

Turn or Burn

Here again is another one of my “musings” centered on salvation and how many are misled to falsely believe they possess it. This has been a heavy burden on my heart ever since I came to the faith and realized the awful tragedy of this pandemic situation. In this regard, I believe that I have been Spirit-led to write numerous essays attempting to expose this condition, to educate and to appeal to all who might read these attempts, to take heed of what Scripture reveals about the matter. Whatever I write never seems sufficient. Therefore, I continue to probe the issue from every direction I’m led to believe may be beneficial, so that somewhere, some day, some one will be blessed by this effort.

How brutal, insensitive and offensive these title words may seem to be in the minds of many professing “Christians” during these days of easy prayerism and lukewarm churches. How many pastors today would dare to title their message with these, or any other such provocative and caustic words? We live now in the time of the “lukewarm” church, the church Jesus said He would spew out of His mouth. It is now the time of hard- truth avoidance, a time of touchy-feelingness, ultra tender sensibilities, tolerance, ecumenism, quick and easy “unsaving” prayerism, and outright heresy being preached from the pulpits of many of most popular Christian churches, and even some of those claiming to be evangelical. They are popular because they appeal to the worldly lifestyles in that they avoid any mention of humility, of accountability, of obedience, of sin, of hell, of repentance, or of God’s coming wrath. Even the preaching of the simple Gospel of Christ Jesus has become a rarity. Any pastor today, who has an inclination to speak such harsh truths and dares to act on them, will soon see the sea of heads in front of him replaced with the starkness of empty pews. Pew sitters want to leave the service filled with what is pleasing to their ears. They just want sermonetts recited by preacheretts, and don’t want to hear anything that is convicting, threatening to their lifestyles, humbling, or challenging to their self- esteem. They want Jesus to be their personal Savior, as long as they don’t have to be too personal with Him. Furthermore, they vigorously avoid having Jesus as their personal Lord. Lord means Master, and a master is someone who has the power and authority to control ones life, to demand obedience, and to extract punishment.

Absent the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit, this idea of Lordship is frightening and needs to be rationalized away. There is no salvation where this reasoning exists. However, to varying degrees and colors, this seems to be the prevailing condition of the “professing” Christian. That which sends them off for the week filled with sweet tasting inoffensive homilies and psychological babble that is buttressed with clever clichés, amusing stories, and an occasional scriptural reference to legitimize the message, is all the spiritual food they want. More than a few who occasionally sit in the sanctuary feel subconsciously, or even consciously, that they have fulfilled their obligation to God, just for “giving” Him that weekly hour and a few dollars. They become defensive at the suggestion that more is required if they are to be considered as part of His Body. Defensiveness in this regard is strong evidence of an unsaved soul. Where the Holy Spirit indwells, there is an insatiable desire and hunger to give. The gratitude and commitment of a saved soul, craves to serve, to obey, and to please our Lord and Master. “I’ve done enough”, is a foreign thought to a mature son or daughter of God.

Am I being too cynical or excessively critical of today’s church? Perhaps so, if you belong to a rare assembly where the whole unvarnished truth of the Word is delivered from the pulpit, and from a heart focused 100% on saving rather than pleasing souls. However, from what I have read, heard and observed, I am convinced that such a church is all but extinct. Perhaps a test of this contention might be to notice how often anything even approaching a “turn or burn” type of message is delivered. An even simpler test is to try to recall the last time you heard the word “repent” or “obedience” broadcast from the pulpit in any significant way. If it is uttered at all, it is often followed by an apology for having been so bold and offensive.

This title is not of my own making. From what I understand, it was the title of one of Charles Spurgeon’s thousands of sermons. I have not read that sermon, but from the many hundreds that I have read, the title by itself reveals the essence of many of his inspired messages, and what Scripture alludes to over and over again as absolutely critical to salvation. Spurgeon preached for over forty years, during the mid to late nineteenth century. This was during the closing years of what Scripture indicates was the

period of the “Church of Philadelphia,” the church about which Jesus had nothing negative to say. It was the time of great revival and worldwide spread of genuine Christianity, as well as when several additional pseudo-Christian churches were formed. These churches, along with the current wide-spreading departure from what was then serious Bible-based preaching, has laid the groundwork for the predicted coming end time. That is when the whole world will have totally turned away from the Gospel and from all scriptural truth.

Spurgeon was a great orator and an outstandingly fruitful disciple of Jesus. His messages were so extensively received very early in his ministry, that a huge new church called the Metropolitan Tabernacle was erected in order to accommodate the many thousands who were drawn to hear his sermons. It is said that as many as 20,000 would gather to hear him in out-door facilities. It seems that he never failed to fill to overflowing all facilities wherever it was that he preached. Having read very many of his recorded sermons, I can attest to the fact that most of them were as brutally honest and as convicting as the above title suggests. Yet, it seems that there never was an empty seat or even a vacant place to stand wherever and whenever he spoke, and he usually gave two different sermons a day.

Could he generate such a following today? Highly unlikely! Today’s Christians, that is all but a very small remnant, would be too offended, and too uncomfortable to ever “tolerate” such an imposition, or such a departure from their comfortable non-taxing “Christian lite” messages. Even beyond that, most of the ecumenical and other heretical segments of the “church” would seek his dismissal as would the secular authorities that already are succeeding to outlaw or muzzle this expressing of politically incorrect scriptural truths commonly understood and faithfully believed and lived by in his day.

If I am in any way representative of that small remnant of believers, they would be thrilled and exceedingly grateful to hear such sermons, because they know that only through telling-it-like-it-is-in-Scripture messages can one come to a true understanding of what Christianity really is and thereby bring about “genuine” not pseudo conversions. That doesn’t mean that there are not some who can and do come to the faith today in spite

of the dearth of clear repentant-centered teaching. But if they do, it's because somewhere they have learned and applied the necessity of repentance, with all of its implications. Also it doesn't mean that there are not some churches where sound doctrine is preached even though many of the tougher scriptural views are deliberately avoided. God always has, and will continue, to provide ways in which the seeking hearts can be led to the faith.

It simply means that during the closing days of this dispensation, it becomes more and more difficult and less frequent for anyone to come to the true saving faith, and much easier for one to be misled and to falsely believe that their professions of faith indeed represent possession of it. Scripture makes this abundantly clear as it reveals how the great revival church of Philadelphia would fade with time and be replaced with the final church, this present day ineffectual church of Laodicea. This end-time church will continue in its back-sliding until "*the fullness of the gentiles be come in.*" (Romans 11:25) Then the whole of the real church, the redeemed remnant church, will be removed from the earth.

How really awful is this simple "turn or burn" expression? Why it is merely a crude, right-to-the-point paraphrase of what Peter was prompted to write in 2Peter 3:9, that God is, "*...not willing any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" How much more succinct and accurate could this primary theme of the whole Scripture be expressed? God doesn't want any to perish (burn), but wants everyone to repent (turn). It's that simple. Unless one repents, one must perish. Is "burn" that so awful to say when Scripture unequivocally states that all who fail to repent will surely spend eternity in the "lake of fire"?

What a sad commentary it is on the condition of the church when the primary assemblies of the so-called "Body," judged by their high attendance, are represented by such heretical institution as the "Crystal Palace" in California where the humanistic "itching ears" (2Timothy 4:3) revel in the theme of that church, which claims that the only sin is the lack of self-esteem! This may seem like the height of absurd hypocrisy, yet there are many other highly attended "Christian" assemblies preaching equally perverse non-

biblical doctrines. Much of the “TV evangelism” circuit is also contaminated with such vial untruths.

If anyone looks at man’s spiritual predicament objectively, fully understanding its true nature and significance, they cannot help but be alarmed at the lack of serious concern and understanding among professing Christians as to what does and what does not constitute a saving faith. In the days of Spurgeon, biblical literacy, serious prayer, heavy church attendance, and passionate, convicting sermons were the rule, not the exception as they are today. The percentage of those who actually possessed the saving faith back then, as compared with those who merely professed it, was far, far greater than it is today. A true Christian lived a Christian life; He walked the talk, wore his faith as a badge of honor, and did not hide the light of his faith. He revealed its brightness 24-7. We must credit the Spirit-filled Spurgeon, and the large number of other pastors who delivered undiluted, convicting, and salvation-centered messages, for drawing so many to the true saving faith, because they focused primarily on Jesus and His Gospel, along with the narrow, repentant and truth-filled way He paved for us. A full-hearted Christian life in Christian Countries was far closer to the norm than the exception in Spurgeon’s day. Historical evidence of this abounds.

We should all know, if we but think about it clearly, that our God is one who doesn’t think well of superficial or half-hearted conduct. Where He has saved souls, He has given them each a new heart, a whole heart, never a half heart. That is why He expects from His own, whole-hearted obedience, love, worship, and fruitfulness. This applies to that turning that is called repentance. We cannot expect to please God or receive the grace of salvation by a half-turning, that is a partial repentance. It is all or nothing! Repentance is a full turning to Jesus and making Him the One and only Savior, and the One and only Lord-Master in each of our lives! Read carefully the preaching’s of Jesus and of His Apostles. Repentance was the primary theme, and there can be no doubt that this word, in this context is synonymous with the word salvation! **WITHOUT REPENTANCE THERE IS NO SALVATION!!** Wiggle, squirm, deny, rationalize, or

fight it all you want, but it is a fact that cannot be changed or removed from God's truth, and choosing to do so is tantamount to choosing to perish.

Nothing in this world is more important than accepting Jesus as both Lord and Savior. Troubling, as it may seem to some, Jesus will not be your Savior if He is not also your Lord. As your Lord, He requires your love, obedience and trust. Having that by God's grace, He becomes your Savior, and issues you a passport to eternal life. Accepting Him is a full turning towards Him and staying there to the end. Don't merely accept the much in vogue easy beliefism peddled by too many of the so-called new evangelists. You must make Jesus your number one of a list of one in your life, because without Him in that capacity, there is no such thing for you as salvation. You won't even be able to squeeze in under the gate, as so many "believers" claim would satisfy them.

Easy prayerism as expressed in the so-called sinner's prayer, by itself, doesn't save. At best it merely introduces one to where salvation may be found if one is seeking it. Salvation is a gift, but not without a price. Anyone who says otherwise is absent the spiritual knowledge so vital to effective evangelism, and does a grave disservice to any soul-saving ministry. Jesus called all who would be saved, that is to be born-again, to be His disciples. Read Matthew 10:17-42 to find out what Jesus means by discipleship. This was a strong unequivocal call to a full and full time commitment to Him and His way, as ones personal Lord and Master. Accepting His Lordship and the obedience that it implies, is the result of the love and gratitude that one has for having been blessed to be chosen to receive Jesus as Savior. That love and gratitude, along with the acceptance of His Lordship that in turn is expressed as total commitment and obedience, is the strongest evidence of a truly saved soul. Absence of this full compliment of evidence puts one at grave risk of not having really turned, but instead, unwittingly having chosen to burn.