moment of a person's salvation - If there is no change; if there is no true realization that he or she is now a totally "new creation in Christ" then something may be wrong. This person's attitude of heart should now desire to bless the heart of their God. This is done through their lifestyle, character and manner of behavior. That person's entire being becomes an act of worship xdesiring to be a "living sacrifice" unto the Lord. If this isn't happening; if this isn't even starting to happen, then again I suggest that something may be wrong. Could it be that we may be missing a key ingredient to the whole process of salvation?

If we look at the very first message preached in the Gospels by both John the Baptist and Jesus, we see that their message was both the same, *"Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Some may say that message was one given prior to Jesus' death and resurrection and that it does not apply now because of what Jesus did. They say that all you need to do is say a simple little prayer and "ask and accept" Jesus into your heart and you will be born again. They refer to this as God's wonderful grace. I am not totally disagreeing with that. I do believe in God's wonderful love, grace and mercy. However, if we look carefully in the Book of Acts, we see that the very first message that Peter preached immediately after the Holy Spirit filled the believers on the day of Pentecost was very similar. If we look at Peter's message we see that He brought forth three things which resulted in many believing and becoming true "new creations in Christ."

First, Peter laid out through the scriptures that Jesus was indeed their Messiah as the Son of David. He also, laid out for his listeners through the scriptures that Jesus was not only the Son of David and therefore the Messiah, but that He was also David's Lord. (Psalm 110:1) What Peter did was to show them, through their own scriptures, that Jesus was and is, **both** the Messiah (the Son of Man, the son of David) and the Son of God (David's Lord/Adonai). Jesus is **both**, Messiah and Lord. (Acts 2:25-36)

Secondly, Peter **made them aware of their sin of denying Jesus** for who He was, as well as their lack of truly recognizing their need for God and their need to be saved from eternal separation from Him. (Acts 2:22-24) Peter held nothing back. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he told them the absolute truth about their spiritual situation and it was not good. We see that those that truly heard what Peter was saying and whose hearts were open to the truth were *"pricked/cut to the heart."* They cried out to Peter and the rest of the Apostles that were present, *"Men and brethren, what must we do?"*

The third thing Peter did was to respond immediately to the cry of their hearts. However, his response was not to simply tell them to "ask Jesus into their heart." He did not lead them in a "sinners prayer." He boldly told them, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."* (Acts 2:38) Peter did not hold back. He did not walk in the idea of the "seeker friendly" role model. When asked what must a person do to be saved, his immediate, bold and truthful response was, "...repent and be baptized."

To fully grasp what Peter was telling those that truly heard what he was saying concerning Jesus, we must place ourselves within their understanding of what they heard in Peter's response to them. First, Peter said that they needed to "repent." We are all very familiar with this term. However, lately in the "Christian realm" this term has almost become a "taboo" word. It is a term that we are told not to use in bringing the message of Jesus to the unsaved. We are told that it is too harsh and it "turns people off" to the Gospel.

Hey, there is nothing wrong with telling the unsaved how much God loves them and that Jesus loved them so much that He gave His life for them. They should be told that their sins have been forgiven. That is the absolute truth. However, they must also be told that they must repent from their denial of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is that "sin," the sin of denying Jesus as their Lord (their absolute, supreme and final authority) of their life, that they are truly held accountable for. It is that sin that the Holy Spirit, through God's ambassadors, convicts all men of. (John 16:8,9) It was the sin that the Holy Spirit, through God's servant, Peter, at this time in Acts 2, that was bringing conviction to those who were truly listening.

A person must be at a place within their heart where they recognize their need for God. Jesus called this "attitude of heart" as being "poor in spirit." (Matthew 5:3) The person must first recognize their need for God in their life. The person must repent of their denial within their heart of who Jesus truly is - the Son of God, the Lord of lords and King of kings. The term "repent" implies a total change in direction. It implies that a person was going in a direction of death and destruction because of their denial (whether realized or out of ignorance) of Jesus. True repentance is now making a decision to totally change direction and turn towards God. This is the very definition of true worship - turning towards God and recognizing who He is and totally surrendering to Him and His ways. It means that the person is making a **willful choice** to turn and walk on that path and lifestyle which was role-modeled by Jesus. It means that now the person is to make a radical change in lifestyle and walk in the ways, precepts, commandments, and character of a true child of God and as a true disciple of Jesus. It is a decision to totally live a lifestyle that is totally opposite of what they were living previously.

Peter also said they were to be "baptized." To understand what Peter was telling them, again we must understand the Jewish concept of baptism. The term baptism is not a "Christian term." Its roots are based in Judaism. Contrary to what many think, the ritual of baptism is totally different than that of what is commonly known as a Jewish "mikvah." A "mikvah" is a Jewish ritual of purification. It is a washing and cleansing for preparation of certain Jewish activities and other rituals. However, it is much different than Jewish baptism. The concept of Jewish baptism has to do with recognition of sin. When a Jewish person is "baptized" it is not simply to purify themselves. What the person is declaring, in the physical action of submersing themselves in water, is that they are a very sinful person. They are literally stating that they are even more sinful than the dreaded Gentile. They are declaring through this action that they realize that they are in desperate need of God and that they are repenting and desiring to turn towards God. Again, Jesus refers to this kind of heart as "being poor in spirit." (Matthew 5:3) It wasn't the baptism that brought their restoration and salvation but it was the action that expressed the person's attitude of heart. John the Baptist called this baptism a "fruit of repentance." It was a "fruit" of truly recognizing their heart as a sinner who needs God. It is a "fruit" of outwardly acknowledging this and desires to turn from their wickedness and turn towards God. This attitude of heart "prepares the way" for the Lord within a person's life

Understanding this makes Jesus' baptism from John even more powerful. That is why when Jesus came to John to be baptized, John said to Jesus that it was he that needed to be baptized by Jesus. Yet, Jesus said that John needed to baptize Him. This was because, even though Jesus was sinless, through this action of Jewish baptism, Jesus was identifying himself with every sinful person, Jew and Gentile, so that when He went to the cross He would be able to carry their sins and take the punishment for their sin in their place.

The result of Peter's message of laying out the scriptural evidence of who Jesus was, along with the conviction by the Holy Spirit of their sin of denying Jesus and Peter's response to their question of what they must do (repent) was that almost 3,000 people **truly repented**, were baptized and were added to the ranks of true believers and disciples of Christ. Acts 2:41 - *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."*

Notice, the scripture tells us that *"the people received his word with gladness."* This message of conviction and the call to true repentance was actually received **"with gladness"** by those who were seeking after and ready to hear the truth. Yes, it cut to their heart. Yes, it stung. Yes, it was not "seeker friendly." But yes, it was the truth. People will respond to the truth if their hearts are truly seeking to know and hear the truth - even about themselves - no matter how hard or difficult it may be to hear. They will receive it with gladness. They will actually be glad when someone is honest enough to tell them the truth and not just tickle their ears with things that may make them happy for the moment but yet does nothing for them in the long run.

It reminds me of the "Parable of the Sower" where Jesus tells us of the four types of "soils" which really refer to the four types of the condition of heart that a person may have. In the parable, those whose heart was open to the truth/the Word (good soil) received it and *"kept it"* and brought forth much fruit. It brings forth a totally changed heart and life leading to a totally new and different lifestyle which would be the total opposite of the sinful lifestyle they were living in previously.

Going back to Acts 2, we see the immediate evidence of this totally renewed and changed lifestyle in these new believers. This true repentance, this true decision to turn from the old lifestyle and turn towards God, led to a new lifestyle of caring for each other and taking care of each other as anyone would have need. Old things were passed away, all things (their lifestyle, character and manner of behavior) became totally new. The evidence was their new lifestyle. The lifestyle role modeled by Jesus. The greatest example of "fruit" of what a changed life through Jesus and the Holy Spirit can do is found in Acts 2:42. These totally, radically changed people were recognized even by the unsaved as being different. The "unsaved" saw that it was a genuine change. They saw the difference. We read that these new believers *"found favor with all the people."* (Acts 2:42) The result was that even more people repented and were *"added to the church daily."*

My question is this. Could it be that we have "watered down" the salvation message so much that we have changed it from being a "relationship oriented message" to that of a "destination oriented message?" What I mean is that we have made our salvation message all about going to heaven. Which, in part it is. However, the pathway to heaven is through a true relationship with Jesus and the Father. Jesus came to restore the breach in relationship between God and man. As I have mentioned in previous essays and teachings, Jesus gave us His definition of eternal life in John 17:3,22,23 - *"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent... And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."* It is all about knowing the Father and Jesus. It is all about being in "oneness" with Him. It is all about relationship.

This relationship can only happen when a person recognizes that they are living a life that is leading them in the wrong direction. This relationship can only happen when a person recognizes their need for God and becomes "poor in spirit." This relationship can only happen when a person truly repents with a heart of deep understanding of their sin of denying Jesus for who He really is and should be within their life. Not a superficial understanding, but a true understanding that cuts to the heart and stings, but yet it brings that person to the place of truth about themselves. They are separated from a Holy God. They must recognize and repent with "fruits of this repentance" which consists of a totally new and Christ like lifestyle and manner of behavior. This lifestyle can only be walked and lived out by a true believer through the fullness of the Holy Spirit, who is given to the true repentant, born again child of God.

Could it be that there are many who think and are under the impression that they are "going to heaven" because they simply recited a prayer but have absolutely no relationship with the One who is "the Way?" We discussed that Jesus, John the Baptist and Peter all preached the same message of the need to repent

for salvation. You either repent and turn towards God or you continue on that path you are on. You either do or you don't. You are either in it all the way or not in it at all. You either are a new creation or you are not. Yes, I know we all "mess up" at times, maybe many times. But if we truly have that relationship with the Father and His Son, Jesus, we "own up" and confess those mess-ups and turn from them and "sin no more." If we do this (which is actually an action of repentance) than we are told that our God is so faithful to truly forgive us of every one of those "mess ups." (1John 1:9)

A person who truly repents from their denying of Jesus as their Lord and now turns towards Him truly becomes a "new creation." Their heart desires, and has a passion, to bless the heart of their God in all they do and with all their heart, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - day and night and night and day. The "fruit of this repentance" is truly the changed heart, lifestyle and character resulting in a totally "new species of being," a true child of God and disciple of Jesus. Salvation = A changed life!! Truly, *"...old things are passed way. Behold **ALL** things are become new."*